

The Reputation of Edward II, 1305–1697: A Literary Transformation of History

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Contents

The Reputation of Edward II, 1305–1697: A Literary Transformation of History.....	1
Contents.....	2
Cover blurb	4
Keywords	5
Author details.....	5
Acknowledgements	5
Introduction.....	7
Abstract.....	7
Keywords.....	7
Life of an ‘unfortunate king’	9
Writing Edward II’s narrative	11
Reading Edward II’s narrative	12
Structure.....	22
Chapter 1 – Riot, Sodomy, and Minions: The Ambiguous Discourse of Sexual Transgression	30
Abstract.....	30
Keywords.....	30
Introduction.....	30
Riot.....	31
Sodomy.....	33
Minions.....	44
Conclusion.....	51
Chapter 2 – From Goats to Ganymedes: The Development of Edward II’s Sexual Reputation	60
Abstract.....	60
Keywords.....	60
Introduction.....	60
Lechery and goats	61
Sexualized stock phrases.....	65
Ganymede.....	70
The role of Marlowe.....	71
Conclusion.....	80
Chapter 3 – Edward II and Piers Gaveston: Brothers, Friends, Lovers	89

Abstract	89
Keywords	89
Introduction.....	89
Brotherhood and friendship.....	91
Romanticizing Edward and Gaveston.....	100
Romanticization in chronicles	100
The role of Marlowe.....	103
Establishing a romantic relation.....	103
Mourning and revenge.....	108
Conclusion.....	112
Chapter 4 – ‘Is it not strange that he is thus bewitch’d?’: Edward II’s Agency and Culpability	120
Abstract.....	120
Keywords.....	120
Introduction.....	120
Unsuitable companions.....	122
Agency in attraction.....	125
Political agency.....	132
Evil counsel – or evil nature?.....	139
Conclusion.....	144
Chapter 5 – Edward II as Political Exemplum	156
Abstract.....	156
Keywords.....	156
Introduction.....	156
Polemical invocations.....	158
Elizabeth I	159
Henri III.....	165
James VI and I	167
Charles I and James II.....	170
Other political allusions	172
Conclusion.....	182
Chapter 6 – ‘No escape now from a life full of suffering’: Edward II’s Sensational Fall	190
Abstract.....	190
Keywords.....	190

Introduction.....	190
Deposition	193
Imprisonment.....	196
Edward’s story as <i>de casibus</i> narrative	201
Conclusion.....	207
Chapter 7 – Beyond Sexual Mimesis: The Penetrative Murder of Edward II.....	214
Abstract.....	214
Keywords.....	214
Introduction.....	214
Development of a consensus.....	215
Precedents for penetration	219
Sexual mimesis	226
Pain and torture	228
Marlowe’s murder scene	231
Conclusion.....	237
Conclusion: The Literary Transformation of History.....	246
Abstract.....	246
Keywords.....	246
Introduction.....	246
Illuminating Marlowe	247
Literary transformations	248
Appendix: Accounts of and allusions to Edward II’s reign, composed 1305–1697. 255	
Abstract.....	255
Keywords.....	255
Introduction.....	255

Cover blurb

During his lifetime and the four centuries following his death, King Edward II (1307-1327) acquired a reputation for having engaged in sexual and romantic relationships with his male favourites, and having been murdered by penetration with a red-hot spit. This book provides the first account of how this reputation developed. In doing so, it provides new insights into the processes and priorities that shaped narratives of sexual transgression in medieval and early modern England; the changing vocabulary of sexual transgression in English, Latin and French;

the conditions that created space for sympathetic depictions of same-sex love; the use of medieval history in early modern political polemic; and the cultural impact of Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II* (c.1591-92). Through close reading of chronicle accounts and political pamphlets alongside poetry and drama, it demonstrates that Edward's medieval and early modern afterlife was significantly shaped by the influence of literary texts and techniques – and makes the case for a 'literary transformation' of historiographical methodology, as an apposite response to the factors that shaped medieval and early modern narratives of the past.

Keywords

Edward II, sexuality, homosexuality, historiography, Christopher Marlowe, chronicles

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Introduction

Abstract

This introduction discusses the reputation of King Edward II (1307–1327) in medieval and early modern England, and the implications of this reputation beyond its immediate relevance to scholars of Edward II's reign and afterlife: as a case study for the history of sex and the changing vocabulary of sexual transgression; as a source of positive depictions of love between men; as a paradigmatic exemplum for discussions of favouritism and deposition, and thereby a case study providing insight into the early modern use of medieval history; as a means of developing our understanding of literary texts such as Marlowe's *Edward II*; and as a process that illuminates the literary nature of medieval and early modern historical narratives.

Keywords

Chronicles, early modern, medieval, historiography, homosexuality, sexuality

What do you think you know about Edward II? This unfortunate English King is mainly remembered today for his relationships with his male favourites, celebrated or censured for their queer potential; and for his supposed murder with a red-hot poker, assumed by many to have been real or imagined retribution for his sexual behaviour. This modern reputation strikingly preserves the salient facts about Edward as highlighted by the writers of medieval and early modern England. During the four centuries after Edward's death in 1327, a historiographical consensus developed that Edward's relationships with his male favourites, particularly Piers Gaveston and the younger Hugh Despenser, were sexual and romantic; and that he was murdered by anal penetration with a red-hot spit. Despite the numerous other notable aspects of Edward's narrative in medieval and early modern accounts – not least his disastrous military efforts against Scotland – it was these details which persisted in even the shortest early accounts of his reign; and it is these aspects of his reputation, moreover, which have attracted a disproportionate amount of scrutiny from literary critics and historians alike.¹ This book is the first attempt to trace, and to account for, the process by which this reputation developed in medieval and early modern England.

The case of Edward II's reputation has important implications beyond its immediate relevance to scholars of his reign and afterlife. As the English monarch with by far the most

¹ See Phillips, 'Introduction', for a representative sample of the diverse historiographical considerations that Edward's reign has attracted. For a summary of historiographical treatments of Edward's sexual behaviour, see Burgtof, 'With My Life', pp. 33–36.

substantial reputation for same-sex love, desire and activity – in medieval, early modern, and modern texts – Edward is a valuable case study for the history of sex in England. The accumulation of stories around him provides one of the clearest and richest examples of the processes and priorities that shaped narratives of sexual transgression in this period; and it provides a detailed insight into the abundance of sexual discourse in English, Latin and French, and the ways in which this shifted from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century. Moreover, the existence of so many detailed accounts of his reign allows us to observe that approaches to Edward’s relationships with men were far from wholly condemnatory. Thorough attention to texts across genres reveals a nuanced distinction between same-sex love and same-sex desire – the former associated with classical ideals of friendship and used as a source of sympathy and pathos, the latter condemned as sinful indulgence alongside other kinds of sexual and bodily transgressions – which complicates teleological narratives of steadily increasing liberalisation in attitudes towards same-sex relationships.

Beyond the history of sex, attention to early modern narratives of Edward’s reign also demonstrates his enduring relevance as a political exemplum. As the first English King to be deposed, the study of his reputation provides a means to build on Simon Walker’s insights into the collective memory of Richard II’s reign and the ways in which the process of memory and memorialisation helped to construct subsequent ideas of kingship, extending this analysis to think about the use of memories of medieval history more broadly.² Like Richard II, by the sixteenth century Edward had taken on a paradigmatic function as a locus of discussions around deposition and overmighty favourites: narratives of his reign therefore illuminate political discussions surrounding Elizabeth I, James VI and I, Charles I and James II, as well as into the early modern ‘use’ of medieval history.

One aspect of that ‘use’, of course, was literary. Christopher Marlowe’s *Edward II* is central to the process of reputation-building that this book traces; and importantly, Marlowe appears in this account not simply as an absorber and refiner of chronicle sources. *Edward II*, as the first text to explicitly present Edward’s relationships with his male favourites as sexual and romantic, exerted a significant impact on the direction and focus of future narratives of his reign. This book provides a reassessment of the play’s significance and impact in light of that, responding to Judith Haber’s recent call ‘to consider afresh how *Edward II* brings together “sexuality” and “history”’.³ In addition, it uses new readings of Marlowe’s sources (and the

² Walker, ‘Remembering Richard’.

³ Haber, ‘State of the Art’, p. 96

sources of those sources) to illuminate our understanding of the play's emotional structure and its critically contentious murder scene.

In its attention to drama, poetry, chronicles and political pamphlets alike – and in my focus on the language, form and narrative structure of these sources – this book is deliberately transdisciplinary. This is not simply because a literary-historical approach can facilitate a more comprehensive assessment of how Edward II's reputation developed, and what the study of it can illuminate: it is because the case of Edward's reputation reveals the significant impact of literary texts and techniques on the construction of historical narratives, and the value of close reading (applied to texts of all genres) for accurately and specifically elucidating the ways that medieval and early modern writers conceptualised sex and history. I hope, therefore, that scholars of medieval and early modern literature and history might also be prompted by this study to think afresh about the ways we understand genre and methodology; to blur the boundaries between literature and history, both in the way we identify our sources and in the ways we read them.

Life of an 'unfortunate king'

Edward II was born at Caernarfon on 25 April 1284, the youngest child (but only surviving son) of King Edward I and his wife Eleanor of Castile. In 1300, the Gascon-born squire Piers Gaveston joined Edward's household, and the two became close. Gaveston first becomes prevalent in historiographical accounts of Edward's life in 1305, when Edward quarrelled with his father's treasurer, Walter Langton. The quarrel certainly concerned money, but some accounts also accuse the young Edward and Gaveston of having broken into one of Langton's deer parks; in any case, Edward I sided with his treasurer and temporarily banished his son from the court. He also temporarily banished Gaveston and another young noble, Gilbert de Clare, from his son's household – thus initiating a pattern whereby Edward's bad behaviour was repeatedly blamed on Gaveston's influence. Despite a reconciliation between Edward and his father shortly afterwards, the Prince's excessive favouritism towards Gaveston clearly continued to cause Edward I some concern, and he sent Gaveston into exile in February 1307. Less than five months later, however, Edward I was dead.

Edward II received the homage of England's lords on 20 July 1307, and was crowned in March 1308, having married Isabella, daughter of Philippe IV of France, in January of that year. Contemporaneous accounts of his reign agree that one of his first acts on acceding to the throne was to recall Gaveston from exile and to grant him the earldom of Cornwall. The elevation of

this minor noble to an office ‘closely associated with the crown’ caused Edward’s other nobles some concern; this was sharply exacerbated by Edward’s decision to appoint Gaveston as regent of England during his voyage to France to marry Isabella, by other displays of favouritism at Edward’s coronation, and by Gaveston’s haughty behaviour in his new position.⁴ In April 1308, Edward’s nobles demanded that Gaveston be exiled. Edward agreed, but made Gaveston his lieutenant in Ireland, a privileged position which undermined the nobles’ intentions. Following Edward’s recall of Gaveston in 1309; a further exile (on which tighter conditions were imposed, resulting in Gaveston fleeing to Flanders) in 1311; and a subsequent return early in 1312 around the time when Gaveston’s wife Margaret was due to give birth, Gaveston was captured and executed in June 1312.

Gaveston’s execution caused a rift between Edward and his nobles – particularly his cousin Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, and Guy, Earl of Warwick, whose leadership had been primarily responsible for his capture and execution. Despite various uneasy attempts at reconciliation, the conflict between Edward and Lancaster was again exacerbated by Edward’s excessive promotion of and favouritism towards two men, a father and son both named Hugh Despenser. Like Gaveston, the Despensers were considered insufficiently high-born to justify their influence over Edward and his patronage, or to excuse their proud, apparently often obnoxious behaviour. Their continuing influence led, in 1321, to civil war. Initially a group led by Humphrey de Bohun, Earl of Hereford, attacked the Despensers’ lands in the Welsh marches; in July 1321 the father and son were forced into exile. In January 1322, however, Edward announced the annulment of their exile; following this and a series of failed attempts at reconciliation, the conflict between King and nobles escalated. Finally, at the battle of Boroughbridge on 16th March 1322, de Bohun was killed and Lancaster captured. Shocking contemporary commentators, Edward subsequently executed him, along with 27 other nobles.

Although Edward had apparently gained control over his nobles, the remaining years of his reign were marked by widespread discontent at the Despensers’ influence both at court and in the Welsh marches. In March 1325, Edward sent his wife Isabella to France to negotiate with her brother, now King Charles IV, over conflict in Gascony; in September she was joined by their son, the twelve-year-old Prince Edward. Isabella refused to return to the English court while the Despensers remained dominant. While in France, she developed alliances with Roger Mortimer of Wigmore (who had been imprisoned by Edward after the battle of Boroughbridge, but escaped in 1323) and with John, Count of Hainault. In September 1326, they invaded

⁴ Phillips, *Edward II*, p. 122.

England. Edward fled with his favourites – initially to Lundy Island, then to Wales – but was captured in November 1326 and deposed (or forced to abdicate) in favour of his son; the Despensers and Edward's other favourites were executed. The deposed Edward was initially imprisoned at Kenilworth Castle, then moved to Berkeley in Gloucestershire, where he died on 21 September 1327.

Writing Edward II's narrative

This summary of Edward II's life is a partial one, foregrounding the influence of his favourites above other military and political events.⁵ Its partiality, however, accurately represents the preoccupations of modern scholars and premodern commentators alike. Hundreds of accounts of Edward II's life and reign – in chronicles, poetry, drama, novelistic prose narrative and political pamphlets – were written during the fourteenth, fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries. Together, these accounts shaped and reshaped Edward's reputation, and deployed him as a political exemplum in relation to contemporary issues from Elizabethan favouritism to the Jacobean Exclusion Crisis. Their focuses vary, but the overwhelming majority agree on a small number of details fundamental to Edward's reign. His relationships with Gaveston and the Despensers are recounted at length, far more so than those with other favourites such as Robert Baldock, and are (unlike those other relationships) characterized by excessive intimacy and by the favourites' undue influence over political matters. His highly emotional deposition is followed by imprisonment and mistreatment sometimes amounting to torture, and by a murder which is quickly established as anally penetrative, painful, and undetectable on the body. The centrality of these details reflects the fact that medieval and early modern accounts of Edward's reign overwhelmingly prioritise the sensational, exciting, and emotionally compelling aspects of his narrative – in other words, the aspects that are most conducive to enjoyable reading – as well as (or, often, at the expense of) those conducive to factual accuracy.⁶ While Chris Given-Wilson has shown that chroniclers remained aware of their audience in terms of their language and chronology, I argue here that they (and other writers of historical accounts) more substantially centred and prioritised their readers' engagement.⁷ The case of Edward II's reputation reveals the literary nature of medieval and early modern history-writing, and the need to be thoughtful about generic categories when considering the priorities of writers from these periods.

⁵ For a fuller overview, see Phillips, 'Edward II [Edward of Caernarfon] (1284–1327)'.

⁶ On the importance of accuracy to medieval chroniclers, see Given-Wilson, *Chronicles*, pp. 1–20.

⁷ Given-Wilson, *Chronicles*, pp. 151–152.

Many of these narratives of Edward's reign are short chronicles which are now little read.⁸ These texts, many of which were popular enough to go through multiple editions, are often very derivative of the longer chronicles which have attracted more attention from modern scholars. As such, they provide an important insight into the way in which those longer texts were read by early modern readers – for the writers of short chronicles were readers too. Their texts suggest which details of historical figures were considered most important to preserve in short accounts, and can sometimes reveal how the more ambiguous sections of longer texts were interpreted by these readers who became writers; additionally, they show evidence of intertextual influence from multiple genres, particularly the impact of Christopher Marlowe's play *Edward II*. Owing to their popularity, they also provide insight into 'popular opinion' of the past.⁹ Reading them has been an essential stage in reconstructing a sense of the multiplicitous nature of the reputations of historical figures in medieval and early modern England. In recognition of how challenging readers may find it to keep track of these sources – and of the additional confusion resulting from the inconsistent nomenclature of many medieval texts – the book is accompanied by an appendix table, 'Accounts of and allusions to Edward II's reign, composed 1305–1697'. This table provides a guide to the accounts of Edward's reign cited in this book, and to other accounts consulted but not quoted. It summarizes their date of composition; textual history and alternative titles; sources and influentiality; and a brief summary of their significance in relation to this study. Since the book cites a large number of primary sources, the Appendix is intended as a quick reference for these details: it provides an alternative to reminding the reader of each source's significance and textual history every time a quotation from it is used, which would prove intrusive and repetitious. I hope it will also provide a useful resource for future scholars of Edward II's historiographical reputation and/or of the texts that comprise it.

Reading Edward II's narrative

Alongside the medieval and early modern readers who digested and developed accounts of Edward's reign and produced new ones, this book is interested too in modern readers: the historians and literary critics who have used these narratives, and the methodologies and perspectives they have brought. Medieval historians, in particular, have hitherto approached the early texts this book discusses as potential sources of factual information about Edward's sexual

⁸ On early modern English 'epitome culture', attitudes towards these short chronicles, and the ways in which their construction made use of humanist scholarly strategy, see Wheatley, *Epic, Epitome, and the Early Modern Historical Imagination*, pp. 9–38.

⁹ Metzger, 'Controversy and "Correctness"', p. 438; see also Beer, 'English History Abridged', pp. 1–14, 26; Wheatley, *Epic, Epitome, and the Early Modern Historical Imagination*, pp. 40–41; Woolf, 'Genre into Artifact', pp. 344–347. See Woolf's entire article for the reasons behind the popularity and ultimate decline of these texts. On this, and the reading practices with which early modern people engaged with chronicles, see also Woolf, *Reading History*.

behaviour and/or about popular opinion of it during or after his reign. While nineteenth- and twentieth-century historians initially saw Edward's reign primarily in terms of its importance for constitutional developments, John Boswell's description of Edward as 'the last overtly homosexual monarch of the Middle Ages' in his seminal 1980 book *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality* solidified Edward's sexual behaviour as a historiographical preoccupation (as W.M. Ormrod points out), and cemented his place in a queer historical lineage in popular imagination.¹⁰ Boswell offered a partial assessment of fourteenth-century chronicle sources on the basis of their contemporary popularity and their closeness in date to Edward's reign, remaining unequivocal in his conclusions about Edward's sexual behaviour. Following this, in his 1988 biography of Piers Gaveston, J.S. Hamilton used fourteenth-century chronicles to resituate Gaveston as a central figure in Edward's political and personal actions, rehabilitating him from what he saw as the marginalisation imposed by constitutional historians like William Stubbs, T.F. Tout and J. Conway Davies, and concluding that 'there is no question that the king and his favourite were lovers'.¹¹ Pierre Chaplais, writing six years later, built on Hamilton's centring of Gaveston but used the same sources to argue for a relationship of sworn brotherhood, rather than a romantic and sexual one.¹² Jochen Burgtof, in a 2000 essay, provided a valuable synthesis of historiographical approaches to Edward and Gaveston's relationship, and – arguing that 'Apart from the charter evidence which sheds some light on the two men's relationship, it is fourteenth-century historical writing which offers the most insights' – offered fresh translations of much of the ambiguous Latin vocabulary used to refer to this relationship in contemporary chronicles, suggesting that it should not be interpreted as denoting sexual desire or romantic love.¹³ J.R.S. Phillips, in the fullest and most recent scholarly biography of Edward, takes a similar approach: his discussion of Edward's sexual behaviour reads contemporary chronicles alongside other documentary evidence to establish a factual narrative, evaluating sources on the basis of their date, motivation and tone.¹⁴

In a 2006 collection edited by Gwilym Dodd and Anthony Musson, aimed at providing 'new perspectives' on Edward's reign, W.M. Ormrod, Ian Mortimer and Michael Prestwich all address Edward's sexual behaviour. Mortimer calls useful, detailed attention to the earliest discussion of the term 'sodomy' in relation to Edward II – a sermon allegedly preached by Adam Orleton, Bishop of Hereford, in 1326 – and presents this, alongside what he argues are the

¹⁰ Boswell, *Christianity*, p. 298; Ormrod, 'Sexualities', p. 23. For constitutional histories of Edward's reign, see, for example, Tout, *Place of the Reign of Edward II*; Maddicott, *Lancaster*; Davies, *Baronial Opposition*.

¹¹ Hamilton, *Gaveston*, pp. 12–16.

¹² Chaplais, *Gaveston*.

¹³ Burgtof, 'With My Life', p. 32 and *passim*.

¹⁴ Phillips, *Edward II*, pp. 96–100.

contemporary sexual connotations of Edward's penetrative murder, as the two 'information streams for the sodomitical reputation of Edward II'.¹⁵ Prestwich, in discussion of the character of Edward's court, uses the King's household accounts alongside evidence of legal and religious condemnation of same-sex desire to argue that Edward's relationships with his favourites were not sexual.¹⁶ Ormrod, meanwhile, uses fourteenth-century sources to establish the discourse of 'degeneracy' surrounding Edward, and argues that this was correlated with sex between men in the contemporary imagination.¹⁷ Departing from other historians, he also points out the difficulty of establishing the facts of Edward's sexual behaviour, arguing instead that:

the nature of the evidence makes it impossible to tell what Edward actually did – let alone what he thought himself to be doing – whether and when he engaged in emotional and physical contact with women or men. Rather, we are dealing here, of necessity, with *reputations*: with what people thought and said about Edward II's personality, and the place of his sexuality within it, during his lifetime and in the generation after his demise.¹⁸

In this focus on 'reputations' (as well as in his focus on discourse), I have found Ormrod's work particularly valuable. Quite apart from its considerable value for political historiography, the work of the historians cited above is clearly useful for its assessment of the reliability of contemporary chronicles of Edward's reign as factual sources, and their adherence to the narrative that can be pieced together from charters and other official documents. Yet my own focus on reputation in this book has been productive for two reasons in particular. Firstly, it has relieved me of the obligation to evaluate texts as 'sources' based on their reliability as repositories of fact. Texts like Geoffrey le Baker's *Chronicon* (1347–1360) and the Long Version of the popular, sensational history known as the prose *Brut* (c. 1337–1347), for example, are both utterly unreliable when evaluated according to this criterion; yet they exerted substantially more influence on Edward II's reputation than did sources like the anonymous *Vita Edwardi Secundi* (written contemporaneously during Edward's reign, probably by a secular clerk) which were closer to the events they describe. Secondly, I have deliberately chosen to abstain from the ongoing and ultimately futile debate about the facts of Edward's sexual behaviour. In making this choice, this book departs from the majority of scholarly historiographical treatments of his reign (Ormrod's excepted). As Phillips puts it, 'Edward II has never been the "possession" wholly of historians'; 'other traditions have built up, and continue to build up around him'.¹⁹ These 'other traditions' have been overwhelmingly characterized by the debate that, in Ormrod's

¹⁵ Mortimer, 'Sermons of Sodomy', p. 56 and *passim*.

¹⁶ Prestwich, 'Court of Edward II', p. 70.

¹⁷ Ormrod, 'Sexualities'.

¹⁸ Ormrod, 'Sexualities', p. 22.

¹⁹ Phillips, 'Introduction', p. 1.

words, ‘aims to claim Edward either as gay or as straight’.²⁰ The language of ownership employed by both historians is striking, but attention to historiographical scholarship which addresses the question of Edward’s sexual behaviour does, in some cases, appear to justify it. There is evidently – even in work that is otherwise essential reading for scholars of Edward II – a temptation towards selective or partial treatment of sources when using them to discuss sexual behaviour, apparently in order to pin down a clear, unambiguous reading of what exactly Edward was doing sexually. Phillips, for example, while dismissing the multiple English sources which ‘can be interpreted as implying homosexuality’ as ‘much later in date or the product of hostility’, affords relative credibility to a single Hainault source that suggests adultery between Edward and the wife of the younger Hugh Despenser.²¹ Phillips’s unbalanced treatment of sources may not result from conscious bias, but does suggest a heteronormative perspective – arguably an unconscious bias – which scholarly treatments of Edward’s sexual behaviour would do well to avoid. On the other side of the debate is Michael Goodich, who asserts that Thomas Burton (an abbot of Meaux Abbey in East Yorkshire, who composed his chronicle around 1388–1396) ‘attributed [Gaveston’s] death to “too much sodomy”’; in actuality, this text states that Edward himself ‘delighted too much in sodomitical vice’ (*vitio sodomitico nimium delectabat*), without linking this to any particular event or to any particular favourite.²² Goodich also omits to mention any historiographical disagreement concerning the penetrative manner of Edward’s murder, and assumes that this murder method was self-evidently sexually mimetic; his work thereby suggests, through selective handling of evidence, that Edward’s near-contemporaries believed unequivocally that he engaged in sex with men.

It is not, then, my intention in this book to ‘claim’ Edward II for any modern category of sexuality, or even to claim (in the non-possessive sense) that he engaged in any particular sexual acts; and similarly, my analysis of Edward’s developing historiographical reputation deliberately acknowledges the ambiguity of certain texts and terminology. Freeing myself from this task has allowed me to step outside of a debate in which scholars have sometimes been unhelpfully dismissive of each other’s conclusions. Yet in writing this, I remain aware of both the scholarly context and the wider political context in which this study of Edward II takes place. The question of whether Edward engaged in sexual and romantic relationships with men is far from an apolitical one, and in stating my intention not to answer it I do not wish to undermine its deeply felt importance for many within and outside academia. It is important to state explicitly

²⁰ Ormrod, ‘Sexualities’, p. 22.

²¹ Phillips, *Edward II*, pp. 97–98.

²² Goodich, *Unmentionable Vice*, p. 11; Burton, *Chronica*, III, 355. For a fuller discussion of the translation of this phrase, see Chapter 1.

that the historiography of Edward II has been inevitably affected by heteronormativity, and by the characterization of relationships between men as sensational and deviant: scholars who now try to address this question would do well to remember that the previous scholarship to which they must respond, and which often unconsciously shapes interpretations of primary texts, has consequently not been neutral or objective. I also understand, and am convinced of, the value of highlighting historical examples of queer experience in combatting isolation for modern-day queer people, and in countering those who continue to use the claimed nonexistence of those historical examples as arguments against the validity of modern queer identities. I am equally convinced, however, that the best way to contribute to this conversation is not to present yet another polemical response to a question about the nature of a fourteenth-century man's relationships which can, realistically, never be conclusively answered. Instead, I aim to illuminate how those relationships were constructed historiographically, and how Edward II's reputation developed in medieval and early modern England – a reputation which, based on its adoption as consensus across texts of all genres, became in many ways more significant and influential than the unknowable facts themselves.

Building on the efforts of the historians cited above to establish Edward's reputation during his lifetime and immediate aftermath, this study has a longer temporal scope, allowing me to trace the full process by which a consensus was formed about the sexual and romantic nature of his relationships with his favourites. I also reassess key areas of evidence considered by these scholars, including the precise significations of individual accusations of 'sodomy', and the symbolism of Edward's murder in different texts. For the latter in particular, it has been crucial to draw on genres other than chronicles: plays, poems and political texts were all influential in the development of Edward's reputation.

Given this cross-genre appeal of Edward's narrative, several accounts of his reign have also attracted substantial literary criticism, with which this book also engages. The Long Version of the prose *Brut*, first composed in Anglo-Norman between 1333–1347 (and further popularized in an English translation, known as the Common Version, made in the late fourteenth century), has attracted attention not just as an example of popular medieval history, but for its juxtaposition of legend with sensationalised but fact-based historical accounts; Julia Marvin, particularly pertinently, has argued that its writer was 'deeply aware of history as a literary genre'.²³ Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles*, first printed in 1577 with a second edition

²³ Marvin, 'Albino and Isabelle', p. 182. See also Marvin, *Construction*; Marvin, 'Arthur Authorized'; Marx and Radulescu, *Readers and Writers*; Taylor, 'French Prose *Brut*'. For the reasoning behind my *terminus ad quem* of 1347 for the Long Version of the Anglo-Norman Prose *Brut*, see Appendix and Chapter 7.

(revised by a syndicate of other writers) printed in 1587, have been analysed as sources for literary texts as well as for their ideological stance.²⁴ Christopher Marlowe's play *Edward II*, printed in 1594 but probably composed in 1591–1592, has received enormous critical attention in relation to its engagement with early modern political and ethical questions, its generic instability, its gendered and sexual politics, and the fertile ground it offers for both queer theory and biographical readings.²⁵ Michael Drayton's several poems which engage with Edward's reign, *Peirs Gaveston* (printed in 1594 and revised as *The Legend of Pierce Gaveston* in 1595) and *Mortimeriados* (printed in 1596 and revised as *The Barrons Wars in the Raigne of Edward the Second* in 1603), while initially discussed in relation to their form and their relationship to other contemporary poems framed as 'mirrors' or 'legends', have more recently been set in the context of Drayton's literary and political life; critics including Scott Giantvalley and Kelly Quinn have also centred the Edward/Gaveston relationship in their analysis, with Quinn's work offering a particularly useful contextualisation of Drayton's Gaveston poems in relation to the wider genre of 'royal mistress complaint'.²⁶ Elizabeth Cary's two histories of Edward II's reign, the folio *History of the Life, Reign, and Death of Edward II* and the octavo *History of the Most Unfortunate Prince King Edward II* (composed in 1627–1628 but not printed until 1680), have – once established as her work by Donald Stauffer – been discussed as key examples of women's engagement with contemporary politics, given their clear allusions to the excessive power of the Duke of Buckingham at Cary's time of writing, as well as in relation to their generic innovation.²⁷

This book reads all of these literary texts as stages in the process of forming Edward II's reputation, an approach which freshly illuminates and contextualises their influences and significance. It sees the *Brut*, alongside Marvin, as a profoundly 'literary' history whose preference for sensational detail and narrativity influenced subsequent accounts of Edward's reign for the next three centuries, and which exerted seminal influence on Edward's subsequent reputation as the earliest source for the story of his anally penetrative murder. It sees Holinshed's *Chronicles* as tactically drawing on different sources at different points in its account of Edward's reign in order to create a *de casibus* narrative structure; and as translating the Latin chronicle of the Italian scholar Polydore Vergil, *Anglica Historia* (composed around 1512–1513 and first printed in Basle in 1534) to create a subtly suggestive account which is clear that Edward's favourites encouraged

²⁴ Patterson, *Reading Holinshed's Chronicles*, esp. Introduction and Chap. 1; Djordjevic, *Holinshed's Nation*.

²⁵ For a full overview of criticism, see Farabee, 'The Critical Backstory'; Haber, 'State of the Art'.

²⁶ Zocca, *Elizabethan Narrative Poetry*; Hulse, *Metamorphic Verse*; Brink, *Michael Drayton Revisited*; Tillotson, 'Drayton and Richard II'; Giantvalley, 'Barnfield, Drayton and Marlowe'; Quinn, 'Mastering Complaint'.

²⁷ Stauffer, 'Deep and Sad Passion'; Krontiris, *Oppositional Voices*; Starner-Wright and Fitzmaurice, 'Shaping a Drama Out of a History'; Skura, 'Elizabeth Cary and Edward II'; Britland, 'Kings Are But Men'; Raber, 'Introduction', pp. xxiv–xxv.

his sexual transgressions, but stops short of stating that they participated in them. It sees Marlowe's *Edward II* as historiographically innovative – the first text to explicitly present Edward's relationships with his favourites as sexual and romantic – and, as discussed above, it uses this perspective on the play (as one stage in a historiographical process) to develop our understanding of its emotional trajectory and of what happens in the scene where Edward dies. It sees Drayton's poems as in close dialogue with Marlowe, and as provoking both anxiety and enjoyment in their readers through their presentation of Edward and Gaveston's relationship as highly erotic, pleasurable, and pathos-inducing. And it sees Cary's histories as an important example of early seventeenth-century political uses of Edward's reign, as well as a valuable source for the incorporation of Edward into negotiations of the relationship between favouritism and classical ideals of friendship.²⁸

In addition to this analysis of texts traditionally subjected to literary criticism, this book also argues that it is useful to acknowledge the popularity of histories as reading material, and not just as source material. For example, John Stow's account of Edward's reign in his long chronicle (first published in 1580 as *Chronicles*, but better known as *Annales*) – which contains both derivative and innovative elements – had a twofold influence on the formation of Edward's historiographical reputation: Marlowe used it as a source, but it was also itself widely read, and we should take seriously the strategies used by writers like Stow to ensure such popularity and commercial success with readers. Equally, we cannot fully appreciate the significance of literary texts if we do not also investigate their role as sources themselves: Marlowe's *Edward II*, for example, impacted subsequent narratives of Edward's reign across multiple genres, including the chronicles which have hitherto been seen primarily as sources for drama. My reading of political pamphlets which deploy Edward as a cautionary exemplum also situates them in this cross-genre tradition, building on the work of Curtis Perry to emphasise that readers' approaches to these texts were influenced by their previous encounters with Edward II's reign and by the wider literary discourse of favouritism.²⁹

It is my hope that this book will influence further reading of Edward II's narrative. Historians of sexuality, and scholars of queer history and literature, will find Chapters 1, 2 and 3 useful for their focus on the sexual and romantic nature of Edward's relationships with his favourites, as well as Chapter 7's reassessment of the penetrative murder's presumed sexually mimetic connotations. Scholars of literature and politics will find Chapter 5's focus on Edward's function as a political exemplum most useful, as well as Chapter 1's discussion of the term

²⁸ See Shannon, 'Monarchs, Minions and "Sovereign" Friendship'; this is discussed further in Chapter 3.

²⁹ Perry, *Literature and Favoritism*.

‘minion’ and Chapter 4’s section on Edward’s agency and culpability in his relationships with his favourites. For those interested in Marlowe’s *Edward II*, while this text remains part of discussions throughout the book, Chapter 2 particularly illuminates its significance in shaping Edward’s sexual reputation and Chapter 7 contextualises and re-presents its murder scene. For literary critics of Drayton, the discussions of Gaveston’s sexual attractiveness in Chapter 2, Edward’s romantic attachment to him in Chapter 3, and his sexual-political influence in Chapter 4 will all be helpful. For those interested in genre, the relationship between literature and history, and the factors that shaped the writing of historical narratives in early modern England, these questions recur throughout the book but are directly addressed in Chapter 6.

My aim here is also to invite scholars from all of these groups to consider *how* we might read these narratives – both narratives of Edward II, and historical narratives from this period more broadly – in a different way. In investigating the development of Edward’s reputation, it has consistently been helpful for me to look beyond the techniques traditionally ascribed to the historian, and to also employ techniques associated with literary scholarship. Close textual analysis has helped me to move beyond dismissing certain terms, such as ‘sodomy’ and ‘minion’, as hopelessly ambiguous, instead asking what interpretation of an ambiguous term is encouraged by any given text. Cross-genre investigation has been essential in gaining a complete picture of the shifting historiographical consensus concerning Edward and his favourites: drama, poetry, chronicles, and political writings all play a significant role in this process. And by considering the decisions that writers of histories made with their readers in mind, I have been able to account for the development of many historiographical trends and the emergence of certain key stories, not least the story of Edward’s penetrative murder. This approach, and the findings it has facilitated about the literary nature of medieval and early modern history-writing, demonstrates the broader potential of incorporating literary sources and literary methodologies into historiography; the methodological implications, as it were, of the fact that ‘In early modern England the distinction between history and literature was, at least technically, an anachronism’.³⁰ This book demonstrates that the formation of Edward II’s reputation over the period 1305–1697 took place across and between texts of several genres; and in many ways, it also took place as a result of creative, literary decisions made by writers in all of those genres. As such, it establishes the paramount importance of considering chronicles and other historical texts *as texts*. Not only were they written for readers to enjoy and, particularly following the advent of printing, to purchase; they were written *by* readers, who consumed earlier historical texts as sources and responded to what they suggested and implied as well as to the facts they explicitly laid out.

³⁰ Kelley and Sacks, ‘Introduction’, p. 2.

Moreover, these accounts very often prioritise emotional detail, sensation and narrativity over factual detail. Here, as (I would suggest) in all scholarship of medieval and early modern history-writing, a literary methodology is appropriate to the literary nature of the source material.

Equally useful, however, has been a rigorous historical contextualisation of these narratives of Edward II's reign in terms of their contemporary political allusions, their use of contemporary discourse, and (perhaps most importantly) the way their writers might have conceptualised the sexually transgressive behaviour they allude to. This book is the first attempt to consider the full development of Edward II's reputation from a perspective grounded in the current scholarly understanding of the history of sex. While recognising that Foucault's schema of 'acts' versus 'identities' is ultimately simplistic and reductive – obscuring the sophistication with which the people of medieval and early modern Europe discussed same-sex desire and activity, and reflecting the brevity with which Foucault treated this period within the overall scope of his *History of Sexuality* – recent scholarship in the field of medieval and early modern sexuality continues to emphasise the conceptual distinction between this period's understanding of sex and our own.³¹ Although there is evidence to suggest that medieval and early modern English culture 'did recognize that some people, at least, can be grouped on the basis of their sexual practice', it seems clear that 'these groups do not correspond to their modern identity categories either in definition or status'; and similarly, that our modern perceived dichotomy between hetero- and homosexual (culturally entrenched, though clearly equally unsatisfactory for modern identities) is incompatible with medieval and early modern conceptualizations.³² Since the modern terminology of 'sexuality' ('gay', 'homosexual', 'bisexual', etc.) inevitably connotes the modern understandings of those categories, scholars have emphasised that it is often more productive to refer to discrete acts (sex, love, desire); and to recognize that the medieval and early modern imagination grouped same-sex desire and activity into a broader schema of unacceptable sex acts which also comprised (for example) adultery, non-procreative sex, bestiality, and masturbation.³³ Even this seemingly clear categorization is ultimately simplistic, since it ignores the influence of other contextual factors – usefully summarised by Mario

³¹ Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, I. See for example Mills, *Seeing Sodomy*; Cocks, *Visions of Sodom*; Bullough, 'Sin Against Nature'; Lochrie, McCracken and Schultz, *Constructing Medieval Sexuality*; Karras, *Sexuality*; Betteridge, *Sodomy in Early Modern Europe*; Crawford, 'Love, Sodomy and Scandal'; Masten, *Queer Philologies*; Melnikoff, 'Introduction'.

³² Lochrie, McCracken and Schultz, 'Introduction', p. xvi; Sedgwick, *Between Men*.

³³ For example, Frantzen, 'Disclosure of Sodomy', pp. 451–452; Bray, *Homosexuality*, pp. 14–17, Chap. 1; Lochrie, 'Presidential Improprieties and Medieval Categories', p. 93; Clarke, 'The Sovereign's Vice', p. 51.

DiGangi as ‘perceived consonance or dissonance with dominant social ideologies’ – on society’s interpretation of any given act or relationship.³⁴

Recognition of these issues is a productive way to avoid the assumption – found in several recent scholarly treatments of Edward’s reign – that Edward’s marriage and children constitute evidence against his sexual involvement with men.³⁵ It also prompts us to recognize the factors that often obstructed ‘explicit reference’ to sex between men in medieval and early modern England, and thus to avoid holding texts of this period to an unreasonable standard of evidence.³⁶ As Joan Cadden argues, ‘any historical finding, *whether of silence or positive evidence*, must be evaluated [...] in the context of the particular cultural site in which it was generated’.³⁷ Explicit claims that Edward’s relationships with his male favourites were sexual are particularly rare in texts written during his reign or that of his son, Edward III. This can be attributed both to their potential political sensitivity, and to the historic status of male-male sex – in particular as an aspect of ‘sodomy’ – as an ‘unnameable’ sin: the idiomatic description of sodomy as ‘not to be named among Christians’ was popularized by the theological work of Thomas Aquinas around 1255.³⁸ While my focus in this book differs from that of most recent historians (in that I am not working to establish the facts of Edward’s sexual behaviour), I do think the historiography of Edward II is a field which would significantly benefit from development with this sex-related historical context in mind, and this has influenced my own historicist approach. Just as I want here to show the value of literary critical techniques for historiography, then, I also want to demonstrate the utility of a historically grounded approach for the interpretation of references to sexual transgression in texts of all genres.

This book therefore makes the case for an integrated literary-historical approach to sexual transgression – where historical contextualisation can help us to reach accurate conclusions, and close reading can help us to establish the connotations of ambiguous sexual vocabulary – and to narratives and understanding of the past, which were shaped by both literary and historical considerations. This mixed methodology is not only useful for our own scholarship, but represents, as I argue, an apposite response to the nature of the sources that constituted historical knowledge in medieval and early modern England. In order to take full

³⁴ DiGangi, *Homoerotics*, pp. ix–x.

³⁵ For example, Haines, *Edward II*, p. 42; Chaplais, *Gaveston*, p. 8; Phillips, *Edward II*, p. 101.

³⁶ Gray, *Scalacronica*, pp. 55, 223 n. 38; Prestwich, ‘Court of Edward II’, pp. 70, 71. See Bray, *Homosexuality*, pp. 67–80; Bullough, ‘Formation of Medieval Ideals’, p. 20.

³⁷ Cadden, ‘Sciences/Silences’, pp. 41–42; emphasis added.

³⁸ Jordan, *Invention of Sodomy*, pp. 150–151; Salih, ‘Sexual Identities’. For fourteenth-century uses of this idiom, see (for example) Chaucer, ‘Parson’s Tale’, p. 320, ll. 907–909; Castleford, *Chronicle*, ll. 38948–38949.

account of the relationship between literature and history in this period, it is vital that the scope of our sources – and the methods we employ in our analysis – traverse this generic divide.

Structure

While my original plan was to structure this book by genre – addressing Edward’s reputation in chronicles, in poetry, in drama, and in political texts – as I read more primary sources it became increasingly apparent that this would be an artificial and arbitrary separation. Not only do texts of different genres frequently influence each other, but the most significant and influential decisions made by writers of chronicles are those with motivations and effects that we would associate with literary composition: decisions about narrative structure, and about inventing or preserving exciting anecdotes and sensational details. I was keen, too, to send a message about the interpretation of the drama and poetry I consider: as discussed above, part of my aim in this book is to shift our perspective on texts like Marlowe’s *Edward II*, and to emphasize the potential of considering them as responses and contributions to the wider historiography of Edward II. The book is therefore structured thematically: each chapter addresses a different one of the key preoccupations or features of medieval and early modern narratives of Edward’s reign, enabling me to emphasise the cross-genre consistency of these preoccupations while facilitating the book’s utility to scholars of different fields.

Chapter 1 – ‘Riot, Sodomy, and Minions: The Ambiguous Discourse of Sexual Transgression’ – establishes the book’s methodology of close attention to language and the value of Edward II’s reputation as a case study for the history of sexuality. I discuss the key terms with which medieval and early modern writers articulate Edward II’s sexual transgressions; this analysis includes interrogating the accepted translations of Latin and French texts, and arguing for the incorporation of the term ‘minion’ into our discussion of early modern sexual vocabulary. I emphasise the specific importance of words whose ambiguity could be tactically embraced by medieval and early modern writers: in this case, they allowed writers to suggest that Edward II did engage in sex with men, but provided an element of plausible deniability for this politically sensitive claim. The texts that constitute Edward II’s historiographical reputation therefore also constitute a corpus that allows us to assess how writers strategically deployed this ambiguous sexual vocabulary, as well as how they negotiated that ambiguity and encouraged specific interpretations at different moments.

Chapter 2 – ‘From Goats to Ganymedes: The Development of Edward II’s Sexual Reputation’ – provides the first scholarly assessment of how Edward II developed a reputation

for having engaged in sexual relationships with his male favourites. Edward's reputation for non-specific sexually transgressive behaviour developed during his reign; however, the first writer to explicitly state that this transgression constituted sex with men was Christopher Marlowe.

Following the publication of Marlowe's *Edward II*, discourse concerning Edward and his favourites shifted towards consensus that their relationships were sexual. Marlowe's play can therefore be shown to have influenced writers of chronicles, who were aware that dramatic portrayals of history shaped public opinion, and were keen to achieve commercial success by mimicking the appealing and sensational aspects of Marlowe's narrative. As well as documenting the cumulative process by which narratives of sexual transgression were shaped, then, this chapter provides new insights into the significance of Marlowe's work, and into the ways in which drama as a genre enabled his historiographical innovation.

Chapter 3 – 'Edward II and Piers Gaveston: Brothers, Friends, Lovers' – takes up the emotional dimension of Edward's relationships with his favourites, considering the significance and decline of medieval claims that Edward 'called Gaveston his brother'; engagements in early modern narratives of Edward's reign with classical ideals of friendship; and the increasing romanticization of his relationship with Gaveston. I show that accounts of Edward's love for his favourites, and his grief at their deaths, are often crafted to elicit sympathy and pathos, and thus represent a valuable source of positive depictions of relationships between men. Moreover, analysis of these depictions in texts of all genres provides insight into the literary influences and motivations of early modern chroniclers, including their incorporation of tropes of the romance genre and the impact of Marlowe's highly emotional representation of Edward and Gaveston in his play *Edward II*.

Chapter 4 – "'Is it not strange that he is thus bewitch'd?': Edward II's Agency and Culpability' – addresses the complex political and sexual implications of Edward's close relationships with his favourites. Specifically: given that writers frequently presented Edward's favourites as irresistibly attractive, and as controlling all of his political decisions, how did this affect Edward's culpability for the disastrous events of his reign, or for his transgressive sexual behaviour? The question of Edward's agency and culpability in love and sex tapped into a wider early modern cultural anxiety concerning the potential for everyone to experience unwitting but transgressive attraction. In the case of his political agency, although willingness to attach some blame to Edward himself increases over time – reflecting the increasing temporal remoteness of his reign – chroniclers consistently retained a level of strategic ambivalence, reflecting the fact that it remained politically risky to present Edward's deposition as justified. Through analysis of

these accounts, I frame the widely acknowledged polyvocality of early modern chronicles as a consequence of their need to negotiate the engaging political pertinence of their subject matter with its risky, seditious potential. The necessity of this complex political balancing act was, I suggest, an essential factor in shaping the polyvalence of these rich and thoughtful historical accounts.

Chapter 5 – ‘Edward II as Political Exemplum’ – discusses the use of allusions to, or narratives of, Edward II and his favourites to critique monarchs in early modern England and France: Elizabeth I, Henri III of France, James VI/I, Charles I, and James II. Analysis of these allusions in both political pamphlets and literary texts (including a contextualization of Marlowe’s *Edward II* in relation to other contemporary political uses of Edward’s reign) demonstrates the continuing relevance of Edward II’s story to contemporary political issues at multiple points during the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As the first English King to have been deposed, a paradigmatic example of the dangers of overmighty favourites, and a locus of anxiety about the specific problems caused by favourites who might be sexually attractive to the monarch, Edward was a compelling historical precedent for writers across the political spectrum during the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Analysis of the ways in which writers deployed his example provides a valuable case study for investigating how historical exempla functioned in early modern political discourse, and reveals the hermeneutic agency of political writers in the process of ‘using’ history, when examples such as Edward’s deposition could be interpreted as supporting either side of a political debate like the Exclusion Crisis.

Chapter 6 – “No escape now from a life full of suffering”: Edward II’s Sensational Fall’ – analyses accounts of Edward’s deposition and his subsequent imprisonment. I argue that early modern chroniclers exercised creative agency in selecting their sources for this period of Edward’s life, prioritising engaging anecdotes, emotionally compelling detail, and narrativity. In particular, they selected sources which facilitated the construction of Edward II’s reign as a *de casibus* narrative: a popular narrative structure characterized by the image of an ever-rotating ‘wheel of fortune’. Emphasis on the *de casibus* elements of Edward’s story should, I suggest, be seen as a creative decision made with readers in mind: it creates a clear narrative arc with which readers would likely have been familiar from literary texts, enhancing the pleasurable readability of accounts of his reign. Analysis of narratives of Edward II’s fall thereby enables us to appreciate the literary motivations of early modern chroniclers, and the way these motivations shaped their research process as well as their writing.

Chapter 7 – ‘Beyond Sexual Mimesis: The Penetrative Murder of Edward II’ – engages with the narrative that Edward II was murdered by anal penetration with a red-hot spit. My analysis does not draw a conclusion regarding the actual events of Edward’s death, but instead investigates the means by which it became an established consensus in medieval and early modern accounts, and questions its interpretation by scholars as a self-evidently sexually mimetic murder method with punitive connotations. In fact, the earliest accounts of this murder present it primarily as painful, torturous, and an invisible murder method whose cause of death could not be detected by outward inspection; and importantly, these earliest accounts emerge *before* the formation of a consensus on whether Edward’s transgressions were sexual, let alone whether they specifically constituted sex with men. This analysis prompts a reassessment of the place of this narrative in the history of queer sexuality, and of the murder scene in Marlowe’s *Edward II*, while also further illuminating the literary priorities of medieval and early modern chroniclers.

My conclusion, ‘The Literary Transformation of History’ explores the implications of this study for two key areas of scholarship: the study of Marlowe’s *Edward II*, and our understanding of medieval and early modern history-writing. I argue that it is productive to acknowledge the extent to which the medieval and early modern writing of history was a literary process, one significantly shaped by literary techniques and literary texts. Medieval and early modern writers constructed historical accounts in all genres – chronicles and political texts as well as drama and poetry – for an imagined reading public. In this way, writers’ consideration for imagined readers – based on knowledge of the actual tastes of the reading public – directly shaped the reputations of historical figures.

A note on editorial decisions: I have silently modernized u/v and i/j in quotations from early modern texts, and expanded contractions. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own. I have usually provided quotations in the original language alongside translations where this is helpful for the clarity or justification of arguments that rest on close textual analysis.

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Chapter 1 – Riot, Sodomy, and Minions: The Ambiguous Discourse of Sexual Transgression

Abstract

This chapter establishes the value of Edward II's reputation as a case study for the history of sexuality. I discuss the importance of ambiguous sexual-political vocabulary to the articulation of Edward II's transgressions: terms that allowed medieval and early modern writers to suggest that Edward did engage in sex with men, but provided an element of plausible deniability for this politically sensitive claim. The texts that constitute Edward II's historiographical reputation therefore also constitute a corpus that allows us to assess how writers strategically deployed this ambiguous sexual vocabulary, as well as how they negotiated that ambiguity and encouraged specific interpretations at different moments.

Keywords

Chronicles, Edward II, homosexuality, sexuality, translation, vocabulary

Introduction

Jeffrey Masten's 2016 book *Queer Philologies* called our attention to the fact that 'the study of sex and gender in historically distant cultures is necessarily a philological investigation'.¹ The evidence for the nature of Edward II's sexual reputation in any period is, necessarily, refracted through language – and, in the case of evidence in Latin or Anglo-Norman texts, doubly refracted through translation. It is important, then, to begin by addressing this language directly. The work of scholars including Madhavi Menon and Valerie Traub has successfully moved the study of the language of early modern sex beyond the pioneering work on the term 'sodomy' carried out by Alan Bray and others to illuminate the messy, multiplicitous and often opaque nature of the early modern sexual lexicon; and in this chapter, I want to emphasise the specific importance of words whose ambiguity could be tactically embraced by medieval and early modern writers.² Through this, I aim to underline the implications of Edward II's reputation as a case study for the history of sexuality.

¹ Masten, *Queer Philologies*, p. 28.

² Menon, *Wanton Words*; Traub, *Thinking Sex*; Bray, *Homosexuality*; Bredbeck, *Sodomy and Interpretation*; Betteridge, *Sodomy in Early Modern Europe*.

This chapter, in particular, makes the case for incorporating the term ‘minion’ into our discussions of early modern sexual discourse. This ambiguous term had both sexual and political connotations, as well as pointed contemporary political resonance in England and France during the 1580s and 1590s. Attention to the significations of ‘minion’ allows for new appreciation of its function in Marlowe’s *Edward II*; and when combined with the other terms discussed here, ‘riot’ and ‘sodomy’, it illuminates the value to medieval and early modern writers of ambiguous sexual discourse. These writers, I argue, relied on the ambiguity of terms like ‘riot’, ‘sodomy’ and ‘minion’ to enable them to make sensational sexual suggestions which nonetheless retained plausible deniability. Moreover, I want to emphasise the methodological importance of analysing sexual vocabulary, and the value of precise translation of Latin and French texts, in order to accurately interpret the way that writers deployed this ambiguous vocabulary. Through close reading, I illuminate the strategic ways in which medieval and early modern writers used these terms: carefully weighting their emphasis on one or more of a given term’s several possible valences, depending on the precise interpretation they wanted to convey, or on precisely how they wished to direct its allusiveness. It is my hope that historians of Edward II’s reign will find this work as valuable as will historians of sexuality: rather than claiming (as R.M. Haines does in his discussion of Edward’s sexual behaviour) that “The medieval connotation of “sodomite” need not concern us here’, we should recognize that awareness of how this language was used can productively illuminate our reading of the texts that constitute Edward’s reputation.³

Riot

‘Riot’ is a term that rarely appears in scholarly investigations of sexual terminology, but a concept that is consistently present in them. The suggestion of ambiguously disordered behaviour underlies many of the terms used to indicate sexual transgression in medieval and early modern texts (‘sodomy’ being the most extensively discussed), and many of the descriptions of Edward’s behaviour with his favourites. Like many such terms, ‘riot’ is not inevitably sexualized. However, it can become sexualized in specific texts if accompanied by other, more specific accusations of sexual transgressions. It can also lose its ambiguity as part of the derivative process by which medieval and early modern narratives are shaped. An accusation that one of Edward’s favourites led him to ‘riot’ may have no sexual connotations in an early text, written and read in a period when no consensus had been reached on the nature of Edward’s sexual transgressions; but it may take on those connotations if transferred to a

³ Haines, *Edward II*, p. 43.

derivative later text, written in the context of a historiographical consensus that Edward's relationships with his favourites were sexual.

At some point between 1312 and 1326, an anonymous writer lamented that abuse and corruption persisted at every level of English society in the poem now known as 'On the Evil Times of Edward II'. The writer bemoans:

Pat riot reyneþ now in londe everiday more and mo[re],
 De lordis beþ wel a-paiþ þerwith and listneþ to here lo[re]
 But of þe pouer mannes harm, þerof is now no speche.⁴

That riot reigns now in the land everyday more and more
 The lords are well aware of this, and pay attention to their [own] harm
 But of the poor man's harm, there is now no speech.

The word 'riot' is not used specifically for Edward's behaviour here, and it is difficult to establish its precise meaning here beyond general social disorder. The earliest text to employ 'riot' with specific reference to Edward himself is *The Prophecy of the Six Kings to Follow John*, a prophetic text composed during Edward's lifetime and popularized by its inclusion in the Long Version of the Anglo-Norman prose *Brut* chronicle (written c. 1333–1347) and its Middle English translation (made in the later fourteenth century).⁵ The writer reports that *When [Edward] was made Prynce of Walys, to miche he gaf him unto realte and folie* ('When [Edward] was made Prince of Wales, he gave himself too much to riot and folly').⁶ The *Brut* writer uses 'riot' four times with reference to Edward, and its semantic field is complex. In the other three cases, it is linked to Gaveston's influence over Edward, and suggests undesirable irresponsibility. The dying Edward I enjoins his barons *þat þai shulde nought suffre Piers of Gavaston come azeyn into Engeland forto make his sone use ryaute* ('that they should not allow Piers Gaveston to come again into England to make his son use riot'), a request later reiterated almost verbatim as justification for Gaveston's exile. His fears are soon fulfilled, when *Kyng Edwardes sone sette by þe Scottes non force, for þe ryaute of Piers of Gavaston* ('King Edward's son took no account of the Scots, because of the riot of Piers Gaveston').⁷ *Ryaute* here clearly represents a distraction from state affairs, an unsanctioned and disordered activity, but the nature of the activity is not clear. However, given that *The Six Kings* is the earliest

⁴ Ross, 'On the Evil Times', ll. 391–393.

⁵ For the relationship between *The Six Kings* and the *Brut*, see Marvin, *Construction*, pp. 240–242; for an overview of the origins and development of the prose *Brut* tradition, see pp. 1–15. For reasons of concision, the Long Version is referred to simply as the *Brut* in this book, since this is the version that exerted by far the most influence on Edward II's reputation. Quotations from the *Brut* are taken from the Middle English Common Version.

⁶ *Brut*, p. 243.

⁷ *Brut*, pp. 203, 205.

text to accuse Edward of sexual transgressions (as detailed in Chapter 2), ‘riot’ takes on a sexualized meaning in this text, and in the *Brut* which incorporates it.

The lack of clarity with which ‘riot’ is used persists in later texts. An anonymous fifteenth-century English translation of Ranulf Higden’s *Polychronicon*, an encyclopaedic universal chronicle whose first version was composed in Latin around 1327, condenses Higden’s description of the King’s character – ‘lavish in giving, splendid in banqueting, ready in speech, diverse in deeds, unfortunate against his enemies, wild in his household’ – into the phrase *ziffynge hym to ryette* (‘giving himself to riot’).⁸ Here, the diverse semantic field of *ryette* enables the translator to use it as a succinct summary of his source text, a catch-all term that conveys the connotations of all the acts Higden delineates, without having to list each one. In Raphael Holinshed’s 1577 *Chronicles* and Christopher Marlowe’s play *Edward II* (c. 1591–1592), the concepts of ‘riot’ and disorder are invoked to condemn both Gaveston and the nobles.⁹ As Thomas Cartelli observes, these semantic echoes ‘fram[e] [the nobles’] actions in the same discourse of misrule the peers deploy against his relations with Gaveston’.¹⁰ Jonathan Goldberg famously and astutely wrote of Marlowe’s play, using the term in its wider early modern sense to denote both sexual and social disruption, that ‘sodomy is the name for all behaviour in the play’.¹¹ It is, I would argue, equally justified to conclude that for Holinshed, riot is the name for all behaviour in Edward’s reign; and it seems plausible that Marlowe drew from Holinshed the sense of all-encompassing disruption and disorder that characterizes *Edward II*.¹² In these late sixteenth-century texts, however, the concept of ‘riot’ derives any sexual connotations from the writers’ other, clearer assertions that Edward was sexually transgressive.¹³

Sodomy

The term ‘sodomy’ is used far more rarely than ‘riot’ with reference to Edward II or his favourites, and no use can be conclusively documented in Edward’s lifetime – yet it has attracted far more critical attention. This would seem in part to be attributable to its ‘convenient ambiguity’.¹⁴ As a concept whose semantic multiplicity is well established, ‘sodomy’ provides

⁸ Higden, *Polychronicon*, VIII, 298–299. For this passage in the original Latin see Chapter 4.

⁹ Marlowe, *Edward II*, I.iv.404 and Holinshed, *Chronicles* (1587), VI, section 10/p. 318; Marlowe, II.ii.88 and Holinshed (1587), VI, section 10/p. 326. For an earlier sixteenth-century example of ‘ryot’ associated with Gaveston, see Rastell, *Pastyme of People*, fol. C2^v.

¹⁰ Cartelli, ‘*Edward II*’, p. 161.

¹¹ Goldberg, *Sodomities*, p. 123.

¹² See Deats, ‘Myth and Metamorphosis’, p. 306 for an examination of how this is conveyed through ‘classical parallels’ which ‘suggest mythological figures traditionally associated with either cosmic, political, or sexual disorder’.

¹³ See also Drayton, *Legend*, ll. 365–366; Hubert, *Deplorable Life*, stanza 109.

¹⁴ Ormrod, ‘Sexualities’, p. 37.

scholars with evidence that can be marshalled to argue that no one believed Edward had sexual relationships with men (on the basis of its rarity, its ambiguity, or both);¹⁵ or, conversely, to argue that some people did (on the basis of its being used at all).¹⁶ ‘Sodomy’ has been treated in a way analogous to Gregory Bredbeck’s summary of the scholarly treatment of ‘homosexuality’: scholars have either worked on the ‘assumption that we can trace an atemporal conception [...] throughout history’ or asserted that ‘because we *cannot* trace this particular concept through history, nothing can be traced’.¹⁷

To be clear, then, the term ‘sodomy’ is, in medieval and early modern sources, neither necessary nor sufficient to suggest sex between men. It was not this period’s only mode of referring to sex between men; nor can it be assumed to denote sex between men with any specificity. ‘Sodomy in the Middle Ages,’ Robert Mills summarizes, ‘was a fluid and wide-ranging category, which served only intermittently to refer to a clear variety of sexual activity or to evoke the behaviour of a particular kind of person.’¹⁸ Sodomy was not always sexual, but could indicate a range of socially disruptive activities: sometimes it stood for specific sins such as heresy and witchcraft, but frequently its significations were less coherent.¹⁹ The *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) definition of the term was updated in June 2018 to reflect these non-sexual meanings, though its range of examples remains more limited than the reality of uses in medieval texts.²⁰

The uses of ‘sodomy’ regarding Edward and his favourites thus merit reassessment with this semantic multiplicity in mind.²¹ These uses are so sparse and temporally dispersed that, for the most part, no textual influence can be demonstrated between them; an effective reassessment thus requires separate analysis of each individual usage. I have also chosen to focus on establishing the significations of sodomy *in each text*, without relying on well-known medieval theorizations of the term or concept (such as those of Peter Damian or Alan of Lille). Over-reliance on these texts’ exploration of sodomy can, I would suggest, create a false sense of semantic certainty: knowing what Peter Damian thought sodomy meant does not necessarily tell us anything about how a writer on Edward II is using the term in the context of a historical account. As Ruth Mazo Karras has emphasized, medieval European conceptualizations of sex

¹⁵ See, for example, Phillips, *Edward II*, p. 98; Burgtof, ‘With My Life’, p. 35.

¹⁶ For example, Goodich, *Unmentionable Vice*, p. 11.

¹⁷ Bredbeck, *Sodomy*, p. xi.

¹⁸ Mills, *Seeing Sodomy*, p. 3.

¹⁹ See Frantzen, ‘Disclosure of Sodomy’, pp. 451–452; Bray, *Homosexuality*, pp. 14–17, Chap. 1; Lochrie, ‘Presidential Improprieties and Medieval Categories’, p. 93; Clarke, ‘The Sovereign’s Vice’, p. 51.

²⁰ ‘Sodomy, n.’, *OED Online* (2018).

²¹ The noun ‘sodomitry’ and the adjective ‘sodomitical’ do not appear to have meanings distinct from that of ‘sodomy’ in the period under discussion; instead, they should be treated as variants and/or derivatives.

were heterogeneous and rarely portable between different contexts.²² For this investigation, then, I wanted to approach these texts with the semantic ‘intermittence’ (to paraphrase Mills) of ‘sodomy’ in mind, and to ask what close reading can tell us about the meaning of Edward II’s sodomitical behaviour, as well as what representations of Edward II’s sexual behaviour can tell us about sodomy.

Although Robert Mills suggests that the ‘Westminster’ continuation of the early fourteenth-century chronicle *Flores Historiarum* ‘characterize[s] Edward as a sodomite’, this text (written at Westminster Abbey around 1326–1330, in Latin, by the monk Robert of Reading and an anonymous continuator) does not actually use the word ‘sodomy’ or any of its derivatives.²³ In fact, the text’s only reference to Edward’s sexual behaviour is as follows:

O vesana stultitia regis Anglorum, a Deo et hominibus cunctis reprobanda, qui sibi propriam infamiam et concubitus illicitos peccatis plenos non dilexisset, nequaquam tam generosam regni consortem et dulces amplexus conjugales in contemptum generis sui a latere suo removisset!²⁴

O the insane foolishness of the King of England, condemned by God and all men, who should not have loved his own sin and illicit copulations, full of sin, nor by any means removed from his side the noble consort of his realm and her sweet marital embraces, in contempt for her noble birth!

The writer accuses Edward of ‘unlawful’ and ‘sinful’ sexual activity, and suggests that this is adulterous, but nowhere explicitly mentions sodomy. Moreover, Antonia Gransden has argued that the *Flores* is atypically hostile to Edward, and may even constitute ‘official history’ written for Isabella and Mortimer’s party in order to justify Edward’s deposition, meaning that we should treat its accusations with some suspicion – even if, as I will show, Robert of Reading may have been drawing on other accusations or rumours which had emerged during Edward’s reign.²⁵ In general, Mills overplays Edward’s association with sodomy: he may have been ‘England’s most notorious high-ranking “sodomite”’ by the time Chaucer wrote ‘The Miller’s Tale’, but only in that there were few other candidates.²⁶

In fact, the earliest connection of the word ‘sodomite’ with Edward II is the accusation ascribed in April 1334 to Adam Orleton, who was Bishop of Hereford during Edward’s reign.

²² Karras, *Sexuality*.

²³ Mills, *Seeing Sodomy*, p. 351.n. 97.

²⁴ Reading, *Flores*, p. 229.

²⁵ Gransden, *Historical Writing*, II, 17–18; ‘Propaganda’, pp. 369–370; see also Taylor, *English Historical Literature*, p. 81. On how the *Flores* fits into broader European traditions of ‘official history’, see Given-Wilson, *Chronicles*, pp. 152–156.

²⁶ Mills, *Seeing Sodomy*, p. 278.

The circumstances of the ascription are complex, but can be briefly summarized as follows.²⁷ In December 1333 Orleton was translated from the bishopric of Worcester to the more prosperous see of Winchester by papal provision, against the will of Edward III, who had another candidate in mind. An appeal to the papal curia against Orleton's promotion was subsequently mounted by John Prickehare, probably a literate layman of the diocese of Winchester. Had the Pope known of Orleton's earlier misdeeds, Prickehare claimed, 'he would by no means have made the translation' (*si scivisset hujusmodi Translacionem nullo modo fecisset*).²⁸ These misdeeds, according to Prickehare, principally comprised a sermon preached at Oxford in October 1326, shortly before Edward II's deposition. In this sermon (Prickehare alleged), Orleton had:

pernaciter asseruit [...] et docuit publice Clero et populo ad audiendum Verbum Dei congregatis in multitudine copiosa [...] quod idem Dominus Edwardus, qui tunc [...] Rex Anglie extitit coronatus legitime et inunctus, et cui predictus Magister Adam [...] astrictus extitit ex debito [...] fidelitatis vinculo juramenti, fuit tyrannus et sodomita.²⁹

perniciously asserted [...] and publicly instructed the clergy and the people, congregated in an abundant multitude hearing the word of God [...] that [...] Lord Edward, who then [...] was the legitimately crowned and anointed King of England, and to whom the aforesaid Master Adam [...] was bound by his debt [...] [and by] the chain of his oath of fidelity, was a tyrant and sodomite.

In response, Orleton claimed that his only reference to tyranny had concerned the younger Hugh Despenser, 'who tyrannically presumed to dominate the King and the realm' (*qui tyrannice dominari presumpsit Regi et Regno*). As for the 'sodomite' comment, 'that thing about the unnameable vice that I was falsely declared to have said, was nowhere said or proposed by me, as God is my witness' (*quod de innominabili vicio falso proponitur me dixisse, nusquam fuit a me dictum vel propositum, Deo teste*).³⁰ This latter denial is particularly important, since it appears to have been missed by Ian Mortimer in his 2006 examination of the Orleton/Prickehare affair.³¹ Although Prickehare's claims are widely agreed to have been politically motivated, Mortimer takes them at face value, and thus as evidence that 'Orleton was the original source for the public idea that Edward was a sodomite'.³² Part of Mortimer's justification is that Orleton, 'in his defence, did [not] deny that he had said these things; rather, he claimed that he was innocent of defaming Edward III's father on the grounds that he had meant Despenser (not the King) was a tyrant and a sodomite'.³³ Yet as

²⁷ See, for more detail, Usher, 'Career'; Haines, 'Looking Back'; Haines, *Archbishop John Stratford*.

²⁸ *Register of John de Grandisson*, p. 1542.

²⁹ *Register of John de Grandisson*, p. 1542.

³⁰ *Register of John de Grandisson*, p. 1545.

³¹ Mortimer, 'Sermons', pp. 48–60.

³² Haines, *Archbishop John Stratford*, p. 82; Haines, 'Looking Back', p. 391; Usher, 'Career', pp. 45–46; Mortimer, 'Sermons', p. 51.

³³ Mortimer, 'Sermons', p. 50.

we have seen, Orleton *did* in fact deny ever calling anybody a ‘sodomite’. Granted, he never explicitly states, ‘I did not use the term “sodomite”’, but sodomy had been long established as ‘the unnameable vice’ in theological discourse; there is no real ambiguity about what Orleton claimed to have been ‘falsely declared to have said’.³⁴

Certainly, it was in Orleton’s interest to deny ever having slandered Edward III’s father in such a manner. But if we are to question his denial owing to his vested interest in the outcome, we must subject Prickehare’s accusation to equal suspicion given his likely political motivations. It is far from certain that Orleton ever called Edward II a ‘sodomite’ in 1326, or that ‘Orleton was the original source for the public idea that Edward was a sodomite’. Whether such a ‘public idea’ existed among Edward II’s contemporaries will be considered more fully in Chapter 2.

With Orleton’s ‘accusation’ thus cast into doubt, the earliest source definitively to associate sodomy with Edward II is the Latin chronicle written at Meaux Abbey, East Yorkshire, by the abbot Thomas Burton during the 1390s. Burton’s summary of Edward’s character states that ‘This Edward delighted too much in sodomitical vice’ (*Ipse quidem Edwardus in vitio sodomitico nimium delectabat*).³⁵ The fact that Burton wrote in Latin, a language which does not routinely use articles, makes the translation of this clause problematic: is it ‘the sodomitical vice’, or ‘a sodomitical vice’? Articles provide evidence of what a writer understands by ‘sodomitical vice’: ‘the sodomitical vice’ would indicate one specific act, whereas ‘a’ would indicate one of a range of possible transgressions. What is clear is that this is a reference to ‘sodomitical vice’, and not – as this sentence has commonly been translated – to ‘the vice of sodomy’.³⁶ This can be clearly seen if we contrast Burton’s phrasing with the description of the crimes of which the Knights Templar were accused found in the *Annales Londonienses*, a Latin chronicle probably composed by the administrator Andrew Horn which offers a partial account of Edward’s reign up to 1316. This text provides a phrase which clearly *should* be translated as ‘the vice of sodomy’: *quidam Templarius [...] quemdam consanguineum suum opprimere voluit vitio Sodomiae*.³⁷ Precise translation is essential for effective analysis of meaning. ‘The vice of sodomy’ is, despite the ambiguity of ‘sodomy’, more specific than ‘sodomitical vice’: the latter refers to some vice that has socially or

³⁴ Jordan, *Invention of Sodomy*, pp. 150–151; Mills, *Seeing Sodomy*, pp. 3–4; Salih, ‘Sexual Identities’, pp. 120–121.

³⁵ Burton, *Chronica*, III, 355.

³⁶ See (for examples of the latter translation) Mortimer, ‘Sermons’, p. 52; Burgtof, ‘With My Life’, p. 35; Hamilton, *Gaveston*, p. 16. For a supporting example of translating Thomas Aquinas’s ‘vitium sodomiticum’ as ‘sodomitic vice’, see Jordan, ‘Homosexuality, Luxuria and Textual Abuse’.

³⁷ *Annales Londonienses*, pp. 192–193; emphasis added. Here, ‘sodomiae’ is a noun in the genitive case; Burton’s ‘sodomitico’, conversely, is an adjective whose ablative case agrees with the noun ‘vitio’. That ‘Sodomiae’ should be translated ‘of sodomy’ and not ‘of Sodom’ is demonstrated by the Vulgate, in which the genitive of Sodom is ‘Sodomae’ (Deuteronomy 29.23, *Biblia Sacra*).

sexually disruptive (i.e. sodomitical) attributes, while the former directly identifies the vice committed as the act of sodomy.

A brief cross-section of Latin references to sodomy highlights the diversity that meticulous translation can illuminate. The dissolution of the Templars, who were accused of sodomy among other misdeeds, provides a useful focal point for these references. ‘Sodomies’ sometimes occur in the plural (*facinus sodomorum*)³⁸ and the term is delineated with varying degrees of specificity. Some texts offer no explanation;³⁹ others clarify ‘sodomy’ or ‘sodomitical vice’ by equating it with the assertion that the Templars ‘can mingle carnally together, one with another’ (*ad invicem poterant unus cum alio carnaliter commisceri*)⁴⁰ or that ‘none should use women, but whatever they should want to do with each other’ (*nullus utatur mulieribus, sed quilibet altentro cum voluerit*).⁴¹ This selection of quotations demonstrates the richness of sodomitical language that existed in this period. Translating ‘vitio sodomitico’ as identical to ‘vitio sodomiae’ fails to convey that richness, and the complexity of understandings and definitions that it indicates. Just as Tom Betteridge has (in his analysis of the *Brut* chronicles) called our attention to the potential difference between ‘us[ing] the sin of sodomy’ and *being* a sodomite, so we should avoid collapsing the distinction between these different ways of articulating sodomitical behaviour through imprecise translation.⁴²

As well as the accusation against Edward, Burton’s account of his reign contains two other references to sodomitical acts: one concerning the Templars, the other a cook in the household of the Pope’s marshal, which appears to be original to Burton’s text:

In AD 1320 [...] a cook of the marshal of the Lord Pope, because of sodomitical vice committed [*propter vitium sodomiticum comissum*] with his attendant in the kitchen – a boy of 15 years, unwilling and crying out in protest – was led to the greatest punishment, along with the said boy, outside the city of Avignon. Where they both were tied to a post in a fire, with many cords and ropes.⁴³

Here, ‘sodomitical vice’ is, by context and implication, a sexual act that can involve two participants: in this case, both male. It is unclear whether the boy protests during the act of ‘sodomitical vice’ or during his procession to punishment, but this ambiguity makes it possible to interpret this event as the cook’s rape of his attendant. Burton’s emphasis on the attendant as ‘boy’ (*puero*) rather than man, while specifying his age and subordinate employment status,

³⁸ Guisborough, *Chronicle*, p. 387; ‘Gesta Edwardi’, pp. 28–29.

³⁹ Guisborough, *Chronicle*, p. 387; ‘Gesta Edwardi’, pp. 28–29.

⁴⁰ *Annales Londonienses*, p. 192.

⁴¹ Walsingham, *Historia*, fol. G^r.

⁴² Betteridge, ‘Place of Sodomy’, p. 11.

⁴³ Burton, *Chronica*, III, 321.

supports this interpretation by highlighting the unequal power balance of their relationship. The subsequent events related by Burton reinforce this: while the cook is burned to a cinder, the boy remains unharmed and attributes his miraculous survival to his appeal to the Virgin Mary.

This account appears only shortly before Burton's famous statement on Edward II, which uses the same phrasing (*vitio sodomitico*).⁴⁴ Although Burton may not have perceived Edward as guilty of the same transgressive acts as the cook, he does not explicitly encourage a contrary interpretation. It is reasonable to suggest that readers would have recalled the recent 1320 incident – particularly given its sensational content – when they encountered Burton's reference to Edward's sodomy.⁴⁵ The passage reads as follows:

De cuius quidem Edwardi meritis, an inter sanctos annumerandus sit, frequens in vulgo sicut de Thoma comite Lancastriae disceptatio fuit. Sed revera nec carceris foeditas nec mortis vilitas, cum ista sceleratis debeantur, nec etiam oblationum frequentia aut miraculorum simulacra, cum talia sint indifferentia, nisi corresponderet sanctimonia vitae praecedentis, quoniam sanctum probant. Ipse quidem Edwardus in vitio sodomitico nimium delectabat, et fortuna ac gratia omni suo tempore carere videbatur.⁴⁶

Concerning the merits of this Edward, whether he should be numbered among the saints was frequently debated by the people, just as it was concerning Thomas, Earl of Lancaster. But in fact, neither foulness of imprisonment, nor vileness of death along with atrocious things, deserves this; nor do even frequent offerings, or semblance of miracles, prove anyone a saint; such things should be indifferent, unless they should correspond with holiness of the preceding life. This Edward delighted too much in sodomitical vice, and all his time seemed to be deficient in terms of fortune and grace.

The opening of this passage is copied almost verbatim from a paragraph on Edward's character in Higden's *Polychronicon*, which proved extremely influential. Burton is the only writer to add a reference to sodomy when copying it. Though he does not specify whether Edward's 'sodomitical vice' involved two participants, or indeed was sexual, recollection of the 1320 affair in the Pope's marshal's household would have implied to readers that this was the case. Similarly, since both participants in the 1320 act(s) were male, this encourages a reading of Edward's 'sodomitical vice' as sex between men.

Burton was not the only writer to interpolate sodomy into an existing historiographical account of Edward II. Discussing Edward's relationship with Gaveston in his *Chronographically History of Britain* (printed in 1641), the poet and playwright Thomas Heywood writes:

⁴⁴ Burton, *Chronica*, III, 355.

⁴⁵ For Burton's readers (real and imagined), see Burton, *Chronica*, I, pp. lii–liiii, 72.

⁴⁶ Burton, *Chronica*, III, 355.

by his loose and effeminate conditions, he drew the King to many horrible vices, as adultery (& as some think) sodomitry, with others: therefore the Lords againe assembled, and maugre the King, banisht him into Flanders.⁴⁷

Heywood's source is Robert Fabyan's *Newe Cronycles*, a history of England and France probably composed around 1504 but first printed in 1516. In Fabyan's text, Gaveston is accused of having 'brought the kyng by meane of his wanton condicions, to manifold vices, as avoutry [adultery] and other'.⁴⁸ Unlike the many other chronicles that take this sentence from Fabyan (discussed below), Heywood identifies the 'other'. The phrasing by which he does so – 'as some think', rather than (as is more conventional in similar contexts) 'as some say' – could, given the censure attached to 'naming' sodomy, be seen as a deliberate device to avoid attributing the 'sodomy' accusation to a specific source. Alternatively, it may indicate that his addition of 'sodomitry' was inspired by popular understanding rather than a written account.

The significations of 'sodomitry' for Heywood's readers were hardly less vague than for Burton's: arguably more so, given that the use of the term with reference to the Templars' sexual transgressions was now a far more distant memory. However, Heywood collocates 'sodomitry' with two other terms that carry sexual connotations: 'adultery' unambiguously denotes extramarital sex, while 'effeminate' in this period denotes excessive sexual interest in women, reflecting (or possibly causing) a 'womanlike' lack of sexual control.⁴⁹ As such, it seems clear that he is foregrounding the sexual aspects of 'sodomitry'. Heywood does not specify whether Gaveston (who 'drew' Edward to such 'horrible vices') is the procurer or the source of these sexual transgressions (see Chapter 2). However, as Chapter 2 shows, Edward's historiographical reputation had shifted by 1641 to the extent that readers may well have been more likely to interpret his 'sodomitry' as sex between men.

The one other historical text to associate Edward with sodomy is the *Chroniques* composed by the Hainault writer Jean Froissart. In Froissart's *Chroniques* – a four-book account of the Anglo-French 'Hundred Years' War' written in three versions between 1373–1400 – it is

⁴⁷ Heywood, *Chronographically History*, fol. 2B^r.

⁴⁸ Fabyan, *Prima Pars*, fol. 2K1^r; emphasis added. For variant spellings of 'adultery' (including 'avoutry'), see 'adultery, n.', *OED Online* (2011).

⁴⁹ See Crawford, 'Love, Sodomy, and Scandal', p. 518; Smith, *Homosexual Desire*, p. 196; Brodwin, 'Edward II', pp. 147–148; Perry, *Literature and Favoritism*, p. 221; Deats, 'Study in Androgyny', pp. 37–39; Baines, 'Sexual Polarity'; Mills, *Seeing Sodomy*, pp. 4–5; Cady, 'Masculine Love', pp. 132–133. Ian Frederick Moulton also points out that effeminacy was associated with 'military weakness' in late sixteenth-century moralistic discourse; this is also pertinent to the other context in which Heywood accuses Edward of 'effeminacie', in which he describes him as 'being unserviceable for war' (Heywood, *Chronographically History*, fol. 2B3^r; Moulton, 'Printed Abroad and Uncastrated', p. 79).

not the King but the younger Hugh Despenser who is labelled ‘heretic and sodomite’.⁵⁰ Of the 50 surviving manuscripts of the *Chroniques* that definitely cover Despenser’s execution, 44 contain the ‘first redaction’ of Book I.⁵¹ Taken largely from the *Vraies Croniques* of Jean le Bel, a canon of Liège who wrote his French chronicle around 1352–1356, this ‘first redaction’ relates the execution as follows:

on li coppa tout premiers le vit et les couilles pour tant qu’il estoit hérites et sodomittes enssi que on disoit, et meysmement dou roy meysme, et pour ce avoit décachiet, sicomme on disoit, li roys, le royne en sus de lui et par son enort. Quant li vit et les couilles lui furent coppées, on les jetta out feu et furent arsses. Apriès on li fendi li ventre et li osta-on le coer et toute le coraille, et le jetta-on ou feu pour ardoir, et pour tant qu’il estoit faux de coer et traytres et que par son traytre conseil et enort li rois avoit honni son royaume et mis à meschief, et avoit fet decoller les plus hault barons d’Engleterre par lesquels li royaumes devoit estre soustenus et deffendus⁵²

his member and his testicles were first cut off, because he was a heretic and a sodomite, even, it was said, with the King, and this was why, as it was said, the King had driven away the Queen on his suggestion. When his private parts had been cut off, they were thrown into the fire to burn. Afterwards, they cleaved open his belly and tore out his heart and all the vital organs, and threw them into the fire to burn, because he was false of heart and a traitor, and because by his treasonable advice and promptings had led the King to bring shame and misfortune upon his kingdom and to behead the greatest lords of England, by whom the kingdom ought to have been upheld and defended⁵³

At stake here is, firstly, the nature of Despenser’s status as sodomite; and secondly, its relation to Edward. Froissart indicates the former with more clarity than at first appears. In the two mutilations described above – Despenser’s castration, and the removal of his heart – Froissart creates a causal chain of reasoning. Despenser is castrated because he is a heretic and sodomite, sins expressed by his role in Edward and Isabella’s separation. Similarly, his heart is removed because he is ‘false of heart and a traitor’, a crime expressed by his role in the 1322 executions of English nobles. Through these parallel punishments, Froissart establishes a pattern whereby a transgression is punished by the mutilation and burning of the corresponding body part, and an example is then given of how that transgression manifested itself. The implication, then, is that

⁵⁰ Froissart, *Chronicles*, trans. Brereton, p. 44. I quote and analyse the text from Froissart rather than le Bel due to the former’s comparative popularity; however, Froissart took this section from le Bel almost verbatim. See le Bel, *Chronique*, I, 28.

⁵¹ Numbers calculated from *The Online Froissart*. While the actual number may be slightly higher than 50, the sample I consulted contained such a high proportion of manuscripts of the ‘first redaction’ compared to other redactions that I am confident additional manuscripts would not skew this representation. See Froissart, *Oeuvres*, I.ii, for details on the redactions.

⁵² Froissart, *Oeuvres*, II, 87–88.

⁵³ Translation adapted from Geoffrey Brereton’s (Froissart, *Chronicles*, p. 44).

being a ‘sodomite’ is a transgression related to the genitals – that is, a sexual transgression. Moreover, it is a sexual transgression that resulted in the disruption of Edward’s marriage.

‘Heretic and sodomite’ was, of course, a well-established collocation – but while this means that the accusation should be treated with caution, it does not render it meaningless, as the preceding attention to the stylistic context of the term indicates.⁵⁴ If anything, it is the heresy accusation rather than the sodomy accusation which appears to be tokenistic and added for shock value. Despenser’s heresy is not detailed further, but Froissart does effectively elaborate on his sodomy by connecting it to the genitally focused punishment of castration. This suggests that Froissart perceived ‘sodomite’ to be the central descriptor of Despenser, and added ‘heretic’ because it was frequently associated with ‘sodomite’.

What, then, is Edward’s connection to his favourite’s sexual transgressions? Geoffrey Brereton’s translation, quoted above, follows convention, translating *enssi que on disoit, et meysmement dou roy meysme* as ‘even, it was said, with the King’.⁵⁵ However, two alternative translations could alter the implications for Edward considerably. Firstly, the phrase *du roy* could also be translated as ‘of the King’. ‘Of the King’ could be syntactically linked to ‘sodomite’ – making Despenser the ‘sodomite of the King’ – or, alternatively, to ‘it was said’. The first reading presents Despenser and Edward as sexual partners with an unequal power dynamic: Despenser is effectively ‘the King’s sodomite’. The second accuses Edward of sodomy more directly: ‘[Despenser] ... was a heretic and sodomite, as was even said of the King’. Support for this reading is provided by the fact that, although Brereton collapses *meysmement* and *meysme* into a single word (‘even’), *meysmement* could in this period be translated as ‘likewise’.⁵⁶ This would render the phrase ‘he was a heretic and a sodomite, as it was said, and even likewise of the King’. This critique of the accepted translation is crucial, since it suggests that le Bel and Froissart may be the earliest writers to accuse Edward of sexual involvement with his male favourites. It is, however, equally crucial to recognize the remaining ambiguity, and the fact that no English writer made a similar assertion with any explicitness for another three centuries.

The ‘third redaction’ of Froissart’s *Chroniques* – found only in one unfinished manuscript, but ‘most probably intended [...] as the definitive version’ – demonstrates that Froissart’s caution increased over time.⁵⁷ Adding to le Bel’s text, Froissart emphasizes the influence of public report

⁵⁴ Bullough, ‘Postscript’, pp. 206–226; Bullough, ‘Sin Against Nature’, pp. 55–71.

⁵⁵ For other examples of this translation, see, for example, Ormrod, ‘Sexualities’, p. 39; Sponsler, ‘The King’s Boyfriend’, p. 152.

⁵⁶ ‘Même’, *Dictionnaire Historique*.

⁵⁷ Froissart, *Chronicles*, p. 25.

on his story of Despenser's (or, as above, possibly Edward's) sodomy, distancing himself from its creation:

il estoit et avoit esté herites et sodomites, ensi que renonmee puble [sic] courroit par toute Engleterre et dou roi meismes.⁵⁸

he was, and had been, a heretic and sodomite, as was publicly renowned and current throughout all England, and even of the King.

This version also removes the adverb *meysmement*, rendering Edward's connection to Despenser's sodomy more ambiguous. Later writers who translated Froissart or used him as a source were similarly cautious, either emending 'sodomite' to 'so demed' or omitting the clause altogether.⁵⁹

Only one text – the earliest version of Michael Drayton's *Peirs Gaveston*, a narrative poem from Gaveston's perspective first published in 1594 – explicitly accuses Edward's earlier favourite of sodomy. Drayton's Gaveston attributes the accusation to gossip:

Some slanderous tongues, in spightful manner sayd,
That heer I liv'd in filthy sodomy,
And that I was King Edwards Ganemed,
And to this sinn he was intic'd by mee.⁶⁰

The adjective 'slanderous' creates a defensive tone, but this is somewhat undermined by Gaveston's suggestion that the claim 'that I was King Edwards Ganemed' is similarly 'slanderous'. Gaveston has previously described his relationship with Edward in precisely these terms ('My Jove with me, his Ganimed, his page'), and the reader's memory of this is likely to inspire scepticism about his denial of 'filthy sodomy'.⁶¹ This tension between Gaveston's denial of sexual transgression and his unapologetic descriptions of his sexual relationship with Edward is characteristic of the poem.⁶² Here, although Gaveston uses the singular first person pronoun 'I' (thus refraining from explicitly accusing Edward of sodomy) the term 'Ganemed' indicates the

⁵⁸ Froissart, Città Del Vaticano Reg. Lat. 869, *Online Froissart*, fol. 10^v.

⁵⁹ For 'so demed', see John Bouchier, Lord Berners's English translation of Froissart (Froissart, *Here Begynneth the First Colum of Sir Johan Froyssart of the Cronycles*, trans. Bouchier, fol. A5^v); for omission, see Grafton, *Chronicle*, fol. S6^v. Since Froissart's 'first redaction' was the most popular in manuscript and the basis for the first printed *Chroniques* [for example, *Le premier Volume*], Berners almost certainly worked from this text. See also the 1588 Catholic League pamphlet *Histoire Tragique et Memorable, de Pierre de Gaverston*, which draws a more explicit link between Despenser's sin and his genitally focused punishment ('in detestation of his sodomy, they cut off his shameful parts'), though the link between Despenser's sins and those of his King is less clear (fol. H3^r).

⁶⁰ Drayton, *Peirs Gaveston*, ll. 1267–1270.

⁶¹ Drayton, *Peirs Gaveston*, l. 213.

⁶² Zocca, *Elizabethan Narrative Poetry*, p. 82; Brink, *Michael Drayton Revisited*, p. 34. Indeed, it may well be characteristic of early modern men's conceptions of their own sexual behaviour, as Alan Bray persuasively argues: 'The individual could simply avoid making the connection [between the acts he knew were sinful and his own desires or behaviours]: he could keep at two opposite poles the social pressures bearing down on him and his own discordant sexual behaviour, and avoid recognizing it for what it was.' (*Homosexuality*, p. 67).

sexual nature of their relationship with relative specificity, as will be discussed more fully in Chapter 2.⁶³

This survey of the few medieval and early modern uses of the language of sodomy in relation to Edward II – and indeed their paucity in the first place – indicates that the writing of sodomy was as complex an activity as our reading of it. Our interpretation of this language can, I have suggested, be productively developed if we remain alert not only to the ambiguity of the language itself, but to the decisions taken by writers that alternately obstruct and encourage specificity of meaning. Moreover, there is considerable value in contextualizing the language of sodomy on a wide scale – within the attitudes and modes of reference typical of its period – and on a small scale within the stylistic framework of its particular text. By approaching each reference to sodomy and its derivatives in this way, we can go some way towards establishing contemporary perceptions of Edward’s sexual behaviour.

Minions

The terminology of overmighty royal favourites exploded in Europe during the sixteenth century. *Favoris* (‘favourites’), *privadoes* (‘privates’) and *mignons* (‘minions’) became the subject of intense discussion in print and manuscript.⁶⁴ While renewed interest in Tacitus’s account of the Roman favourite Sejanus is likely to have played some role in prompting these discussions, this is only a very partial explanation: as J.H. Elliott argues, Tacitus would not have had the influence he did ‘if playwrights, spectators and readers had not been convinced that they, too, were living in an age of overmighty favourites’.⁶⁵ Although ‘favourite’ is the term most commonly used to describe Edward II’s relationships with Piers Gaveston and the two Hugh Despensers in modern scholarly discourse, it is used relatively rarely in early modern texts: its only appearances are two uses in Marlowe’s *Edward II* and one in *Numerus Infaustus*, a 1689 chronicle by gentleman historian Charles Caesar which argues that monarchs who were the second of their name have been inherently unlucky.⁶⁶ Both terms, however, are dwarfed in these texts and elsewhere by the dominant early modern term for Edward’s favourites: ‘minion’.

‘Minion’ is, like ‘sodomy’, an ambiguous term with the *potential* to indicate sexual transgression. The *OED*’s definition helpfully emphasizes this semantic multiplicity. A ‘minion’

⁶³ See Smith, *Homosexual Desire*, pp. 191–192.

⁶⁴ Elliott, ‘Introduction’, pp. 1–2; Worden, ‘Favourites on the English Stage’, p. 168; Shannon, ‘Monarchs, Minions and “Sovereign” Friendship’, p. 95.

⁶⁵ Elliott, ‘Introduction’, p. 2.

⁶⁶ Marlowe, *Edward II*, I.i.5, III.ii.44; Charles Caesar, *Numerus Infaustus* (London: for Ric. Chiswell, 1689), fols. E6r, F2r.

can be ‘a (usually male) favourite of a sovereign, prince, or other powerful person; ‘a person who is dependent on a patron's favour’; ‘a hanger-on’; ‘a male or female lover’; ‘a frequently derogatory’ term for ‘a man or woman kept for sexual favours’; ‘a fastidious or effeminate man’; and both ‘a term of endearment or affection’ and ‘a derogatory term [...] slave, underling’.⁶⁷ The term is used in all these senses to refer to Edward's favourites, and frequently sustains several meanings simultaneously. While it very rarely lacks a politically pejorative aspect, the extent to which it implies sexual involvement varies between texts. Emphasis on potential is therefore a central interpretive strategy: I want to ask here whether writers encourage potential sexual connotations, or obstruct them.

The first English text to use the term ‘minion’ for any of Edward's favourites was Marlowe's *Edward II*. In this, Marlowe was almost certainly influenced by the French *mignon*, which had been used to denote a powerful favourite since the early fifteenth century.⁶⁸ *Mignon* emerged as a term for ‘someone who lends themselves to the pleasure of another’, later developing ‘the pejorative sense of “passive homosexual”’.⁶⁹ It was ‘especially employed to indicate the young favourites [*jeunes gens favoris*] of the entourage of Charles VII [...] then the effeminate favourites [*favoris efféminés*] of Henri III’.⁷⁰ The adjective ‘effeminate’ seems key to the term's original application to Henri III's favourites, in that (although it was originally applied to men) ‘mignon’ could by the sixteenth century function as an ‘affectionate appellation’ for a female lover, ‘with the sense of “elegant, pretty, pleasant”’ (*gracieux, joli, agréable*) and indicating ‘smallness’ and ‘delicacy’ (*petitesse* and *gentillesse*).⁷¹ This is borne out by the evidence of seventeenth-century French dictionaries, which emphasize the association of *mignon* with physical beauty: ‘delicate, pretty, nice’ (*Delicat, joli, gentil*).⁷²

Pierre de L'Estoile's *Registre-Journal du Règne de Henri III* – part diary, part scrapbook of pamphlets and satirical verses, compiled contemporaneously from 1574–1611 – notes that the popularity of the term ‘mignon’ emerged following Henri's 1576 visits to the parishes of Paris. Henri was collecting subsidies to fund the payoff of Protestant mercenaries (an unpopular aspect of the treaty that ended the fifth war of religion) and was accompanied by his favourites. This entourage of expensively dressed young men, accompanying the supposedly cash-strapped King

⁶⁷ ‘Minion, n.1 and adj.’, *OED Online* (2002).

⁶⁸ Contamine, ‘Pouvoir et Vie de Cour’, p. 544; ‘Mignon’, *Dictionnaire Historique*.

⁶⁹ *Dictionnaire Historique*. The latter meaning should be taken to indicate the receptive partner in anal sex between men.

⁷⁰ *Dictionnaire Historique*; see also Potter, ‘Marlowe's *Massacre*’, p. 86; Contamine, ‘Pouvoir et Vie de Cour’, pp. 541–542 and *passim*.

⁷¹ *Dictionnaire Historique*.

⁷² *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française*, II, fol. I3^r. See also Furetière, *Dictionnaire*, fol. 3S^v; Richelet, *Dictionnaire*, II, fols. E3^r, E4^v; Levin, *Overreacher*, pp. 92–93.

on a mission to collect funds for religious purposes, was at best tactless and at worst offensive.⁷³ L'Estoile's description integrates details of the *mignons*' offensively elaborate dress and hairstyles with accusations of sexual transgression: they indulge in 'fornicating' (*paillardier*), while their clothing is 'unchaste' (*impudiques*), and their headgear like that of 'whores in the brothels' (*comme font les putains du bordeau*).⁷⁴

Over the next thirteen years of Henri's often unpopular rule, accusations of sexual sin on the part of his *mignons* – and of their sexual involvement with Henri – increased in frequency and clarity.⁷⁵ Both King and favourites were called 'bugger' (*bougre*) and 'sodomite' (*sodomite*) in contexts that encourage a sexual interpretation, and Henri's love for his *mignons* was described as excessive.⁷⁶ Indeed, as we have seen, *mignon* could explicitly indicate the receptive partner in anal sex between men. This is reflected in the fact that the 'mignons' were described as 'shameless Ganymedes' (*Ganimèdes effrontés*) and as practising 'among themselves the art / Of lewd Ganymede' (*Entre eux ils pratiquent l'art / De l'impudique Ganimède*).⁷⁷ 'Ganymede' was, in early modern Europe, one of the most specific terms available for referring to sex between men, and the only such term whose sexual denotations were really foregrounded; it referred, similarly, to the receptive partner in anal sex.⁷⁸

The parallels between Henri and Edward II did not go unnoticed. In 1588, the French Catholic League sponsored the anonymous pamphlet *Histoire Tragique et Memorable, de Pierre de Gaverston*. This text – largely a translation of the St Albans monk Thomas Walsingham's *Chronica Maiora*, composed during the 1390s – explicitly equated Gaveston with his sixteenth-century counterpart Jean Louis de Nogaret de La Valette, also a minor noble from Gascony, whom Henri had created Duc d'Épernon. By implication, this aligned Henri with the deposed Edward. This text and its influences – including a minor pamphlet war – will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5. Its relevance here is that it contains the first reference to any of Edward II's favourites as a *mignon*. The writer uses the term frequently, often substituting it where Walsingham's original text uses Gaveston's Latinized first name, 'Petrus'.⁷⁹ Given the writer's

⁷³ Crawford, 'Love, Sodomy, and Scandal', pp. 523–524.

⁷⁴ L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, II, 42–43; trans. by Crawford, 'Love, Sodomy, and Scandal', p. 524. I cite a more recent critical edition of L'Estoile than was available to Crawford.

⁷⁵ See Cady, 'Masculine Love', pp. 123–154. While I have reservations about Cady's insistence that the sexual slanders and satires against Henri and his *mignons* represent sixteenth-century awareness of homosexual identity in a way directly comparable to modern conceptions, his essay provides a valuable synthesis of these accusations from across L'Estoile's *Registre-Journal*.

⁷⁶ Crawford, 'Love, Sodomy, and Scandal', p. 542; Cady, 'Masculine Love', pp. 132, 136–137.

⁷⁷ L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, II, 185, 46; see Cady, 'Masculine Love', pp. 139–140, for further examples.

⁷⁸ Smith, *Homosexual Desire*, pp. 195–196; see also Chapter 2.

⁷⁹ Compare, for example, *Histoire Tragique*, fol. E1^r (*chasser ce mignon hors de sa Cour*) to Walsingham, *Historia*, fol. F6^v (*dictum Petrum a sua propoelleret comitiva*).

parallel with Nogaret, his use of *mignon* suggests that the term's connotations as established regarding Henri's favourites – fashionable, effeminate dress, sexual transgression, and an excessively close emotional relationship with the King – were also intended to apply here.

Alan Stewart has recently argued convincingly for the influence of the *Histoire Tragique* on Marlowe's *Edward II*, suggesting that 'this attack on the Duc d'Épernon shapes and informs Marlowe's play', and that 'we should understand [the] English historical frame [of *Edward II*] as co-existing with another: that of contemporary French politics'.⁸⁰ Although Stewart stops short of suggesting that Marlowe read the *Histoire Tragique*, or that its 'influence [on *Edward II*] can be proven by the usual identification of source material that provides precedents for plot, scenes, character or specific language', it seems to me very plausible that he did: it was, as Stewart says, 'clearly a best-seller' with a 'remarkable' impact.⁸¹ Moreover, it seems possible that one element of 'specific language' – his use of the term 'minion' for Gaveston – is drawn from it. There is stronger evidence for the influence of a later Catholic League pamphlet on Marlowe's play *The Massacre at Paris* (c. 1593) suggesting that Marlowe had some familiarity with and access to the French libels.⁸² Marlowe's knowledge of Henri from this play may also have suggested the topic of *Edward II*, prompting Marlowe to investigate the French King's fourteenth-century English counterpart.⁸³ Overall, however – as Richard Hillman argues – 'it seems less fruitful to speculate about Marlowe's inspiration than to recognize that, even if he derived this theme from English historical sources, it came to him multiply overlaid and countersigned by the contemporary discourse of French political satire'.⁸⁴ The writer of the anonymous play *Thomas of Woodstock*, who was Marlowe's contemporary, also uses the term 'minion' liberally to denote Richard II's favourites, and his emphasis on their excessive interest in fashion (they 'sit in council to devise' new and impractical footwear) seems a clear and deliberate echo of Henri's favourites.⁸⁵

Outside the historiography of Edward II, English uses of 'minion' are diverse. In some cases, it clearly connotes sexual transgression: for poet Edmund Spenser, the 'mincing mineon' Perissa warrants condemnation for 'looseness', while for John Payne (in his depiction of London's Royal Exchange) a 'secret minion' is an adulterous partner.⁸⁶ Elsewhere, 'minion' appears as part of a condemnation of a monarch's excessive reliance on the company and advice

⁸⁰ Stewart, 'Edoüard et Gaverston', pp. 110, 97.

⁸¹ Stewart, 'Edoüard et Gaverston', pp. 99, 102, 108.

⁸² Thomas and Tydeman, *Plays and their Sources*, pp. 251, 278–280; Briggs, 'Marlowe's *Massacre*', pp. 263–265; see also Potter, 'Marlowe's *Massacre*'.

⁸³ Briggs, 'Marlowe's *Massacre*', p. 263.

⁸⁴ Hillman, *Shakespeare, Marlowe and the Politics of France*, p. 98; see also Rufo, 'Marlowe's Minions', p. 16.

⁸⁵ *Thomas of Woodstock*, II.iii.88. For 'minion' see (for example) I.ii.43; for fashion see (for example) III.ii.201–207.

⁸⁶ Spenser, *Faerie Queene*, II.ii.37, quoted in Shannon, 'Monarchs, Minions and "Sovereigne" Friendship', p. 95; Payne, *Royall Exchange*, fol. D2^r. See also Zocca, *Elizabethan Narrative Poetry*, p. 268.

of young, fashionable men, or as part of anti-court discourse which castigates the preoccupation of courtiers with petty matters of fun and fashion rather than weightier affairs of state.⁸⁷ Henry VIII's young, unpopular favourites were, as Edward Hall's chronicle *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancaster and York* (first printed 1548) notes, 'called the kynges minions', and were ultimately expelled from court – a parallel with Edward II's favourites which may have affected the connotations of the term 'minion' for writers and readers familiar with the events in question.⁸⁸ For the politician Robert Naunton, reflecting positively on Elizabeth I's reign in his 1641 text *Fragmenta Regalia, Or, Observations on the Late Queen Elizabeth, Her Times and Favorits*, the salient connotation of 'minion' was that of a favourite with excessive power over the monarch. Naunton explicitly contrasts Elizabeth's 'favourites' with the precedents of 'Gaveston, Vere [and] Spencer', who, as 'minions', acted 'by their own wills and appetites' rather than following their monarchs' instructions.⁸⁹

When Marlowe chose the term 'minion' to apply to Gaveston, then, he was choosing a profoundly unstable and ambiguous term with the potential to signify sexual transgression; anti-court sentiment; a young, fashionable favourite with insufficient concern for governance; and a favourite with singular and/or excessive political power.⁹⁰ He had previously used the term to apply to Henri III's favourites in *The Massacre at Paris*, but the situations differ in one key respect, which can best be observed in a close linguistic echo between the two plays: Henri's 'mind [...] runs on his minions', while Edward's 'runs on his minion'.⁹¹ Henri has many minions, who are overwhelmingly spoken of in the plural, as a band of followers; his preoccupation with them emphasizes his excessive reliance on flatterers.⁹² Edward, by contrast, has one – suggesting Gaveston's dangerously unchecked political influence but also Edward's excessive emotional commitment and loyalty to him.

Far more so than *The Massacre at Paris*, *Edward II* establishes a rich complexity of meaning for 'minion'. The play exclusively applies the term to Gaveston – Spencer is 'never a "minion"', always one of [Edward's] (always plural) "flatterers" – which further highlights the singularity observed above.⁹³ Edward's nobles use it as a contemptuous metonym emphasizing Gaveston's

⁸⁷ The use of this discourse in relation to Edward II's favourites will be discussed in Chapter 4; see Shannon, *Sovereign Amity* and 'Monarchs, Minions and "Sovereign" Friendship', for the way in which the discursive field of 'minion' 'presents the political scandal of a monarch's unsuppressed private self, with the individuated and self-centred body natural eclipsing the body politic' ('Monarchs, Minions and "Sovereign" Friendship', p. 94).

⁸⁸ Hall, *Union*, fol. 3M2^v.

⁸⁹ Naunton, *Fragmenta Regalia*, fol. A3^r–A3^v; see Adams, *Leicester and the Court*, pp. 56–57.

⁹⁰ On the singularity of the 'minion', see Rutkoski, 'Breeching the Boy', p. 282.

⁹¹ Marlowe, *Massacre*, XIV.43–46; Marlowe, *Edward II*, II.ii.4.

⁹² Rufo, 'Marlowe's Minions', p. 15.

⁹³ Stewart, 'Edoüard et Gaverston', p. 112.

low social status ('thy base minion') and to mock Edward's excessive love for his favourite ('The King is lovesick for his minion').⁹⁴ Later, Edward takes defensive ownership of the term: 'Were he a peasant, being my minion, / I'll make the proudest of you stoop to him.'⁹⁵ Moreover, the use of 'minion' to refer to Gaveston, who the play quickly establishes is Edward's sexual partner (see Chapter 2), is crucial in cementing its sexual connotations in the play. As Vincenzo Pasquarella points out, Lancaster's attempt to reassure Isabella – 'now his [Edward's] minion's gone / His wanton humour will be quickly left' – suggests a causal association between the term 'minion' and Gaveston's influence over Edward's sexually transgressive ('wanton') behaviour.⁹⁶ Perhaps most interestingly, Marlowe also imbues 'minion' with a long history, applying it to a succession of male-male pairs:

The mightiest kings have had their minions:
Great Alexander loved Hephestion;
The conquering Hercules for Hylas wept;
And for Patroclus stern Achilles drooped.
And not kings only, but the wisest men:
The Roman Tully lov'd Octavius;
Grave Socrates, wild Alcibiades.⁹⁷

This passage represents Marlowe's engagement with an early modern textual practice that allowed writers to discuss love and sex between men provided that their discussion could be interpreted as humanist classical imitation.⁹⁸ A comparable example can be found in the poet Richard Barnfield's preface to his second volume of poetry (1595), in which he defended his homoerotic poem *The Affectionate Shepheard* (first printed 1594) as 'nothing else, but an imitation of Virgill, in the second Eclogue of Alexis'.⁹⁹ The gloss to Spenser's collection of eclogues, *The Shepheardes Calender* (written by 'E.K.', a figure of contested identity) similarly aligns the character Hobbinol's love for his friend Colin, the propriety of which clearly causes him some concern, with Virgil's second eclogue.¹⁰⁰ The very status of Virgil's second eclogue as an established example of one man's unrequited love for another, however, enabled these poets' claims of *imitatio* (Barnfield's probably more deliberately than E.K.'s) to act simultaneously as signals concerning their poems' content. Marlowe applies the same practice not to texts, but to human relationships. Analogous to Virgil's eclogue, the classical pairings Mortimer cites were established

⁹⁴ Marlowe, *Edward II*, I.i.132, I.iv.87; see Shannon, 'Monarchs, Minions and "Sovereigne" Friendship', p. 104.

⁹⁵ Marlowe, *Edward II*, I.iv.30–31.

⁹⁶ Pasquarella, *Marlowe's Representation of Love*, p. 74; Marlowe, *Edward II*, I.iv.198–199.

⁹⁷ Marlowe, *Edward II*, I.iv.390–396.

⁹⁸ See Guy-Bray, *Homoerotic Space*, pp. 3–23 and *passim*; Deats, 'Myth and Metamorphosis', pp. 308–310; Haber, *Desire and Dramatic Form*, p. 33; Shepherd, *Marlowe and the Politics of Elizabethan Theatre*, p. 204.

⁹⁹ Barnfield, *Complete Poems*, p. 30.

¹⁰⁰ Spenser, *Shepheardes Calender*, fol. A2r.

in this period as deep emotional male-male partnerships.¹⁰¹ Suggestions that these relationships were sexual were also not infrequent: in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, for instance, Thersites describes Patroclus as Achilles's 'masculine whore'.¹⁰² Through Mortimer's speech, Marlowe aligns Edward and Gaveston with this catalogue of classical pairs – simultaneously exonerating them (and exonerating himself from discussion of love and sex between men) and confirming the nature of their relationship. In addition, Marlowe's application of the term 'minion' – an intrinsically newfangled figure with powerful contemporary resonance – to these classical couples destabilizes its contemporary political currency. His statement that 'The mightiest kings have had their minions' can be contrasted with an assertion made by the poet Samuel Daniel: Daniel's *Collection of the History of England* (whose first edition covering Edward's reign was printed in 1618) describes Gaveston as 'the first Privado of this kinde ever noted in our History', thus depriving Edward and Gaveston of any legitimating precedent for their actions.¹⁰³ In Daniel's account, Edward is transgressing by not emulating positive examples from history as early modern kings were expected to do; in Marlowe's, he is acting in a well-established classical tradition.

Marlowe's use of 'minion' as a term for Edward's favourites can be shown to have influenced several subsequent writers. Edward II's 'minions' first appear in a chronicle in 1607. Edward Ayscu, whose 1607 *Historie* highlights positive interactions between England and Scotland prior to their union under James VI and I, contrasts Edward with his Scottish counterparts:

while this youthfull King sought nothing more, then to spend his time in voluptuous pleasure & riotous excesse, making such his familiers, and chiefe minions about him, as best fitted his humor: Bruse on the other side wholly indeavored by all possible meanes, how to restore his country to her former liberty and quiet estate¹⁰⁴

This passage is heavily derivative of Holinshed's *Chronicles*: the phrase 'passing his time in voluptuous pleasure, and riotous excesse' originates in Holinshed, as does the suggestion that Edward was 'desirous to advance those that were like to him selfe'.¹⁰⁵ Holinshed, however, does not use the term 'minions' in relation to Edward II.¹⁰⁶ Between the publication of Holinshed's and Ayscu's texts, Marlowe's *Edward II* was printed twice and (according to the 1594 title page)

¹⁰¹ See Marlowe, *Edward II*, I.iv.390–396n.

¹⁰² Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, V.i.17. See also Spenser, *Shepheardes Calender*, fol. A2^r, for anxiety concerning Socrates and Alcibiades.

¹⁰³ Daniel, *Collection*, fol. Q4^r. On Daniel's historical and political thought more broadly, see Woolf, 'Community, Law and State'.

¹⁰⁴ Ayscu, *Historie*, fol. K4^r.

¹⁰⁵ Holinshed, *Chronicles* (1587), VI, section 10/p. 318.

¹⁰⁶ Holinshed does use 'minion' elsewhere to denote favourites: for example, he describes Richard Ratcliffe as Lord Lovell's 'mischeevous minion' [*Chronicles* (1587), VI, section 10/p. 746].

had been ‘sundrie times publicly acted in the honourable citie of London’.¹⁰⁷ It is therefore plausible that Ayscu’s use of ‘minion’ for Edward’s favourites was directly influenced by its frequency in Marlowe’s play. An important factor to support this is that, while Ayscu does not name Edward’s ‘chiefe minions’, the original passage in Holinshed is specifically about Gaveston. Marlowe’s play also applies the term to Gaveston in particular. Ayscu, when reading this passage in Holinshed, may have been encouraged by familiarity with Marlowe’s *Edward II* to associate it with the term ‘minion’: had he read, seen, or known of Marlowe’s play, Ayscu would have associated Gaveston specifically with the term ‘minion’, and this term would thus have been called to mind when he read Holinshed’s account of Edward’s reign.

Given the comparative popularity of Ayscu’s and Marlowe’s texts (the former was never reprinted), it seems likely that subsequent uses of ‘minion’ in historical accounts of Edward’s reign were initially also influenced by Marlowe, before beginning to influence each other. John Speed’s *History of Great Britaine*, published only four years after Ayscu’s *History*, was the first chronicle to refer to a specific favourite of Edward II as a ‘minion’: like Marlowe, Speed uses the term to refer to Gaveston.¹⁰⁸

Conclusion

Can we read the popularity of ‘minion’ in the early modern historiography of Edward II as evidence of a cultural assumption by which Edward was assumed to have engaged in sex with men? Ultimately, while this term’s applicability to both political and sexual transgressions lent it contemporary relevance – especially during the reign of James VI and I – its ambiguity is often difficult to unravel. When considering this ambiguity, and that of the other two terms discussed in this chapter, it is instructive to look back to Marlowe’s innovative usage of ‘minion’.

Marlowe’s passage on the minions of ‘mightiest kings’, as detailed above, depends for its significance on the early modern device of using classical references simultaneously to obscure and indicate discussion of love and sex between men. The efficacy of this technique relies on the wider strategy of tactical ambiguity that (as Annabel Patterson has argued) characterized textual approaches to sensitive topics in early modern England: provided a text could *potentially* be interpreted as not requiring censorship (or, in the case of sex between men, censorious interpretation), it was usually given the benefit of the doubt.¹⁰⁹ As an early modern habit of thought, this has far-reaching implications – it can be recognized, for example, in the cognitive

¹⁰⁷ Marlowe, *Edward II*, pp. 1–2. See also Knutson, ‘*Edward II* in Repertory’.

¹⁰⁸ Speed, *History*, fol. 4S2^r.

¹⁰⁹ Patterson, *Censorship*, pp. 10–11.

dissonance that (Alan Bray argues) allowed people to avoid reconciling men in their community with the figure of the ‘sodomite’, until they had a compelling (often political) reason to do so.¹¹⁰ And it can, I think, help us to understand the popularity of the term ‘minion’ for Edward II’s favourites, as well as that of equally ambiguous terms like ‘riot’ and ‘sodomy’ both in narratives of Edward II and across medieval and early modern texts. These terms’ dual meanings – situated at the intersection of the political, the social and the sexual – combined suggestion of sexual transgression with plausible deniability. In the context of accounts of Edward II’s reign, referring to his favourites as ‘minions’ enabled writers to suggest that Edward may have engaged in sex with them, while maintaining the potential for a political interpretation that simply condemned their excessive power. Similarly, and more widely, accusing particular figures of ‘riot’ or ‘sodomy’ made available an accusation of sexually transgressive behaviour, while maintaining the potential to interpret these words simply as accusations of social disruption. The texts that constitute Edward II’s historiographical reputation therefore also constitute a corpus that allows us to assess how writers strategically deployed this ambiguous sexual vocabulary, as well as how they negotiated that ambiguity and encouraged specific interpretations at different moments. Extending this investigation to further ambiguous sexual terms and to other textual traditions beyond the case of Edward II may well, I would suggest, prove rewarding in developing our understanding of how medieval and early modern writers selected and used sexual vocabulary.

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Chapter 2 – From Goats to Ganymedes: The Development of Edward II’s Sexual Reputation

Abstract

This chapter provides the first scholarly assessment of how Edward II developed a reputation for having engaged in sexual relationships with his male favourites. Edward’s reputation for non-specific sexually transgressive behaviour developed during his reign; however, the first writer to explicitly state that this transgression constituted sex with men was Christopher Marlowe. Following the publication of Marlowe’s *Edward II*, discourse concerning Edward and his favourites in texts of all genres shifted towards consensus that their relationships were sexual. As well as documenting the cumulative process by which narratives of sexual transgression were shaped, this chapter provides new insights into the significance of Marlowe’s work, and into the ways in which drama as a genre enabled his historiographical innovation.

Keywords

Beast allegory, Christopher Marlowe, chronicles, homosexuality, prose Brut

Introduction

How did Edward II develop his sexual reputation? Despite repeated statements from scholars about what the nature of that reputation was, this question has been surprisingly seldom asked. When it has been, investigation has largely focused on chronicle accounts written in Edward’s lifetime or shortly afterwards.¹ This chapter makes the case for the important role played by texts of other genres. Focusing exclusively on historical texts or contemporary political documents means that we miss what was ultimately the most influential development during Edward’s lifetime: the attribution of ‘lechery’ to his allegorical character in the prophetic text *The Prophecy of the Six Kings to Follow John*. Moreover, the ongoing process of constructing Edward’s reputation did not end in the immediate aftermath of his reign: it took nearly three centuries for it to crystallize as a narrative involving love and sex between men. Building on Chapter 1’s discussion of how narratives of Edward II reveal the strategic use of ambiguous sexual vocabulary, this chapter focuses on the vocabulary which *shaped* Edward’s reputation, and the

¹ For example, Ormrod, ‘Sexualities’; Mortimer, ‘Sermons of Sodomy’.

terms and texts which constitute milestones in that process. Through this, it traces the means by which hints of sexual transgression became a consensus that Edward's relationships with his favourites were sexual and romantic: by which the sexual connotations of allegorical goats became the unequivocal accusations of allusions to Ganymede, the cupbearer of Jupiter in classical mythology. This was a process in which literary techniques and literary texts – particularly Marlowe's *Edward II*, but also Michael Drayton's Gaveston poems – played a continually crucial role.

Lechery and goats

The earliest mode of reference to Edward's sexual transgression is found in medieval prophetic texts which allegorize him as a goat.² The tradition of allegorizing prominent political figures as animals was established by Geoffrey of Monmouth's 'Prophetia Merlini'. This text was popularized by its inclusion in Geoffrey's *Historia Regum Britanniae* (c. 1136), but as Lesley A. Coote has detailed, it 'was completed and in circulation before the rest of the *Historia*, c. 1135' and subsequently enjoyed 'independent circulation in later medieval England, often appearing without the *Historia*'.³ The technique of animal allegory was, according to Rupert Taylor, a typically English form of 'symbolical' prophetic discourse.⁴ The standard set of symbolic animals associated with Merlin's prophecies included 'the Boar, the Lion, the Eagle, the Lynx, the Goat, the Ass, the Hedgehog, the Heron, the Fox, the Wolf, the Bear, the Dragon, the Bull, and the Owl'.⁵ One of the animals which appears in Geoffrey's *Historia* is a 'goat of the castle of Venus' (*hircus venerei castrî*).⁶

In the early fourteenth century, this passage from the 'Prophetia Merlini' found its way into the *Annales Londonienses* (a chronicle probably composed around 1316 by the administrator Andrew Horn) – this time as an allegory for Edward II. The allegory – Edward as *hircus venerei castrî*, 'the goat of the venereal [which Coote glosses as 'beautiful'] castle' – appears at the start of the account of his reign. The writer expresses high hopes for Edward as the 'son of Edward the Conqueror': using the goat allegory to link him to Alexander the Great via the Bible, the

² My reference to 'prophetic texts' is based on Lesley A. Coote's useful suggestion that 'prophecy is a discourse, not a genre' ('Language of Power', p. 18).

³ Coote, 'Language of Power', p. 26 n. 1.

⁴ Taylor, *Political Prophecy*, pp. 4–5.

⁵ Taylor, *Political Prophecy*, p. 45.

⁶ Taylor, *Political Prophecy*, p. 136.

prophecy asserts that he will ‘manfully defeat and take possession of Scotland, Norway, Dacia, France, and all the lands which the most glorious soldier Arthur gained by the sword.’⁷

Written long before Edward II’s birth, this original ‘goat’ prophecy is predictive rather than retrospective; its depiction of Edward was not based on the actual events of his reign.⁸ However, it provided a precedent for the later allegorization of Edward as a goat in false prophecies written after the fact; and in these texts, as I will show, the goat allegory does indicate Edward’s sexually transgressive nature. Although Coote’s gloss of *venerei* as ‘beautiful’ accords well with the laudatory tone of the passage as it appears in the *Annales Londonienses*, *venerei* could also be translated as relating to lust or sexual pleasure.⁹ While it seems likely that this sense was not intended at the time of writing, the collocation of this passage with accusations of ‘lechery’ in later texts make it reasonable to conclude that a dual interpretation of *venerei* would have been available to later readers of the *Annales Londonienses*. Additionally, the specific identification of Edward as a *hircus* (‘billy goat’) carries pejorative force: the billy goat was, in bestiary tradition, particularly associated with sexual transgression.

The earliest unequivocal description of Edward as sexually transgressive is found in the early fourteenth-century prophetic text *The Prophecy of the Six Kings to Follow John*, also known as *The Last Kings of England*.¹⁰ This was preserved – and popularized – by its inclusion in the Long Version of the popular Anglo-Norman prose *Brut* chronicle (composed c. 1333–1347) and in the Middle English translation known as the Common Version (made in the later fourteenth century).¹¹ However, it also circulated independently; its relationship to the *Brut* is analogous to that of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s ‘Prophetia Merlini’ to his *Historia Regum Britanniae*, as outlined above. *The Six Kings* purports to recount Merlin’s prophecies about the final six kings of England, each of whom is allegorized as a different animal. The animal symbols are taken from Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Book of Merlin*. In Geoffrey’s text, as Taylor notes, ‘the animal names are arbitrary and mean nothing’; but in *The Six Kings*, ‘the animal species used to identify

⁷ Trans. by Coote, *Prophecy*, p. 84.

⁸ The several other predictive prophecies written about Edward II had no discernible influence on his historiographical reputation, and as such will not be considered here. For discussion of these prophecies, see Phillips, ‘Edward II and the Prophets’. Taylor’s suggestion that ‘Adam Davy’s Five Dreams of Edward II’ could have been written during the early years of his reign as opposed to around the time of his accession (*Political Prophecy*, pp. 94–98) has been refuted by Phillips (op. cit.) and Scattergood (‘Adam Davy’s Dreams and Edward II’).

⁹ *Revised Medieval Latin Word-List*, p. 507.

¹⁰ See Appendix for a full list of alternative titles. I use the title favoured by Smallwood.

¹¹ See Marvin, *Construction*, pp. 240–242. For reasons of concision, the Long Version is referred to simply as the *Brut* in this book, since this is the version that exerted by far the most influence on Edward II’s reputation. Quotations from the *Brut* are taken from the Middle English Common Version.

particular kings in the text have been chosen for their appropriateness, according to the point which the writer wishes to make about that individual'.¹²

T.M. Smallwood has identified eight versions of *The Six Kings*, including translations from the original Anglo-Norman into English, Welsh and Latin.¹³ The earliest version, 'The "Original" Prose Version', contains references to Edward as a goat, to his 'lechery', and to Gaveston's rise and fall; it does not mention the Despensers or Edward's downfall, which has prompted Smallwood to suggest that it was written around 1312.¹⁴ This is, therefore, the earliest suggestion we have that Edward's sexual behaviour was in some way transgressive: the monk Robert of Reading's continuation of the chronicle *Flores Historiarum* (which, as noted in Chapter 1, accuses Edward of 'unlawful', 'sinful', adulterous sexual behaviour) was composed around 15 years later. It also means that, while the harsh tone of the *Flores* accusations supports Gransden's argument for political motivation,¹⁵ they may not have been entirely invented by Robert of Reading; indeed, it would have been advantageous for Robert to draw on rumours or opinions that were already circulating, since this would render his accusations more plausible.

The most popular version of *The Six Kings* is what Smallwood calls 'The English Prose Translation'. This text, a translation of 'The Revised Prose Version', was composed later and as such does cover the Despensers and Edward's deposition. This is the version included in the Middle English Common Version of the *Brut*. It would be difficult to overemphasize the influence of the *Brut* – and therefore of this version of *The Six Kings* – on Edward's historiographical reputation. 'In the absence of official history in England,' John Taylor argues, the *Brut* 'became for the mass of its medieval readers the standard history of the day': 'many Englishmen and Englishwomen must have obtained their view of Edward II's reign from the text of the prose *Brut*.'¹⁶ Similarly, Julia Marvin suggests that the *Brut* may have been 'a basic element of a vernacular library in late medieval England'.¹⁷

Marvin argues that *The Six Kings* was interpolated into the *Brut* to enhance its authority: the prophecies combine Merlin's established authority with the common technique of 'apparently fulfilled prophecy concerning events that have already occurred'.¹⁸ The relevant prophecies from *The Six Kings* appear at the conclusion of each monarch's reign. Following

¹² Taylor, *Political Prophecy*, p. 110; Coote, *Prophecy*, p. 103; see also Given-Wilson, *Chronicles*, p. 209.

¹³ Smallwood, 'Prophecy', pp. 572–573.

¹⁴ Smallwood, 'Prophecy', pp. 575–576.

¹⁵ See Gransden, *Historical Writing*, II, 17–18.

¹⁶ Taylor, 'French Prose *Brut*', pp. 247, 252; see also Marvin, *Construction*, pp. 1–15.

¹⁷ Marvin, *Construction*, pp. 174–175.

¹⁸ Marvin, 'Arthur Authorized', p. 93; see also *Construction*, p. 240–242.

Edward's deposition, the writer summarizes his reign by retrospectively noting the prophecies that were fulfilled:

Of þis Kyng Edward, propheciede Merlyn, and saide þat þere shulde come a gote out of a car, þat shulde have hornes of silver and a berde as white as snowe; and a drop shulde come out at his noseþrelles þat shulde bitokne miche harme, hungre, and deþ of þe peple, and gret losse of his lande; and þat in þe bigynnyng of his regne shulde ben hauntede michel lecherie; and saide soþ, allas þe tyme! ffor Kyng Edward, þat was Kyng Edwardus sone, þat was born in Carnarivan in Walys, for soþ he hade Hornes as silver, and a berd as snowe, when he was made Prynce of Walys, & to miche he 3af him unto realte and folie. And soþ saide Merlyn in his prophecie þat þere shulde come out of His nose a drop; ffor in his tyme was grete hunger amonges þe pore men, and stronge deþ amonge þe ryche, þat deiden in strange lande wiþ miche sorw, and in Scotland; and afterwarde he loste Scotland and Gascoigne; and whiles þat him-self was Kyng, þer was miche lecherie hauntede.¹⁹

Of this King Edward, Merlin prophesied, and said that there should come a goat out of a chariot, that should have horns of silver and a beard as white as snow; and a drop should come out of his nostrils that should betoken much harm, hunger, and death of the people, and great loss of his land; and that in the beginning of his reign, much lechery should be habitually practised; and he spoke the truth, alas the time! for King Edward, that was King Edward's son, that was born in Caernarfon in Wales, forsooth he had Horns like silver, and a beard like snow, when he was made Prince of Wales, and he gave himself too much to riot and folly. And Merlin said truth in his prophecy that a drop should come out of his nose; for in his time there was great hunger amongst the poor men, and grievous death among the rich, who died in a strange land with much sorrow, and in Scotland; and afterwards he lost Scotland and Gascony; and while he was King, much lechery was habitually practised.

In bestiary tradition the goat – and specifically the billy goat (*hircus*), as mentioned above – ‘is known for “fervent and hoot worching[e] of generacioun”, and so becomes a symbol for moral degeneration, which often means sexual immorality’.²⁰ The statement that *in þe bigynnyng of [Edward's] regne shulde ben hauntede michel lecherie* reflects these associations. The meaning of lechery as ‘habitual indulgence of lust’ is relatively stable in this period, though in this context its meaning cannot be narrowed further than non-specific sexual sin.²¹ While the text stops short of accusing Edward himself of *haunting* (‘habitually practising’) *lecherie*, the implied personal accusation is clear from the connotations of the goat allegory.²² The prophecy of *lecherie* is decoupled from the initial *gote* allegorization, enabling a double-edged accusation of sexual transgression: *gote* establishes the connotations, before *lecherie* makes them explicit.

¹⁹ *Brut*, p. 243.

²⁰ Coote, *Prophecy*, p. 104.

²¹ ‘Lechery, n.’, *OED Online* (1902).

²² C.f. Langland, *Piers Plowman*, in which ‘Losels [...] leccherie haunten’ (‘Prologue’, l. 77).

As the *Annales Londonienses* demonstrates, ‘the symbol [of the goat] had been associated with Edward since the beginning of his reign [...] but in order to glorify, not to revile, the King’ through the link to Alexander the Great.²³ This established association seems likely to have been one influence on the inclusion of the goat allegory in *The Six Kings*. But was this also influenced by Edward’s emerging reputation for sexual transgression? As mentioned above, the goat allegory and ‘lechery’ accusation appear in the earliest version of *The Six Kings*, probably composed around 1312. Smallwood argues that the mention of ‘lechery’ in this version is merely one of ‘a confused medley of commonplace themes of late medieval English prophecy, mostly sensational’ found in the text.²⁴ Whatever the intention of this initial collocation of ‘goat’ and ‘lechery’ with Edward, however, its impact was powerful: it influenced the inclusion of those details in the ‘English Prose Translation’ of *The Six Kings*, and thus their inclusion in the *Brut*, which played a very significant role in the formation of Edward’s historiographical reputation for sexual transgression.²⁵

Sexualized stock phrases

Following the establishment of Edward’s reputation for sexual transgression during his lifetime by means of the goat allegory and the popularity of the *Brut*, a series of popular, mostly cheap, printed chronicles developed these implications further. The phrases ‘adultery and other’ and ‘appetites and pleasures of the body’ became frequently used, almost ‘stock’ references to Edward’s bodily (perhaps sexual) sins, allowing us to productively assess how they were interpreted by subsequent writers. The former phrase originates in Robert Fabyan’s *Newe Cronycles of England and Fraunce* (composed c. 1504 and first printed in 1516). Gaveston, Fabyan writes, ‘brought the kyng by meane of his wanton condicions to many folde vycis as avoutry [adultery] and other’.²⁶ This is the earliest reference to Edward’s favourites inciting the King to any kind of sexual transgression. While adultery is clearly a sexual sin, Fabyan gives no suggestions as to the meaning of ‘other’: he does not specify sexual transgression, but gives no reason to rule it out, perhaps employing strategic ambiguity. The printer Richard Grafton, borrowing this phrase for his *Chronicle At Large* (1569), makes no alterations.²⁷ However, as

²³ Coote, *Prophecy*, p. 104.

²⁴ Smallwood, ‘Prophecy’, pp. 576–577.

²⁵ For example, the goat allegory in *The Six Kings* may have influenced a later goat allegory in *The Prophecy of John of Bridlington*, a highly cryptic Latin verse prophecy written in the 1360s. See Rigg, ‘John of Bridlington’s Prophecy’. The only early modern source to retain the prophecies of Merlin is Heywood, *Chronographically History*. On the popular importance of the figure of Merlin as a prophet in early modern England, see Thornton, *Prophecy, Politics and the People*, p. 54.

²⁶ Fabyan, *Prima Pars*, fol. 2K1r. For variant spellings of ‘adultery’ (including ‘avoutry’), see ‘adultery, n.’, *OED Online* (2011).

²⁷ Grafton, *Chronicle*, fol. R2v.

detailed in Chapter 1, Thomas Heywood's *Chronographicall History* (1641) defines 'other' as 'sodomitry', in a context that encourages the reader to interpret this term as indicating sex between Edward and Gaveston.

The engagement of later historians John Foxe and William Martyn with the phrase 'adultery and other' demonstrates different possible approaches to the ambiguity that Heywood crystallized as 'sodomitry'. In John Foxe's 1570 edition of his *Actes and Monumentes* (which, although best known for its accounts of the deaths of Protestant martyrs, also contains a broader history of Britain), Gaveston is accused of having 'brought þe kyng (by meane of his wanton conditions) to manifold vices, as advoutry, and other such lyke'; his addition of 'such lyke' implies that Edward's other vices are *like* adultery, encouraging the reader to interpret them as unspecified sexual transgressions.²⁸ By contrast, William Martyn's *Historie, and Lives, of the Kings of England* (1615) specifies Edward's 'other' vices as sexual in nature, but takes pains to exclude interpretations involving sex between men. Martyn bases his account of Edward's reign on Grafton's *Chronicle*, and therefore (while he rewords Grafton's account) necessarily interpreted the phrase 'adultery and other' as part of the writing process, as can be seen here:

Hee [Gaveston] also tooke much pleasure to feede the Kings fancies with great varietie of new delights; and by his example, hee enured him to Banquet, Drinke, and to Carowse beyond measure: And his dishonest persuasions and enticements made him carelesse of the Bed and of the societie and fellowship of Isabell his Religious and vertuous Queene, the daughter of the French King Philip the faire, and sister to his Successor Charles the fourth; and trayned him to the adulterous consortship of wanton Curtizans and shamelesse Whores.²⁹

Here, the 'adulterous' behaviour that Gaveston incites in Edward is clarified to involve female-gendered 'Curtizans' and 'Whores'. Martyn's alterations of his source usually tend towards moral condemnation of Edward. Having previously written a manual entitled *Youths Instruction* aimed at his son, Martyn states in his 'Epistle Dedicatorie' that his history is aimed at 'young gentlemen', and clearly perceived Edward's reign (marked by the marginal note 'An evill King') as a negative moral example for his young male readers.³⁰ His interpolation of 'Curtizans' and 'Whores' here could therefore be seen as extending Edward's applicability as a cautionary tale by accusing him of the kind of sins that might tempt 'young gentlemen'. Yet his choice also removes the element of ambiguity in Grafton's text, enabling him to avoid raising the suggestion to his young male readers of a sexual relationship between Edward and Gaveston. The conventional caution surrounding the mention of sex between men to younger readers, lest the raising of the concept

²⁸ Foxe, *Actes and Monumentes*, fol. R2^v.

²⁹ Martyn, *Historie*, fol. N1^v.

³⁰ Martyn, *Historie*, fols. ¶3^r, N1^r.

prompt thoughts or desires that would otherwise not have occurred, was well established by this period.³¹ Continually stressed in medieval confessional manuals, the persistence of these expressions of caution in the early modern period is evidenced by Philemon Holland's preface to his 1603 translation of Lucian's *Erotes*, which notes that the mentions of 'the love of yoong boyes' make it 'more dangerous to be read by yoong men than any other Treatise of Plutarch'.³² Martyn's unusual specificity compared to his source may represent a response to this culturally enforced caution and silencing.

A similarly context-dependent ambiguity can be discerned in a stock description of Edward's character which originates in a short, popular text titled *An Epitome of Chronicles*. Begun by Thomas Lanquet, whose account extended from the Creation to A.D. 17 at the time of his death in 1545, the *Epitome* was continued by Thomas Cooper (later master of Magdalen College, Oxford, then Bishop of Lincoln and Winchester) and printed as a complete text in 1549.³³ Cooper's description of Edward's character reads as follows:

This Edward was fair of body, but unstedfast of maners, & desposed to lightnes. For he refused the company of his lordes and men of honour, & haunted among vilaines & vile personages. He gave him self also to over much drinking, & lightly would disclose thinges of great counsail: & besides, that he was geven to these vices of nature, he was much worse by the counsail and familiarity of certain evil disposed persons, as Pierse of Gaveston, Hugh the Spensers, & other, whose wanton counsaile he folowing gave him self to the appetite and pleasure of ye body, nothing ordring his common weale by sadnes, discretion, and justice: whiche thing caused first great variance betwene him and his nobles, so that shortly he became to them odible [odious], and in the ende was deprived of his kingdom.³⁴

In Fabyan's *Newe Cronycles*, Cooper's main source here, the components of this paragraph appear in two separate locations. Fabyan opens his account of Edward's reign by translating the description of the King's character written by Ranulf Higden in his fourteenth-century Latin *Polychronicon* (the same description, as seen in Chapter 1, to which Thomas Burton added 'sodomitical vice'):

This Edward was fayre of bodye, and greate of strength, but unstedfast of maners, and vile in condicions. For he would refuse the company of lordes and men of honour, and haunte him with vilayns & vile persons. He also gave him to great drincke, and lightly he would discover thinges of great counsayle. With

³¹ Jordan, 'Invention of Sodomy', pp. 92–113.

³² Smith, *Homosexual Desire*, p. 40; Frantzen, 'Disclosure of Sodomy', p. 455.

³³ See Levy, *Tudor Historical Thought*, pp. 177–178.

³⁴ Lanquet and Cooper, *Epitome*, fols. 3M4^r–3M4^v.

these and manye other disallowable condicions he was exercised, which tounred him to great dishonoure, & his lordes to greate unrest³⁵

Later, Fabyan relates Gaveston's return from exile:

Than the kyng gave shortly after unto Piers of Gavestone, the erledome of Cornwayle, and the Lordeshypp of Malynforde, and was ruled al by hys wanton counsayle, and folowed the appetyte and pleasure of hys bodie, nothyng ordering by sadnesse, nor yet by ordre of the lawe or justice.³⁶

In Fabyan's text, Edward's tendency to '[follow] the appetyte and pleasure of hys bodie' – an ambiguous phrase that denotes pleasurable physical indulgence without specifying sexual acts – is presented as one of a series of events that took place early in his reign. By contrast, Cooper's conflation of these two sections places Edward's indulgence of 'the appetyte and pleasure of ye bodie' in the context of a summary of his character, presenting it as resulting from his disposition. Cooper's conflated paragraph became a popular element of Edward's reign in shorter, cheaper chronicles: among others, it appears in Richard Grafton's epitome *An Abridgement of the Chronicles of England* (1562); in a text called *A Breviat Cronicle* which went through seven editions between 1552–1560, whose authorship is usually attributed to its printer John Mychell; and John Stow's *Summary of Chronicles* (1565).³⁷ Even these near-verbatim copies can be illuminating: Grafton, for example, alters his source to state that Edward 'was geven to [...] filthie pleasures of the Bodie'. The adjective 'filthie', which adds an element of moral condemnation, was frequently collocated with sexual matters: 'filthy parts' indicated the genitals, while the 1604 dictionary composed by clergyman Robert Cawdrey, *A Table Alphabeticall*, defines 'sodomitrie' as 'when one man lyeth filthilie with another man'.³⁸ This does not mean that Grafton's 'filthie' definitively constitutes a reference to sex between men, but we should note the possibility of it being interpreted as such.

All of these works were popular in the sixteenth century: Cooper's *Epitome* and Grafton's *Abridgement* went through five editions each, Mychell's eight, and Stow's nineteen (more than twice the number of his longer *Annales*). As such, it is important to consider this paragraph's influence on popular perceptions of Edward and his sexual behaviour. Its vague suggestion of bodily, possibly sexual transgression is characteristic of the lack of clarity with which this subject is treated in shorter sixteenth-century chronicles – probably reflective both of caution, as discussed in the previous chapter, and of the lack of available space for further speculation.

³⁵ Fabyan, *Prima Pars*, fol. 218^r.

³⁶ Fabyan, *Prima Pars*, fol. 218^v.

³⁷ Grafton, *Abridgement*, fols. K2^r–K2^v; Mychell, *Breviat Cronicle*, fols. C6^v–C7^r; Stow, *Summarie*, fol. O1^v.

³⁸ Cawdrey, *Table*, fol. H6^v; Smith, *Homosexual Desire*, pp. 216–217.

These accusations that Gaveston induced Edward to vice ‘by meane of his wanton condicyons’ form part of a significant historiographical tradition which represents Edward’s sexual or bodily transgressions as having been incited by his favourites (particularly, but not exclusively, Gaveston). Gaveston’s propensity for this is explained or compounded, several texts claim, by his own lasciviousness, as Fabyan’s reference to his ‘wanton condicyons’ implies.³⁹ In addition to this, there is a persistent historiographical tradition in which Gaveston arranges indulgent or titillating entertainments for Edward, beginning with the Latin chronicle of the Italian scholar Polydore Vergil, *Anglica Historia* (composed around 1512–1513 and first printed in Basle in 1534). In Vergil’s account, Gaveston’s main role in Edward’s transgressions appears to be controlling rather than participatory – he provides ‘approval and instigation’, ‘assists [Edward’s] enthusiasm’, ‘surround[s]’ him with entertainers – and it is not clear whether these transgressions are sexual in nature. However, the way in which Raphael Holinshed’s 1577 *Chronicles* adapt and translate Vergil’s account demonstrates the possibility of a sexualized interpretation. In particular, in the equivalent passage in Holinshed (in which Edward is ‘corrupted’ by Gaveston, who becomes ‘a procurer of his disordred dooings), Vergil’s phrase *daret ac vitam mollissimam luxuque* (translated by Dana F. Sutton as ‘he quickly gave himself over to [...] a very soft, wanton way of life’) becomes ‘he gave himselfe to wantonnes, passing his time in voluptuous pleasure, and riotous excesse’.⁴⁰ ‘Voluptuous’, denoting indulgence in sensual pleasure, was frequently used as a condemnatory adjective for lust; ‘wanton’ had the dual sense of undisciplined and lustful.⁴¹ Holinshed also adds the stronger moral condemnation ‘filthie’ to Vergil’s *parum honesta*, which again (as observed above) had sexual connotations.⁴²

Holinshed’s choices regarding his translation of Vergil may well indicate that he interpreted his source as suggesting sexual transgression – and opinions gained from his other sources, along with prevailing cultural conceptions of Edward II produced by the texts analysed so far, may also have contributed to those choices. Ultimately, however, his account stops short of explicitly stating that Edward’s relationship with Gaveston was sexual. He states that Gaveston encouraged and facilitated Edward’s transgressions, and strongly suggests that those transgressions were sexual, but it is for the reader to make the necessary link. There is no explicit sex between men to be found here.

³⁹ For example, Fabyan, *Prima Pars*, fol. 2K1r; Stevenson, *Florus Britannicus*, fol. F1r; Hubert, *Deplorable Life*, stanza 42; Niccols, *Mirour*, fol. 3A2v.

⁴⁰ Vergil, *Anglica Historia*, chap. 18, trans. by Sutton; Holinshed, *Chronicles* (1587), VI, section 10/p. 318. See also Mills, *Seeing Sodomy*, p. 262.

⁴¹ ‘Voluptuous, adj.’, *OED Online* (1920); ‘Wanton, adj. and n.’, *OED Online* (2014); Perry, ‘Politics of Access’, p. 1061; Smith, *Homosexual Desire*, pp. 216–217.

⁴² ‘Filthy, n.’, *OED Online* (2016); Smith, *Homosexual Desire*, p. 217.

Ganymede

Somewhere between Holinshed's *Chronicles* and the accounts of Marlowe and Drayton (both written in the early 1590s), a shift took place in the representation of Edward II's sexual behaviour. Holinshed may have heavily implied that the sexual transgressions incited by Gaveston constituted sex *with* Gaveston, but he carefully and deliberately did not make that statement explicitly. By contrast, both Marlowe and Drayton present a clearly sexual relationship between Edward and Gaveston. A locus of this shift is the term 'Ganymede'.

The use of 'Ganymede' is the most specific, and the most unequivocal, way in which early modern writers indicate the sexual nature of Edward's relationship with Gaveston. Indeed, it was one of the most specific and unequivocal terms available to them with which to indicate sex between men: according to Bruce R. Smith, 'For Renaissance Englishmen, like their counterparts all over Europe, the story of Jupiter and Ganymede was the best known, most widely recognized myth of homoerotic desire.'⁴³ The unequal social statuses of the partners in that myth – Jupiter the god, Ganymede the beautiful boy he abducted and made his cupbearer – made it particularly appropriate to Edward II's situation. 'More explicitly than any other myth,' argues Smith, the myth of Jupiter and Ganymede 'articulated the social and political dynamics that complicated male-male desire in the cultural context of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England. In social terms, it spoke to the tensions in power that were at the heart of homoerotic relations between men in early modern England.'

Although this term was available to medieval writers, the earliest use of it in an account of Edward's reign is William Warner's verse history *Albions England* (whose second edition, printed in 1589, is the first to extend as far as Edward II).⁴⁴ Warner does not explicitly use the term with reference to Edward, but digresses from his relation of Edward's reign to tell a story

⁴³ Smith, *Homosexual Desire*, p. 192; see also, for example, Saslow, *Ganymede in the Renaissance*; Barkan, *Transuming Passion*.

⁴⁴ On medieval uses of the term more generally, see, for example, Kolve, 'Ganymede/Son of Getron'; Mills, *Seeing Sodomy*. Although Geoffrey le Baker mentions Ganymede in his account of Edward's reign in his *Chronicon* (composed c. 1347–1360), I do not believe this should be treated as a reference to Edward's or his favourites' sexual behaviour. The context is a description of the Isle of Lundy, to which Edward and his followers attempt to flee following Isabella's invasion in 1326. On Lundy, le Baker writes, 'There are pigeons and also sparrows, called the birds of Ganymede by Alexander Neckham' (*Chronicle*, p. 22, trans. by Preest). Barber and Preest cite Alexander Neckam (*De Naturis Rerum Libri Duo*, pp. 97–99), as le Baker's source for this, but this chapter is actually about cranes, which Neckam describes as 'the birds of Palamedes' (not Ganymede). Sparrows, treated on pp. 109–110, are described as 'lustful' (*libidinosa*) but not explicitly connected with Ganymede, so the reference to Ganymede is either a misremembrance or deliberate interpolation on le Baker's part. However, since le Baker's text is unusually sympathetic towards Edward and nowhere hints at a sexual relationship between the King and his favourites, instead emphasizing his faithfulness and devotion to Isabella, it seems very unlikely that the mention of Ganymede here is intended to refer to Edward's sexual behaviour. For further investigation of le Baker's 'birds of Ganymede', and the suggestion that they may represent gannets (with no reference to Edward's sexual behaviour), see Sharpe, 'Geoffrey le Baker's "Aves Ganymedis"'.

involving ‘Ganymedes’ (a seemingly incongruous blending of mythological and chronicle material typical of *Albions England*, as Helen Cooper notes).⁴⁵ Thomas of Lancaster, ‘over-warred’ from conflict with Edward, flees into the woods and meets a hermit, to whom he complains that the country ‘doth decline / Through wilde and wanton Guydes’.⁴⁶ His prediction of this ‘decline’, he says, is based on ‘Presidents too like and fire too likely heere to flame’. He then recounts these ‘Presidents’, which are a succession of historical wars caused by lust. The implication is that the wars in England have similar origins – that is, that Edward’s promotion of Gaveston and the Despensers, which has so angered his nobles, is a result of his sexual attraction to these men.

Lancaster’s narrative of wars caused by lust eventually focuses in on Ireland in the time of the Norwegian King Turgesius, who defeats five Irish kings to become sole ruler of Ireland. One of the defeated men, the former King of Meth, becomes Turgesius’s favourite; his flattering techniques and excessive power (he becomes ‘a pettie King’) are reminiscent of Edward’s favourites. Following the lustful Turgesius’s request for the hand of Meth’s daughter in marriage, Meth offers him a choice between his five nieces, who, he says, are ‘farre more fairer’ than his daughter.⁴⁷ The five nieces visit Turgesius in his chamber, and he extols their beauty, before comparing them to Jupiter’s lovers:

How many view I fairer than Europa or the rest,
And Girle-boyes, favouring Ganimæde heere with his Lord a Guest.
And Ganimædes we are, quoth one, and thou a Prophet trew,
And hidden Skeines from underneath their forged garments drew,
Wherewith the Tyrant and his Bawds, with safe escape, they slew⁴⁸

The story is bizarre, but its subtext clear: lust, and particularly the presence of ‘Ganimædes’ at court, have been Turgesius’s downfall. Lancaster’s subsequent tale, in which an instance of adultery leads to the invasion and conquest of Ireland, has a similar moral. He concludes, ‘Alone observe what changes heere through onely lust befell: / And note our England surfetteth in greater sins than it’.⁴⁹ It seems reasonable to conclude that Warner’s interpolated reference to ‘Ganimædes’ is intended to hint that the nature of Edward’s non-specific ‘greater sins’ is, specifically, sex with men.

The role of Marlowe

⁴⁵ Cooper, ‘Elizabethan Havelok’, pp. 169–183.

⁴⁶ Warner, *Albions England*, fol. Q2^v.

⁴⁷ Warner, *Albions England*, fol. Q3^r.

⁴⁸ Warner, *Albions England*, fol. Q4^r.

⁴⁹ Warner, *Albions England*, fol. Q4^v.

Christopher Marlowe's play *Edward II* (composed around 1591–1592) is the first text to use the term 'Ganymede' explicitly with reference to Edward and Gaveston's relationship.⁵⁰ This reflects the fact that Marlowe instigated a shift in understanding of Edward and Gaveston's relationship, from cautious ambiguity to a consensus about its sexual nature. As detailed above, Holinshed's *Chronicles* (Marlowe's principal source) present Edward as sensually indulgent and probably sexually transgressive; these transgressions are presented as incited by Edward's favourites, particularly Gaveston. As Michel Poirier first observed in 1968, Marlowe 'insistently stresses what Holinshed mentioned discreetly in his *Chronicle*'; in Danielle Clarke's words, 'Chronicle histories [...] generally enfold Edward's homosexuality into a general category of immorality that is less specific than these narratives become after Marlowe, in which Edward's bonds with men threaten, rather than coexist with, other kinds of sexual act'.⁵¹ Marlowe's *Edward II*, then, is a historiographically innovative account: the first text to present Edward and Gaveston's relationship as unambiguously sexual and romantic.

This choice was significantly influential, not just on other 'literary' texts but on chronicles too. Marlowe's play thus stands at the centre of the development of Edward II's sexual reputation, absorbing and transforming earlier chronicles and shaping the content of later ones.

Several critics have sought the origins of Marlowe's choice to emphasize and make explicit the sexual and romantic nature of Edward's relationship with Gaveston. Charles Forker suggests that 'the whole climate of sexual politics' found in *Edward II* is influenced by Shakespeare's first tetralogy, drawing a particular connection between Marlowe's protagonist and Shakespeare's Edward IV as 'sensualists, their judgement clouded by sexual attachments'.⁵² Others argue for the influence of contemporary portrayals of Henri III: Hillman points out that 'the sexual accusations against Henri and his minions in [the 1589 pamphlet *Les Choses Horribles Contenuës en une Lettre Envoyée à Henry de Valois*] amply mandate the most fundamental alteration made by Marlowe to his English chronicle sources' – that is, his explicit treatment of Edward's sexual involvement with his favourites.⁵³ Curtis Perry suggests that, while 'Marlowe's interest in the meaning of erotic favouritism undoubtedly had a great deal to do with the sodomitical libel surrounding the minions of Henri III [...] the way Marlowe uses favouritism to think about prerogative owes something to *Leicester's Commonwealth*, a text that lies behind the vivid

⁵⁰ For the suggestion of a possible personal and/or textual relationship between Warner and Marlowe, see Hopkins, 'Marlowe and the Succession', pp. 191–194.

⁵¹ Poirier, *Christopher Marlowe*, p. 38; Clarke, 'The Sovereign's Vice', pp. 51–52.

⁵² Marlowe, *Edward II*, p. 30.

⁵³ Hillman, *Shakespeare, Marlowe and the Politics of France*, p. 107; Bakeless, *Tragicall History*, p. 88.

characterization of Gaveston in the first half of the play'.⁵⁴ *Leicester's Commonwealth*, a libel against Robert Dudley first printed in 1584, draws a pejorative comparison between Leicester and Gaveston; and, as has frequently been noted, the entertainments Gaveston imagines for Edward in I.i bear several similarities to the entertainments arranged by Leicester for Elizabeth I on her visit to Kenilworth in 1575.⁵⁵

In addition to these contemporary textual influences, Meg F. Pearson widens the focus to consider the culture of commercial playwriting. Chronicle plays were commercially successful, she argues, and so were sought after by theatre shareholders.⁵⁶ Marlowe, she notes, was 'staging the most notorious portions of Edward II's life, particularly his brutal, secret murder'.⁵⁷ This is a crucial observation: aware of the potential commercial value of his historical subject, and that the literate portion of his audience might well have been familiar with Edward's historiographical reputation (particularly with its 'notorious' aspects), Marlowe gave them an intensified version of what they were expecting.⁵⁸ 'The chronicle plays,' Pearson points out, 'stage not only the famous speeches, the battles, the victories and the defeats; they have the capacity to stage the quiet, unknown moments behind the scenes that often have a more profound influence on reputation.'⁵⁹ Chroniclers like Holinshed simply make assertions about Edward's nature and his sensually indulgent behaviour, state that this behaviour was encouraged by his favourites, and leave the reader to join the dots; Marlowe's dramatic form allowed him to *show* interactions between Edward and Gaveston, those 'quiet, unknown moments behind the scenes' that Holinshed's assertions obliquely suggest took place.

Those moments are numerous and striking.⁶⁰ Firstly, as mentioned above, Marlowe invokes the figure of Ganymede. Spurned by Edward in favour of Gaveston, Queen Isabel complains:

Like frantic Juno will I fill the earth
With ghastly murmur of my sighs and cries;
For never doted Jove on Ganymede
So much as he on cursed Gaveston.⁶¹

⁵⁴ Perry, *Literature and Favoritism*, pp. 191–192.

⁵⁵ Smith, *Homosexual Desire*, p. 99; Kay, 'Marlowe, *Edward II*, and the Cult of Elizabeth', pp. 9–10; Kewes, 'Marlowe, History and Politics', p. 139.

⁵⁶ Pearson, 'Die with Fame', p. 101.

⁵⁷ Pearson, 'Die with Fame', p. 98.

⁵⁸ Pearson, 'Die with Fame', pp. 101–102.

⁵⁹ Pearson, 'Die with Fame', p. 98.

⁶⁰ See Pasquarella, *Marlowe's Representation of Love*, pp. 74–100, for a near-comprehensive summary of the ways in which Marlowe indicates the sexual and romantic nature of Edward and Gaveston's relationship. See also Clark, 'Marlowe and Queer Theory'.

⁶¹ Marlowe, *Edward II*, I.iv.178–181.

Isabel's comparison here has several interrelated effects. First, of course, it equates Edward's love for Gaveston to Jupiter's for Ganymede, indicating that it is a deep emotional attachment with a component of sexual attraction. However, Edward's affection here is presented as greater than Jupiter's. Jupiter is frequently represented as being disempowered, and distracted from his rule, by his love for Ganymede (the opening to Marlowe's *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, is a particularly good example of this characterization) – and so Edward's love, which exceeds even this, is clearly transgressive. The verb 'doted' also indicates excessive and foolish love.⁶² Several critics have also observed the particularly disruptive connotations of Jupiter and Ganymede's relationship, both in terms of the family (Isabella aligns herself with Juno, Jupiter's spurned wife) and in terms of Jupiter's role as King of the gods. In *Dido*, 'Jupiter is prepared to overturn the order of heavens for Ganymede's love', and Edward's love in *Edward II* parallels this (see Chapter 4).⁶³

Yet unlike its use in other texts, the 'Ganymede' reference in *Edward II* is far from the sole locus of evidence that Edward and Gaveston's relationship is presented as sexual. In fact, this is strongly suggested by Gaveston's opening speech:

Sweet prince I come. These, these thy amorous lines
Might have enforced me to have swum from France,
And, like Leander, gasped upon the sand,
So thou wouldst smile and take me in thine arms.⁶⁴

Gaveston here aligns himself and Edward with the mythological lovers Hero and Leander, which, as Forker says, 'quickly establishes the erotic nature of his relationship to Edward'.⁶⁵ He also explicitly establishes its physical expression, both through his imagination of Edward's embrace and through his later reference to 'The King, upon whose bosom let me die' – a pun that combines a romantic swooning embrace with a sexual reference to orgasm.⁶⁶ This line crystallizes the hints given by the Leander comparison moments earlier, ensuring the audience are well aware that Gaveston is speaking about the King as his sexual partner.

Minutes later, in the same scene, Gaveston envisages the entertainments he will stage for Edward:

⁶² 'Dote, v.1', *OED Online* (2019).

⁶³ Hattaway, 'Marlowe: Ideology and Subversion', p. 211; on the disruption of the family in *Edward II* and *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, see Deats, 'Myth and Metamorphosis', p. 313; Hopkins, 'Fissured Families'; Williams, 'Dido, Queen of England', pp. 44–45.

⁶⁴ Marlowe, *Edward II*, I.i.6–9.

⁶⁵ Marlowe, *Edward II*, I.i.9n.

⁶⁶ Marlowe, *Edward II*, I.i.14; Deats, 'Study in Androgyny', p. 38.

Music and poetry is his delight;
 Therefore I'll have Italian masques 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,
 Crownets of pearl about his naked arms,
 And in his sportful hands an Olive tree,
 To hide those parts which men delight to see,
 Shall bathe him in a spring, and there hard by,
 One like Actaeon peeping through the grove,
 Shall by the angry goddess be transformed,
 And, running in the likeness of an hart,
 By yelping hounds pulled down, and seem to die.
 Such things as these best please his majesty,
 My lord.⁶⁷

Gaveston's imagined 'Italian masque' is clearly homoerotic, and, as Thomas Cartelli identifies, it is 'powerfully seductive', such that Edward's nobles will find it hard to compete with Gaveston for both the King's and the audience's affections.⁶⁸ The locus of this seduction is the 'lovely boy in Dian's shape', who is imagined as sensuously beautiful ('hair that gilds the water'), 'naked', and teasingly coy ('sportful hands'). Importantly – as numerous critics have acknowledged – though superficially taking 'Dian's shape', the erotic figure remains essentially a 'boy' who is referred to with male pronouns.⁶⁹ The genitals he hides with those 'sportful hands' – 'those parts that men delight to see' – are therefore, by implication, a penis and testicles. This is potentially a cause of anxiety for the audience: as Ralf Hertel observes, 'Gaveston's envisioned masque presupposes a natural homoerotic desire when he refers to the genitals of the lovely boy in Dian's shape as "those parts which men delight to see" – not just some men, but men in general.'⁷⁰ Such anxiety is compounded by the enjoyment an audience might well take in Gaveston's beautiful, lyrical, sensory description; he specifies that his intended audience, Edward, will be 'please[d]' and 'delight[ed]' by his plans, thus providing a guide for the reaction of his other audience in the Elizabethan theatre. This scene, then, introduces the audience to the play's oft-noted ambivalent treatment of Edward and Gaveston: 'the Elizabethan audience might well feel in two minds

⁶⁷ Marlowe, *Edward II*, I.i.53–71.

⁶⁸ Cartelli, *Edward II*, p. 163.

⁶⁹ For example, Brown, 'Tampering with the Records', p. 183; Brumble, 'Personal, Paternal and Kingly Control'; Pasquarella, *Marlowe's Representation of Love*, p. 126; Masinton, *Marlowe's Tragic Vision*, p. 91; Haber, *Desire and Dramatic Form*, p. 175; Tromly, *Playing With Desire*, p. 122.

⁷⁰ Hertel, *Staging England*, p. 215; see also Cartelli, *Marlowe, Shakespeare, and the Economy of Theatrical Experience*, p. 127.

about the King and his favourite, being properly scandalized by their behaviour and yet taking in it a measure of delight'.⁷¹

The rich symbolic potential of Gaveston's reference to Actaeon's metamorphosis has attracted substantial critical attention. Some (among them Brent Sunesen, Joan Parks, David Stymeist and Judith Weil) read it as prefiguring the plot of the play, with either Edward or his nobles as the doomed Actaeon; Bruce R. Smith reads it as echoing Suetonius's lurid *Life* of the Roman Emperor Tiberius; and Mathew Martin reads it as Christological symbolism, which prefigures the play's later alignment of Edward's suffering with Christ's Passion.⁷² Sara Munson Deats usefully draws together many of these interpretative threads.⁷³ Here, I want to build in particular on her attention to early modern exegesis of Ovid, which allows us to surmise the likely interpretations of Marlowe's audience. Arthur Golding's *Epistle* to his translation of the *Metamorphoses*, Deats writes,

allegorizes the Actaeon fable as a caveat against debauchery of all kinds as well as a warning against 'flattering freaks', and interprets the hounds as Actaeon's own devouring desires, a reading commonplace in this period. ...Golding...pictures Actaeon as a cautionary warning against all kinds of indulgence, including flattery, gambling, lechery, and gluttony.⁷⁴

Similarly, Jonnes Sambucus's 1564 *Emblemata* 'reduces the fable to a denunciation of excessive love of venery'; and Abraham Fraunce glosses the story as showing that 'A wiseman ought to restraine his eyes, from beholding sensible and corporall bewty, figured by Diana: least, as Actaeon was devoured of his own dogges, so he be distracted and torne in peeces with his affections and perturbations'.⁷⁵ Added to this sexual interpretation is, of course, Gaveston's assertion that the actor will 'seem to die': once again this carries a double meaning, suggesting both Actaeon's literal death and the actor's feigned orgasm (continuing in the erotic vein of Gaveston's previous imagined scene). The invocation of Actaeon thus foreshadows Edward's sexually transgressive behaviour and its culmination in a death with potential erotic aspects (see Chapter 7). There are numerous other hints at the nature of Edward and Gaveston's relationship throughout the play, even in scenes primarily focused on Edward's political transgressions (for example, Edward's wish for 'some nook or corner left, / To frolic with my dearest Gaveston'

⁷¹ Leech, 'Power and Suffering', p. 188.

⁷² Sunesen, 'Marlowe and the Dumb Show'; Parks, 'History, Tragedy and Truth', p. 286; Stymeist, 'Status, Sodomy, and the Theatre', pp. 240–241; Weil, *Christopher Marlowe*, p. 164; Smith, *Homosexual Desire*, p. 212; Martin, 'Plays of Passion', p. 90. See also, for example, Brumble, 'Personal, Paternal and Kingly Control'; Pasquarella, *Marlowe's Representation of Love*, p. 89; Mackenzie, 'Edward II and the Rhetoricians of Myth'; Lara, 'Ambiguous Devices', p. 105.

⁷³ Deats, 'Myth and Metamorphosis', pp. 310–311; see also Wessman, 'Edward II as Actaeonesque History', for a similarly cohesive approach.

⁷⁴ Deats, 'Myth and Metamorphosis', p. 311.

⁷⁵ Brumble, 'Personal, Paternal, and Kingly Control'.

can be read as a wish for uninterrupted sexual dalliance owing to the dual significations of the verb ‘frolic’.⁷⁶ Edward’s nobles, clearly, do not solely object to the sexual component of his relationship with Gaveston, but to this combined with its disruptive implications for his family, his patronage, and his rule, as will be more fully discussed in Chapter 4.⁷⁷

Interestingly, this aspect of Marlowe’s portrayal of Edward appears to have influenced Shakespeare’s portrayal of England’s other famously deposed King, Richard II. Shakespeare deviates from his sources to hint at a sexual relationship between Richard and his favourites. Bolingbroke tells Bushy and Green:

You have, in manner, with your sinful hours
Made a divorce betwixt his queen and him,
Broke the possession of a royal bed,
And stain’d the beauty of a fair queen’s cheeks
With tears drawn from her eyes by your foul wrongs.⁷⁸

As Derrick Higginbotham observes, ‘this moment decidedly queers Richard’; and as Forker convincingly argues, it ‘strongly suggests a borrowing from *Edward IP*’.⁷⁹ Forker suggests that the borrowing functions ‘as a subtle means of undermining our respect for Bolingbroke at a point in the action when he needed to begin manipulating audience sympathies in the direction of Richard’, since ‘the words convey expediency and underhandedness in the speaker, who is shown to behave in the episode like a military dictator presiding at a show trial of expendable dissidents’.⁸⁰ Igor Djordjevic’s observations about Shakespeare’s other history plays provides useful contextualization and support for this suggestion:

It is interesting that Shakespeare’s ‘St Crispin’s Day’ oration in *Henry V* has more in common with [Holinshed’s version of] Richmond’s speech before Bosworth than with its direct chronicle source [i.e. Henry V’s speech in Holinshed]. This is hardly accidental, because for Shakespeare as a chronicle reader the two characters may well have been interchangeable.⁸¹

Just as one warlike Harry was interchangeable for another, it seems reasonable that one chronicle account of a deposed King was, to Shakespeare, fair game as source material for a play about his great-grandson.

⁷⁶ Atwood, ‘All Places Are Alike’, pp. 59–60.

⁷⁷ See DiGangi, *Homoerotics*, p. x.

⁷⁸ Shakespeare, *Richard II*, III.i.11–15.

⁷⁹ Higginbotham, ‘The Construction of a King’ (n.p.); Forker, ‘*Edward II* and *The Merchant of Venice*’, p. 66; see also Marlowe, *Edward II*, p. 89; Skura, ‘Marlowe’s *Edward IP*’.

⁸⁰ Marlowe, *Edward II*, p. 39.

⁸¹ Djordjevic, *Holinshed’s Nation*, p. 233. See also Farabee, ‘Critical Backstory’, p. 22.

The influence of Marlowe's *Edward II* on Edward's sexual reputation can be demonstrated by observing the number of writers after Marlowe who align Edward and Gaveston's relationship with that of Jupiter and Ganymede, compared to only Warner's subtle implication before the publication of Marlowe's play. In Drayton's *Peirs Gaveston* (which presents the two men's relationship as clearly sexual; 'blinded by pleasure', Gaveston describes how Edward 'beare[s] me' 'on his back'), Gaveston describes himself and Edward in these terms: 'My Jove with me, his Ganimed, his page'.⁸² In the later *Englands Heroicall Epistles* (1597), a popular series of verse epistles between famous English lovers modelled on Ovid's *Heroides* which features Edward's wife Isabella and her lover Roger Mortimer, Drayton's character of Isabella again uses 'Ganimed' as a term for Gaveston, and makes it clear that his sexual relationship with Edward is at the expense of Isabella's own: she is outraged 'That English EDWARD should refuse my Bed, / For that lascivious shamelesse Ganimed'.⁸³ Similarly, the Edward of Drayton's long chorographical and historical narrative poem *Poly-Olbion* (1612) promotes 'Faire Ganimeds and Fools' to court office.⁸⁴ Influenced by Drayton, both Francis Hubert's poem (1597–1600) and the two versions of Elizabeth Cary's prose history of Edward II (1627–1628) describe Gaveston as Edward's Ganymede.⁸⁵ Later in the seventeenth century, in John Bancroft's 'historicall play' *King Edward the Third* (1691), the character of Mortimer collocates Ganymedes with Edward's neglect of Isabella, using them as a justification for his adulterous relationship with her.⁸⁶

As shown in Chapter 1, Marlowe's use of the term 'minion' for Gaveston influenced numerous chronicle writers. In one instance, there is suggestive evidence that the ambiguous term 'minion' in one chronicle was transformed into the sexually specific term 'Ganimed' in a later text. The herald Francis Sandford's *Genealogical History of the Kings of England and Monarchs of Great Britain* (1677) is the only chronicle to include the term 'Ganymede' in an account of Edward's reign. Sandford's account follows the phrasing of Samuel Daniel's *Collection of the History of England* (1618) almost verbatim – with one key variation. Reporting Edward's decision to travel to Boulogne for his wedding after his father's funeral, Daniel writes, 'After the Funeralls

⁸² Drayton, *Peirs Gaveston*, ll. 275, 282, 214; see Giantvalley, 'Barnfield, Drayton and Marlowe', p. 21; Brink, *Michael Drayton Revisited*, p. 34; Quinn, 'Mastering Complaint', pp. 450–452.

⁸³ Drayton, *Englands Heroicall Epistles*, ll. 61–62.

⁸⁴ Drayton, 'Poly-Olbion', XVII.195.

⁸⁵ Hubert, *Deplorable Life*, stanza 107; Cary, *History of the Life*, fol. B2^v; Cary, *Unfortunate Prince*, fol. B2^r. Virginia Brackett argues that this is evidence of Drayton's direct influence on Cary's text ('Elizabeth Cary, Drayton, and Edward II', p. 518; see also Britland, 'Kings Are But Men', p. 36).

⁸⁶ Bancroft, *Edward the Third*, t.p., fol. B4^v.

performed at Westminster, hee [Edward] passes over to Bologne'. Sandford writes, 'His Fathers Funerals performed, over He passes with His Ganimed to Boloigne'.⁸⁷

The 'Ganimed' of Sandford's text is clearly Gaveston: he is the only favourite Sandford has so far mentioned, and his presence at Edward's wedding in Boulogne is subsequently noted.⁸⁸ So what is the origin of Sandford's interpolation of it – and with it, the explicit suggestion that Edward and Gaveston's relationship was sexual? When the rest of the *Genealogical History* is so derivative (either of Daniel or of Richard Baker, whose account of Edward's reign in his 1643 *Chronicle of the Kings of England* itself substantially relies on Daniel), a short burst of outright invention seems unlikely. It is more plausible that Sandford's 'Ganimed' makes explicit what he already found implicit in his sources. Yet neither Daniel nor Baker make particular effort to suggest that any of Edward's transgressions were sexual; indeed, Baker explicitly asserts 'that neither Gaveston nor the Spensers had so debauched him, as to make him false to his bed, or to be disloyall to his Queene'.⁸⁹ Sandford also used Thomas Walsingham's *Chronica Maiora* (1390s), an influential text for the romanticization of Edward and Gaveston's relationship, but Walsingham's focus is emotional rather than sexual.

A remaining factor is the fact that Daniel very frequently describes Gaveston as Edward's 'minion' – in fact, his account of Edward's reign contains the highest density of the term found in any chronicle. If Sandford was seeking a term for Gaveston, able to replace his name in quasi-metonymic fashion as 'Ganimed' does, 'minion' was the precedent most prominently available to him. That Sandford perceived 'minion' to have sexual connotations is further suggested by his reference to Roger Mortimer as Isabella's 'mignon': the adulterous, sexual nature of their relationship was well established, and indeed Sandford later mentions that Mortimer was accused of having been 'too familiar with the Queen'.⁹⁰ His use of 'Ganimed' therefore provides suggestive evidence that he read Daniel's use of 'minion' as indicating a sexual relationship between Edward and Gaveston. Sandford's *Genealogical History* therefore provides an important hint of how ambiguous texts like Daniel's were being read and interpreted in the later seventeenth century – thus highlighting the scholarly value of careful reading of derivative, less popular chronicles.

Sandford may be unique among chroniclers in using the term 'Ganymede' with reference Edward and Gaveston – but his casual substitution of 'Ganymede' for the 'minion' in his source

⁸⁷ Daniel, *Collection*, fol. Q2^v; Sandford, *Genealogical History*, fol. 2P2^r.

⁸⁸ Sandford, *Genealogical History*, fols. 2P2^r–2P2^v.

⁸⁹ Baker, *Chronicle*, fol. T4^v.

⁹⁰ Sandford, *Genealogical History*, fols. 2Q2^r, 2T^r.

text points to the underlying consensus concerning their sexual relationship which is more explicitly expressed in poetry and drama. If Sandford were making a new, potentially shocking suggestion, cautionary phrases could be expected: ‘According to Daniel’, or ‘As some say’. By including ‘Ganimed’ without comment, mid-sentence, Sandford suggests that he expects his readers to take his reference to sex between men at face value; almost, I would venture, as a fact they already know.

Conclusion

Did the people of medieval and early modern England believe that Edward II had sex with his male favourites? This is a more fruitful question to ask than one that attempts to establish the ‘facts’ of Edward’s behaviour, though it still requires modification to be answered with any level of reliability: what were these hypothetical people reading, and when?

It is clear that Edward’s reputation for non-specific sexually transgressive behaviour developed during his reign: references to his ‘lechery’ appear in the earliest version of *The Prophecy of the Six Kings*, composed around 1312, and Robert of Reading accused him of non-specific adulterous sexual transgression around 1326–1330 in his continuation of the chronicle *Flores Historiarum*. Although the accusations in the *Flores* may have been politically motivated, their co-occurrence in *The Six Kings* suggests that Robert of Reading may have been capitalizing on existing public opinion, and that the accusations would have appeared plausible to readers. Early uses of ambiguous terms like ‘sodomy’, as discussed in the previous chapter, should be seen in light of this; in particular, if we know that the immensely popular *Brut* was describing Edward as sexually transgressive through the goat allegory, this increases the likelihood that contemporary uses of ‘sodomy’ and its derivatives with reference to Edward were intended to specifically indicate sexual transgression.

By the early sixteenth century, Robert Fabyan was drawing a causal link between the influence of Edward’s favourites and this sexually transgressive behaviour, and Polydore Vergil was accusing Gaveston of arranging titillating entertainments for Edward, resulting in behaviour described in terms that connote sexual transgression.⁹¹ But did these writers and their readers believe that these sexual transgressions comprised sex with men? The answer to this question must necessarily be less clear-cut: as I argued in my introduction, to seek clarity of reference to sex between men in medieval or early modern texts is a fallacy. It may well be the case that readers of these texts, and others influenced by them, made the connection that the writers were

⁹¹ Fabyan, *Prima Pars*, fol. 2K1r; Vergil, *Anglica Historia*, chap. 18.

unwilling to specify, and received the impression that Edward did engage in a sexual relationship with Gaveston. Moreover, it is vital to remember that no chronicle text existed in a vacuum, either for its writer or for its readers. Writers of chronicles were (as we have seen) responding to literary representations as well as their chronicle sources. Readers could and did consume multiple accounts: their perceptions of an ambiguous sentence about Edward and Gaveston could be coloured by Marlowe's and Drayton's representations of a sexual and romantic relationship between King and favourite, as well as by the source chronicle before their eyes.

It is almost impossible to overstate the role of Marlowe's *Edward II* in this process. Marlowe was the first writer to 'join the dots' between Edward's favourites' *incitement* of his sexually transgressive behaviour and their *participation* in it: to move beyond stating that Edward was sexually transgressive and that his favourites encouraged that behaviour, and depict an Edward whose sexual transgressions constituted sex with men. His representation of a king and his favourite in a loving, romantic relationship with a clear sexual element was innovative and demonstrably influential. Moreover, Marlowe's repeated use of the term 'minion' cemented Edward's relevance to contemporary politics in three key ways: by associating him with Henri III's sexually transgressive *mignons*; with anti-court discourse that condemned young courtiers for their perceived prioritization of fashion and entertainments over governance; and with the conviction that early modern people 'were living in an age of overmighty favourites'.

In the end, the very casualness with which Francis Sandford uses the term 'Ganimede' for Gaveston – the first occurrence of this term in a chronicle text, one that describes itself as historical and treats multiple reigns rather than focusing entirely on Edward – is one of the most telling instances observed in this chapter. Sandford's text suggests a sexual relationship between King and favourite without fanfare, without any indication that their suggestion is shocking or needs explanation. This, to me, is the strongest evidence that by the mid-seventeenth century an element of consensus had been reached: Edward II was accepted to have been engaged in sexual and romantic relationships with Gaveston and one or both of the Despensers.

Tracing the process by which Edward acquired his sexual reputation, and by which non-specific hints became a specific consensus of sex between men, is revealing of the way that narratives of sexual transgression were constituted in this period. The process combined verbatim repetition (reflective of the derivative nature of medieval and early modern history-writing, but also of the caution that accusations of sexual transgression – particularly such politically sensitive accusations as those attached to a deposed monarch – tended to attract) with a gradually increasing emphasis on the sexual elements of the overall narrative, which tended to

be the more exciting and sensational elements. Yet as the case of Holinshed demonstrates, it seems that writers of chronicles were ultimately unwilling to cross the fine but significant line between heavy suggestion of sex between men and explicit statement. Marlowe's choice to shift the historiographical process into the latter – to clearly present a sexual and romantic relationship between two men – was certainly facilitated by his chronicle sources, but it was also crucially dependent on genre. Drama allowed him to present history through first-person narration in the mouths of fictional characters, rather than through an authorial voice, allowing him to distance himself more effectively from his play's potentially transgressive claims; it allowed him to create a relationship through the interaction and dialogue between two characters, rather than having to describe that relationship from an omniscient perspective; and it allowed him to use classical allusions, which were the stock-in-trade of the dramatist far more than they were that of the chronicler, to clearly yet obliquely convey his meaning.

Despite the importance of genre to Marlowe's innovation, its historiographical impact was not confined to the literary sphere.⁹² Tracing the development of Edward II's reputation reveals that the process by which narratives of the past were shaped in medieval and early modern England was thoroughly cross-genre. As such, investigating it invites interdisciplinary methodology. This investigation has necessitated a combination of close reading; rigorous contextualization, in light of changing conceptions of sex; and considering writers *as readers*, paying close attention to how writers interpret their sources and to how those texts are subsequently interpreted by later writers. In other words, it has demonstrated the potential of combining literary and historiographical approaches to facilitate a fuller understanding of this process of sexual reputation-building, and to provide new perspectives on the texts (from both sides of that traditional generic divide) that constituted this process.

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⁹² See also Parks, 'History, Tragedy and Truth', on the ways in which Marlowe's play engages politically with the conceptualisations of history and nationhood established by his chronicle sources.

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Chapter 3 – Edward II and Piers Gaveston: Brothers, Friends, Lovers

Abstract

This chapter takes up the emotional dimension of Edward's relationships with his favourites, considering the significance and decline of medieval claims that Edward 'called Gaveston his brother'; engagements in early modern narratives of Edward's reign with classical ideals of friendship; and the increasing romanticization of his relationship with Gaveston. I show that accounts of Edward's love for his favourites, and his grief at their deaths, are often crafted to elicit sympathy and pathos, and thus represent a valuable source of positive depictions of relationships between men. Moreover, analysis of these depictions in texts of all genres provides insight into the literary influences and motivations of early modern chroniclers, including their incorporation of tropes of the romance genre, and the impact of Marlowe's *Edward II*.

Keywords

Christopher Marlowe, chronicles, David and Jonathan, friendship, homosexuality, love between men

Introduction

It is important to emphasize that Edward's relationships with his favourites were not represented by medieval and early modern writers solely as sexually indulgent. The emotional depth of these relationships is a central part of the historiographical tradition surrounding Edward II, and it is this – arguably more than the sensationalized depictions of 'lechery' and sexual sin – that made his story so compelling for writers and readers in these periods. However, the way in which writers depicted Edward's emotional attachment to his favourites shifted over time, as repeated statements that Edward 'called Gaveston his brother' gave way to increasingly romanticized narratives.

The relative scholarly neglect of the emotional, often romantic representation of these relationships (outside of literary criticism of Marlowe's *Edward II*) doubtless partly reflects the lack of attention to the long-term development of Edward's reputation, in favour of attempts to establish the 'facts' of his behaviour. Emotion and psychological realism in accounts of historical figures is often, implicitly or not, considered the preserve of literary critics, and has consequently been largely ignored by biographers of Edward and historians of his reign. It seems to me,

however, that this lack of attention to the significant historiographical tradition of the love between Edward and his favourites also reflects more modern popular discourse, in which same-sex relationships are disproportionately seen as characterized by desire rather than by love. A reassessment of the texts that shaped Edward's reputation, with this potential for unconscious bias in mind, is thus as politically important as it is academically fruitful; both factors have shaped my decision to investigate the representation of Edward II's emotional relationships with his favourites separately from the representation of their sexual relationships.

Such a reassessment shows that emotional attachment – as well as, if not more than, sexual attraction – is very much in evidence. Moreover, representations of the emotional relationships between Edward and his favourites (particularly Gaveston) are often sympathetic, crafted to elicit pathos rather than condemnation. Narratives of Edward II's reign are thus a valuable source of positive depictions of relationships between men. The reasons for these positive depictions are often literary. By this, I mean in part that they help us to appreciate the historiographical influence of literary texts like Marlowe's *Edward II* and Drayton's Gaveston poems; but also that writers of chronicles drew on literary tropes, like those of the romance genre, in order to engage readers in their narratives.

These positive depictions are evidence of the need to complicate our understanding of attitudes towards same-sex relationships in medieval and early modern England. The work of scholars like Jeffrey Masten and Tom Linkinen has done much to develop and diversify our sense of the various discourses and approaches to same-sex desire and activity that were available to writers and readers in medieval and early modern England, moving beyond the view that it was conceptualised solely as 'moral failure and political transgression'.¹ Rather than seeing individual writers' sympathetic treatments of Edward and Gaveston's relationship as evidence that those individuals were 'open-minded' (as Meredith Skura writes of Elizabeth Cary), we can see these multiple sympathetic representations as evidence that writers saw the historiographical tradition of Edward's love for his favourites as an opportunity to engage their readers emotionally.² I therefore want to suggest that space for positive depictions of same-sex relationships was opened up by the cross-genre influences and fluidity that resulted from the desire to construct engaging historical narratives; and that to fully observe that space, we must distinguish in our analysis between the representation of sex between men, and the representation of love.

¹ Rufo, 'Marlowe's Minions', p. 19; Masten, *Queer Philologies*; Linkinen, *Same-Sex Sexuality*; see also Hammond, *Love Between Men*.

² Skura, 'Elizabeth Cary and Edward II', p. 89.

Brotherhood and friendship

Texts composed during Edward's reign, such as the Latin chronicles *Annales Londonienses* (c. 1316) and *Annales Paulini* (contemporaneous up to 1341), are the first to draw attention to the longevity of Edward's relationship with Gaveston: the former text, in a typical example, first identifies him as 'Piers Gaveston, who was his companion in his youth, while his father lived'.³ The poets Michael Drayton and Francis Hubert would later both use this detail to explain the depth of Edward and Gaveston's emotional bond.⁴ Its effect is to simultaneously justify Edward's love for and favour towards Gaveston – rendering it plausible and explicable – and to suggest that his choices of advisors and companions are unwisely based on sentiment.

Relatedly, it is only Gaveston who is linked to Edward as 'sworn brother', or about whom writers state 'Edward called him his brother'. This detail is found in almost all contemporaneous accounts of Edward's reign. The Latin chronicle written at Lanercost Priory in Cumbria, probably copied from a now lost contemporaneous chronicle by Richard of Durham, recounts Edward 'speaking openly of [Gaveston] as his brother' (*vocavit ipsum publice fratrem suum*) during his father's reign, describing this as 'improper familiarity' (*familiaritatem indebitam*) and linking it causally to Gaveston's 1305 exile.⁵ The *Annales Paulini* and the *Vita Edwardi Secundi* (another contemporaneously composed chronicle, probably written by a secular clerk close to the centre of political events during Edward's reign) both note on several occasions that Edward referred to Gaveston as his brother; the former, in which the collocation is so frequent it becomes expected, explicitly attributes this statement of brotherhood to 'excessive love' (*prae amore nimio*).⁶ Both the *Vita* and *Annales Paulini* suggest that these statements of brotherhood had a more formal manifestation than simple verbal convention, referring to Gaveston as Edward's 'adopted' (*adoptivi*) brother.⁷ On the basis of this and other sources, Pierre Chaplais's 1994 book *Piers Gaveston: Edward II's Adoptive Brother* argues that the true nature of Edward's relationship with Gaveston was not romantic or sexual, but 'a compact of adoptive brotherhood, be it brotherhood-in-arms or some other kind of fraternity'.⁸ This, he argues, was the reason for Edward I's hostile treatment of their relationship and his exile of Gaveston in 1305; this, too, was the reason Gaveston was asked to carry the crown of St Edward at Edward II's coronation. Chaplais's argument has remained influential: J.R.S. Phillips (in his recent biography of Edward)

³ *Annales Londonienses*, p. 151.

⁴ Hubert, *Deplorable Life*, stanza 31; Drayton, *Piers Gaveston*, ll. 166–169.

⁵ *Chronicle of Lanercost*, p. 184, trans. Maxwell; *Chronicon de Lanercost*, p. 210.

⁶ *Annales Paulini*, pp. 259, 263, 273; *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, pp. 15, 33, 51, 177. See also *Brut*, p. 205.

⁷ *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, pp. 50–51, trans. by Childs and Denholm-Young; *Annales Paulini*, p. 263. See also, for example, *A Chronicle of London, from 1089 to 1483*, p. 46; Haskins, 'Chronicle', p. 75.

⁸ Chaplais, *Gaveston*, p. 109.

finds it ‘very plausible’, while Wendy Childs (in her edition of the *Vita Edwardi Secundi*) describes it as ‘cogent’.⁹ However, his motivations raise some questions. Chaplais describes his thesis as an alternative to the ‘gratuitous assumption that [Edward and Gaveston] were lovers’: this wording is troubling, since it suggests that scholars opposed to Chaplais are not employing evidence-based reasoning, and carries an implied accusation of sensation-seeking which is less frequently levelled at scholars who posit the historical existence of male-female sexual relationships.¹⁰ Even leaving aside these problematic suggestions, while Chaplais usefully points out that a large proportion of the texts that say Edward ‘called Gaveston his brother’ are contemporaneous, it remains the case that (as he admits) there is ‘no record evidence’ for a formal compact of brotherhood between the two men.¹¹

In any case, in the context of Edward’s historiographical reputation, assertions of brotherhood were relatively short-lived. Although they appear in the *Brut* and London chronicles, which were popular and influential,¹² later writers do not retain this detail. It may be that both texts had more interesting, sensational attributes which resulted in their references to brotherhood being overlooked; or that as representations of Edward’s relationship with Gaveston became increasingly romanticized and characterized by incitement to sexual transgression (discussed below), writers did not perceive the idea of brotherhood – formally sworn or colloquially asserted – to fit their narratives. Particularly in early modern texts, Edward’s relationship with Gaveston is seldom presented as justifiable, explicable or desirable; the chivalric respectability of sworn brotherhood may have been perceived to undermine authorial condemnation of that relationship. The only early modern texts in which Edward calls Gaveston his brother are John Stow’s *Chronicles of England* (first printed in 1580, and later published as *The Annales of England* in six more editions from 1592 onwards) and Marlowe’s *Edward II*. Neither posit a formal compact of sworn brotherhood, instead framing the detail as an example of Edward’s excessive favour towards Gaveston compared to the other nobles: the full sentence from Stow is, ‘The King gave unto Pierce of Gavaston all such giftes and Jewels as had bin given to him, with the Crownes of his Father, his ancestours treasure, and many other things, affirming that if he could, he should succede him in the Kyngdome, calling him brother, not granting any thing without his consent.’¹³

⁹ Phillips, *Edward II*, p. 100; *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, p. xxxv.

¹⁰ Chaplais, *Gaveston*, p. 109.

¹¹ Chaplais, *Gaveston*, p. 109; Burgtof, ‘With My Life’, pp. 39–40.

¹² On the significance and influence of the London Chronicles, see McLaren, *London Chronicles*; on that of the *Brut*, see Taylor, ‘French Prose Brut’, pp. 247, 252; Marvin, *Construction*, pp. 1–15, 174–175.

¹³ Stow, *Chronicles*, fol. X4^r. See also Marlowe, *Edward II*, II.ii.35.

Apart from references to brotherhood, a further way in which medieval chroniclers represent the emotional depth of Edward and Gaveston's relationship is to compare them to the biblical figures of David and Jonathan. Regardless of the problems with Chaplais's work observed above, one of its most valuable aspects is his collation of these comparisons. Analysis of a selection indicates, I would suggest, that their significations fulfil three distinct functions.

In the first case, early in the *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, allusions to David and Jonathan are used in contrast to Edward and Gaveston. The comparison presents Edward and Gaveston's mutual love as excessive, deviant from the norm: 'Certainly I do not remember having heard that one man so loved another. Jonathan cherished David, Achilles loved Patroclus; but we do not read that they went beyond what was usual.'¹⁴ Attention to the Vulgate, and to the dominant medieval interpretation of David and Jonathan's relationship, can illuminate this comparison. Their love is clearly mutual and intense: the Vulgate states that 'the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul' (*anima Ionathan conligata est animae David et dilexit eum Ionathan quasi animam suam*).¹⁵ For Edward and Gaveston's love to exceed even this is striking. Yet the *Glossa Ordinaria*, the 'standard commentary [to the Vulgate] of the middle ages', interprets David and Jonathan's relationship typologically: 'Jonathan [in loving David] signifies those of the Jews who believed in Christ and, perceiving the grace of the Holy Spirit through Christ, abandoned all and followed him'.¹⁶ The writer of the *Vita*, then, is contrasting Edward's relationship with Gaveston – which they imply 'went beyond what was usual' – with a non-transgressive relationship that symbolizes the divinely sanctioned adherence to Christ of early Christian converts.

However, the *Vita* is inconsistent in its use of exempla. In the second case, after Gaveston's death, he and Edward are aligned rather than contrasted with Jonathan and David. The writer defends Edward against public 'derision' of his 'moderate' response to Gaveston's murder:

I am certain the King grieved for Piers as a father at any time grieves for his son.
For the greater the love, the greater the sorrow. In the lament of David upon
Jonathan, love is depicted which is said to have surpassed the love of women.
Our King also spoke like that; and he added that he planned to avenge the death
of Piers.¹⁷

¹⁴ *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, p. 29, trans. by Childs and Denholm-Young. Anthony Heacock notes several similarities between the portrayal of these two relationships from the Vulgate and *Iliad* (*Jonathan Loved David*, pp. 107–108).

¹⁵ I Samuel 18.1, *Biblia Sacra*.

¹⁶ Smalley, *Study of the Bible*, p. 13; I Kings.18.1, *Biblia Latina cum Glossa Ordinaria*.

¹⁷ *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, p. 53, trans. by Childs and Denholm-Young.

This reference constitutes the second type of comparison between Edward/Gaveston and David/Jonathan, which relates specifically to grief and lamentation. In contemporary theology, David's lament over Jonathan is 'a keystone of the erotic interpretation of the relationship' between the two men, based on David's statement at the close of the lament: 'I grieve for you, my brother Jonathan, exceedingly beautiful and amiable above the love of women' (*doleo super te frater mi Ionathan decore nimis et amabilis super amorem mulierum*).¹⁸ However, Vulgate commentaries emphasize the singularity and the superlative nature of David's lament rather than its potential homoeroticism.¹⁹ Nicholas de Lyra's *Postillae*, a fourteenth-century text, notes that, 'This is counted as a remarkable [*singularis*] lamentation over Jonathan, because David uniquely [*singulariter*] loved him', while Theodore's earlier commentary describes the lament as 'the greatest pain' (*summum dolorem*).²⁰ These descriptions of David's emotions – both grief and love – as 'highest', 'remarkable' and 'unique' all align with the *Vita's* description of Edward's love for Gaveston ('beyond what was usual'). Indeed, the *Vita* reports that not only did Edward speak like David, he also 'added that he planned to avenge the death of Piers': Edward is first established as equally grief-stricken to David, before his additional desire for revenge is revealed. Since the *Glossa* explicitly states that David did *not* return to avenge Jonathan's death, Edward here is meeting the example of David and then exceeding it; rather than accepting the will of God as David did, he is taking justice into his own hands. The function of this comparison between Jonathan's and Gaveston's deaths, then, is to highlight the intensity of Edward's grief and its excessive manifestations: like his love, it 'went beyond what was usual'.

The third type of comparison equates Edward I's anger at his son's relationship with Gaveston to Saul's anger with Jonathan as described in the Vulgate. This comparison is made implicitly in the *Chronicle of the Civil Wars* and in the chronicle composed contemporaneously by the canon Walter of Guisborough at Guisborough Priory in North Yorkshire over the period 1280–1312. Both of these texts describe the confrontation leading to Gaveston's 1305 exile in terms that closely mirror the Vulgate.²¹ The biblical scene is as follows:

Iratum autem Saul adversus Ionathan dixit ei
fili mulieris virum ultro rapientis numquid ignoro quia diligis filium Isai
in confusionem tuam et in confusionem ignominiosae matris tuae
omnibus enim diebus quibus filius Isai vixerit super terram
non stabilieris tu neque regnum tuum

¹⁸ Heacock, *Jonathan Loved David*, p. 29; II Samuel 1.26, *Biblia Sacra*.

¹⁹ II Kings.1.21, *Biblia Latina cum Glossa Ordinaria*.

²⁰ *Biblorum Sacrorum Cum Glossa Ordinaria*, col. 520.

²¹ This episode in Guisborough is clearly a case in which, as Gransden puts it, 'in assessing Walter's reliability as a historian, his respect for documents and his excellent sources of information should be weighed against his love of the dramatic' (*Historical Writing*, I, p. 473).

itaque iam nunc mitte et adduc eum ad me quia filius mortis est
 respondens autem Ionathan Sauli patri suo ait
 quare moritur quid fecit
 et arripuit Saul lanceam ut percuteret eum
 et intellexit Ionathan quod definitum esset patri suo ut interficeret David.²²

Then Saul was angry against Jonathan and said to him, ‘You son of a woman who wantonly ravished a man! Do I not know that you have chosen the son of Jesse to your own shame, and to the shame of your mother’s disgrace? For all the days that the son of Jesse lives on earth, you shall not be established, nor your kingdom. Therefore now send and lead him to me, because he is the son of death. And Jonathan, responding to Saul his father, said, ‘Why shall he die? What has he done?’ And Saul took up a lance to strike him, and Jonathan understood that his father was determined to kill David.

Guisborough relates the confrontation between Edward I and his son in clearly similar terms:

Quo vocato dixit ei rex, ‘Quid negocii misisti per hominem istum?’ Qui ait, ‘Ut cum pace vestra dare possem domino Petro de Caverston comitatum de Pontyff.’ Et ait rex, ‘Fili meretricis male generate, vis tu modo terras dare qui nuncquam aliquas impetrasti? Vivit dominus, nisi esset timor dispersionis regni nuncquam gauderes hereditate tua.’ Et apprehensis capillis utraque manu dilaceravit eos in quantum potuit et in fine lassus eiecit eum.²³

The King said to [Prince Edward], ‘On what business did you send this man?’ [Prince Edward] said, ‘That with your peace I might be able to give the earldom of Ponthieu to Lord Piers Gaveston.’ And the King said, ‘Ill-begotten son of a whore, how do you want to give lands, who never obtained any? God living, unless it was for fear of destruction of the realm, you would never enjoy your inheritance.’ And having seized his hairs with both hands, he tore them as far as he could and finally, weary, threw him out.

The *Chronicle of the Civil Wars* describes the episode very similarly: Edward asks that Gaveston be given the earldom of Cornwall, whereupon his father ‘threw him to the ground and trampled him with his feet, saying that all the realm of England should be lost by him’ (*ipsum ad terram dejecit pedibusque conculcavit, dicens totam regionem anglicanam per ipsum fore amittendam*).²⁴

Medieval exegesis elevates David and Jonathan’s relationship to a symbol of the love between Christian converts and Christ. What, then, were Guisborough and the writer of the *Chronicle of the Civil Wars* hoping to suggest by paralleling Jonathan’s admirable love and favour for David with Edward’s transgressive love and favour for Gaveston? As well as the

²² I Samuel 20.30–33, *Biblia Sacra*.

²³ Guisborough, *Chronicle*, pp. 382–383.

²⁴ Haskins, ‘Chronicle’, p. 75. Hannah Kilpatrick has since argued that the contraction ‘ip̄m’, which Haskins expanded as ‘ipsum’, should in fact be ‘ipsam’ (‘Correction to Haskins’). In the quotation above, *ipsum ad terram dejecit* is translated as ‘he threw *him* to the ground’; according to Kilpatrick’s reading, this should be ‘he threw *it* to the ground’, ‘it’ being Prince Edward’s ‘request’ (*petitionem*) in the form of a physical petition. This reading, however, would depart from the scene’s otherwise close paraphrase of the Vulgate, which does involve the threat of violence from father to son.

connotations of intense love and grief explored above, it is instructive to consider the social aspects of David and Jonathan's relationship. Like Edward, Jonathan is a king's son; his beloved friend David is, like Gaveston, a lower-born man taken into his household. Their friendship prompts Jonathan to tell David, 'you will reign over Israel and I will be second to you' (*tu regnabis super Israhel et ego ero tibi secundus*) – disrupting the social hierarchy, and angering Saul.²⁵ It is clear that these social aspects were noticed by medieval English commentators. The dialogue *De Spirituali Amicitia* (*Spiritual Friendship*) written by the Cistercian abbot Aelred of Rievaulx around 1160, foregrounds this hierarchical aspect of David and Jonathan's relationship, and above all Jonathan's declaration of equality, repeating it four times in four short verses: "You will be King," he said, "and I will be second after you."²⁶ To Aelred at least, this aspect of David and Jonathan's relationship was just as significant as David's lamentation.

The parallels with Edward and Gaveston's relationship are striking. It is clearly this aspect of the David and Jonathan narrative with which Guisborough and the writer of the *Chronicle of the Civil Wars* are engaging: the young Edward's desire to bestow an earldom upon Gaveston constitutes a levelling of their respective social statuses comparable to that between Jonathan and David, but not comparably acceptable. Given the accepted veneration of the biblical relationship, these writers (who condemn Gaveston elsewhere) must take care not to venerate Edward and Gaveston's relationship by association. It may be for this reason that, despite the numerous parallels between the two pairs – a king's son and a lower-born member of his household, with an intense love for each other that collapses their difference in status and angers the King, followed by the death of one and the grief of the other – no other texts make this comparison.

As I argued in Chapter 1, Marlowe's approach to the question of explaining and excusing the love between Edward and Gaveston in his play *Edward II* (c. 1591–1592) was to apply the early modern technique of excusing romantic and sexual relationships between men through appeal to classical precedent ("The mightiest kings have had their minions") Drayton uses the same technique, comparing Edward's grief at Gaveston's exile to that of Hercules for the dead Hylas, and their love to that of Hero and Leander.²⁷ However, not all writers were content to compare such heroic figures to the problematic Edward and Gaveston. As several critics have argued, Marlowe's catalogue of heroic couples can function 'as a foil to the irresolute young King', but the poet Francis Hubert appears unhappy to even allow the possibility of direct

²⁵ I Samuel 23.17, *Biblia Sacra*.

²⁶ *Aelred of Rievaulx: Spiritual Friendship*, bk. 3, verses 92, 94, 95, pp. 111–113.

²⁷ Drayton, *Peirs Gaveston*, ll. 1027–1032, 1417–1422.

equivalence between Edward and Alexander.²⁸ In Hubert's poem *The Historie of Edward the Second* (composed c. 1597–1600, and printed in 1628 as *The Deplorable Life and Death of Edward the Second*), the narrator, Edward, first describes himself and Gaveston as 'I Alexander, hee Stephestion [sic]', before correcting himself: 'Oh no, I wrong them to usurpe their names, / Our loves were like, but farre unlike their fames.'²⁹ Similarly, while Elizabeth Cary (in her prose *History of the Life, Reign, and Death of Edward II*, composed around 1627–1628) compares Edward and Gaveston's relationship to the frequently valorized friendship between the mythical classical figures Damon and Pythias, she does not use this comparison to elevate and legitimize their relationship as Marlowe might have done; instead, she voices it in the context of mocking Edward for his fantasies about Gaveston's return from exile:

The Operations of the Fancy transport sometimes our Imagination to believe an actual possession of those things we most desire and hope for [...] Such as the condition of this wanton King, that in this bare overture, conceits the fruition of his beloved Damon, and apprehends this Golden Dream to be an essential part of his fantastique Happiness.³⁰

Friendships like that of Damon and Pythias, Cary suggests, belong in a 'Golden Dream' and not at the English court; Edward's attachment to Gaveston is an aspect of his 'wanton' behaviour and his propensity to pay more attention to 'Fancy' than reality.³¹

At issue here is the question of whether it is possible for a king like Edward to have an intimate friend like Damon. As Laurie Shannon has shown in her study of early modern engagements with classical ideals of friendship, *Sovereign Amity*, and her earlier article 'Monarchs, Minions and "Sovereigne" Friendship', this question took on a new urgency in early modern England and Europe, as humanist scholars like Francis Bacon and Michel de Montaigne worked to disentangle the Neoplatonic model of the friend as 'second self' from its political implications in terms of royal favouritism. Although, as John S. Garrison has shown, early modern writers did not simply unthinkingly accept these 'dyadic' idealised visions of friendship – instead developing their own innovative models of multiplicitous sociality – narratives of Edward's reign continued to emphasise the singularity of his love for Gaveston, and to present their relationship as strictly dyadic to the exclusion of all other potential political intimates.³² As Shannon points out, these

²⁸ Deats, 'Myth and Metamorphosis', pp. 308–310. See also Haber, *Desire and Dramatic Form*, p. 33; Shepherd, *Marlowe and the Politics of Elizabethan Theatre*, p. 204.

²⁹ Hubert, *Deplorable Life*, stanza 135.

³⁰ Cary, *History of the Life*, fol. D2r.

³¹ On the early modern use of Damon and Pythias as exemplars of friendship, see Shannon, *Sovereign Amity*, pp. 8, 29, 53, 88.

³² Garrison, *Friendship and Queer Theory*.

ideals were not easily compatible with theorisations of the monarch as both private individual and public actor:

The rules of *amicitia* run afoul of the monarch's proverbial singularity, his public function of representing polity in generic terms, and his duty to sublimate his affective life to the good of the realm. A monarch so engaged to a particular friend is, from the constitutional perspective of the realm's priority, a captive sovereign – a sovereign subject to an interest at odds with his political purpose. While kings could (and good kings must) have their counsellors, Renaissance texts stress the difference between a monarch's private friend and this counsellor role.³³

For Edward to have a Damon to his Pythias, then, was for him to exemplify 'the political scandal of a monarch's unsuppressed private self, with the individuated and self-centred body natural eclipsing the body politic': a paradigm that Shannon, drawing on the discursive field of the term 'minion' as discussed in Chapter 1, terms 'mignonnerie'. This political concern was compounded, as Alan Bray has argued, by the fact that intimate same-sex relationships between monarchs and favourites breached the 'reassuring conventions' that 'ensured [intimate relationships between men] was read in an acceptable frame of reference': firstly 'the assumption that both masters and their close servingmen would be "gentle" men', and secondly the assumption that 'the bond between a master and such an intimate servingman was personal, not mercenary'.³⁴ In breaching both of these conventions, Bray points out, Edward and Gaveston were – in the early modern imagination – moving away from the 'orderly relationship of friendship between men' and towards 'the profoundly disturbing image of the sodomite, that enemy not only of nature but of the order of society and the proper kinds and divisions within it'. As Bray's collocation of sexual and social disorder indicates, the social transgressions of Edward's relationship with Gaveston were likely to lead, in early modern discourse, to increased attention to and condemnation of his sexual transgressions.³⁵

It is no surprise, then, that numerous early modern accounts of Edward II's reign engaged with the question of how the impossibility of classically idealised friendship for monarchs might be negotiated. Edward and Gaveston were considered highly relevant to this concern: David Wootton cites them as one of 'certain paradigm cases of friendship and favouritism' of which 'seventeenth-century readers were acutely aware'.³⁶ Cary's incorporation of Damon and Pythias into her narrative of Edward's reign bears this out, as does Drayton's

³³ Shannon, 'Monarchs, Minions and "Sovereign" Friendship', p. 93; see also *Sovereign Amity*.

³⁴ Bray, 'Homosexuality and the Signs of Male Friendship', pp. 50–51.

³⁵ See also Halperin, *How to do the History of Homosexuality*, pp. 113–121; Goldberg, *Sodometries*, pp. 118–119; Sponsler, 'The King's Boyfriend', p. 158; Clarke, 'The Sovereign's Vice', pp. 54–59; Wootton, 'Francis Bacon'.

³⁶ Wootton, 'Francis Bacon', p. 186.

reference to Edward as Gaveston's 'second self', and Marlowe's use of the idealised language of friendship to express Edward's love for his favourites.³⁷

The effect of this discourse of friendship in narratives of Edward's reign is not to minimise the romantic and sexual elements of Edward's relationships with his favourites (as has been well established by critics including Paul Hammond, the concepts of 'friendship' and 'love', including sexual love, existed on a semantic continuum in early modern thought), but to foreground the impossibility of Edward and Gaveston's situation.³⁸ Marlowe's Edward conceives of his relationship with Gaveston as idealized friendship not dissimilar to that which Aelred attributed to David and Jonathan four centuries earlier – 'one mind, one heart, one purse' – but as Francis Bacon argued, such a friendship 'many times sorteth to inconvenience' when one of the parties holds a royal office.³⁹ As is stated explicitly in *Divi Britannici*, a chronicle by royalist politician Winston Churchill probably written during the Interregnum but not printed until 1675, Edward's relationship with Gaveston might have been laudable in a different context:

the greatest Crime ever objected against him, was that which one would have thought might have past for the greatest Vertue, his excess of kindness to those he thought worthy to be his Friends; a real effect of good Nature, and perhaps all circumstances considered, not otherwise ill, then as it met with ill-natur'd Interpreters.⁴⁰

The problem, as Shannon neatly puts it, is that 'Any king's effort to enact friendship according to its classically derived script [...] will look like *mignonnerie* so long as the king remains a king'.⁴¹ In fact, when Marlowe applied a very contemporary term for an unacceptably close relationship ('minion') to a list of close relationships that were valorized in their classical contexts – as analysed in Chapter 1 – he created something of a double-edged sword.⁴² The classical examples had the potential to neutralize Edward and Gaveston's relationship, by presenting it as part of a classical tradition; but the contemporary resonance of 'minion' had the potential to emphasize the fact that these kinds of relationship were *not* acceptable between English kings and their favourites. Seen in this light, Edward and Gaveston's relationship appears to the audience of

³⁷ For Drayton, see, *Peirs Gaveston*, ll. 475–477; Giantvalley, 'Barnfield, Drayton and Marlowe', pp. 19, 22–23; Quinn, 'Mastering Complaint', p. 455. For Marlowe, see *Edward II*, I.i.142; Mills, 'The Meaning of *Edward II*'; Cushner, 'Some Observations', p. 14; DiGangi, 'Marlowe, Queer Studies, and Renaissance Homoeroticism', pp. 204–205; Kuriyama, 'Second Selves'; Hillman, *Shakespeare, Marlowe and the Politics of France*, p. 104; Rufo, 'Marlowe's Minions', p. 4; Haber, 'State of the Art', pp. 88–89;

³⁸ Hammond, *Love Between Men*, pp. 30–31; see 'friend, n. and adj.', *OED Online* (2013).

³⁹ *Aelred of Rievaulx: Spiritual Friendship*, bk. 3, verse 99, p. 114; Mills, 'The Meaning of *Edward II*', p. 26.

⁴⁰ Churchill, *Divi Britannici*, fol. 2C2^v.

⁴¹ Shannon, 'Monarchs, Minions and "Sovereign" Friendship', p. 105.

⁴² Marlowe, *Edward II*, I.iv.390–396.

Marlowe's play as an anachronism, better fitted to a classical context than to an English political one.

Romanticizing Edward and Gaveston

Edward's love for his favourites is consistently presented as excessive in texts of all genres.⁴³ But in addition, during the period 1305–1697, Edward's relationship with Gaveston is increasingly romanticized. What I here call 'romanticization' is a comprehensible shorthand for a process by which the emotional dimension of the relationship is foregrounded, with the effect of inducing pathos for their separation by exile and Gaveston's ultimate death; and writers demonstrate that their love for each other is romantic, that of a pair of lovers. While this process draws on the tropes of romance, influences from the broader medieval and early modern discourse of romantic love can also be observed, particularly in Marlowe and Drayton. Romanticization can take the form of emphasizing Edward and Gaveston's fidelity or loyalty; the length and durability of their relationship; non-rational reasons for their attraction to each other; and Edward's grief at Gaveston's exile and death.⁴⁴ Although Marlowe's *Edward II* plays a central role in this process, instigating a shift of focus to the emotional components of this relationship, the trend can also be observed independently.

Romanticization in chronicles

A useful case study of early romanticization is the development of the account of Gaveston's capture at Scarborough in 1312. The Latin chronicle written at St Albans Abbey sometime after 1330 (popularly attributed to John de Trokelowe, though he was in actuality probably the scribe for the chronicle's author William Rishanger) reports that when Gaveston had been taken into custody, 'he humbly begged that he might deserve to enjoy the conversation of the Lord King, with the King having likewise begged the same thing' (*humiliter petiit ut Domini Regis frui mereretur colloquio, Rege similiter hoc idem petente*).⁴⁵ This detail, depicting Edward and Gaveston's mutual desire for a final conversation, encourages sympathy for their separation. The writer later enhances this pathos through his account of the birth of Edward's son, shortly after Gaveston's death:

Because of his birth all England was made joyful [...] and his father was made so cheerful, that he might temper the sorrow which he had conceived for the death of Piers. Therefore from that day his love of his son increased, and the memory

⁴³ See, for example, Murimuth, *Continuatio Chronicarum*, p. 9; *Annales Paulini*, p. 255; Tynemouth, *Historia Aurea*, fol. 225^v; Trokelowe, *Chronica*, pp. 64–65; Drayton, *Peirs Gaveston*, ll. 973–975; Niccols, *Mirour*, fol. 3A2^r; Martyn, *Historie*, fols. N1^v, N4^r.

⁴⁴ For an excellent overview of the tropes of romance, see Cooper, *English Romance in Time*.

⁴⁵ Trokelowe, *Chronica*, p. 76.

of Piers faded; and the Lord King humbly began to be accustomed to stoop to the will of his nobles.⁴⁶

While this passage deals with the diminishing of Edward's grief for Gaveston, by presenting it as something that needs to be 'tempered' (*temperaret*) and 'fade' (*evanuit*) the writer actually emphasizes its significance, and engages the reader's sympathies with Edward and Gaveston's relationship.

The St Albans monk Thomas Walsingham, who popularized the account of 'Trokelowe' by using it as a source for his *Chronica Maiora* (1390s), intensifies this engagement through two significant additions. When Gaveston was captured, Walsingham writes, he did 'not request anything, except that they should allow him *at least once* to enjoy the plentiful conversation of the Lord King' (*nihilque postulavit aliud, nisi ut domini sui regis saltem semel frui colloquio copiam sibi darent*).⁴⁷ Walsingham's interpolation of 'at least once' (*saltem semel*) is significant here, and not just because the additional detail presents a more vivid picture of a pleading Gaveston. Though ostensibly signifying Gaveston's desire for more than one conversation with Edward, Walsingham's diminutive presentation of his final request suggests its importance to Gaveston: if he cannot have anything else, he would like just one conversation with Edward. A similar technique of diminution is also used by Elizabeth Cary: missing his exiled favourite, Edward 'enters into the business of the kingdom, and with a seeming serious care surveys each passage, and *not so much as sighs, or names his Gavaston*'.⁴⁸ Here Cary highlights what Edward really wants to do through understatement ('not so much as') and denial; again, this emphasizes Gaveston's importance to Edward.⁴⁹ Walsingham also makes a small but significant addition to the 'Trokelowe' version of Prince Edward's birth, stating that 'love of his son grew, and the memory of Piers vanished *in his heart*' (*in ejus corde*).⁵⁰ This addition foregrounds the fact that 'the memory of Piers' was characterized by love, intensifying the pathos evinced by the original account.

A similar process of romanticization occurs in the alterations made by Richard Baker (in his 1643 *Chronicle of the Kings of England*) to the account of Gaveston's capture in his source text, Samuel Daniel's *Collection of the History of England* (1618). Baker writes:

⁴⁶ Trokelowe, *Chronica*, pp. 79–80.

⁴⁷ Walsingham, *Historia*, fol. G2^r; emphasis added.

⁴⁸ Cary, *History of the Life*, fol. D2^v; emphasis added.

⁴⁹ See Skura, 'Elizabeth Cary and Edward II', pp. 87–89, for a perceptive analysis of the sympathetic psychological realism of Cary's account, to which this quotation contributes. Skura also suggests that Cary's romanticization of Edward and Gaveston is analogous to her depiction in her drama *Mariam* of the close relationship between Constabarus and Babus, who are compared to David and Jonathan ('Elizabeth Cary and Edward II', p. 94).

⁵⁰ Walsingham, *Historia*, fol. G3^r; emphasis added

But the Lords hearing where Gaveston was, assaulted the Castle with such violence, that Gaveston seeing no meanes to escape, was content to render himselfe; requesting onely, that he might but once be allowed to see the Kings face; and the King hearing he was taken, desired as much⁵¹

Like Walsingham's text, this scene elicits sympathy for both men in its diminutive presentation of Gaveston's last request ('requesting onely [...] but once'). It is also a romanticized alteration from Daniel's narration. Daniel's Edward does not share Gaveston's eagerness for one final meeting, which contrasts with the mutuality of Baker's account.⁵² Moreover, Daniel's Gaveston makes a potentially political request to 'speake with the King'; Baker alters this to the more clearly romantic request to 'see the Kings face'. This may have been influenced by the last request of Marlowe's Gaveston ('Tracherous Earl, shall I not see the King?'), though Daniel of course also had access to this text.⁵³ Laurence Normand observes a similar moment in James Melville's account of the relationship between James VI of Scotland and Esmé Stewart, Earl of Lennox, which helps to further contextualize Baker's alteration:

Melville does indeed register Lennox as corrupting James's whole political outlook, describing the King as being 'sa miserablie corrupted at the wrong time, at the start of his youth' [...] But quite unexpectedly, a sentence appears in a different register when Melville describes James's separation from Lennox: 'And sa the King and the Duc war dissivered [dissevered], and never saw uther againe'.⁵⁴

Noting that this echoes Thomas Malory's language concerning 'the parting of Lancelot and Guinevere', Normand argues convincingly that a scene in which two people are parted and mourn the fact that they will no longer be able to see each other's faces is 'not the language of politics but rather of medieval or Renaissance romance'.⁵⁵ As such, in Melville's text, Normand argues that 'it unsettles the surrounding discourse, emerging to represent the James-Lennox affair as a love story rather than a political conspiracy'. As Tricia McElroy points out, this incorporation of romance tropes can also be observed in Holinshed's *Chronicles*; I would suggest that Baker's *Chronicle* is an additional case in point, indicating that this may represent a more widespread practice across early modern historical accounts.⁵⁶ His choice to depict Gaveston as 'requesting onely, that he might but once be allowed to see the Kings face' thus represents a creative decision to foreground Gaveston's emotional – rather than political – motivations for

⁵¹ Baker, *Chronicle*, fol. S4^v.

⁵² Daniel, *Collection*, fol. Q3^v; emphasis added.

⁵³ Marlowe, *Edward II*, II.vi.15.

⁵⁴ Normand, 'What Passions', p. 182.

⁵⁵ See also Cooper, *English Romance in Time*, pp. 229–234, 361–362.

⁵⁶ McElroy, 'Genres', pp. 271–272.

requesting one final meeting, and encourages the reader to interpret his relationship with Edward as romantic.

The role of Marlowe

Establishing a romantic relation

Attention must be paid here to Marlowe's *Edward II* and its influence. As Kathleen Tillotson observes, one of Marlowe's many innovations in the historiography of Edward and Gaveston was to '[remove] the infatuation on Edward's side from mere weak sensuality, from crass material ambition on Gaveston's; in a word, he showed the relation as romantic'.⁵⁷ Recognition of this aspect of *Edward II* forces us to complicate the extent to which Gaveston fits into the 'theatrical type' of the 'stage favourite', whose 'recognizable set of characteristics' and shared vocabulary Blair Worden has outlined in an extensive survey of early modern drama.⁵⁸ The play does contain many of Worden's hallmarks, and Gaveston is at times both a 'Machiavel' and an 'over-reacher' – but he is also Edward's lover, a role in which he is not solely portrayed as self-interested or caricatured as the indulgence of a weak and foolish monarch.

As my analysis of Drayton will shortly show, one of Marlowe's key legacies was to shift Gaveston to centre stage as Edward's lover at the expense of the Despencers. However, the younger Despencer (Spencer) does of course feature as Edward's second lover in Marlowe's play, and so it is necessary to examine how the play influenced the foregrounding of Gaveston in spite of this. The difference between Edward's two favourites is not as simple as 'a change from personal passion [with Gaveston] to politic power [with Spencer]': Spencer may be politically calculating, and may largely '[work] through the channels of orthodox monarchical power' to gain Edward's favour, but ultimately Edward's decision to promote Spencer 'merely of our love' is unambiguous.⁵⁹ Moreover, the play contains some expressions of parallelism between Gaveston and Spencer. Forker describes Edward's embrace of Spencer at III.i.177 as a 'deliberate parallel to the embracement of Gaveston at I.i.140', and Edward collocates them in his lament while imprisoned: 'O Gaveston, it is for thee that I am wronged; / For me, both thou and both the Spencers died'.⁶⁰ Yet as Marie Rutkoski observes, 'something is missing from Edward and Spencer Jr.'s relationship that existed in the King and Gaveston's'.⁶¹ Leonora Leet Brodwin argues that 'However much Spencer may flatter Edward's delusions and Edward reward Spencer for it, and however much tenderness they ultimately come to feel for each other,

⁵⁷ Drayton, *Works*, V, 24; see also Boyette, 'Wanton Humour'.

⁵⁸ Worden, 'Favourites on the English Stage', pp. 159–160.

⁵⁹ Bredbeck, *Sodomy*, p. 73; Marlowe, *Edward II*, III.i.145.

⁶⁰ Marlowe, *Edward II*, V.iii.41–42.

⁶¹ Rutkoski, 'Breeching the Boy', p. 283; see also Stewart, 'Edward II and Male Same-Sex Desire', p. 90.

their relationship is totally lacking in that poetry which redeemed Edward's love for Gaveston'.⁶² If we consider *Edward II* from the perspective of an early modern audience, the most striking difference between Edward's relationship with Gaveston and his relationship with Spencer is, in fact, poetry. Edward's scenes with Spencer lack the classical allusions, long grief-stricken partings, and elaborate declarations of love that characterize his interactions with Gaveston – and these are a key technique with which Marlowe elicits audience sympathy for the King and his first lover, despite their many political transgressions.

As Catherine Belsey observes, 'Edward's desire for Gaveston is dramatically represented, made palpable for the audience, in terms of a succession of separations'.⁶³ To 'desire' I would add 'love': as Belsey herself notes, parting scenes are typical of early modern representations of romantic love. As Edward and Gaveston part before the latter's exile to Ireland, they employ emotive language that demonstrates the pain they feel at separation, resulting in intense pathos: 'hell of grief', 'too-piercing words', 'torments my wretched soul', 'most miserable'.⁶⁴ The same scene reinforces the romantic nature of their relationship: they exchange portraits in a typical early modern lovers' gesture, and Edward's request that Gaveston 'give me leave to look my fill' demonstrates that their love is based in part on physical attraction.⁶⁵ Their reunion at Tynemouth occasions a similarly lengthy pair of speeches which function in the same way: Edward describes the pain of his separation from Gaveston – 'thy absence made me droop and pine away' – and compares himself to 'the lovers of fair Danae', while Gaveston expresses his joy with rhetorical flourish ('The shepherd nipt with biting winter's rage / Frolics not more to see the painted spring, / Than I do to behold your majesty').⁶⁶ These scenes and others like them (their first reunion in I.i is also particularly important) ensure that Edward's love for Gaveston is memorable for Marlowe's audience and readers in terms of stage time, literary technique, and emotional impact. There is a sad irony in the fact that their final parting is rushed, and leaves no time for rhetorical expressions of love or grief: their last exchange is simply 'Gaveston, away!' / 'Farewell, my lord.'⁶⁷ By contrast, Edward's lamentation after his separation from Spencer and Baldock focuses mainly on his imminent deposition.⁶⁸

⁶² Brodwin, *Edward II*, p. 153.

⁶³ Belsey, 'Desire's Excess', p. 84.

⁶⁴ Marlowe, *Edward II*, I.iv.116, 117, 123, 129.

⁶⁵ Marlowe, *Edward II*, I.iv.139; see Cooper, *English Romance in Time*, pp. 229–234.

⁶⁶ Marlowe, *Edward II*, II.ii.52, 53, 61–63.

⁶⁷ Marlowe, *Edward II*, II.iv.8–9. Melnikoff notes that Gaveston's final words 'before being carted off to execution' are similarly, examples of what Steven Guy-Bray has called 'prosaic' and James Siemon 'stifle[d]' language ('Introduction', p. 6).

⁶⁸ Marlowe, *Edward II*, V.i.5–37.

The audience sympathy inspired by these parting scenes was undoubtedly enhanced in a late sixteenth-century context by Marlowe's consistent association of Gaveston's exile with Catholicism.⁶⁹ The Archbishop of Canterbury expresses his opposition to Gaveston in a speech that explicitly aligns him with Rome, telling his attendant to 'certify the Pope' of the abuses inflicted on the Bishop of Coventry.⁷⁰ When the nobles ally with the Archbishop shortly afterwards, they too become implicitly aligned with the head of the Catholic Church.⁷¹ Following this, the first explicit exhortation that Edward exile Gaveston is made by the Archbishop, who begins by stating 'You know that I am legate to the Pope' and charges Edward to 'Subscribe [...] to his exile' 'On your allegiance to the see of Rome'.⁷² Edward articulates his submission to this command in the same terms – 'The legate of the Pope will be obey'd' – and repeats this when explaining it to Gaveston ('The legate of the Pope will have it so').⁷³ Having been compelled to agree to the exile, Edward's angry soliloquy (which closely echoes the final dying speech of Henri III in Marlowe's *The Massacre at Paris*) not only includes such anti-Catholic hallmarks as 'Proud Rome', 'superstitious taper-lights' and 'antichristian churches', but asks, 'Why should a king be subject to a priest?'⁷⁴ Marlowe's choice of words is striking here: Gaveston's exile has been forced by one priest and many nobles, and Edward could just as reasonably have asked, 'Why should a king be subject to his peers?' In light of this, Marlowe's choice to continually stress the Archbishop's role in separating Edward and Gaveston – and to continually remind us that the Archbishop is a Catholic – seems a deliberate attempt to align audience sympathies with Edward and Gaveston, particularly given that it is original to the play: chronicle accounts mostly attribute Gaveston's exiles to nobles, not bishops.

Elsewhere in the play, Marlowe emphasizes the romantic nature of Edward and Gaveston's love in a number of ways. Isabella's complaint – 'He claps his cheeks, and hangs about his neck, / Smiles in his face, and whispers in his ears' – depicts behaviour associated in other texts either with dandling children (as in Marlowe's play *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, in which Cupid asks, 'Will Dido let me hang about her necke?') or, more frequently, romantic love and sexual attraction.⁷⁵ As Pasquarella notes, Edward's behaviour towards Gaveston here echoes that of the amorous Neptune in Marlowe's narrative poem 'Hero and Leander' ('He clapt his plumpe

⁶⁹ See Smith, *Homosexual Desire*, p. 218.

⁷⁰ Marlowe, *Edward II*, I.ii.35–38.

⁷¹ Marlowe, *Edward II*, I.ii.42–45.

⁷² Marlowe, *Edward II*, I.iv.51–53.

⁷³ Marlowe, *Edward II*, I.iv.64, 109.

⁷⁴ Marlowe, *Edward II*, I.iv.96; Bevington, 'Christopher Marlowe: The Late Years', pp. 216–217; Kay, 'Marlowe, *Edward II* and the Cult of Elizabeth', p. 9; Kewes, 'Marlowe, History and Politics', p. 140; Knowles, 'Political Contexts', pp. 106–107; Stewart, 'Edoüard et Gaverston', pp. 114–115.

⁷⁵ Marlowe, *Edward II*, I.ii.51–52; Marlowe, *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, III.i.30; Williams, 'Dido, Queen of England', p. 44. See also Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage*, fol. 2K3r, for 'a woman with a Child hanging about her necke'.

cheekes, with his tresses playd / And smiling wantonly, his love bewrayd').⁷⁶ Shakespeare's Petruchio similarly offers the fact that Kate 'hung about my necke' as evidence of 'How much she loves me', and Leontes in *The Winter's Tale* uses this behaviour as evidence of Hermione's adultery.⁷⁷ Indeed, Edward and Gaveston's love often echoes that of other romantic pairs, both outside the play and within it. Edward's reply to Mortimer Junior's question 'Why should you love him whom the world hates so?' – 'Because he loves me more than all the world' – is 'a probable echo' of the Ghost's expression of love for Bel-imperia in Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*.⁷⁸ Gaveston's love for Edward is also repeatedly paralleled with Isabella's.⁷⁹ 'To the Queen's 'Villain! 'tis thou that robb'st me of my lord', Gaveston replies, 'Madam, 'tis you that rob me of my lord'.⁸⁰ Similarly, both say they value Edward's love more than material reward, and echo each other's language when that love is demonstrated: 'O how a kiss revives poor Isabel!'; 'Renowned Edward, how thy name / Revives poor Gaveston!'⁸¹ These examples and others present Gaveston's love for Edward as qualitatively equivalent to that of his wife.⁸² Not only does this emphasize the romantic nature of that love, it highlights the way in which it disrupts established social structures by competing directly with Edward's marriage: although an early modern audience would not have assumed that Edward's desire for Gaveston prevented him from having a sexual relationship with Isabella, Marlowe makes it clear that Edward's favourite has displaced his wife from his affections.⁸³ Marlowe uses a similar parallelism with Margaret, Gaveston's wife-to-be, here with the primary effect of emphasizing Margaret's naivety: her claim that the letter she has received from Gaveston 'argues the entire love of my lord' is belied by her echoes of Edward's phrasing ('my sweet Gaveston') and by her image of Gaveston sleeping on her bosom (reminiscent of his reference to 'The King, upon whose bosom let me die').⁸⁴ This reminds the audience that Gaveston has another lover and that his marriage to Margaret will be purely political – as Edward's statement, 'Gaveston, think that I love thee well, / To wed thee to our niece', makes clear.⁸⁵

⁷⁶ Pasquarella, *Marlowe's Representation of Love*, p. 93.

⁷⁷ Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew*, II.i.303–304, *The Winter's Tale*, I.ii.309–310. For other examples see Lyly, *The Woman in the Moone*, fol. C3^v; Boccaccio, *Amorous Fiammetta*, fol. G4^r.

⁷⁸ Marlowe, *Edward II*, I.iv.76–77n.

⁷⁹ Jardine, *Still Harping on Daughters*, p. 23.

⁸⁰ Marlowe, *Edward II*, I.iv.160–161.

⁸¹ Marlowe, *Edward II*, I.i.170–173, I.iv.329–331; I.iv.332, II.v.40–41.

⁸² Jardine, *Still Harping on Daughters*, pp. 23–24; Boyette, 'Wanton Humour', p. 46; Hopkins, 'Truest of the Twain', pp. 118–119.

⁸³ Marlowe, *Edward II*, I.ii.49–50.

⁸⁴ Marlowe, *Edward II*, II.i.63; II.i.59 (cf. I.iv.48, 306); II.i.65; I.i.14. On the queer implications of the epithet 'sweet' when used by Edward for Gaveston, see Masten, 'Towards a Queer Address'.

⁸⁵ Marlowe, *Edward II*, II.ii.256–257.

Michael Drayton's poem *Peirs Gaveston* expresses the love between Edward and Gaveston through rhetorical speeches and parting laments, suggesting that Drayton was substantially influenced by Marlowe's *Edward II*. No chronicle accounts foreground Edward and Gaveston's partings, or represent them through emotional detail or direct speech.⁸⁶ Moreover, Drayton's portrayal of Edward and Gaveston's farewell before Gaveston's second exile has several similar themes to the equivalent scene in Marlowe:

He wanted words t'expresse what he sustain'd,
Nor could I speake to utter halfe my wrong,
To shew his grieffe, or where I most was payn'd,
The time too short, the tale was all too long:
I tooke my leave with sighes when forth I went,
He streames of teares unto my farewell sent.

But sending lookes, ambassadors of love⁸⁷

Here Gaveston and Edward refer to their mutual grief, to the insufficient time they have left together, and to the idea of wordless, grief-stricken parting; Edward, but not Gaveston, is depicted as weeping; and the importance of looking at one another is foregrounded. All of these are key aspects of the analogous scene in Marlowe's play. Their function in Drayton is similar, emphasizing the emotional, romantic component of Edward and Gaveston's relationship and eliciting sympathy from the reader through this emotional detail and the first-person narration.⁸⁸ Elsewhere, Drayton achieves this by using tropes from the early modern discourse of romantic love. Missing Gaveston, Edward 'countes the howers, so sloly how they runne, / Reproves the daye, and blames the loytring sunne'; later, Gaveston says, 'When did I laugh? and he not seene to smile? / If I but frownd, hee silent all the while.'⁸⁹ Drayton also highlights the equivalence of Edward and Gaveston's love to male-female love, frequently by making several similes in succession and shifting from a comparison without sexual or romantic connotations to one with both. The following stanzas, describing the pair's reunion after Edward I's death, are a good example:

Who ever sawe the kindest romane dame
With extreame joye yeeld up her latest breath,
When from the warres her sonne triumphing came,
When stately Rome had mourned for his death:

⁸⁶ See Quinn, 'Mastering Complaint', p. 439; given these specific parallels, I would suggest that Drayton drew his depiction of a 'romantic relationship' between king and favourite primarily from Marlowe rather than from 'his chronicle sources'.

⁸⁷ Drayton, *Peirs Gaveston*, ll. 943–949; cf. *Edward II*, Marlowe, I.iv.106–143.

⁸⁸ Masten, 'Is the Fundament a Grave?', p. 139.

⁸⁹ Drayton, *Peirs Gaveston*, ll. 455–456 (c.f. Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, III.ii.1–31); 773–774 (c.f. Grahame, *Anatomie of Humors*, fol. J1^v; Roche, *Eustathia*, fol. D1^r).

Her passion here might have exprest aright,
When once I came into the Princes sight.

Who ever had his Ladie in his armes,
That hath of love but felt the miserie,
Touching the fire that all his sences warmes,
Now clips with joy her blushing Ivorie.
Feeling his soule in such delights to melt,
Ther's none but he can tell the joye we felt.⁹⁰

In the first stanza, Drayton establishes the intensity of joy felt by Edward and Gaveston; in the second, he introduces its romantic and sexual elements. As well as heightened emphasis, this technique lends Gaveston's narration a teasing tone; he is effectively lulling his readers into a false sense of security about the non-sexual nature of his and Edward's love, before injecting an explicitly romantic and sexual note. Moreover, as Quinn notes, 'Setting up but then defeating our expectation of parallels has the effect of emphasizing Gaveston's maleness, and the impact of that maleness.'⁹¹ Of course, as Drayton's often defensive Gaveston might himself argue, the simile of lovers is only a simile – but Gaveston aligns himself and Edward so exclusively with the imagined lovers ('Ther's none but he can tell the joye we felt') that there is really no room for doubt. Cary uses an identical technique when she reports that Edward and Gaveston's reunion 'was accompanied with as many mutual expressions, as might flow from the tongues, eyes, and hearts of long-divided Lovers'; the simile leaves ostensible space for defence, but the implication that they *are* 'long-divided Lovers' is clear.⁹²

Mourning and revenge

Marlowe's representation of Edward's grief at Gaveston's exiles and death was also influential. The dramatic form enabled him to use direct speech and stage directions to portray what the majority of his sources had simply described. As such, the scene following Gaveston's exile opens with the stage direction 'Enter KING EDWARD mourning'.⁹³ Edward is apparently in mid-lament: his opening line, 'He's gone, and for his absence thus I mourn', does not specify the name of the person in question, emphasizing the intimacy of his relationship with Gaveston (the audience is in no doubt about who 'he' is). This referential opening line also establishes Edward's lack of concern for – possibly lack of awareness of – his observers; he is 'entirely self-

⁹⁰ Drayton, *Peirs Gaveston*, ll. 607–618; see also, for example, ll. 235–246.

⁹¹ Quinn, 'Mastering Complaint', p. 443.

⁹² Cary, *History of the Life*, fol. Fr.

⁹³ Marlowe, *Edward II*, I.iv.304.

absorbed', 'as if he were soliloquizing in public'.⁹⁴ Edward then evokes his grief in vivid, physical terms:

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.⁹⁵

The adjectives 'giddy' and 'frantic' convey the increasing, all-consuming intensity of Edward's emotional state.⁹⁶ (The association of a 'giddy' brain with erotic anticipation, and its all-consuming and incapacitating power, is confirmed by the use of this adjective by Shakespeare's Troilus immediately prior to his first meeting with Cressida: 'I am giddy. Expectation whirls me round'.⁹⁷) Edward's speech is strikingly intense, which must be enhanced by the physical performance of an actor, and which clearly shocks his on-stage observers. Isabella's early comment, 'Hark! how he harps upon his minion', comes across to the audience as lacking in compassion. The verb 'harp' ('to dwell wearisomely upon in speech or writing') has a sardonic tone, verging on boredom, which is a cruel response to the pathos created by Edward's description of his 'sorrow' and by the memory of his parting from Gaveston at the start of this scene; the audience, having been plunged into Edward's mindset by their instinctive knowledge of who 'he' is that Edward misses, are more likely to perceive him as a subject with whom to identify than as an object of mockery.⁹⁸ Moreover, Isabella's contemptuous use of 'minion' (which foregrounds Gaveston's political role as favourite) feels inapposite straight after Edward has referred to Gaveston as 'so dear a friend' (foregrounding Gaveston's emotional importance to him).⁹⁹ However, Lancaster's exclamation – 'Diablo! What passions call you these?' – invites more empathy from an audience witnessing the phenomenon of a 'frantic' King, focusing on Edward's 'passions' (a quasi-medicalized term very appropriate to the physicality with which he describes and enacts his emotions) and their unprecedented, alien nature.¹⁰⁰

However, Edward's emotional extremity cannot sustain its novelty and shock value forever: subsequent scenes of his grief and fear for the exiled Gaveston have the potential to inspire exasperation or comedy. As he awaits Gaveston's return in II.ii, Edward remains distracted ('I fear me he is wrack'd upon the sea') and Isabella's comment on his behaviour ('Look, Lancaster, how passionate he is, / And still his mind runs on his minion') is a more

⁹⁴ Cartelli, *Edward IP*, p. 165.

⁹⁵ Marlowe, *Edward II*, I.iv.311–314.

⁹⁶ 'giddy, adj.', *OED Online* (1899); 'frantic, adj. and n.', *OED Online* (1898); Cartelli, *Edward IP*, p. 165.

⁹⁷ Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, III.ii.16.

⁹⁸ 'harp, v.', *OED Online* (1898).

⁹⁹ Marlowe, *Edward II*, I.iv.309–310.

¹⁰⁰ Marlowe, *Edward II*, I.iv.318. See Cartelli, *Edward IP*; Edwards, 'In No Respect Can Contraries Be True'.

objective, less judgmental assessment of his state of mind and its perhaps surprising longevity ('still').¹⁰¹ When Edward responds to Lancaster's interjection by assuming that everyone's mind is as fixed on Gaveston as his own – 'How now! what news? Is Gaveston arrived?' – the audience's patience with his obsessive emotional preoccupation may well be wearing thin, particularly since the danger of the couple's perpetual separation (the main source of pathos thus far) has now disappeared with Gaveston's recall. Indeed, Edward's excessive fear for Gaveston's safety in this scene contributes to a sense of irony in the moments before he is told of his death. His fatalistic lines, 'Ah, he is mark'd to die! [...] I shall never see / My lovely Pierce, my Gaveston again!' are so typical of his continued worry that there is a sad irony in the fact that the audience knows his fears are justified this time around.¹⁰² In the wake of this verbose and rhetorical speech, Arundel's announcement of Gaveston's death is shocking in its directness: 'Yea, my good lord, for Gaveston is dead.'¹⁰³ Edward's immediate reaction is similarly terse, giving the impression of one shocked out of rhetoric and articulacy: 'Ah, traitors, have they put my friend to death?'¹⁰⁴ Exhorted by Spencer, however, he recovers as the scene progresses to deliver a vow of revenge laden with violent vocabulary:

EDWARD (Kneels and saith). By Heaven, and all the moving orbs thereof,
 By this right hand, and by my father's sword,
 And all the honours 'longing to my crown,
 I will have heads, and lives for him, as many
 As I have manors, castles, towns, and towers.
 Treacherous Warwick! Traitorous Mortimer!
 If I be England's King, in lakes of gore
 Your headless trunks, your bodies will I trail,
 That you may drink your fill, and quaff in blood,
 And stain my royal standard with the same,
 That so my bloody colours may suggest
 Remembrance of revenge immortally
 On your accursed traitorous progeny,
 You villains that have slain my Gaveston.¹⁰⁵

As with his earlier lament on Gaveston's exile, Edward does not name his favourite here; again, the audience instinctively knows the referent of 'I will have heads, and lives for him', heightening their level of identification with Edward. The stage direction 'Kneels' lends the vow a quasi-religious tone, conveying its importance to Edward; the comprehensive nature of his oath (invoking divine authority, his own royal authority, and that of his father), and the bloody semantic field he creates, have a similar function.

¹⁰¹ Marlowe, *Edward II*, II.ii.2–4.

¹⁰² Marlowe, *Edward II*, III.i.4, 7–8.

¹⁰³ Marlowe, *Edward II*, III.i.90.

¹⁰⁴ Marlowe, *Edward II*, III.i.91.

¹⁰⁵ Marlowe, *Edward II*, III.i.128–142.

As Forker points out, Marlowe's sources contain no precedent for this speech.¹⁰⁶ Holinshed's 1587 *Chronicles*, Marlowe's likely source for this scene, describes Edward as 'woonderfullie displeased' and 'making his vow that he would see his death revenged'; Marlowe chooses to foreground this vow and express Edward's planned revenge in violent threats.¹⁰⁷ In doing so, he participates both in the romanticization of Edward and Gaveston's relationship, and in the development of Edward as a sympathetic historiographical character with psychological depth (a process begun by Geoffrey le Baker, perpetuated by Holinshed and Stow's use of his text, and continued by writers like Drayton and Cary who were influenced by Marlowe). However, this romanticization is complicated by Edward's swift adoption of Spencer into Gaveston's 'place of honour and of trust', 'Despite of times'.¹⁰⁸ This is at odds with chronicle accounts of Edward's reign, many of which (as I have shown) emphasize the longevity of Edward's grief for Gaveston and the gap between his death and the rise of the Despencers as Edward's favourites. Marlowe's collapse of this timescale is partly a function of his chronologically condensed play, but by segueing straight from 'You villains that have slain my Gaveston!' into 'Spencer, sweet Spencer, I adopt thee here', he presents Edward as inconstant, suggesting that his vows of revenge and his devotion to Gaveston's memory may not be followed through.¹⁰⁹ In the subsequent scene this is shown not to be the case: Edward announces afresh his desire 'To be avenged on you for all your braves, / And for the murder of my dearest friend, / To whom right well you knew our soul was knit', a reminder of the depth of his attachment to Gaveston which renews the pathos of the situation. However, his earlier note of emotional inconstancy nonetheless reminds the audience that he lacks the resolution to be an effective ruler, and perhaps an effective avenger.

Drayton followed the precedent set by Marlowe: a striking feature of *Peirs Gaveston* is Edward's long laments on each of Gaveston's exiles (Drayton, unlike Marlowe, represents all three) and his death. The laments escalate in intensity, progressing to madness and reaching a climax in Edward's reaction to Gaveston's third exile, in the context of which he is compared to Orlando Furioso and Hecuba, figures of frenzied grief, madness and (in Orlando's case) unrequited love.¹¹⁰ His emotional reactions are described in minute detail.¹¹¹ His stated aim in avenging Gaveston – 'That men unborne may wonder at my love' – is undoubtedly achieved by

¹⁰⁶ Marlowe, *Edward II*, III.i.128n.

¹⁰⁷ Holinshed, *Chronicles* (1587), VI, section 10/p. 321.

¹⁰⁸ Marlowe, *Edward II*, III.i.144, 147; see Goldberg, *Sodometries*, p. 125; Lee, 'Classifying Early Modern Sexuality', p. 119.

¹⁰⁹ Marlowe, *Edward II*, III.i.142, 144.

¹¹⁰ Drayton, *Peirs Gaveston*, ll. 1021–1026, 1321–1322; 1327–1330; see Zocca, *Elizabethan Narrative Poetry*, pp. 81–82. On further connections between Edward and Orlando, see Giantvalley, 'Barnfield, Drayton and Marlowe', p. 20.

¹¹¹ For example, Drayton, *Peirs Gaveston*, ll. 1343–1350.

Drayton's poem.¹¹² But it is easy to lose Gaveston in this narration of Edward's madness. In Drayton's later version, *The Legend of Pierce Gaveston*, Edward's laments are excised, meaning that Edward is far less vividly evoked. It seems plausible that these revisions were (as Tillotson and Quinn suggest) 'designed to prune resemblances to James I', especially given that Drayton was 'attempt[ing] to ingratiate himself with the Stuart court around this time', and that (as Chapter 5 will show) comparisons were frequently drawn between James and Edward and their respective favourites.¹¹³ Revising his poem to shift the focus away from the character of a king passionately in love with his male favourites would have helped to exonerate Drayton from drawing such comparisons.

Conclusion

While Edward's relationships with all of his favourites were represented as excessively emotional, Piers Gaveston has – as this chapter has demonstrated – consistently loomed larger than any of his successors. Despite Edward's favourites being afforded relatively equal attention in contemporary accounts, representations of them started to diverge, particularly from the sixteenth century onwards: Gaveston became significant for his emotional impact on Edward's life, and the Despencers for the political control they exerted. As such, they became suited to different genres and modes of representation. Texts that aimed to emphasize the political lessons to be learned from Edward's reign would foreground the Despencers, whereas those that aimed to create an emotionally compelling narrative would foreground Gaveston. It was a text of the latter class – Marlowe's *Edward II* – which brought the story of Edward's reign to prominence in the 1590s, and thus cemented Gaveston's centrality and his role as Edward's most significant favourite. In politically motivated texts and contexts, the Despencers still retained a prominent position.

Three aspects of Gaveston were conducive to enjoyable, readable narratives, and were therefore popular with writers, contributing to his historiographical predominance. Firstly, Edward had known Gaveston from his early life, and even the earliest chronicles describe his grief for his death as excessive; this enabled writers more easily to romanticize their relationship. Secondly, Gaveston was an individual, rather than a member of a family dynasty: as well as being additionally conducive to romanticization, this fact meant that Gaveston fitted better into the Elizabethan and Jacobean political paradigm of the individual dominant favourite. Thirdly, far

¹¹² Drayton, *Piers Gaveston*, l. 1698.

¹¹³ Drayton, *Works*, V, 24.n. 4; Quinn, 'Mastering Complaint', p. 446.

more memorable, exciting details and anecdotes were attached to him than to the Despensers. These latter two factors will be explored in more detail in Chapter 4.

The romanticization of Edward's relationship with Gaveston was already occurring before Marlowe's *Edward II*, enabled by a number of contextual factors: his singularity (the Despensers usually come as a father-son package), the fact he had known Edward since their youth, and Edward's well-reported grief after his murder. Marlowe, however, cemented Gaveston's status as Edward's lover for subsequent historiographical accounts. The Despensers did not disappear from historiography: as Chapter 5 will show, they remained central political exempla, and representations of them place a stronger emphasis on their political transgressions and control over Edward.

From a modern perspective, given the condemnation of same-sex desire and activity in the context in which these texts were written, it might seem odd that so many writers encouraged their readers to invest emotionally in a romantic relationship between two men. However, it is important to realize that representations of Edward's love for his favourites never extend to condoning their relationships: sympathetic accounts of a grieving Edward frequently coexist with condemnation of his sexual transgressions. These aspects of the narrative are not at odds, but were popular and persistent for the same reason: they functioned to construct an enjoyable, engaging narrative. Indeed, by combining both elements, writers and readers achieved the best of both worlds: emotional engagement *and* sensational sexual sin. Nor was the sympathy elicited for Edward and his favourites by accounts of their love for each other an anomaly in narratives of their lives: as Chapters 6 and 7 show, many aspects of Edward's life were presented as more about sympathy and less about sex than has previously been acknowledged. Reading narratives of Edward II, then, demonstrates the value of considering the impacts of genre when analysing representations of same-sex relationships, or of individuals associated with sexual transgression, in medieval and early modern texts – and of being flexible with our expectations of what those impacts might be. When reading depictions of relationships between men or between women, we should consider the ways in which writers are engaging with generic expectations in their depiction of same-sex relationships, or of sexually transgressive individuals, and the way their priorities – economic or otherwise – are determining their construction of the elements that relate to same-sex relationships. Stepping back from our texts to ask these questions – in this case, reading narratives of Edward II and his favourites for their emotional components, and foregrounding the impact of literary texts and techniques – can help to develop our

understanding of the richness and complexity of the ways in which medieval and early modern readers encountered same-sex desire, activity and love.

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Chapter 4 – ‘Is it not strange that he is thus bewitch’d?’: Edward II’s Agency and Culpability

Abstract

This chapter addresses the representation of Edward II’s agency and culpability in his sexual and political relationships with his favourites. I situate depictions of Edward’s favourites as irresistibly attractive in the context of wider early modern cultural anxiety concerning transgressive sexual attraction; and consider medieval and early modern writers’ changing negotiations of the question of Edward’s culpability for the disastrous political events of his reign compared to that of his favourites’ ‘evil counsel’. Although willingness to attach some blame to Edward himself increases over time – reflecting the increasing temporal remoteness of his reign – chroniclers consistently retained a level of strategic polyvocality, demonstrating their need to negotiate the engaging political pertinence of their subject matter with its risky, seditious potential.

Keywords

Anti-court, evil counsel, homosexuality, nature or nurture, witchcraft

Introduction

Historiographical representations of Edward II are in many ways inextricable from those of his significant favourites, Piers Gaveston and the two Hugh Despensers, and the dynamics of their relationships. Many writers demonstrate fundamental aspects of Edward’s personality and reign through portraying interactions with his favourites, or describing the favourites themselves. Persistent details or anecdotes came to stand, metonymically, for a particular issue: for example, a collection of details clustered around Edward’s coronation demonstrate Gaveston’s pride (through his ostentatious dress), his social status (through condemnation of Edward’s choice to let him, rather than another noble, carry the crown of St Edward during the ceremony), and Edward’s excessive love for him (through claims that he neglected his wife for Gaveston during the feast). As such, Edward’s relationships with his favourites were in part presented as transgressive because those favourites had qualities that made them unsuitable companions. Although more recent scholarship has demonstrated that Gaveston, at least, made some genuine political contributions, medieval and early modern writers almost universally condemned Edward

for his politically unwise choice of advisors: as ‘mirrors for princes’ consistently advised, older and more experienced counsellors were preferable to young favourites, who were seen as frivolous and foolish.¹

Yet Gaveston and the Despensers were not portrayed as wholly undesirable comrades. On the contrary, many writers stressed that they were attractive, if unwise, choices for Edward, with several emphasising their almost irresistible sexual allure. Around this tension – the sense that Edward’s favourites were unsuitable companions, but very attractive choices – a profound ambivalence arose concerning the extent of Edward’s agency and culpability in his relationships with them. To what extent was he able to resist his favourites’ wiles – and consequently, to what extent should he be held responsible for the political and sexual sins he committed?

Numerous factors affected how writers negotiated these questions. Earlier texts, particularly those written during the reigns of Edward II or III, returned reflexively to the concept of ‘evil counsel’ or ‘false counsel’: the divinely appointed Edward was infallible, and his favourites were responsible for inducing him to any and all bad behaviour. However, Ranulf Higden’s Latin *Polychronicon* (whose first version was composed around 1327, followed by a longer and more popular version in the 1340s) initiated an influential concern with the nature of Edward’s character. Early modern writers (usually following the adaptation of Higden’s character description made by Robert Fabyan in his *Newe Cronycles*, composed around 1504) freely built on this to suggest that Edward was naturally disposed to vice. Yet this question of ‘evil counsel or evil nature’ was compounded firstly by its political sensitivity – many writers apparently felt unable to state unequivocally that a king, even a fourteenth-century king, was intrinsically flawed – and secondly by the concurrently growing consensus that Edward’s transgressions specifically comprised sex with his male favourites. The question of Edward’s agency and culpability in these sexual relationships tapped into a wider early modern cultural anxiety concerning the potential for everyone to experience unwitting but transgressive sexual attraction, as expressed with particular clarity in antitheatricalist concerns about boy actors and their worryingly enticing portrayal of beautiful women.² More broadly, it spoke – as Curtis Perry has argued – to growing concerns about the personal fallibility and corruptibility of monarchs in late Elizabethan and Stuart England. Negotiations of Edward II’s agency and culpability, and the ambivalence they frequently display, therefore also provide insight into the political stakes of writing historical

¹ See, for example, Hoccleve, *Regiment of Princes*, ll. 4829–4856; on the ‘mirror’ genre in poetry, see Zocca, *Elizabethan Narrative Poetry*, pp. 9–92. For the first revisionist view of Gaveston’s political contributions, see Hamilton, *Gaveston*.

² On the universal latent potential for same-sex desire, see Frantzen, ‘Disclosure of Sodomy’, p. 460; Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*, p. 31.

narratives in different periods; into the discourse and tropes used to exonerate monarchs from their personal transgressions; and into the complex political implications of those monarchs' personal desires.

Unsuitable companions

The contemporaneously composed Latin chronicle *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, probably written by a secular clerk close to the centre of politics, complains at length about Gaveston's unsuitability as a companion for a prince or king. Central to these complaints are Gaveston's social status ('it was universally known that he was not a king's son, nor was he related to any royal stock whatsoever'); his status as a 'foreigner' (he was born in the duchy of Gascony, one of England's overseas territories, but this was considered sufficiently 'foreign' to declare Gaveston an unsuitable companion for Edward when it suited chroniclers); his financial malpractice (he 'consumed [the country's] treasure'); and his insufferable pride (in relation to which he is frequently used as a moral exemplum).³ These preoccupations recur in other contemporary accounts and persist in later ones.⁴ With the exception of foreign birth (since neither were born overseas), the Despensers are also characterised as unsuitable favourites in these terms.⁵ What contributed to the increasing historiographical focus on Gaveston, however, was the persistence of easily extractable anecdotes which metonymically evidenced these condemnable qualities. His pride, for example, was frequently expressed by censuring his propensity for ostentatious dress. The Latin *Annales Paulini*, composed contemporaneously during Edward's reign, describe his attire at Edward's coronation:

Petrus vero, non regis sed gloriam propriam quaerens, et quasi Anglos contempnens, ubi ceteri in deauratis vestibus incedebant, ipse in purpura, margaritis intexta preciosis, inter convivas, quasi rege pretiosior equitabat.⁶

Truly Piers, not striving for the glory of the King but for his own, and as if looking down on the English, where others were advancing in gilded garments, he in purple, embroidered with precious pearls, rode among the guests like a more precious King.

³ *Vita*, pp. 9, 27–29, 31, 69, trans. by Childs and Denholm-Young.

⁴ For Gaveston's social status, see e.g. Reading, *Flores*, p. 139; *Vita*, pp. 29–31; *Annales Paulini*, p. 258; Trokelowe, *Chronica*, p. 64; Walsingham, *Historia*, fol. F5^r; Holinshed, *Chronicles* (1577), IV, section 1/p. 849; Marlowe, *Edward II*, I.i.157–158; Speed, *History*, fol. 4S2^r; Baker, *Chronicle*, fol. S4^v; Foxe, *Actes and Monumentes*, fol. R2^v; Howell, *Medulla*, fol. K4^v. Cf. Phillips, *Edward II*, p. 96. For his Gascon birth, see Stow, *Chronicles*, fol. X3^v; Gilbertson, *Faithful Analist*, fol. B^r. For his financial malpractice, see *Songs*, p. 260; *Brut*, p. 206; Castleford, *Chronicle*, II, ll. 38899–38900; Daniel, *Collection*, fol. Q3^v; and see Worden, 'Favourites on the English Stage', p. 167, for this trope in early modern drama. For his pride, see *Songs*, pp. 259–261; *Brut*, p. 243; Lanquet and Cooper, *Epitome*, fol. 3N^r; Marlowe, *Edward II*, I.i.18–19 and II.ii.74–78.

⁵ For the Despensers' financial misconduct, see *Brut*, p. 214. For their pride, see Le Baker, *Chronicle*, p. 16, trans. by Preest; Fabyan, *Prima Pars*, fol. 2K3^v; Grafton, *Abridgement*, fol. K1^r; Martyn, *Historie*, fol. O^r.

⁶ *Annales Paulini*, p. 262.

This story also appears in the continuation of the *Flores Historiarum* written at Westminster Abbey by the monk Robert of Reading (c. 1326–1330) and persists in most longer texts (sometimes later transferred to Edward’s wedding rather than coronation).⁷ Its account of deliberate flamboyance, calculated to draw attention and exceed the opulence of the other nobles, is similar to two other recurring anecdotes used to illustrate Gaveston’s arrogance. In one, Gaveston disgraces the other nobles in a tournament held at Wallingford, where ‘Lord Piers’s side could not raise an earl, but almost all the younger and harder knights of the kingdom, whom persuasion or reward could bring together, supported him’ – thus defeating his opponents in a manner clearly felt to be unjust.⁸ In another, Gaveston’s insulting nicknames for the other earls become well-known: ‘he demeaned himself with greater pride and insolence then at first, calling Sir Robert of Clare Earle of Gloster whoreson, the earle of Lincolne sir Henry Lacy Burstenbelly, sir Guy Earle of Warwick, black dog of Arderne, and the noble Earle Thomas of Lancaster churle’.⁹ These stories share an emphasis on the conspicuous, excessive and intolerable nature of Gaveston’s pride; they function metonymically to demonstrate that pride through a single, hyperbolic, entertaining example, and provide implicit justification for the other nobles’ actions against him. In a similar way, a popular anecdote claiming that Gaveston stole a gold table and trestles that had belonged to King Arthur and transported them overseas stands metonymically for his financial crimes and disloyalty to England: the literal transport of objects with such a symbolic link to national identity sensationalizes his misdeeds.¹⁰

In early modern texts which placed greater and clearer emphasis on Gaveston’s sexual transgressions, his existing reputation for financial misconduct was easily sexualised. As Vincenzo Pasquarella points out, in Marlowe’s *Edward II* (c. 1591–1592), Mortimer Junior’s accusation that ‘The idle triumphs, masks, lascivious shows, / And prodigal gifts bestow’d on Gaveston, / Have drawn thy treasure dry, and made thee weak’ ‘implies that sexual intercourse has drained the King’ – both through the causal connection with explicitly sexual ‘lascivious shows’, and because ‘treasure’ could function as a euphemism for semen or genitalia.¹¹ The implication in this and other texts is that the financial favours Edward bestows on Gaveston result from their sexual relationship; more specifically, they are Gaveston’s reward for the sexual

⁷ For example, Daniel, *Collection*, fol. Q2^v.

⁸ *Vita*, p. 7, trans. by Childs and Denholm-Young. See also (for example) Guisborough, *Chronicle*, p. 380n.; Capgrave, *Abbreviacion*, p. 136; Baker, *Chronicle*, fol. S3^v.

⁹ Heywood, *Chronographycall History*, fol. 2A4^v. See also (for example) Reading, *Flores*, p. 152; *Chronicle of Lanercost*, p. 194; Speed, *History*, fol. 4S2^r.

¹⁰ *Brut*, p. 206. See also (for example) Fabyan, *Prima Pars*, fol. 2P1^r; Stow, *Chronicles*, fol. X5^r; Holinshed, *Chronicles* (1587), VI, section 10/p. 320.

¹¹ Marlowe, *Edward II*, II.ii.156–158; Pasquarella, *Marlowe’s Representation of Love*, p. 76; Rufo, ‘Marlowe’s Minions’, p. 13. See also Drayton, *Peirs Gaveston*, ll. 793–794; Atwood, ‘All Places Are Alike’, pp. 49–50; Belsey, ‘Desire’s Excess’, p. 88.

pleasure he gives Edward. The result, as Mortimer makes clear, is that Edward's sexual relationship with Gaveston leads directly to his, and England's, impoverishment.

This sentiment is a key aspect of the discourse which connected Gaveston with late sixteenth-century concerns about the financial repercussions of sexually attractive royal favourites, and with the broader discourse of popular prejudice against young, fashionable courtiers.¹² This connection was reinforced by early modern writers' emphasis on Gaveston's foreign tastes and qualities,¹³ his youth,¹⁴ and his 'extravagance of dress'.¹⁵ As Dennis Kay points out, 'Gaveston [...] is figured as the quintessential Elizabethan courtier' – indeed, other aspects of his character reinforce this, such as his use of 'terms that explicitly echo the behaviours and discourses of royal celebration under Elizabeth'.¹⁶ This association, once established, persisted: Thomas Dekker's prose satire *The Seven Deadly Sinnes of London* (1606) uses a figure named as 'the Gaveston of the Time', who is 'as phantastically attyred as a Court Jeaster', to condemn the sin of 'Apishness'.¹⁷

As Judith Haber cogently summarises with reference to Marlowe's play, what links the criticisms levelled at Gaveston in early modern narratives of Edward II's reign is that they constitute 'affronts to and inversions of traditional values: the base is raised above the noble, the foreigner above the native-born, the frivolous above the serious and practical, the superficial above the substantive'.¹⁸ Each of these 'inversions' are socially disruptive, and are causes of both anxiety and anger for the nobles in Marlowe's play; Gaveston's pride, meanwhile, fuels and aggravates this social disruption. In addition, by echoing anti-courtier discourse, they would have

¹² Bailey, *Flaunting*, pp. 77–102; Hillman, *Shakespeare, Marlowe and the Politics of France*, p. 101; Hakim, 'Marlowe on the English Stage', p. 63; Belt, 'Anti-Theatricalism and Rhetoric'; Goldberg, *Sodometries*, p. 117; Perry, *Literature and Favoritism*, p. 1 and *passim*; Wessman, 'Edward II as Actaeonesque History', pp. 9–10.

¹³ For example, Marlowe, *Edward II*, I.i.22, 89; Hubert, *Deplorable Life*, stanza 30; Cary, *History of the Life*, fols. B2^v, H1^v. See Rufo, 'Marlowe's Minions', pp. 5–6, 16; Bailey, *Flaunting*, pp. 101–102; Hakim, 'Marlowe on the English Stage', p. 63; Burnett, 'Edward II and Elizabethan Politics', p. 98; Hillman, *Shakespeare, Marlowe and the Politics of France*, p. 101.

¹⁴ Marlowe, *Edward II*, I.iv.344–346. For a similar contemporary example, see the anonymous drama *Thomas of Woodstock*, II.i.4–5.

¹⁵ Marlowe, *Edward II*, I.iv.412n; Nakayama, 'I Know she is a Courtesan by her Attire', p. 160. C.f. *Thomas of Woodstock*, e.g. III.ii.203–204, III.ii.223–226; and Niccols, *Cuckon*, fol. B3^v, an anti-court poem by the writer who subsequently incorporated Edward II into the *Mirror for Magistrates* canon.

¹⁶ Kay, 'Marlowe, *Edward II*, and the Cult of Elizabeth', p. 9; see also Siemon, 'Overpeered', pp. 151–152; Smith, *Homosexual Desire*, p. 212; Lanier, 'Fertile Visions'.

¹⁷ Dekker, *Seven Deadly Sinnes*, fol. E4^r; Marlowe, *Edward II*, I.iv.412n; Siemon, 'Overpeered', p. 150. See also Marlowe, *Edward II*, p. 1, for evidence that Marlowe's depiction of Gaveston was considered a marketable factor in its own right, probably because of his contemporary resonance. For the depiction of theatrical Vice figures as contemporary courtiers, see Dessen, 'Edward II and Residual Allegory', p. 65.

¹⁸ Haber, *Desire and Dramatic Form*, p. 33. On Marlowe's representation of Edward's favourites as low-born, see also Belt, 'Anti-Theatricalism and Rhetoric', pp. 152–153; Bartels, *Spectacles of Strangeness*, p. 164; Voss, 'Edward II', p. 520; Marlowe, *Edward II*, pp. 51–52; Bennett, 'Baldock's "Gentrie"'; Melnikoff, 'Introduction', p. 9; Siemon, 'Overpeered'.

played upon the anxieties of his audience. This combination of characteristics historiographically associated with Gaveston (and the Despensers) contributes to the representation of their relationships with Edward as unwise, inappropriate, and transgressive.

Agency in attraction

Why, then, might Edward have made such unwise choices of companions? Many accounts suggest that Gaveston and/or the Despensers found favour because of their physical attractiveness and the physical pleasure they were able to provide Edward. The foremost implication of this, particularly when contrasted with their unappealing personalities, is that Edward's choices of favourites reflect his impaired judgement. His judgment is shown to be based more on superficial or emotional factors than on sober assessment of character: in the words of Michael Drayton's long narrative poem *Poly-Olbion* (1612), Edward 'chose not men for wit, but only for their faces'.¹⁹ This is, of course, closely connected to condemnation of Edward's sexual behaviour, which is frequently presented as a distraction from royal duty. Depictions of attractive favourites also suggest that Edward's reliance on sexual attraction, rather than rational judgement, has resulted in inappropriate choices of close advisers – thus contributing to an overall politically motivated condemnation of his sexual transgressions.

One early example aside, the tradition of Gaveston's beauty really begins in earnest with Drayton's poetry.²⁰ It would be impossible to fully enumerate the ways in the narrator of Drayton's *Peirs Gaveston* conveys his own extraordinary attractiveness: the poem heaps stanza upon stanza of copious description, simile, and classical allusion.²¹ As Kelly Quinn points out, this technique is typical of royal mistress complaints, a sub-genre to which she convincingly demonstrates *Peirs Gaveston* belongs.²² Strikingly, however, many of Gaveston's self-descriptions suggest that Gaveston's attractiveness is not limited to Edward; his appeal is universal:

The heavens had lim'd my face with such a die
As made the curiost eie on earth amazed,
Tempring my lookes with love and majestie,
A miracle to all that ever gazed²³

Like the erotic masque in Marlowe's *Edward II*, this passage presents 'all' people 'on earth' as susceptible to Gaveston's beauty.²⁴ This dangerous potential for homoerotic attraction is

¹⁹ Drayton, 'Poly-Olbion', XVII.196.

²⁰ For the earliest example, see Haskins, 'Chronicle', p. 75 (translation in Chaplais, *Gaveston*, pp. 12–13).

²¹ For example, Drayton, *Peirs Gaveston*, ll. 133–138; ll. 157–162; see Zocca, *Elizabethan Narrative Poetry*, pp. 79–80.

²² Quinn, 'Mastering Complaint', p. 444.

²³ Drayton, *Peirs Gaveston*, ll. 115–118.

²⁴ Marlowe, *Edward II*, I.i.53–71.

compounded by the verb ‘lim’d’: Gaveston’s beauty, and its effect on Edward, is metaphorically compared to sticky birdlime with which birds are caught and held fast. The hunting metaphor casts Gaveston in the role of predator, as does his later description of his beauty as ‘bayte’ with which he ‘fisht for Edwards love’.²⁵ These images call into question the extent to which Gaveston’s observers can control their attraction to him. Drayton’s revisions to his poem (it was republished as *The Legend of Pierce Gaveston* in 1595) suggest a sustained interest in this issue of control and agency; a stanza that in *Peirs Gaveston* begins ‘My lookes *perswading orators* of Love’, becomes the following in *Legend*:

My Lookes so powrefull Adamants to Love,
And had such Vertue to attract the Sight,
That they could fix it, or could make it move,
As though it followed some Celestiall Light,
That where my Thoughts intended to surprize,
I at my pleasure conquer’d with mine Eyes.²⁶

Persuasion can be resisted; ‘powrefull Adamants’ less so. Gaveston’s ‘Lookes’ themselves become the agents of the verbs ‘attract’, ‘fix’ and ‘make it move’, controlling the observer’s sight in a manner compared to divine power.

This irresistible physical attractiveness is compounded by Gaveston’s inducements to sexual transgression. Developing from the cluster of texts which accused Gaveston of inducing Edward to vice ‘by meane of his wanton condicyons’ (see Chapter 2), most early modern accounts of Edward’s reign present his early favourite as the instigator of Edward’s sexual transgressions – including, though not limited to, sexual encounters between the two men.²⁷ Drayton’s *Peirs Gaveston*, unquestionably influenced by the clarity with which Marlowe presented a sexual relationship between Edward and Gaveston, is the most explicit example of this. Most critics identify the following moment (narrated by Gaveston) as Gaveston anally penetrating Edward:

My youthfull pranks, are spurs to his desire,
I held the raynes, that rul’d the golden sunne,
My blandishments were fewell to his fyer,
I had the garland whosoever wonne:
I waxt his winges and taught him art to flye:

²⁵ Drayton, *Peirs Gaveston*, l. 163.

²⁶ Drayton, *Legend*, ll. 67–72; c.f. *Peirs Gaveston*, ll. 133–138.

²⁷ For example, Vergil, *Anglica Historia*, chap. 18, trans. by Sutton; Holinshed, *Chronicles* (1587), VI, section 10/p. 318; Marlowe, *Edward II*, ll.49–71; Niccols, *Mirour*, fol. 3A2v. For the ways in which this element of Marlowe’s play indicates Gaveston’s adherence to the theatrical type of the Vice, see Deats, ‘Study in Androgyny’, p. 39; Levin, *Overreacher*, p. 114; MacKenzie, *Deathly Experiments*, p. 56.. For accounts in which Gaveston induces Edward to male-female adultery – which was, of course, similarly part of a spectrum of activities that someone described as ‘wanton’ might engage in – see Martyn, *Historie*, fol. N2v; Hubert, *Deplorable Life*, stanza 540.

Who on his back might beare me through the skie.²⁸

Gaveston's persuasive and commanding role in this sexual act is clear: he is the subject and Edward the object of the first five lines of the stanza, explicitly controlling him despite his royal status ('I held the raynes, that rul'd the golden sunne') and openly facilitating his sexual transgression ('spurs', 'blandishments', 'waxt his winges', 'taught'). The final line of the stanza makes his penetrative role equally obvious. Gaveston identifies this moment as a turning point in his journey to sin and damnation: 'O me! even heere from paradice I fell'.²⁹ As Quinn argues, 'it is quite clear well before Gaveston says 'Here, here, here I fell from grace' [a paraphrase of the stanza that directly follows the moment of penetration analysed above] that he and Edward are sexually involved'.³⁰ It is not, then, the act of sex with Edward that damns Gaveston, but the specific dynamics of that act:

Gaveston has frolicked happily as Edward's Ganymede and maintained his paradisiacal state, but it is here, when Gaveston mounts Edward's back, that Gaveston falls. The sin consists not of sexual involvement between Edward and Gaveston, but with Gaveston taking the active position, and so defiling the sun-bright temple that is the King's body, as their previous activities did not.³¹

Moreover, as Sara Munson Deats argues, the figure of Icarus (invoked here by Gaveston's statement that he 'waxt [Edward's] winges') is associated with pride and political overreaching.³² As in numerous other accounts, Gaveston's intimacy with Edward is rendered more unacceptable by its potential political consequences, his 'influence over an easily led King'.³³

Yet despite framing it as unacceptable and with the potential to damn at least one participant, Drayton presents Edward and Gaveston's sexual encounter as clearly pleasurable. Gaveston introduces the passage above, in which he penetrates Edward, with the following lines:

The table now of all delight is layd,
Serv'd with what banquets bewtie could devise,
The *Sirens* sing, and false *Calypso* playd [...]

Fraught with delight, and safely under sayle,
Like flight-wing'd Faucons now we take our scope,
Our youth and fortune blowe a mery gale,
We loose the anchor of our vertues hope:

²⁸ Drayton, *Peirs Gaveston*, ll. 277–282. In Drayton's revised version of this poem, *The Legend of Pierre Gaveston*, this stanza is preceded by a simile comparing Edward and Gaveston to Venus and Adonis 'bent to amorous sport' (ll. 133–138); the sexual nature of Venus and Adonis's relationship was well established in this period.

²⁹ Drayton, *Peirs Gaveston*, l. 287.

³⁰ Quinn, 'Mastering Complaint', p. 449.

³¹ Quinn, 'Mastering Complaint', p. 450.

³² Deats, 'Myth and Metamorphosis', p. 307; Quinn, 'Mastering Complaint', p. 450.

³³ Quinn, 'Mastering Complaint', p. 450.

Blinded with pleasure in this lustfull game,
By oversight discard our King with shame.³⁴

The act that ‘defil[es]’ Edward, and casts Gaveston ‘downe to hell’, is one characterized by ‘delight’, ‘pleasure’ and the allure of ‘Sirens’. ‘Pleasure’, he argues shortly afterwards, is ‘the very lure of sinne’.³⁵

This confluence of pleasure and sin clearly caused some writers anxiety. In Francis Hubert’s *Deplorable Life and Death of Edward II*, for example, Gaveston entices Edward with descriptions of pleasurable sexual acts (‘With one sweete night, thou wilt be so delighted, / That thou wilt wish the world were still benighted’), and Edward, though initially ‘asham’d of sinne’, learns to enjoy it (‘sinne did say, my greatest sinne was shame, / Then by degrees did I delight therein: / And from delight did I desire the same’).³⁶ However, elsewhere the pleurability of such acts is collocated with their consequences: Gaveston, for example, is ‘Drown’d in delights, if one may terme them so / That hatch in lust, and breath their last in woe.’³⁷ Similarly, following Drayton’s depiction of a beautiful Gaveston, several writers took pains to contrast his outward appearance with his (lack of) inward virtue.³⁸

Other responses to this anxiety concerning agency in attraction took a different, more oblique approach. A small number of writers, beginning in contemporaneous accounts and extending to the seventeenth century, suggest that Edward’s favourites bewitched him. The *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, for example, states that ‘Our King...was incapable of moderate affection, and on account of Piers was said to forget himself, and so Piers was regarded as a sorcerer’ (*Modum [...] dileccionis rex noster habere non potuit, et propter eum sui oblitus esse diceretur, et ob hoc Petrus maleificus putaretur esse*).³⁹ Here, identifying Gaveston as a ‘sorcerer’ appears to be a means of explaining Edward’s propensity to ‘forget himself’ where affection for Gaveston is concerned; that is, absolving him of some responsibility for the excessive and inappropriate love he bears his favourite.

Several early modern accounts retain similar accusations. While Abraham Fleming (in his 1587 additions to Holinshed’s *Chronicles*) and the character of Mortimer Senior (in Marlowe’s

³⁴ Drayton, *Peirs Gaveston*, ll. 265–276.

³⁵ Drayton, *Peirs Gaveston*, l. 319.

³⁶ Hubert, *Deplorable Life*, stanzas 69, 84.

³⁷ Hubert, *Deplorable Life*, stanza 42; see also stanza 386. This effect is enhanced in Hubert’s revised version of the poem (printed in 1629) by the addition of an appendix poem entitled ‘Noli peccare’, with the repeated refrain ‘Forbeare to sinne’ (Hubert, *Historie*, pp. 170–171).

³⁸ For example, Hubert, *Deplorable Life*, stanzas 37–38; Niccols, *Mirour*, fol. 3A2r; Speed, *History*, fols. 4S2r and 4R2r (irregular signatures).

³⁹ *Vita*, p. 29, trans. by Childs and Denholm-Young. C.f. *Annales Paulini*, p. 262; Le Baker, *Chronicle*, p. 10; *Songs*, p. 261.

Edward II) both use the rhetoric of bewitchment to express their confusion at the depth of Edward's love for Gaveston, the most detailed engagement with this theme is that of John Stow.⁴⁰ In his long chronicle (which went through seven editions, initially as *The Chronicles of England* and later as the *Annales*, between 1580–1632), Stow reports:

The King gave unto Pierce of Gavaston all such giftes and Jewels as had bin given to him, with the Crownes of his Father, his ancestours treasure, and many other things, affirming that if he could, he should succede him in the Kyngdome, calling him brother, not granting any thing without his consent. The Lords therefore envying him, told the King, that the Father of this Pierce was a Traytour to the King of Fraunce, and was for the same executed, & that his mother was burned for a Witch, and that the said Pierce was banished for consenting to his mothers witchcraft, and that he had now bewitched the King himselfe.⁴¹

The collocation of this charge with a description of the financial and political favours bestowed on Gaveston suggests that, again, witchcraft is offered as a possible explanation of Edward's excessive love for his favourite. However, the accusation is presented as a result of the nobles' 'envy'. Drayton, using Stow as a source, frames the accusations in a similar way: the envious nobles, 'lunatick and wood' with 'execrable rage', are primarily motivated by a desire to 'scandelize' Gaveston's 'name and fame' when 'they all affyrme, my Mother was a Witch'.⁴² As a result, it is unclear how much credence Stow and Drayton's readers are intended to give the claim that Gaveston bewitched Edward. It is important to distinguish between plausibility in the fourteenth-century world they describe – that is, whether Edward's nobles were convinced of Gaveston's witchcraft – and plausibility for their own early modern readers. It is also important to apply the same distinction to motivations: to separate analysis of these writers' motivations for including this anecdote from what they present as the nobles' (fictional) motivations for telling Edward this information. While the nobles' actions, in the world of the text, resemble a formal, orchestrated attempt to discredit Gaveston by accusing him of witchcraft – an example of what Stuart Clark calls 'casting political opponents as disturbers of the established order', analogous to accusations against heretical sects like the Templars or political opponents like Robert Dudley – Stow and Drayton's reasons behind the inclusion of this anecdote, and its effect on their readers, fit less comfortably into this model.⁴³

⁴⁰ Holinshed, *Chronicles* (1587), VI, section 10/p. 319; Marlowe, *Edward II*, I.ii.55 and p. 42. On comparable accusations against Gaveston in French pamphlets, see Stewart, 'Edoüard et Gaverston', p. 105.

⁴¹ Stow, *Chronicles*, fol. X4^r. It seems likely that Stow invented this detail, though given his large number of sources it may possibly originate in a manuscript that has now been lost and was not used by any earlier writers.

⁴² Drayton, *Peirs Gaveston*, ll. 1249–1260. Cf. Drayton, *Englands Heroicall Epistles*, p. 165; Hubert, *Historie*, stanza 218; Baker, *Chronicle*, fol. S4^v.

⁴³ Clark, *Thinking With Demons*, p. 558; *Leicester's Commonwealth*, p. 191. See also Perry, *Literature and Favoritism*, p. 119.

Indeed, consideration of the work of Clark and his successors on demonology – particularly concerning male witches – demonstrates that these stories of Edward’s favourites do not fit readily into a demonological paradigm. Clark argues that male witches were ‘literally unthinkable’ for demonologists: weak-willed, subservient to the Devil, and easily susceptible to carnal lust, witches, ‘for culturally specific reasons, were expected to be female’.⁴⁴ Yet this weak, subservient role clearly does not correspond with portrayals of Edward II’s bewitching favourites. On the contrary, historiography consistently emphasizes Gaveston and Despenser’s power: their political control over Edward, their ability to make him love them and emotionally ‘forget himself’, their manipulation of patronage and their political situation. Moreover, very rarely in these texts are demons or the devil called to mind. (This can be contrasted with the accusations levelled at Henri III, which describe in minute detail the diabolical practices that his favourites allegedly induced him to perform.⁴⁵) Instead, the focus is on the seemingly inexplicable intensity of Edward’s love for them, with magic offered as a possible explanation for these otherwise mysterious emotions. Gaveston and the Despensers have a historiographical reputation as unsuitable and undesirable companions – making it necessary to explain why Edward nonetheless chose to favour them so extravagantly. In this sense, Richard Grafton’s phrasing concerning bewitchment in his 1569 *Chronicle* is particularly revealing: for him, Edward is ‘bewitched *with the love of* the Despensers.’⁴⁶ It is Edward’s ‘love’ for his favourites, not the men themselves, which has ‘bewitched’ him: an emotional power, not a magical one. Grafton’s assertion reflects the literary trope that associates love with witchcraft, highlighting its emotionally involuntary aspects (Shakespeare’s Henry V tells Katherine, ‘You have witchcraft in your lips’, while Romeo is ‘bewitched by the charm of looks’), as well as the trope that uses witchcraft to explain otherwise inexplicable attraction (as in Shakespeare’s *Othello*, where Brabantio argues that Desdemona would never have loved Othello ‘If she in chains of magic were not bound’).⁴⁷

Francis Hubert’s 1629 version of his narrative poem on Edward’s reign provides evidence of increasing scepticism concerning the convenient excuse that witchcraft accusations provided. As Purvis Boyette observes of Marlowe’s *Edward II*, ‘If [Gaveston] has bewitched the King, Edward is clearly a happy and willing victim’.⁴⁸ In Hubert’s poem, Edward admits as much.

⁴⁴ Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, pp. 130, 111; see also Apps and Gow, *Male Witches*, pp. 13, 118–119, 127–128, 131–132.

⁴⁵ Potter, ‘Marlowe’s *Massacre*’, pp. 82–83; Hillman, *Shakespeare, Marlowe and the Politics of France*, p. 108.

⁴⁶ Emphasis added; see Lee, ‘Classifying Early Modern Sexuality’, pp. 114–115.

⁴⁷ Shakespeare, *Henry V*, V.ii.274; *Romeo and Juliet*, II Chorus 6; *Othello*, I.ii.–72. See also Pasquarella, *Marlowe’s Representation of Love*, pp. 77–78.

⁴⁸ Boyette, ‘Wanton Humour’, p. 43.

‘It is too true,’ he says, ‘my dotage was extreame’ – ‘But that the same was wrought by Magick Spell / Is such a Tale as old wives use to tell’:⁴⁹

Besides, when any Errour is committed
Whereby wee may Incurr or losse or shame,
That wee our selves thereof may be acuttid
Wee are too ready to transferre the blame
Upon some Witch: That made us doe the same.
It is the vulgar Plea that weake ones use:
I was bewitch’d: I could nor will: nor chuse.

But my affection was not caus’d by Art;
The witch that wrought on mee was in my brest.
My Gaveston wholly possest my heart
And that did make him swell above the rest⁵⁰

Hubert scathingly recognizes that witchcraft accusations provide a convenient way to ‘transferre the blame’ away from the monarch. In fact, as his Edward admits, he was personally at fault: ‘The witch that wrought on mee was in my brest.’ Kings who develop transgressive attachments to their favourites, Hubert suggests, are fully in control of their actions; any ‘plea’ of bewitchment simply betrays the fact they were too ‘weake’ to withstand their emotional impulses. These stanzas, added to the poem as Hubert revised it in 1629, may reflect a growing climate of scepticism concerning witchcraft in general, but also indicate a lack of patience with its use as a political get-out clause. Nevertheless, the prospect Hubert offers – that of a king who might knowingly and deliberately enter into an emotional and sexual relationship with a male social inferior – was threatening, in much the same way as the suggestions made by Drayton and other writers that Edward might have deliberately chosen Gaveston for his attractiveness. This was a pressing enough concern for early seventeenth-century writers, who recognized Edward’s attachments to his favourites as possible precedents for those of James VI and I; but far more so for contemporaneous fourteenth-century observers, many of whom walk a difficult line between criticizing Edward’s choices and blaming his favourites.

All of these anxious responses to Edward’s agency in attraction, I would suggest, reflect a wider cultural anxiety concerning the level of control that could be exercised over transgressive, yet pleasurable, attraction or love. The antitheatrical writings of John Rainolds, concerned that onstage cross-dressing could result in unwitting same-sex attraction, illuminate this:

⁴⁹ Hubert, *Historie*, stanza 219.

⁵⁰ Hubert, *Historie*, stanzas 224–225.

can you accuse your selfe, or anie other, of anie wanton thought stirred up in you by looking on a beautifull woman? If you can, then ought you beware of beautifull boyes transformed into women by putting on their raiment, their feature, lookes and facions.⁵¹

The phrase ‘accuse your selfe’ suggests that the reader is culpable, but Rainolds simultaneously places responsibility for their ‘wanton thoughts’ on extraneous forces. The thoughts are ‘stirred up in you’ by the sight of ‘beautifull boyes transformed into women’, a grammatical construction that leaves no room for agency in the person who experiences these thoughts. Similarly, he writes:

When Critobulus kissed the sonne of Alcibiades, a beautifull boy, Socrates saide he had done amisse, and very dangerously: because, as certain spiders, if they do but touch men onely with their mouth, they put them to wonderfull pain and make them madde: so beautifull boyes by kissing do sting and poure secretly in a kinde of poyson, the poyson of incontinencie.⁵²

Once again, an element of personal responsibility is suggested: Critobulus *chose* to kiss this ‘beautifull boy’ and is censured for it (‘he had done amisse’). Again, however, Critobulus experiences a simultaneous lack of control: ‘the poyson of incontinencie’, itself an inability to control oneself, is ‘poure[d] [...] in’ against his will. More troubling still is Rainolds’s description of both cross-dressing actors and Alcibiades’s son as ‘beautifull boys’. The choice to look at or kiss someone ‘beautifull’ is an understandable one, an appealing prospect – and hence, a potent cause for anxiety. Early modern writers’ negotiations of Edward’s agency in attraction, then, are not only inflected by concerns about why Edward would make such politically unwise choices of favourites, but also by wider conversations about the consequences of alluring inducements to same-sex desire or activity.

Political agency

A key historiographical concern that compounds the issue of Edward’s culpability further – and that is shared by a significant number of medieval and early modern accounts – is the question of the extent to which the disastrous political events of his reign resulted from the influence of his favourites. Earlier texts, closer to Edward’s reign and his immediate descendants, tended to cautiously attribute his failures to ‘evil counsel’. While I agree with Perry that ‘to attack favouritism is in a sense to attack the nature of personal monarchy, or, more precisely, the personal aspects of royal power’ – and hence, that attributing Edward’s catastrophic political record to ‘evil counsel’ does not straightforwardly exonerate him – the significantly higher density of ‘evil counsel’ claims in texts written during the reigns of Edward II or Edward III

⁵¹ Rainolds, *Overthrow*, fol. E3^v.

⁵² Rainolds, *Overthrow*, fol. D1^v.

does, I think, suggest that these claims were considered an acceptable strategy of displacing blame in medieval political culture.⁵³ Despite the tendency of medieval monastic chronicles to be critical of the monarchy overall, earlier accounts of Edward's reign are substantially more likely to downplay the extent of Edward's agency (and therefore of his culpability) in political decisions, relative to the agency and culpability of his favourites.⁵⁴ While later writers engaged more reflectively with this question, they still often – as Blair Worden shows – demonstrate an ongoing 'commitment to the ideal of just kingship' through discourse of 'evil counsel'.⁵⁵

The distinction between 'flattery' and 'evil counsel' deserves brief discussion here. Gaveston and the Despencers are typically characterized as offering bad advice or exerting control over Edward's political actions – not as flattering him in the sense that Curtis Perry calls 'instrumental favouritism', praising his decisions and enabling his every whim in order to ingratiate himself in the manner of the Roman Sejanus:

The theory of instrumental favouritism depicts imperial favourites as instrumental extensions of absolute power rather than, say, as bewitching lovers or corrupting counsellors [...] Treating favourites as imperial instruments means that tyrannical emperors are wholly to blame for their corrupt favourites rather than the other way around.⁵⁶

It is this type of favourite who was clearly in the mind of Erasmus when he wrote of the 'destructive' potential of 'a flatterer': 'his embrace suffocates and kills with poison brewed with honey'.⁵⁷ The rarity with which Edward's favourites are represented in this way no doubt relates to the weighting of blame that Perry identifies: if Edward's favourites merely enabled his designs, rather than exercising their own, then Edward is completely culpable for the political failings of his reign. Since historiographical accounts written during or shortly after Edward's reign were understandably less likely to assign blame to Edward for his political transgressions, later writers were unlikely to find depictions of 'instrumental favouritism' in their sources: rather than enabling Edward's own poor political decisions, Gaveston and the Despencers are represented as manipulating or overruling him to push their own personal and political agendas. Texts in which Edward's favourites *do* fill this flattering role can often be explained through attention to contemporary political allusions. As John Cutts observes, the Spencers' flattery in Marlowe's *Edward II* 'is never obsequious enough to justify the barons' charge of smooth dissembling

⁵³ Perry, 'Literature and Favoritism', p. 10.

⁵⁴ Gransden, 'Uses Made of History', p. 473.

⁵⁵ Worden, 'Favourites on the English Stage', pp. 165–166; see also Waith, 'Shadow of Action', p. 61. For an example of how early modern chroniclers applied this technique to contemporary favourites in order to 'explain away' 'awkward episodes', thus exonerating the monarch, see Adams, *Leicester and the Court*, pp. 53–54.

⁵⁶ Perry, *Literature and Favoritism*, p. 231.

⁵⁷ Erasmus, *Collected Works*, p. 339, quoted and trans. by Ostman, 'Backbiters', p. 312.

flatterers': there is a mismatch between Marlowe's portrayal of the Spencers, which is based on their behaviour in Holinshed, and the invented speech of his barons, which is closer to the Elizabethan discourse of condemning favourites.⁵⁸ Equally, Gaveston's 'skill in dissimulation and flattery' in the play has more to do with his literary function as an 'Elizabethan stage Machiavel' than it does with his historiographical reputation prior to Marlowe; and Hubert's depiction of Gaveston as one of several favourites who 'sow'd pillowes under-neath my sin, / And prais'd that most, that I delighted in' owes more to the frequently didactic tone of his poem's concern with late Elizabethan and early Jacobean favouritism than it does to his chronicle sources.⁵⁹ Elizabeth Cary, whose account of Edward's reign (as Barbara Lewalski and Karen Britland have observed) clearly reflects concerns about the power of the Duke of Buckingham over Charles I, goes so far as to invent an additional flatterer who encourages Edward to recall Gaveston from exile (a 'green States-man' who 'strives rather to please, than to advise'), but Britland suggests that this character 'comes from Cary's personal history' and corresponds directly to courtier Sir Roger Jones.⁶⁰ Condemnation of Edward's favourites as 'instrumental' flatterers rather than evil counsellors, then, appears to indicate a particular writer's desire to foreground their relevance to contemporary politics.

Allegations of Edward's favourites' 'evil counsel' typically begin in accounts of the events that led to Edward I exiling Gaveston in 1305. 'This year,' writes Adam Murimuth in his Latin chronicle (written around 1337, based on Murimuth's personal recollections), '[Edward I] caused a certain Gascon, Piers of Gaveston, to abjure the realm of England, because he gave evil counsel [*dedit malum consilio*] to his son, who loved this Piers with inordinate affection.'⁶¹ The Long Version of the *Brut* gives a similar account: *Edward, prou3 conseil and procurment of on, Piers of Gavaston, a squyer of Gascoigne, had broke þe parkez [of the Bishop of Chester]* ('Edward, through the counsel and procurement of one Piers Gaveston, a squire of Gascony, had broken into the parks [of the Bishop of Chester]').⁶² Both texts recount the Prince being punished by his father for crimes that were clearly instigated by Gaveston, and the influence of the *Brut* popularized this reading of the 1305 events.⁶³ Throughout the *Brut*, references to the 'false counsel' of Edwards' favourites (particularly the Despensers) become so repetitive that they appear almost reflexive: a phrase automatically included in order to avoid slandering Edward. Given the incongruity of this

⁵⁸ Cutts, *Left Hand of God*, pp. 229–230.

⁵⁹ Deats, 'Study in Androgyny', p. 39; Hubert, *Deplorable Life*, stanzas 29–30. For contextualization of the 'stage Machiavel', see Ribner, *English History Play*, p. 20.

⁶⁰ Britland, 'Kings Are But Men', pp. 45–46; Cary, *History of the Life*, fols. D^r, F2^r–F2^v. See also Lewalski, *Writing Women*, pp. 206–207.

⁶¹ Murimuth, *Continuatio Chronicarum*, p. 9. C.f. *Vita*, p. 73.

⁶² *Brut*, p. 196.

⁶³ See, for example, Holinshed, *Chronicles* (1587), VI, section 10/p. 313.

suggestion with the pro-Lancastrian, anti-Edward bias of the Long Version of the *Brut* as a whole,⁶⁴ the influence of concerns regarding royal infallibility here seems clear.

Such unqualified attribution of Edward's misdeeds to 'evil counsel' is considerably rarer in early modern texts; more typically, later accounts express a conflict over whether Edward's misdeeds are the result of evil counsel or intrinsic flaws, as discussed more fully below. What texts of all periods do share is an emphasis on the agency of Edward's favourites over his political decisions, whether this control is exerted politically, sexually and/or emotionally. While L.W.B. Brockliss points out that the real Gaveston and the Despensers did not, in fact, have power equivalent to early modern 'minister-favourites' (who were 'by and large surrogate sovereigns'), contemporary historiography undeniably presents them as such, through both general statements and specific anecdotes.⁶⁵ Charles Forker's assessment of Marlowe's *Edward II* is, in fact, an apt description of medieval and early modern historiography of Edward more broadly: 'the theoretically distinct roles of monarch and minion seem to be reversed, or at least confused, by Gaveston's sexual and psychological dominance over Edward'.⁶⁶ Clearly, as Forker suggests, Gaveston's political control is inextricably linked to his emotional and sexual influence over Edward. In other words, a significant historiographical strand suggests that Edward's emotions towards his favourites (love and grief) motivate his political decisions.

This interrelationship between the sexual/emotional and the political was a potent cause for concern in early modern thought, as it represented the monarch's 'body natural' – their individual body, subject to physical appetites and to emotions understood as physiologically constituted passions – impacting their 'body politic', the enduring public office of king or queen. Since Ernst Kantorowicz first called attention to this distinction in his 1957 book *The King's Two Bodies*, it has been developed and nuanced by literary scholars in particular: it seems clear that while early modern literary texts frequently engage with the idea of the 'King's two bodies', they rarely straightforwardly articulate it, and Marie Axton has highlighted that it 'was never a *fact*, nor did it ever attain the status of orthodoxy; it remained a controversial idea'.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, early modern commentators did continue to wrestle with the specific problem that favouritism

⁶⁴ Gransden, *Historical Writing*, II, p. 73.

⁶⁵ Brockliss, 'Concluding Remarks', p. 283; see also Marlowe, *Edward II*, p. 82. For examples of Gaveston's political control over Edward, see for example *Songs*, p. 259; Castleford, *Chronicle*, II, ll. 38834–38835, 38861; *Annales Paulini*, p. 259. For example of the Despensers', see for example Murimuth, *Continuatio Chronicarum*, p. 33; *Brut*, p. 212; Holinshed, *Chronicles* (1587), VI, section 10/p. 325; Speed, *History*, fol. 4R2^r (irregular signatures).

⁶⁶ Marlowe, *Edward II*, p. 82; see also Smith, *Homosexual Desire*, pp. 212–214; Clarke, 'The Sovereign's Vice', pp. 54, 60; Zucker, *Stage and Image*, p. 123; Callaghan, 'Terms of Gender', p. 285; Stymeist, 'Status, Sodomy, and the Theatre', p. 241.

⁶⁷ Kantorowicz, *King's Two Bodies*; Axton, *Queen's Two Bodies*, p. x. See also Axton, pp. 11–14; Bredbeck, *Sodomy*, pp. 48–77; Anderson, 'Surpassing the King's Two Bodies', pp. 585–586 and *passim*; Bianco, 'To Sodomize a Nation', p. 8.

instigated a transgressive blurring of the monarch's private and public lives.⁶⁸ As discussed in Chapter 3, Laurie Shannon has shown that this concern about how to negotiate the monarch's status as both private individual and public actor was also articulated through discussions of the way that classical ideals of friendship functioned (or failed to function) in early modern political contexts.⁶⁹ Moreover, as Carole Levin has pointed out, the transgressive potential of this private/public entanglement was particularly acute in the case of sexual involvement between monarch and favourite: 'Even the most private sin would have impact in public rule, and this was particularly the case for a sexual sin. Corruption to the body of the monarch would reflect the corrupting of the whole realm, the body politic.'⁷⁰ The relationship of influence between such private and public corruption was not monodirectional: according to Danielle Clarke's analysis of seventeenth-century narratives of Edward II, 'Transgressive bonds with other men – political, sexual and financial – are produced as both cause *and* effect of Edward's profligacy'.⁷¹

This fraught relationship between Edward II's political and sexual/emotional life is articulated in early modern narratives of his reign in three distinct but related ways; consequently, these narratives provide insight into the complex and nuanced nature of early modern engagements with the issue of the monarch's simultaneous public and private selves. Firstly, the political promotions that Edward granted his favourites are overwhelmingly presented as concrete manifestations of his excessive love for them – confirming the point, made by several scholars, that excessive love in a medieval or early modern political context could be particularly disruptive because of the importance of homosocial bonds to medieval government.⁷² Reports of the promotions granted to Edward's favourites vary, but there is a reasonable consensus over a core set of honours. Hugh Despenser the Younger was made Earl of Gloucester, his father Earl of Winchester; the two were given preferential treatment in an inheritance battle over lands in the Welsh Marches.⁷³ Gaveston was made Earl of Cornwall (an earldom 'closely associated with the crown'), Lord of Man ('which specially belonged to the crown') and possibly chamberlain (an office which implied intimate access to the monarch), as well as receiving various marks of

⁶⁸ Perry, 'Politics of Access'; *Literature and Favoritism*, p. 54.

⁶⁹ Shannon, *Sovereign Amity*; 'Monarchs, Minions, and "Sovereign" Friendship'.

⁷⁰ Levin, *Heart and Stomach*, p. 76.

⁷¹ Clarke, 'The Sovereign's Vice', p. 50.

⁷² Sponsler, 'The King's Boyfriend', pp. 146–148, 158; Dodd, 'Parliament and Political Legitimacy'; Perry, 'Politics of Access', p. 1061 and *passim*; Lawrence, *Forgiving the Gift*, p. 135; see also Goldberg, *Sodometries*, pp. 118–119; Martin, 'Plays of Passion', p. 100. Sponsler's observation specifically concerns Froissart's portrayal of Edward and Gaveston's relationship, but scholarship on the nature of fourteenth-century English government indicates that Froissart's portrayal reflects contemporary political reality; see Davies, *Baronial Opposition*, pp. 30–31. On the specific relevance of these concerns to Elizabeth I's patronage and political rewards, see Chapter 5 and Shephard, 'Sexual Rumours', p. 103.

⁷³ Phillips, *Edward II*, pp. 366–367.

honour at Edward's coronation, and the hand in marriage of Edward's niece, the sister of the Earl of Gloucester.⁷⁴ Various writers report that these favours resulted directly in Gaveston behaving arrogantly and dressing in an ostentatious manner – claims which facilitated the condemnation of Gaveston through anti-courtier discourse, as discussed above.⁷⁵

Secondly, compounding this problem of Edward's translating his emotional attachments into political rewards, many writers also demonstrate the transgressive nature of Edward's love by highlighting its potential to distract him from royal duties.⁷⁶ This issue is central to Marlowe's *Edward II*: at multiple points, Edward indicates that Gaveston is more important to him than England. The opening scene establishes this: 'sooner shall the sea o'erwhelm my land, / Than bear the ship that shall transport thee [Gaveston] hence'.⁷⁷ Similarly, Edward treats his royal office as disposable in his quest to secure permission to live with and promote Gaveston: 'Curse me, depose me, do the worst you can'.⁷⁸ His suggestion that his other nobles 'Make several kingdoms of this monarchy, / And share it equally amongst you all' would, as many critics have noted, have signalled particularly alarming irresponsibility.⁷⁹ In addition to this abstract disinterest, Edward is indifferent towards more concrete political threats to the realm, as Mortimer Junior and Lancaster enumerate in II.ii.⁸⁰ The causal link they draw between these threats and Edward's relationship with Gaveston is borne out by III.i, in which Edward appears genuinely distracted by thoughts of his favourite, his conversation leaping suddenly away from news of the seizure of Normandy and back again:

Valois and I will soon be friends again.—
But to my Gaveston; shall I never see,
Never behold thee now?—Madam, in this matter,
We will employ you and your little son;
You shall go parley with the King of France.⁸¹

⁷⁴ Phillips, *Edward II*, p. 122; Walsingham, *Historia*, fol. F5^r. See Chaplais, *Gaveston*, pp. 101–105, for discussion of whether Gaveston was really appointed chamberlain (a claim which occurs repeatedly in medieval and early modern texts); and see Burgtof, 'With My Life', pp. 49–50, for the significations of this office and its related Latin terminology. The arranged marriage should be interpreted as confirming, not disrupting, the intimacy between Edward and Gaveston: as Stephen Orgel observes in light of Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* and James VI and I's arranged marriages for his favourites, 'a wife is the supreme gift of male friendship, not at all a repudiation of it' (Orgel, *Impersonations*, p. 77; see also Shepherd, 'A Bit of Ruff', p. 112; Quinn, 'Mastering Complaint', pp. 457–458).

⁷⁵ See, for example, Speed, *History*, fol. 4S2^r, for consequences of Gaveston's favours at Edward's coronation; Walsingham, *Historia*, fol. F6^v, for Gaveston's arrogance resulting from his marriage.

⁷⁶ For example, 'Prophecy of John of Bridlington', p. 133; *Anonimale*, pp. 84–85; Vergil, *Anglica Historia*, chap. 18.

⁷⁷ Marlowe, *Edward II*, I.i.151–152; see also I.iv.48–50.

⁷⁸ Marlowe, *Edward II*, I.iv.54–57.

⁷⁹ Marlowe, *Edward II*, I.iv.70–73; see Atwood, 'All Places Are Alike', p. 59; Hopkins, 'Englishmen Abroad', pp. 345–346; McAdam, 'Edward II and the Illusion of Integrity', p. 210; Ribner, 'Edward II and the Tudor History Play', p. 251.

⁸⁰ Marlowe, *Edward II*, II.ii.156–194; see Bartels, *Spectacles of Strangeness*, pp. 162–163.

⁸¹ Marlowe, *Edward II*, III.i.67–71.

The impression given here is that Edward is unable to concentrate on political matters for more than a few seconds before his passionate emotions command his attention. Francis Hubert presents a similar moment, perhaps influenced by this scene or others like it:

When they did say, that Scottish Bruce did burne
 My Northerne borders, and did wast the same,
 Then sighing I, to Gavestone would turne,
 And say (sweete Peeres [sic – indicating Gaveston, not the peers]) my selfe feeles fancies
 flame,
 I saw, I love, I dye for such a dame:
 Cupid I feare a Bruce to me will prove,
 My hold's by him, my heart is fier'd with love.⁸²

Here, as in Marlowe, Edward becomes distracted by ‘fancies flame’ immediately after receiving news of a political emergency. What distinguishes Hubert’s text, of course, is that Edward’s love is not for Gaveston, but for ‘such a dame’. The central issue, it is essential to recognize, is Edward’s propensity to allow emotion to distract him from politics. Edward’s most historiographically well-known emotions, and those most consistently represented as excessive and distracting, are those towards his favourites – but as Hubert shows, the objects of those emotions are not of fundamental importance. Just as claims that Edward chose his favourites for their attractiveness function (as seen above) primarily to demonstrate the irrational basis on which he selects counsellors, so depictions of love distracting him from his duties function primarily to demonstrate his failure to prioritise or manage his emotional responses; to ‘sublimate [...] private interests in the required interests of the realm’,⁸³ as kings must do. Narratives which present Edward’s disagreements or civil war with his nobles as revenge for Gaveston’s death (as discussed in Chapter 3) function in a similar way.

Thirdly, Edward’s favourites are presented as using Edward’s love and sexual attraction to secure political influence. This is partly reflected in the sexualised financial malpractice discussed above, but also more broadly in imagery that reverses the hierarchical positions of king and favourite. In Drayton’s poems, for example, Gaveston describes Edward as ‘By byrth my Sovereigne, but by love my thrall’, and then offers a concrete, visual emblem of that reversal (‘Oft would he sette his crowne upon my head’).⁸⁴ That such a surrender of sovereignty is intrinsically linked to the sexual and romantic nature of their relationship is underlined by what follows: Edward, having crowned Gaveston, would ‘in his chayre sit downe upon my knee, /

⁸² Hubert, *Deplorable Life*, stanza 163. C.f. Cary, *History of the Life*, fol. K1v.

⁸³ Shannon, *Sovereign Amity*, p. 157.

⁸⁴ Drayton, *Peirs Gaveston*, ll. 767, 769.

And when his eyes with love were fully fed, / A thousand times he sweetly kissed mee'.⁸⁵

Elsewhere in the poem too, descriptions of Gaveston's political control segue into descriptions of his sexual attractiveness: one stanza states that 'My words as lawes, Autentique he alloude, / Mine yea, by him was never crost with no', while the next describes Gaveston's beauty and Edward's transition from gazing at him to physical interaction.⁸⁶

Kelly Quinn argues convincingly that this feature of *Peirs Gaveston* must be seen in relation to the genre of 'royal mistress complaint', in that it points up 'the dangerous power of male [as opposed to female] royal consorts who translate their erotic sway into active political power'.⁸⁷ Unlike female 'royal mistresses' like Jane Shore, Quinn argues, 'Gaveston wields power over the kingdom not only through his persuasive private influence over the King, but also, and chiefly, through his public positions of authority. These benefactions are, in many ways, a consequence of his maleness'.⁸⁸ This perceptive point highlights the relevance of Gaveston to early modern fears of seductive male favourites, both under Elizabeth I and James VI and I. When an anonymous poet begged God, in a poem dedicated to James, to 'save / My soueraing from a Ganemed / Quhoose hoourische breath hath pouer to lead / His Majestie such way he list', he was not just expressing concern about a sexually attractive young royal favourite exerting control over a king, but expressing a particular fear about the maleness of that 'Ganemed' and the resulting potential for him to have substantial political influence that would be unavailable to a female mistress.⁸⁹ As many critics have argued from both a historicist and a queer perspective, Marlowe's representation of the way that Gaveston's sexual influence over Edward becomes (and/or is metaphorically figured as) political influence should also be seen in light of these contemporary political anxieties.⁹⁰

Evil counsel – or evil nature?

While these representations of Edward's favourites' overwhelming sexual and political influence in this way had the potential to exonerate him, they also had the potential to

⁸⁵ Drayton, *Peirs Gaveston*, ll. 770–772.

⁸⁶ Drayton, *Peirs Gaveston*, ll. 217–218, 225–227.

⁸⁷ Quinn, 'Mastering Complaint', pp. 439–440.

⁸⁸ Quinn, 'Mastering Complaint', pp. 445–446. For further analysis of the ways in which Gaveston can be productively compared to Jane Shore, see Foley, 'Tactical Engagements with Sewers'.

⁸⁹ 'For the Kinge', ll. 48–51. This poem has been previously attributed to William Drummond, but Curtis Perry suggests that 'there is no good reason to think [this poem] written by William Drummond' ('Politics of Access', p. 1074, n. 53).

⁹⁰ For example, Bredbeck, *Sodomy*, pp. 31–86; Brumble, 'Personal, Paternal and Kingly Control'; Gil Harris, *Foreign Bodies*, p. 87; Goldberg, 'Sodomy and Society'; Hertel, *Staging England*, pp. 218–219; Kay, 'Marlowe, *Edward II* and the Cult of Elizabeth', p. 15; Martin, 'Plays of Passion', p. 100; Parks, 'History, Tragedy, and Truth', p. 283; Stymeist, 'Status, Sodomy, and the Theater'; Summers, 'Marlowe and Constructions of Renaissance Homosexuality'; Surgal, 'The Rebel and the Red-Hot Spit'; Thurn, 'Sovereignty, Disorder, and Fetishism'.

characterize him as weak-willed, emotional, and easily led. Influenced in particular by Ranulf Higden's popular account of Edward's reign in the *Polychronicon*, which catalogued his flaws and weaknesses, later writers began to engage with this tension by questioning the idea that Edward was simply misled rather than intrinsically unfit to rule. In particular, the influence of Polydore Vergil ushered in a direct engagement with the issue of Edward's flaws, displaying anxiety about the obvious shortcomings of a divinely appointed monarch.

Higden opens his account of Edward's reign with a damning passage on his character:

Erat nempe Edwardus iste vir corpore elegans, viribus praestans, sed moribus, si vulgo creditur, plurimum inconstans. Nam parvipenso procerum contubernio, adhaesit scurris, cantoribus, tragedis, aurigis, fossoribus, remigibus, navigiis et caeteris artis mechanicae officiis, potibus indulgens, secreta facile prodens, astantes ex levi causa percutiens, magis alienum quam proprium consilium sequens; in dando prodigus, in convivando splendidus, ore promptus, opere varius, adversus hostes suos infortunatus, in domesticos efferatus. Ad unum aliquem familiarem ardentem affectus, quem summe coleret, ditaret, praeferet, honoraret. Ex quo impetu provenit amanti opprobrium, amasio obloquium, plebi scandalum, regno detrimentum. Indignos quoque et ineptos ad gradus ecclesiasticos promovit, quod postmodum sudes in oculis et lancea in latere sibi [fuit].⁹¹

Truly this Edward was a man with an elegant body, outstanding in strength, but, if the public are to be believed, inconstant in mood. For, paying little attention to his nobles in companionship, he clung to fashionable idlers, singers, tragedians, grooms, diggers and rowers, sailors and other characters of mechanical skill; indulging in drink, easily giving out secrets, standing and striking out of trivial cause, following rather others' counsel than his own; lavish in giving, splendid in banqueting, ready in speech, diverse in deeds, unfortunate against his enemies, puffed up in his household. Towards one particular familiar he was ardently affected, whom he would cherish, enrich, prefer, honour. From which, with fury, came forth disgrace to the loved one, subservience to the lover [i.e. Edward], offence to the people, and harm to the realm. Likewise, he promoted unworthy and wicked ones to church positions, who afterwards were logs in his eyes and lances in his side.

This passage was enormously influential: versions of it persist in accounts of Edward's reign throughout the medieval and early modern period (in later texts usually via Robert Fabyan's adapted translation: see Chapter 2, and below).⁹² The commentary to the cryptic Latin verse prophecy known as *The Prophecy of John of Bridlington* demonstrates that this character description was treated as significant even by Higden's contemporaries: while the *Prophecy* (written during the 1360s) is original, much of the commentary by John Ergom (written c. 1362–1364) is taken verbatim from the *Polychronicon*. Ergom presents Higden's character as one of the 'three things to

⁹¹ Higden, *Polychronicon*, VIII, 298–300.

⁹² On the fourteenth-century impact of this passage, see Given-Wilson, *Chronicles*, pp. 172–173. On the popularity of the *Polychronicon*, see Taylor, *Universal Chronicle*, and *English Historical Literature*, pp. 55–57.

be [initially] observed' concerning Edward, offers it as evidence that the prophecy's description of Edward as an 'irrational King' (*Rex insensatus*) is justified, and repeatedly refers back to Edward's personal characteristics.⁹³

Higden's description presents Edward's actions as consistently characterized by excess and disruptive of social norms and hierarchies, and highlights particular flaws – vengefulness, drinking, a predilection for unsuitable company and 'rustic pursuits' – that are frequently mentioned in subsequent accounts.⁹⁴ But more crucially, when presented as an introduction to Edward's reign (as it is in the *Polychronicon*; some writers, such as Thomas Burton in his late fourteenth-century chronicle of Meaux Abbey, shift it to the end of the reign) it frames the subsequent events as consequences of these personality attributes.⁹⁵ It prompts a personal interpretation of Edward's disastrous reign, providing justification for writers to blame his misdeeds on personality flaws rather than his favourites' influence.

Most of the attributes in Higden's summary function metonymically, implying that Edward is flawed in particular ways. A preference for companions of low social status suggests that he is a poor judge of character and lacks the skill or discernment to select suitable advisors; alcoholism suggests bodily indulgence; an inability to keep secrets suggests poor judgement and an impaired capacity for decision-making. Many of these were connected in the medieval and early modern imagination, with sensual indulgence additionally associated with sexual transgression; and all of them can be seen to encourage the conclusion that Edward is unfit for royal duties.⁹⁶ This suggestion was made repeatedly in later texts, and was reaffirmed by accounts of the pretender John Deydras (historiographically known as Tanner, Powderham, Poydras or Canne). Deydras claimed in 1318 that he, not Edward, was the rightful King – attacked and scarred by a sow as a baby, he had been exchanged by his panicked nurse for the child of a carter or water-bearer, who had grown up to be Edward II – and several texts claim that his story was widely believed because Edward's character accorded with 'the maners of his fadyr the water-berere'.⁹⁷ Similarly, in Marlowe's *Edward II*, as Charles Forker observes, 'Marlowe capitalizes brilliantly on the dramatic ironies created by the huge gap between the inherent majesty of the crown and the feeble incapacity of its wearer'.⁹⁸ Edward deals clumsily with his royal power from

⁹³ *Prophecy of John of Bridlington*, pp. 132–134.

⁹⁴ See Johnstone, 'Eccentricities'.

⁹⁵ Burton, *Chronica*, III, 355.

⁹⁶ Mills, *Seeing Sodomy*, p. 263.

⁹⁷ *Chronicle of London*, p. 44; see also, for example, Fabyan, *Prima Pars*, fol. 2P2r; Heywood, *Chronographically History*, fols. 2Bv–2B2r.

⁹⁸ Marlowe, *Edward II*, p. 91; see also Melnikoff, 'Introduction', pp. 5–6; Perry, *Literature and Favoritism*, pp. 136–137.

the outset, relying on his royal status to command obedience ('Beseems it thee to contradict thy King?') rather than even attempting to plead the justice of his cause.⁹⁹

Alongside these accusations of particular flaws, early modern writers began to wrestle directly with the question of the extent to which Edward's personal flaws caused his behaviour and subsequent downfall. H. David Brumble offers some useful context for this growing concern in his analysis of Richard Hooker's *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*: human laws, Hooker writes, 'are never framed as they should be, unless [they presume] the will of man to be inwardly obstinate, rebellious, and averse from all obedience unto the sacred laws of his nature; in a word, unless [they presume] man to be in regard to his depraved mind little better than a wild beast'.¹⁰⁰ Jacqueline Murray traces a similar sentiment back to Augustine, arguing that his theology instigated an understanding of humanity as 'engaged in an enduring struggle between irrational animal appetites and the need to discipline and control those appetites through the application of reason and will power'.¹⁰¹ Edward may, therefore, have been badly influenced by his favourites; but he must also, inevitably, have shared 'humanity's depraved inclinations, which are humanity's inheritance from the Fall'. During the sixteenth century, Higden's summary of Edward's character was modified and developed between texts to engage more explicitly with the issue of character flaws versus evil counsel. Robert Fabyan's translation of it became particularly influential.¹⁰² As explored in Chapter 2, Thomas Cooper subsequently conflated Fabyan's character summary with a later passage concerning the 'wanton counsaile' of Edward's favourites, producing the following:

This Edward was fayre of bodie, but unstedfast of maners, and disposed to lightnesse. For he refused the company of his lordes and men of honour, and haunted amonge vilanes and vile personages. He gave hym selfe also to over mucche drinkyng, and lightly woulde disclose thynges of great counsaile: and *besides, that he was geven to these vices of nature, he was made moche worse by the counsaile and familiarite of certaine evill disposed persones*, as Piere of Gaveston, Hugh the Spencers, and other, whose wanton counsaile he folowyng gave him selfe to the appetite and pleasure of the body, nothyng orderyng his common weale by sadnesse, discrecion, and justice¹⁰³

Cooper, then, directly asserts that Edward is naturally disposed to vice ('given to [...] vices of nature') but that, this inherent disposition notwithstanding, he was 'made moche worse' by the influence of his favourites. Yet 'worse', of course, suggests that the favourites' negative influence

⁹⁹ Marlowe, *Edward II*, I.i.91.

¹⁰⁰ Brumble, 'Personal, Paternal, and Kingly Control' (n.p.).

¹⁰¹ Murray, 'Introduction', p. xvi.

¹⁰² Fabyan, *Prima Pars*, fol. 2I8^r.

¹⁰³ Lanquet and Cooper, *Epitome*, fol. 3M4^r. On the influence of this version of Higden's character description on Marlowe's *Edward II* (via John Stow's *Summarie of Engghyshe Chronicles*), see Godman, 'Stow's *Summarie*', pp. 161–162.

was not starting from scratch. Cooper therefore equivocates between the ‘evil counsel’ position of earlier texts, and the character assassination of later texts like William Martyn’s 1615 *Historie, and Lives, of the Kings of England*, whose hostility was doubtless informed by Martyn’s intended audience of potentially impressionable ‘young gentlemen’ (see Chapter 2).

In a separate strand of historiographical influence, Polydore Vergil’s Latin chronicle *Anglica Historia* (written c. 1512–1513) displays prolonged engagement with this issue; and the influential account of Edward’s reign in Holinshed’s *Chronicles* follows Vergil’s account very closely. Holinshed establishes Edward’s ‘nature’ as an essential concern at the opening of his account of the reign:

we find that in the beginning of his governement, though he was of nature given to lightnesse, yet being restrained with the prudent advertisements of certeine of his councellors, to the end he might shew some likelihood of good prooffe, [h]e counterfeited a kind of gravitie, vertue, and modestie; but yet he could not throughlie be so bridled, but that foorthwith he began to plaie divers wanton and light parts, at the first indeed not outragiouslie, but by little and little, and that covertlie. For having revoked againe into England his old mate the said Peers de Gaveston, he received him into most high favour, creating him earle of Cornewall, and lord of Man, his principall secretarie, and lord chamberlaine of the realme, through whose companie and societie he was suddenlie so corrupted, that he burst out into most heinous vices¹⁰⁴

Initially, in contrast to Cooper, Holinshed presents Edward’s ‘nature’ as innately tending towards ‘wanton and light’ behaviour. ‘[G]ravitie, vertue and modestie’ are merely feigned, and the act of feigning them constitutes being ‘bridled’, restraining Edward’s inherent disposition. Yet this idea of ‘counterfeited’ virtue is immediately compounded by the description of Edward’s ‘wanton and light’ behaviour: these qualities, too, are ‘parts’ to be ‘plaie[d]’. The verb ‘plaie’ functions partly to emphasize Edward’s lack of seriousness, but the sense of dissimulation is nonetheless present, especially given Holinshed’s earlier reference to ‘counterfeited’ qualities. Responsibility for Edward’s bad behaviour is then ascribed to the ‘companie and societie’ of Gaveston, who ‘corrupt[s]’ him; immediately after this, however, the idea of a ‘bridled’ innate self recurs with the phrase ‘he burst out into most heinous vices’, which suggests that Gaveston’s influence has breached whatever restraint had been placed on Edward’s character by the ‘prudent advertisements’ of his other nobles.

Holinshed continues to vacillate on the question of whether Edward’s innate ‘nature’ or the counsel of his favourites is to blame for his behaviour. The nobles’ reasoning over exiling

¹⁰⁴ Holinshed, *Chronicles* (1587), VI, section 10/p. 318; c.f. Vergil, *Anglica Historia*, ch. 18. See Bartels, *Spectacles of Strangeness*, p. 154.

Gaveston and the Despensers leans towards the latter, but ultimately remains ambivalent. Their first decision to exile Gaveston is based on the ‘hope that the Kings mind might happilie be altered into a better purpose, being not altogether converted into a venemous disposition, but so that it might be cured, if the corrupter thereof were once banished from him’.¹⁰⁵ Similarly, they later reason that it may be possible to ‘procure [Edward] to looke better to his office and dutie’ if they can exile the Despensers, ‘his nature being not altogether evill’.¹⁰⁶ While the verb ‘converted’, the description of Gaveston as a ‘corrupter’, and the nobles’ hope in both cases suggests that the removal of Edward’s favourites will prompt a change of behaviour, the repeated adverb ‘altogether’ means that both quotations stop short of completely exonerating Edward’s ‘nature’. The tone suggests that the nobles are trying to remain hopeful that Edward can be redeemed, but are not quite convinced. The result is, like Cooper’s text, an equivocal account which stops short of concluding that Edward’s favourites or his character bear sole responsibility for the problems of his reign.

Conclusion

The question of whether Edward was badly influenced or intrinsically flawed was, as this chapter has emphasized, forcefully compounded by the fact that the men represented as his ‘evil counsellors’ were also represented as his lovers. As Perry argues, the question of culpability is central here:

where the evil counsellor tradition has self-evident utility for public political debate, shielding the monarch from blame and thus making it possible to claim to be at once critical of government and loyal to the crown, imagining favour in erotic terms works in precisely the opposite direction. It attributes the favourite’s power to the erotic incontinence of the monarch, thereby blurring the distinction between the King’s own sins and the wickedness of his intimate servants. This redistribution of blame helps explain the appeal of erotic constructions of favouritism: thinking of favouritism as the result of unregulated erotic passion provided observers of the political scene with a useful vocabulary of corruption in which the King’s personal moral weakness could be held directly responsible for the improper distribution of his personal favour and thus for the corruption of his associates.¹⁰⁷

Perry suggests that ‘erotic constructions of favouritism’ – criticism of the relationship between a monarch and their favourite in terms that implied their relationship was sexual in nature – are sometimes the result of a writer’s desire to frame the monarch as responsible for the favourite’s influence, and therefore for their actions: ‘a tension [...] stemming ultimately from the failure of

¹⁰⁵ Holinshed, *Chronicles* (1587), VI, section 10/p. 319.

¹⁰⁶ Holinshed, *Chronicles* (1587), VI, section 10/p. 325.

¹⁰⁷ Perry, *Literature and Favoritism*, p. 136.

traditional notions of majesty and the body politic – in which the mysteries of kingship should minimise the imperfections of the mortal officeholder – to square with the growing sense of political corruption in late Elizabethan and early Stuart England'. Importantly, however, in the case of Edward II, the process Perry outlines was reversed. The suggestion that Edward's relationships with his favourites may have been sexual already existed, and was available in medieval texts. When early modern writers approached these texts as sources for their own accounts, they were confronted both with this suggestion (and its implications as described by Perry), and with the claim that Edward's transgressions resulted from 'evil counsel' – and had to find a way to reconcile the two. That process of reconciliation is what we see in texts like Holinshed's *Chronicles*, which grapple repeatedly with the question of Edward's agency and culpability without ever reaching a firm conclusion. The issue is further complicated by the representation of Edward's favourites as attractive, even irresistibly so. Edward's 'erotic incontinence' is arguably mitigated or excused if his attraction to his favourites is understandable or beyond his control. Perry's analysis helps to explain why the question of 'evil counsel or evil nature' interests early modern writers on Edward II, but attention to the specifics of Edward's historiographical reputation – the extant consensus concerning his sexual transgression, and the further suggestions that his favourites were physically attractive and may have bewitched him – is needed to fully account for its centrality.

It is striking that, despite the clear interest that early modern writers take in the counsel/nature question, none of them presents a coherent account of it. As well as Holinshed and Cooper, for example, Elizabeth Cary and Richard Baker both present Edward as far more culpable for his transgressions than do their medieval sources; but each of these early modern writers stops short of outright condemnation, providing ambiguity by blaming Edward's favourites for their corruption and by suggesting that Edward was not entirely free to choose his own disposition.¹⁰⁸ The consistency of this ambivalence – even in Cary's otherwise forceful and didactic account – suggests that, although the time elapsed since Edward's deposition provided early modern writers with some freedom to discuss his personal failings, it remained politically risky to state unequivocally that Edward was unfit to rule, and that his deposition was therefore justified. Elizabeth Cary's *History* is particularly instructive in this regard. After a sustained depiction of Edward as naturally inclined to vice – his father is dismayed to see that he has 'rather a *natural vicious inclination*, than the corruption of time, or want of ability to command it' – Cary's narrative voice has a sudden change of heart towards the end of the text, and claims that

¹⁰⁸ See, for example, Holinshed, *Chronicles*, (1587), VI, section 10/pp. 318, 319, 325; Cary, *History of the Life*, fols. B1^v, B2^r, X1^r, K^r, 2B^v; Baker, *Chronicle*, fol. S3^v, S4^r.

Edward ‘lost [his kingdom]’ ‘principally by the treacherous Infidelity of his Wife, Servants, and Subjects’.¹⁰⁹ This incongruous assertion suggests that Cary was ultimately reluctant to condone deposition, even that of a deeply flawed monarch. Her text is at times didactic, foregrounding the connections between Edward’s favourites and those of James VI and I; this would have made a positive treatment of deposition politically sensitive, even risky. Cary contents herself by stating that the failure of Edward’s subjects to defend him was due to the ‘Oppression’ he perpetuated, but her conclusion still militates against the condemnatory tone of the preceding text.

The political sensitivity of Edward’s story, then, simultaneously sparked early modern writers’ interest and enforced polyvalent, equivocal representation. This, I would suggest, sheds additional light on the polyvocality that many scholars have recognised in large early modern chronicles. Not only did writers of these texts compile narratives from multiple sources, bear witness to the impact of shifting semantics on the articulation of political theory, and invite readers to judge the validity of diverse opinions in matters of historical debate;¹¹⁰ they also employed polyvocality as a means of strategic ambivalence when constructing historical narratives which had resonance with contemporary political concerns. In the case of Edward II’s reign, chroniclers walked a fine line between engaging their readers by pointing up its continually urgent political pertinence – and by making the thought-provoking suggestion that sometimes, monarchs were intrinsically flawed *as well as* being poorly led – and appearing to seditiously suggest that Edward’s deposition was justified because he was unfit to rule. The necessity of this complex political balancing act was an essential factor in shaping the polyvalence of these rich and thoughtful historical accounts.

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¹⁰⁹ Cary, *History of the Life*, fols. B2^r, 2M^r; emphasis added.

¹¹⁰ Gillespie and Harris, ‘Holinshead and the Native Chronicle Tradition’, p. 136; Djordjevic, *Holinsbed’s Nation*, p. 63; Herendeen, ‘Later Historians and Holinshead’, pp. 238–239; Patterson, *Reading Holinsbed’s Chronicles*; Brink, *Michael Drayton Revisited*, p. 69; Zaller, ‘King, Commons and Commonwealth’.

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Chapter 5 – Edward II as Political Exemplum

Abstract

This chapter discusses the continuing political relevance of Edward II's narrative during the late sixteenth and seventeenth century in England and France. As the first English King to have been deposed, and a paradigmatic example of the dangers of overmighty favourites, Edward was a compelling precedent for writers across the political spectrum. Analysis of the ways in which writers deployed his example provides a valuable case study for investigating how historical examples functioned in early modern political discourse, and reveals the hermeneutic agency of political writers in the process of 'using' history, when examples such as Edward's deposition could be interpreted as supporting either side of a political debate.

Keywords

Charles I, Elizabeth I, Henri III, James I, James II, James VI, use of history

Introduction

Unlike the chronicles discussed in the previous chapter, not all negotiations of the political relevance of Edward II's story were polyvocal. On the contrary, some were deliberately, polemically monovocal. Edward II's reign represented a seminal English precedent for the deposition and execution of a monarch (as Edward's death was widely perceived by the sixteenth century); and it also provided a parallel for the 'age of overmighty favourites' in which (as J.H. Elliott has argued) the people of early modern England believed they lived.¹ As a result, Edward's story was frequently used as an analogue for contemporary events, and was deployed to support various (often contradictory) political positions in early modern England and France. These political allusions do not only provide important insight into the development of Edward's historiographical reputation: they are also a valuable resource for investigating the ways in which historical examples functioned in early modern political discourse.

This chapter relies substantially for its theoretical background on Curtis Perry's excellent introduction to the early modern discourse of favouritism, and its 'cumulative' construction, in

¹ Elliott, 'Introduction', p. 2; see also Adams, *Leicester and the Court*, p. 46.

his 2006 book *Literature and Favoritism in Early Modern England*.² Perry argues that this discourse has many stock elements independent of historical facts:

there is more to the discourse of favouritism than just a series of isolated court contexts: the kinds of invective levelled against successive favourites are so consistent as to hint at habits of political imagination that extend beyond the context of any single career. This is true in terms of the striking recurrence of what Robert Shephard has called the ‘bogy myths’ of favouritism – the way each favourite attracted a similar set of lurid scandal tropes – but also, more subtly, in the way that successive favourites are pigeonholed by observers into the same ethically charged stereotypes set in meaningful opposition to traditional models of honour and duty and service [...] The figure of the all-powerful royal favourite, in other words, is a cultural fantasy, one developed in relation to historical persons and situations but one best understood in larger mythic or ideological terms.³

The use of Edward II’s favourites as exempla to critique early modern royal favourites in England and France must be seen in light of this. Perry contextualizes what he calls ‘the Elizabethan and early Stuart fascination with the figure of the corrupt royal favourite’ by attributing this in part to ‘a profound ambivalence about the legitimacy of personal intimacy as a political mechanism’.⁴ Marie Axton, similarly, argues that Elizabeth’s male favourites ‘With little exaggeration [...] may be likened to a shadow cabinet’, while Mario DiGangi points out the close connection between the personal and political intimacy that favourites enjoyed with the monarch: ‘a favourite could acquire tremendous power through his access to the royal body’.⁵ Consequently, he argues, literary attention ‘to the relation between male monarch and male favourite’ provided ‘a means of dramatizing various matters of contemporary political relevance: the limits of sovereign power and of resistance to it; the means by which political authority is established, maintained, and transferred; the dangers of flattery, misgovernment, and civil war; the interdependence among sovereign, peers, courtiers, subjects, and foreign powers; the conflict between sovereign will and sovereign duty’.⁶

In light of this, Perry argues that the trope of ‘erotic favouritism’ – ‘the constant murmur of erotic gossip accompanying royal favouritism’ – ‘tells us relatively little about the actual practice of the politics of intimacy or about the nature of the relationship between various monarchs and their favourites.’ Rather, ‘the popularity of erotic constructions of favouritism has to do with the fact that they offer an alternative to the longstanding rhetorical tradition of

² Perry, *Literature and Favoritism*, p. 24.

³ Perry, *Literature and Favoritism*, p. 2; see also Worden, ‘Favourites on the English Stage’, p. 168.

⁴ Perry, *Literature and Favoritism*, p. 3.

⁵ Axton, *Queen’s Two Bodies*, p. 10; DiGangi, ‘Marlowe, Queer Studies, and Renaissance Homoeroticism’, p. 204.

⁶ DiGangi, ‘Marlowe, Queer Studies, and Renaissance Homoeroticism’, p. 203.

blaming evil counsellors for misgovernment while exonerating their royal patrons'; and sexual rumours about monarchs and their favourites 'offer an imaginative vocabulary within which urgent and complex socio-political issues are rendered manageably personal'.⁷ As I argued in the previous chapter, however, in the case of Edward II this argument – the insistence that we should not interpret representations of sexual relationships between kings and favourites as indicating the belief that those relationships were actually sexual – should be complicated in light of the independently established historiographical consensus that Edward's relationship with Gaveston, at least, *was* sexual. It is useful, therefore, to consider early modern representations of historical favouritism in light of both the early modern discourse and tropes of favouritism, and the specific historiographical tradition to which they are responding.

Perry emphasizes the centrality of Edward and his favourites to the discourse he examines. Gaveston, he writes, is 'the paradigmatic personal favourite' for early modern commentators, and Edward's reign 'the central native exemplum of passionate and corrupting favouritism for late Elizabethan and early Stuart writers'.⁸ Edward's story 'is utterly ubiquitous in the period's controversial political writing, where it serves as a highly contested precedent for arguments about the nature and limitations of English monarchy, and it is perhaps the most frequently retold political fable of the era as well.'⁹ It not only speaks to the anxieties about personal rule referred to above – 'The idea of favouritism run amok always holds out the threat that the King's will might be extended to the point where it alone determines the composition of the public sphere' – but is useful because of its 'deeply ambiguous' potential: 'it can always be told either as a story about the tyrannical or absolutist potential of unbridled royal will or as a story of treason and rebellion'.¹⁰ 'Not coincidentally,' Perry observes, 'interest in the Edward II story peaks during the periods when English observers were most likely to be concerned with the expansion of royal prerogative and with related shifts in constitutional balance: the 1590s and the 1620s'. Consequently, examination of the functions of Edward II and his favourites as political exempla in early modern England and France provides a productive means of illuminating the use of historical examples in early modern political polemic more broadly.

Polemical invocations

The significant number of texts that name-drop Edward II and his favourites for political purposes – that is, whose sole reason for mentioning Edward is to use his story as a political

⁷ Perry, *Literature and Favoritism*, p. 135; 'Politics of Access', p. 1059.

⁸ Perry, *Literature and Favoritism*, pp. 46, 185.

⁹ Perry, *Literature and Favoritism*, pp. 185–188.

¹⁰ On the association of unbridled desire with tyranny, see Bushnell, *Tragedies of Tyrants*, pp. 1–9 and *passim*.

warning or condemnation – reflects the fact that early modern ‘playwrights, spectators and readers [were] convinced that they, too, were living in an age of overmighty favourites’, and generally (as Blair Worden writes of Nathaniel Crouch’s 1695 text *The Unfortunate Court-Favourites of England*, published under the pseudonym R.B. for ‘Robert Burton’), ‘[conceive] of favouritism as a universal and unvarying phenomenon’.¹¹ Texts which set out to draw parallels between different favourites, contemporary or historical, became increasingly common during the seventeenth century, reflecting the conviction that history was primarily useful insofar as it provided examples for the present day; and in addition to new compositions, ‘plays and tracts about Gaveston were reprinted at moments of political tension in both England and France’.¹² The strategies which can be observed most commonly are the coupling of Edward with his great grandson Richard II as two deposed kings; the use of Edward’s favourites as a benchmark of immorality and the statement that a particular contemporary favourite somehow surpasses this; and an emphasis on Edward’s flaws in order to demonstrate that some people are simply inherently unfit to rule. If deposition is treated as the key issue, depending on the polemical angle of their text, most writers either emphasize the legality of Edward’s deposition or condemn it and argue that it led indirectly to the Wars of the Roses. Some, however, engage with the opposing argument in order to bolster the credibility of their case, and focus their effort on identifying the many differences between Edward’s situation and the contemporary issue under discussion – concluding either that the justifications for deposing Edward do not apply to the current political situation, or that the undesirable consequences of Edward’s deposition would not befall contemporary England. This section will survey polemical invocations of Edward chronologically, identifying the perceived relevance of his reign to those of English and French monarchs from the 1590s to the 1680s.

Elizabeth I

Elizabeth, famously, knew that ‘I am Richard the Second’.¹³ But to many writers she was also Edward II, and her favourites were Gaveston and the Despencers. Edward was, according to Paul Budra, a member of ‘the standard rogues’ gallery of Tudor myth’, and the popularity and influence of Marlowe’s play *Edward II* (written c. 1591–1592) affirmed his place in public consciousness.¹⁴ The most significant common factor between Edward and Elizabeth was their

¹¹ Elliott, ‘Introduction’, p. 2; Worden, ‘Favourites on the English Stage’, p. 172.

¹² Peck, ‘Monopolizing Favour’, p. 55.

¹³ Axton, *Queen’s Two Bodies*, p. 2.

¹⁴ Budra, *De Casibus Tradition*, p. 28. Elizabeth Donno provides further evidence of the topicality of Edward II’s reign during the Elizabethan period, noting that ‘Henslowe refers to a lost *play of mortymore* of 1602 (as well as to an earlier play, 1588/9, dealing with the Spencers)’ (“Admiration” and “Commiseration” p. 377). See also Campbell, ‘Use of Historical Patterns’, pp. 329–330.

preference for male favourites and the existence of sexual rumours concerning them. Simon Adams describes Elizabeth's male favourites as 'a controversial novelty' compared to those of her predecessors: they were novel in terms of not being the same gender as the monarch, in terms of their 'physical and personal attraction for the Queen', in terms of their status as 'individuals' rather than 'a large [and/or] transient series of companions', and in terms of the combination of political influence and personal intimacy they enjoyed.¹⁵ Faced with a 'novelty', many political commentators responded by finding its nearest precedent: Edward II.

The importance of sexual rumours to the parallels that were drawn between Elizabeth and Edward should not be underestimated. As Robert Shephard has shown, 'The frequency and intensity of the rumours about Elizabeth were much greater than those about James [VI and I]'.¹⁶ Elizabeth's refusal to marry was a key factor in the continuance of these rumours: effectively, 'minions, more than marriage, were the reality of Elizabeth's sexuality'.¹⁷ Clearly, however, the resonances that contemporaries found between Elizabeth's and Edward's favourites were not restricted to matters of sexuality: in addition, 'Bacon, Burghley, and Leicester were routinely vilified as atheist timeservers and ambitious Machiavellian upstarts whose advancement had come at the expense of the (Catholic) nobility, Elizabeth's natural counsellors'.¹⁸ As detailed above, the criticism that Edward chose to advance low-born favourites at the expense of those from more noble families – his own 'natural counsellors' – is routinely found in historiographical accounts, and was frequently pressed into service to criticize Elizabeth.

Comparisons between Elizabeth's and Edward's favourites are most frequently found in relation to Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester. Broadly, they represent contemporary reactions to an overmighty favourite whose influence was perceived to result from personal intimacy with the monarch.¹⁹ Dudley was, in Carole Levin's words, 'deeply disliked as an arrogant upstart'; moreover, 'The rumours about Elizabeth's sexual misconduct that abounded throughout her reign almost entirely centred on her relationship with Dudley'.²⁰ Libels against Dudley are a pertinent place to begin this investigation since Perry identifies them as a key starting point in the construction of the figure of the royal favourite: 'Leicester libels [...] use the Earl to construct an

¹⁵ Adams, *Leicester and the Court*, p. 46; see also MacCaffrey, *Elizabeth I*, pp. 456–457.

¹⁶ Shephard, 'Sexual Rumours', p. 102; see also Levin, *Heart and Stomach*.

¹⁷ Williams, 'Dido, Queen of England', p. 44.

¹⁸ Kewes, 'Marlowe, History and Politics', p. 139.

¹⁹ See Adams, *Leicester and the Court*, for Leicester's actual influence at the Elizabethan court.

²⁰ Levin, *Heart and Stomach*, p. 45.

influential set of stereotypes concerning the domineering favourite that continue to shape perceptions and responses to court corruption for the next sixty years'.²¹

The most famous of these libels is the 1584 pamphlet commonly known as *Leicester's Commonwealth*. Written in dialogue form, this defamatory tract 'can be shown to have emanated [...] from a group of lay Catholic exiles, partisans of the Queen of Scots, who were based principally in Paris, more specifically from a subgroup among them composed of formerly pro-Anjou courtiers recently hounded from the English Court (in their view at least) by Leicester himself.'²² D.C. Peck, the tract's most recent editor, summarizes its position as follows:

With only slight oversimplification, the *Commonwealth's* purposes may be briefly defined as three. The first was to defame the Earl of Leicester in both his private life and his public role, and there seemed to be two motives for doing so: a practical motive, to introduce the Earl as a new scapegoat for the rising tensions of the time, thereby diverting attention from the Queen of Scots; and a personal one, to vilify a hated enemy. The second purpose was to advance again the Scottish claim to the crown of England, chiefly for Queen Mary but newly with her son James in mind as well. The third was to attempt to calm the growing religious anxieties in the realm (in part by writing them off to Leicester's agency) and thereby to procure more favourable treatment for the Catholics at home.²³

Leicester's Commonwealth focuses particularly on Dudley's sexual behaviour:

Throughout, the appetite for power (marrying the queen) and for sex (with the other women) are conflated, seen as two aspects of the same unregulated appetite [...] The libel's over-passionate Leicester is thus an emblematic figure of failed self-government, a figure of inconstant and irrational desires incapable even of holding constant to a wicked purpose.²⁴

However, despite the similar reputation that was beginning to attach itself to Edward's favourites, the writer does not draw comparisons between them on this basis. Instead, the first mention of Edward occurs via the suggestion that Leicester is aiming to dispose of Elizabeth:

Lawyer: [...] I for my part would rather counsel them [Elizabeth's favourites] to make much of her Majesty's life, for after that they little knew what may ensue or befall their designments.

Gentleman: They will make the most thereof [...] for their own advantage, but after that what is like to follow the examples of Edward and Richard II, as also of Henry and Edward VI, do sufficiently forewarn us, whose lives were prolonged until their deaths were thought profitable to the conspirators and not longer.²⁵

²¹ Perry, *Literature and Favoritism*, p. 24.

²² *Leicester's Commonwealth*, p. 4.

²³ *Leicester's Commonwealth*, p. 4. See also Adams, *Leicester and the Court*, pp. 48–51.

²⁴ Perry, *Literature and Favoritism*, p. 27.

²⁵ *Leicester's Commonwealth*, p. 138.

No historiographical account of Edward II suggests that his favourites actively pursued his deposition or murder after he ceased to be ‘profitable’ to them, presumably because they famously shared his fate. In this quotation, Leicester is aligned with the ‘conspirators’ who were responsible for Edward’s deposition and death; the primary purpose of invoking Edward here is to darkly remind the reader of the possibility of deposition and inspire them to fear for Elizabeth’s future. It is some time later that the writer invokes Edward in relation to his indulgence of favourites, condemning Elizabeth for favouring Leicester: ‘too much favour towards wicked persons’, they write, explicitly naming ‘excessive favour towards Peter Gaveston and two of the Spencers’, ‘was the chiefest cause of destruction’ for all of England’s deposed kings.²⁶ In addition, the writer uses what became a common technique, claiming that their subject is ‘worse than’ Edward’s favourites: ‘this man, who by the favour of her Majesty so afflicteth her people as never did before him either Gaveston, or Spencer, or Vere, or Mowbray, or any other mischievous tyrant that abused most his prince’s favour within our realm of England’.²⁷ As Karen Britland argues in relation to Elizabeth Cary’s use of the same strategy, this technique renders individual accounts of historical events ‘less universally exemplary’, but ‘paradoxically serves to increase its application to’ the specific contemporary events to which it alludes.²⁸

In all of these examples, the role of Edward and his favourites is that of admonitory precedent: the reader is asked to learn from his example what evils can result from overmighty favourites, and address the Elizabethan situation accordingly. As is well known, this is standard early modern English practice with regard to history: it fulfils one of the purposes of history outlined in Thomas Blundeville’s 1574 treatise *The True Order and Method of Writing and Reading Histories* (‘that we maye be stirred by example of the good to followe the good, and by example of the evill to flee the evill’), and numerous scholars, particularly following the seminal work of Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton, have emphasised that this methodology also informed the physical practices by which early modern readers engaged with history books.²⁹ Such admonition by way of historical exempla was recognized to have seditious potential. *Leicester’s Commonwealth*, by condemning Dudley as worse than Gaveston et al. and then stating that ‘too much favour towards wicked persons was the chiefest cause of destruction’ of three deposed kings, was

²⁶ *Leicester’s Commonwealth*, p. 188.

²⁷ *Leicester’s Commonwealth*, p. 189.

²⁸ Britland, ‘Kings Are But Men’, p. 43.

²⁹ Blundeville, *True Order and Methode*, fol. F3r; Jardine and Grafton, ‘Studied for Action’; Woolf, *Reading History*. On the ‘use of history’ in late medieval England, see for example Gransden, ‘Uses Made of History’; Given-Wilson, *Chronicles*, pp. 2–3, 165–166; Matheson, ‘Genealogy and Women’, pp. 223–224. On early modern England, see for example Budra, *De Casibus Tradition*, pp. 21–22; Campbell, ‘Tudor Conceptions’ and ‘Use of Historical Patterns’; Patterson, *Reading Holinshed’s Chronicles*, pp. 273–274; Woolf, ‘Community, Law and State’, pp. 72–73; Zaller, ‘King, Commons and Commonweal’, pp. 373–375.

coming dangerously close to threatening Elizabeth with deposition. Philip Sidney's reply to the tract in defence of Leicester addresses this point:

[The writer of *Leicester's Commonwealth*] in some places brings in the example of Gaveston, Earl of Cornwall, Robert Vere, Duke of Ireland, and De la Pole, Duke of Suffolk. It is not my purpose to defend them, but I would fain know whether they that persecuted those councillors, when they had had their will in ruining them, whether their rage ceased before they had as well destroyed the kings themselves, Edward and Richard II and Henry VI.³⁰

Sidney, of course, knows perfectly well that those kings ultimately shared their favourites' fates. His reply usefully demonstrates the 'dark side' of political texts that use comparisons with Gaveston and the Despencers to condemn contemporary favourites. Edward as a political exemplum carried inevitable and constant ambiguity – what Perry calls 'reversibility of application' – which made the invocation of his story both potent and risky.³¹

In addition to Dudley, comparisons were also drawn between Edward's favourites and William Cecil by a 'network of exiled English Catholics' – a comparison possibly influenced by the writers' exposure to libels circulating in France (discussed below) which compared Gaveston to Henri III's favourites.³² Here, social status was the key point of identification: these comparisons constitute objections to a favourite whose influence is considered disproportionate and undeserved in relation to his low birth. 'Cecill,' wrote the Jesuit Robert Persons (aka Parsons) in his 1592 pamphlet *An Advertisement Written to a Secretarie of My L. Treasurers of Inghland, by an Inghlishe Intelligencer*, 'being the causer of the most enormous evils [...] is a traitor himself, and the greatest, that ever England nowrished, and farr more noysome and pernicious to the realme, then ever were the Spencers, Peeter of Gaverstone, or any other that ever abused either Prince or people'.³³ Once again, Edward's favourites are invoked as a benchmark of evil influence which contemporary favourites have improbably managed to exceed. Later in the same text, Persons used this comparison to threaten Cecil: 'thincke betymes upon the end of pierse of Gaverston, & the Spencers, & others that have abused their Princes favours in Inghland heretofore, to the debasing of true nobilitie, and pilling of the people'. Ironically, it appears that Cecil did not need exhorting to 'thincke betymes' on the examples of Edward and his favourites: he 'left a six-page manuscript dated 1595, containing notes on the reign of Edward II and marking enemies of the Crown'.³⁴

³⁰ *Leicester's Commonwealth*, pp. 252–253; Campbell, 'Use of Historical Patterns', p. 336.

³¹ Perry, 'Yelverton', p. 332; see also *Literature and Favoritism*, p. 187.

³² Stewart, 'Edouard et Gaverston', pp. 109–110.

³³ Persons, *Advertisement*, fol. D9^v; Campbell, 'Use of Historical Patterns', p. 338.

³⁴ Brink, *Michael Drayton Revisited*, p. 47.

Persons also considered Edward relevant to the Elizabethan succession crisis.³⁵ His 1595 pamphlet *A Conference About the Next Succession*, dedicated to the Earl of Essex, aimed to show – through discussions of ‘Princes deposed for defect in government’ – that ‘succession to government by neernes of bloode is not by Law of nature, or divine, but only by humane & positive Lawes of every particuler common wealth, and consequently, may uppon just causes be altered by the same’.³⁶ Accordingly, it focuses on Edward having ‘acknowledged his owne unwoorthines’ and having been ‘for his evel government deposed’, embodying Marie Axton’s useful concept of ‘contractual kingship’.³⁷

The *Conference* attracted several responses. The Northampton MP Peter Wentworth (in *A Pithie Exhortation to her Majestie for Establishing her Successor to the Crowne*, a text written in the late 1580s but not printed until 1598, a year after Wentworth’s death) sought to reassure Elizabeth that naming a successor would not result in her deposition, using Edward as a supporting example. Edward’s deposition, Wentworth argued, was not forced by his successor, but ‘who so readeth the storie, he shall finde that he was deposed by his Nobilitie and commons, as one (in their judgement) not worthie to be a king’.³⁸ In a less provocative response titled *An Answer to the First Part of a Certain Conference Concerning Succession* (1603), John Hayward condemned Edward’s deposition, arguing that it resulted in divine punishment in the form of Richard II’s deposition and murder. Hayward’s representation of Edward shows the influence in early modern accounts of the sympathetic account of Edward’s deposition, imprisonment, and death (derived ultimately from Geoffrey le Baker’s mid-fourteenth-century *Chronicon*, as shown in Chapter 6):

many of our histories report [Edward] to bee of a good and courteous nature and not unlearned; imputing his defectes rather to Fortune, then either to counsell or carriage of his affaires. His deposition was a violent furie, led by a wife, both cruell & unchast; & can with no better countenance of right be justified, then may his lamentable both indignities and death, which therupon did ensue.³⁹

Hayward’s assessment of the consensus on Edward’s ‘defects’ is, as Chapter 4 has shown, something of a misrepresentation of the historiographical record – but one which serves his anti-deposition agenda well. He later claims that ‘king Edward and King Richard, both surnamed the Second [...] were not insupportable either in nature or in rule; & yet the people more upon

³⁵ For more detail on the relevance of Edward II to the Elizabethan succession, and a reading of Marlowe’s *Edward II* ‘through the lenses of’ succession tracts like those of Persons, see Burnett, ‘*Edward II* and Elizabethan Politics’, pp. 94–95 and *passim*.

³⁶ Persons, *Conference*, fols. F3^v, *3^v.

³⁷ Persons, *Conference*, fols. F2^v, S7^r; Axton, *Queen’s Two Bodies*, p. 97; see also Campbell, ‘Use of Historical Patterns’, pp. 339–341.

³⁸ Wentworth, *Pithie Exhortation*, fol. F8^r; see Campbell, ‘Use of Historical Patterns’, p. 343.

³⁹ Hayward, *Answer*, fol. K^r.

wantonnes then for any want, did take an unbridled course against them'.⁴⁰ Strikingly, Hayward's condemnation of Edward and Richard's deponents is expressed in identical terms ('wantonnes' and failure to be 'bridled') to condemnations of Edward himself in Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1577).⁴¹ These two observations usefully demonstrate the selective reading of history, and selective representation of historiographical tradition, employed by polemical writers.

Henri III

As shown in Chapter 1, comparisons were also drawn between Edward's favourites and those of Henri III of France, which are likely to have influenced Marlowe's portrayal of Edward and Gaveston and his choices of terminology. In this case, accusations of sexual transgression were central to the comparisons.⁴² The French nobles were angered by Henri's promotion of his own favourites over members of the aristocratic families to whom they had traditionally belonged, and by Henri's perceived gender nonconformity and sexually transgressive behaviour. This was compounded by religiously motivated opposition: in particular, the Catholic League were incensed by Henri's moderate attitude towards Protestants, his attempts to negotiate, and his decision to name a Protestant successor. By the 1580s, this resulted in 'a virulent and deliberate campaign of vilification directed against the King'.⁴³ One aspect of this campaign was a pamphlet war centred around a comparison drawn between Gaveston and Henri's powerful favourite Jean-Louis de Nogaret de La Valette, Duc d'Épernon.⁴⁴

The pamphlet war began in 1588 with the anonymous *Histoire Tragique et Memorable, de Pierre de Gaverston*. Several redactions of this text exist: earlier versions simply give an account of Gaveston's life (largely translated from Thomas Walsingham's *Chronica Maiora*), while later ones add Edward's fate (largely derived from Froissart's *Chroniques*).⁴⁵ It was sufficiently influential – and had sufficiently seditious potential – to attract the attention of the English ambassador to France, Edward Stafford (who sent a copy of it to Francis Walsingham with a letter describing it as 'the vyldest book that ever I sawe'); of James VI of Scotland (who 'twice importuned his agent in Paris to acquire a copy'); and of contemporary French historians (it 'was enough of a political event in its own right to be discussed at length in Pierre Matthieu's 1594 account of the Wars of Religion, and Jacques-Auguste de Thou's standard *Histoire universelle*').⁴⁶ As a result, it survives in

⁴⁰ Hayward, *Answer*, fol. O^r.

⁴¹ Holinshed, *Chronicles* (1587), VI, section 10/p. 318; c.f. Vergil, *Anglica Historia*, ch. 18.

⁴² For a summary of the accusations of sexual transgression levelled at Henri III, see Crawford, 'Love, Sodomy, and Scandal', 513–542.

⁴³ Potter, 'Marlowe's *Massacre*', p. 76.

⁴⁴ See Perry, 'Politics of Access', pp. 1063–1064.

⁴⁵ For detail on the different versions of this pamphlet, see Stewart, 'Edoüard et Gaverston', pp. 102–105 and n. 30.

⁴⁶ Stewart, 'Edoüard et Gaverston', pp. 100–102.

‘amazingly high’ numbers. Its most significant contribution to Edward and Gaveston’s historiography was its use of the term ‘mignon’ and its sodomy accusation, and it may also have attracted the attention of Marlowe. In addition, however, several versions of the text are prefaced with a long mock dedication to Épernon which draws a detailed parallel between him and Gaveston, using anagrams (common in pamphlets of the French wars of religion) to transform ‘Pierre de Gauerston’ into ‘Periure de Nogarets’.⁴⁷ The situation in contemporary France, claims the writer, is worse than that of Edward II’s England, but less because Épernon is inherently worse than Gaveston than because Henri’s nobles do not have the courage to exile Épernon as Edward’s did Gaveston.⁴⁸ The writer also uses Gaveston’s fate to threaten Épernon in a satirical dedication:

tous ceuz qui ont abusé de la faveur des Rois, au prejudice & detrimen du pauvre people, comme Gaverston & vous avez fait, reçoivent tousjours une fin funeste et honteuse, pour un guerdon de leurs forfaitcs.⁴⁹

all those who have abused the favour of Kings, to the prejudice and the detriment of the poor people, as Gaveston and you have done, always receive a fatal and shameful end as a reward for their crimes.

Épernon, or someone writing on his behalf, responded to the *Histoire Tragique* in the same year with a pamphlet which became popularly known as *L’Antigaverston*. This text denied the validity of the comparison, asserting that ‘this history is a calumny invented and published by those of the [Catholic] League [...] to inflame more and more the fire of sedition which consumes our poor kingdom’, and particularly stressing Épernon’s native French heritage and noble birth.⁵⁰ Responding in turn, a pamphlet entitled *Replique à l’Antigaverston* (1588) argued that Épernon is worse than Gaveston:

If Gaveston was hated by the English because he was foreign, you should not be hated by the French for that reason, but more because of your infamous and detestable life, and your insufferable pride.⁵¹

Two additional pamphlets printed the same year continued the conversation.⁵² Following this, ‘almost immediately, other libels, poems and plays started to employ the example of Edward and/or [Gaveston]’.⁵³

⁴⁷ *Histoire Tragique*, fol. A^v.

⁴⁸ *Histoire Tragique*, fol. A4^v.

⁴⁹ *Histoire Tragique*, fol. A2^v.

⁵⁰ *Lettre d’un Gentil-Homme Catholique*, fols. A4^v:C^r–C2^r.

⁵¹ *Replique à l’Antigaverston* (n.p., 1588), fols. C4^v–D1^r.

⁵² *Responce a l’Antigaverston; Lettre Missive en Forme de Responce*.

⁵³ Stewart, ‘Edoüard et Gaverston’, p. 108.

As well as these comparisons between Henri's and Edward's favourites, pamphleteers drew direct comparisons between the two kings. A section of the *Histoire Tragique* addressed 'To the reader' in some redactions begins, 'If the condition of Piers Gaveston was miserable, that of King Edward was more so'; it goes on to state that Edward's penetrative murder was 'not only sanctioned but carried out by "the barons of the country"', suggesting that Henri is also at risk of being put to death by his nobles.⁵⁴ Stewart notes that 'A 1589 pamphlet lamenting Henri's assassination of the Guise brothers notes how the English had strongly hated the cruelty and perfidy used by their kings Richard II and Edward II against the nobles of their country, and for that cause principally had deposed them from their royal dignities.'⁵⁵ The pamphlet *Les Choses Horribles Contenuë en une Lettre Envoyée à Henry de Valois* (1589) similarly condemns Edward for having 'put to death good lords'; this time the context is a comparison between Henri's alleged toleration of sorcery, and Edward's harbouring of 'Gaveston, who in the end was found to be a devil in disguise' (*diable desguisé*).⁵⁶ Again the comparison is used implicitly to threaten Henri: 'for his just recompense, this King Edward was skewered alive with a burning iron'. This willingness to condone Edward's deposition and murder is a marked feature of French political uses of his reign, and reflects the heightened political stakes of Henri III's France compared to Elizabeth I's England: the Catholic League's desire to oust Henri from the throne was well known, to the extent that concealing it would have been pointless and unnecessary. Although the Gaveston libels disappeared after Henri's assassination, Stewart notes that they 'resurfaced, retooled against Cardinal Mazarin, among the Mazarinades published during the "Fronde" of the mid-seventeenth century'.⁵⁷

James VI and I

Political uses of Edward's reign in Jacobean texts were prompted, like those under Elizabeth, by the existence of powerful male favourites whose relationships with the monarch were subject to sexual rumours. 'As had been the case with Elizabeth,' Shephard points out, 'the presumption was that the King was not distributing honours and office to the deserving – by whatever standard – but rather was misusing his royal authority to reward those who would gratify his sinful sexual urges'.⁵⁸ Jacobean uses of Edward as a political exemplum place particular

⁵⁴ *Histoire Tragique*, fol. G3^v; quoted and trans. by Stewart, 'Edoüard et Gaverston', p. 107. See also Briggs, 'Marlowe's *Massacre*', p. 264.

⁵⁵ Stewart, 'Edoüard et Gaverston', p. 108; the text in question is *De l'Excommunication, & Censures Ecclesiastiques*, fol. I4^v.

⁵⁶ 'Les Choses Horribles', p. 205.

⁵⁷ Stewart, 'Edoüard et Gaverston', p. 109, n. 37.

⁵⁸ Shephard, 'Sexual Rumours', p. 110. This article is also an excellent source of contemporary quotations concerning James's perceived sexual relationships with his favourites. See also Perry, *Literature and Favoritism*, pp. 131–132.

emphasis on his unwise choice of *young* counsellors and favourites. While the Duke of Buckingham was of course a particularly problematic figure, seeming ‘to many’ to be ‘the second coming of Edward’s favourites’,⁵⁹ James was being compared to Edward before he even acceded to the English throne. Francis Walsingham, on a 1583 diplomatic mission to Scotland, used Edward’s deposition to threaten the young James VI. According to his own report, Walsingham warned James that ‘divers princes’ – and particularly ‘young princes’ – had been deposed as a result of ‘errors’ encouraged by evil counsel; he cited the Earls of Lennox and Arran as particular examples of people who had provided this poor advice. Just ‘as subjects are bound to obey dutifully’, Walsingham admonished James, ‘so were princes bound to command justly; which reason and ground of government was set down in the deposition of Edward the Second, as by ancient record thereof doth appear.’⁶⁰ Walsingham had previously written to James warning against evil counsellors, but had not explicitly mentioned Edward as an example of this. His choice of Edward here (over, for example, Richard II) as a ‘precedent’ of deposition may reflect the circulation of sexual rumours concerning James’s relationships with favourites such as Lennox (see Chapter 3), which made Edward a closer parallel. The 1581 execution of James Douglas, Earl of Morton (who had previously been Regent of Scotland, and whose downfall was allegedly precipitated by Lennox’s opposition) may also have been seen to parallel Edward’s execution of Thomas of Lancaster.⁶¹

Comparisons between Edward and James’s favourites were not restricted to written texts. As Perry’s research has revealed, in a 1621 Parliament session, a verbal comparison made by Sir Humphrey Yelverton had significant political effects:

In April 1621 Sir Henry Yelverton was called before the House of Lords to testify about his role in the enforcement of some controversial patents granted to associates of the marquis (later duke) of Buckingham. Yelverton, a former King’s Attorney, had a history of conflict with Buckingham, and was expected by the favourite’s political opponents to give damning testimony about his corrupt use of influence. True to form, Yelverton defended his actions by blaming Buckingham, ‘whoe was ever present at his Majesties elbowe ready to hew him downe’. For good measure, he added that Buckingham should have “read the articles against Hugh Spencer in this place, for taking upon him to place and displace officers”. The parallel drawn... caused an uproar, bringing the proceedings to a halt until Buckingham himself urged that Yelverton be allowed to continue.⁶²

⁵⁹ Perry, *Literature and Favoritism*, p. 188.

⁶⁰ Read, *Mr. Secretary Walsingham*, II, 218.

⁶¹ I am grateful to Hannah Coates for bringing this early example to my attention, and for suggesting the parallel between Morton and Lancaster.

⁶² Perry, ‘Yelverton’, p. 313. See the full article for a detailed analysis of this affair and its ‘textual resonance’; see also Burnett, ‘*Edward II* and Elizabethan Politics’, p. 99.

James, fully aware of the implications of this comparison, observed, ‘if he Spenser, I Edward 2.’⁶³ Yelverton subsequently denied that he had even meant to compare Buckingham to Despenser, much less James to Edward: ‘Lett me never fynde mercy with God, nor any chylde of myne, yf I ment to compare my Lord of Buckingham with Spencer, or the King James with Edward 2; but only to saye, as yt were, remember Lott’s wife, and so to put my Lord of Buckingham in mynde that he was in many of theis courses abused.’⁶⁴ Yelverton was punished by imprisonment and a fine, presumably an indication that James did not find his denial plausible.⁶⁵ In fact, Perry proposes that ‘Yelverton helped to solidify the association between Buckingham and Spencer in the culture’s imagination... There is every reason to believe that Yelverton’s outburst was much discussed’.⁶⁶ The numerous contemporary accounts that Perry cites as evidence of this discussion often widen the comparison by reporting Yelverton to have actually compared James to Edward, when in reality he had merely compared one aspect of Buckingham’s influence (his control over patents) to one aspect of Despenser’s influence.⁶⁷ As such, although ‘none of the extant accounts of [Yelverton’s speech] seems particularly interested in the erotic implications of Yelverton’s parallel’ – despite the invocation of the biblical story of Sodom in Yelverton’s later reference to ‘Lott’s wife’ – overall ‘Yelverton’s comparison... may well have implied a mental connection between the sodomy frequently associated with Edward II and gossip about James’s sodomitical intimacies with favourites such as Buckingham’.⁶⁸ However, ‘such a connection makes sense primarily within the context of a larger and more nebulous concern with the King’s personal and political weakness and the resulting corruption of his court’.

Perry’s point about ‘mental connection[s]’ and topics ‘frequently associated’ with monarchs is crucial to understanding the significance of politicized invocations of Edward II and his favourites like the one made by Yelverton. When comparisons between Edward or his favourites and contemporary figures focused on political crimes and were made in a political context, they were not primarily intended to implicitly allege sexual transgression. But Edward and his favourites had – like any historical figures – full and complex historiographical reputations which Yelverton’s (or anyone’s) comparison would have called to an audience’s minds. This is true not just in the area of sexual transgression, but in terms of Edward’s ultimate

⁶³ Perry, *Literature and Favoritism*, p. 136.

⁶⁴ Perry, ‘Yelverton’, p. 314.

⁶⁵ Perry, ‘Yelverton’, p. 314.

⁶⁶ Perry, ‘Yelverton’, p. 320.

⁶⁷ Perry, ‘Yelverton’, pp. 320–323.

⁶⁸ Perry, ‘Yelverton’, p. 324; see also Clarke, ‘The Sovereign’s Vice’.

fate – hence James’s strong reaction to the problem that ‘if he Spencer, I Edward 2’, and the existence of royalist counter-interpretations of the Yelverton affair.⁶⁹

Charles I and James II

During the English Civil War, and later the Exclusion Crisis and reign of James II, Edward II’s deposition was understandably the aspect of his reign that attracted the most political commentary.⁷⁰ For some writers, he was an example that provided a legal precedent for deposition: ‘That Kings may be deposed, is cleer by the forementioned Precedent, and that Precedents are Law, will not be denied by any man that deserves to wear a bare Gown.’⁷¹ Such uses of Edward’s reign, when coupled with the technique of claiming that the current situation is worse than any historical precedent, resulted in some unusual defences of Edward: one anonymous writer contrasted him and Richard II with Charles I, excusing the two deposed kings as having been ‘truly misled by evil Councillors’ but condemning Charles as being ‘hurried on by his own inordinate desire of Arbitrary power, to rule both without and against Law’.⁷² In the same text, Edward’s love for Gaveston is validated as deep and long-lasting – ‘*Edward* chose for his companion, and chief Councillor, *Peirce Gaveston*, whom (being bred together from their childhood) he passionately loved’ – compared to Charles’s feigned and calculated love for Buckingham: ‘This King chose to be governed by the Duke of *Buckingham*, whose enemy he was till a few months before his fathers death; and it is more then doubted by honest and discreet men, that they contracted friendship, and agreed to divide the Empire upon condition of poysoning the old man’.⁷³

Texts on the opposing side instead invoked Edward’s story as a warning about the evils of deposition. A speech attributed to Thomas Merk, Bishop of Carlisle, supposedly dating from Richard II’s deposition but printed in 1642, argues: ‘As for the Depositing of King Edward the second it is no more to be urged, than the Poisoning of King John, or the Murdering of any other good and lawful Prince: We must live according to Laws, and not to Examples: And yet the kingdom was not then taken from the lawful Successour’.⁷⁴ Not only is the legal authority of precedent disavowed here, but the proposed course of action in contemporary England is shown

⁶⁹ For example, the text *Observations Concerning Sir Henrie Yelverton’s Charge* capitalizes on the story’s reversibility in order to recast Yelverton and his supporters in the mould of Edward’s rebellious bishops’ (Perry, ‘Yelverton’, p. 331).

⁷⁰ An exception is the 1648 playlet *Crafty Cromwell*, in which ‘Gaveston’ is used as shorthand for Charles I’s overmighty favourites (Potter, ‘Marlowe in the Civil War and Commonwealth’, p. 75.n. 11).

⁷¹ *People Informed*, fol. A4^v.

⁷² *People Informed*, fol. A2^v.

⁷³ *People Informed*, fol. A2^v.

⁷⁴ *Pious and Learned Speech*, fol. A4^r.

to be more drastic and less excusable than the course taken in 1327, when Edward's eldest son succeeded him.

The *Bishop of Carlisle's Speech* was reprinted during the Exclusion Crisis, as was Robert Persons's Elizabethan *Conference About the Next Succession*. The decisions to reprint these texts demonstrate awareness that Edward's story was being employed as a legitimating precedent by the Whig party. For example, John Somers's *Brief History of the Succession* (1681) focuses on the popular consensus over Edward's deposition: 'the People grew weary of his Irregular and Arbitrary Government', and, considering the 'many Instances of the King's Misgovernment, all which he had confessed, they concluded he was unworthy to Reign any longer'.⁷⁵ It is for this reason that, as Daniel Woolf observes, 'the Popish Plot and the ensuing Exclusion Crisis witnessed a revived interest in analogous situations from the past' for this reason.⁷⁶ The choice to print Elizabeth Cary's prose history of Edward II, composed during the 1620s, also represents the application of an older text to a current political crisis: although Woolf has argued that Cary's texts were fabricated as Exclusion Crisis propaganda, his claims have since been convincingly refuted.⁷⁷ Two versions of the history were printed in 1680, one in folio format (*The History of the Life, Reign, and Death of Edward II*) and one in octavo (*The History of the Most Unfortunate Prince King Edward II*). The printer's preface to the folio edition of Cary's text displays a clear politicized hermeneutic agenda despite its ostensible invitation of the readers' judgment:

Thou hast here presented to thy View the Life and Death of Edward the Second, one of the most Unfortunate Princes that ever swayed the English Scepter. What it was that made him so, is left to thee to judge, when thou hast read his Story. But certainly the Falsness of his Queen, and the Flattery of those Court-Parasites, Gaveston and the Spencers did contribute not a little thereto.⁷⁸

Within Cary's text, however, her political allusions make the most sense when considered in relation to the reign of Charles I and the dominance of Buckingham, as will be discussed in the final section of this chapter.

Following the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688, new texts emerged which also used Edward as an exemplum to show the viability of deposition. One 1689 pamphlet reprinted the articles of Edward and Richard II's depositions, emphasizing Edward's responsibility for his failings: he was 'incorrigible, without any hopes of Amendment', and cannot be excused with claims of 'evil

⁷⁵ Somers, *Brief History*, fol. B1v.

⁷⁶ Woolf, 'True Date and Authorship', p. 445.

⁷⁷ Woolf, 'True Date and Authorship', pp. 440, 446. See Skura, 'Elizabeth Cary and Edward II', pp. 80–83, and Britland, 'Kings Are But Men', p. 31, for a summary of the refutation of Woolf's arguments.

⁷⁸ Cary, *History of the Life*, fol. A2r.

counsel' since he allowed himself to be misled.⁷⁹ The text *Historical Observations Upon the Reigns of Edward I, II, III, and Richard II* – written by Robert Howard, who 'helped bring about the revolution that put William of Orange on the throne' – was printed the same year and takes a similar position.⁸⁰ Howard deploys numerous generalized references to 'men', 'Princes' and what 'commonly' occurs, encouraging his readers to apply his statements about medieval kings to current events.⁸¹ Of Edward's favourites, he writes that 'those of the loosest and most debauched Principles are aptest to feed the Humour of men, who love to be nourish'd by soft Flatteries'; but despite this oblique reference to sexual transgression, his emphasis is on the culpability of 'Princes', who themselves 'tempt the Tempters'.⁸² On the Tory side, Edward was not frequently invoked as a precedent – presumably because of concerns that his example would remind readers that an English King had previously been successfully deposed, however unjustly – but the politician and physician Robert Brady did respond to John Somers's *Brief History of the Succession* with a text titled *A True and Exact History of the Succession of the Crown of England* (1681), which called Edward's deposition 'notorious Rebellion' and 'a Design of wicked popular Barons, and not the Action, much less the Choice of the People'.⁸³

Other political allusions

In addition to the texts discussed above, which were explicitly and wholly politically motivated, many other writers unsurprisingly seized the opportunity to make political allusions as part of their accounts of Edward's reign. This is apparent in texts of all genres. In chronicles, for example, Sir Richard Baker dedicated his *Chronicle of the Kings of England* (1643) to 'the High and Mighty Prince Charles, Prince of Wales, and Duke of Cornewall: Eldest Sonne of our Sovereigne Lord, Charles, King of Great Britaine, France, and Ireland'.⁸⁴ Unsurprisingly, Baker expresses discontent at contemporary political events in his dedicatory epistle; but despite this stance, he does not take Edward's reign as an opportunity to point out the injustice of rebellion against a monarch.⁸⁵ Instead, he takes pains to justify the nobles' actions, stating after Gaveston's death that:

while the King was altogether ruled by Gaveston, and Gaveston himself was altogether irregular; the Common-wealth could have but little hope of Justice, but was sure to suffer as long as Gaveston was suffered. And this may be sufficient

⁷⁹ *True Relation*, fols. A3^v, A3^r.

⁸⁰ Vander Motten, 'Howard, Sir Robert'.

⁸¹ For example, Howard, *Historical Observations*, fol. D5^v.

⁸² Howard, *Historical Observations*, fol. D4^v.

⁸³ Brady, *True and Exact History*, fol. G2^v; see also Brady, *Great Point of Succession*.

⁸⁴ Baker, *Chronicle*, fol. A^r.

⁸⁵ Baker, *Chronicle*, fol. A^v.

to justify the Lords, that it be not interpreted to be Rebellion, which was indeed but Providence.⁸⁶

Here, the lords' execution of Gaveston in 1312 is presented as 'justice', and therefore admissible. Baker is, however, careful not to present the nobles' execution of Gaveston as 'rebellion': to do so would equate 'rebellion' with 'justice', a stance inconsistent with his contemporary royalism. Instead, he states his intention to ensure 'that it be not interpreted to be Rebellion, which was indeed but Providence' – a lexical choice that suggests divine approval had shifted from Edward's side to that of his nobles.

Baker's exoneration of Edward's nobles is at first reinforced by a lack of sympathy towards the King himself. Referring to Edward I, he writes that, 'of foure sonnes which he had by his Wife Queen Eleanor, three of them died in his owne life time, who were worthy to have out-lived him; and the fourth out-lived him, who was worthy never to have beene borne.'⁸⁷ Baker's attitude towards Edward then shifts as he begins to rely more on Geoffrey le Baker's *Chronicon* as a source around the point of the deposition. While this is a well-established trend in early modern chronicles (as detailed in Chapter 6), it is also a decision that allows Baker to present deposition as abhorrent despite his earlier tolerance of Gaveston's murder. Unlike many less well-researched chronicles, Baker was not transcribing unthinkingly from his main source (Daniel): his extensive range of sources gave him plenty of opportunities for alternative views on Edward's deposition, such as the pro-Lancastrian *Brut* or Froissart's Hainault-centric account. His choice to use le Baker as his main source for 1326–1327 may have been a choice to follow convention, but has political significance nonetheless.

In poetry and drama, the political possibilities of Edward's reign have received by far the most critical attention in relation to Marlowe's *Edward II*. As Ruth Lunney summarises, 'the action [of the play] is much concerned with issues that were the commonplaces of contemporary historical discussion', including evil counsel and the political impacts of lust, ambition and pride.⁸⁸ Critics have seen its depiction of a close relationship between a monarch and his young male favourite as either critically alluding to Elizabeth's favourites, or conversely seen Edward's ineptitude as pointing up Elizabeth's capability.⁸⁹ These apparently contradictory arguments are,

⁸⁶ Baker, *Chronicle*, fol. S4^v.

⁸⁷ Baker, *Chronicle*, fols. S2^r–S2^v.

⁸⁸ Lunney, 'Edward II and Early Playhouse Audiences', p. 32; see also Kay, 'Marlowe, *Edward II* and the Cult of Elizabeth', p. 6.

⁸⁹ For example, Curtis Bright sees the play as a 'political allegory in which Gaveston and the Spencers stand for Burghley' (*Surveillance, Militarism and Drama*, p. 134); Carole Levin points out the parallels between Gaveston's proposed erotic masque and the origins of Elizabeth's favour towards Christopher Hatton, who 'had first captured her attention by his graceful dancing in a court masque' (*Heart and Stomach*, p. 78; see also Axton, *Queen's Two Bodies*,

in my view, best reconciled by Mark Thornton Burnett, who suggests that ‘The presence of Elizabeth haunts *Edward II*, in such a way as to evoke apparent similitudes and to destabilize clear-cut resemblances’, and argues for the overall relevance to the play of the Elizabethan succession crisis.⁹⁰ Richard Hillman notes that the comparison between Edward and Henri III, analysed above in French texts, meant that Marlowe’s play would also have reminded English audiences of Henri.⁹¹ Other critics have seen Edward and Gaveston as deliberate parallels for James VI of Scotland and his favourite Esmé Stuart, Duke of Lennox; however, given the fact that (as Perry notes) ‘the popular image of James as weak, debauched, and politically irresponsible was not prevalent until after he came to England’, I would suggest that Marlowe’s play alludes less deliberately to James than it does to Elizabeth, whose relationships with her male favourites were the subject of more intense sexual rumours in England at the time Marlowe’s play was written and performed.⁹² As Andrea Stevens points out, though, while Marlowe may not have intended his characterization of Edward to allude to James, those allusions may well have been created anew by Jacobean performances of *Edward II*: ‘a play about a sodomitical King with problematic male favourites would have resonated in newly provocative ways’.⁹³

In at least three instances, however, there is hard evidence of early modern readers recognizing the political potential of Marlowe’s *Edward II*. Through close attention to the minute differences between the 1612 quarto text and its predecessors, Mathew Martin argues that ‘the editor of the 1612 quarto [...] aggressively repunctuated sections of the text, thereby foregrounding a particular reading of the play that resonates in complex ways with the Jacobean concern about royal favourites.’⁹⁴ Jeffrey Masten, on discovering a copy of the play bound with ‘a long theological tract’ on whether ‘it is permissible to execute heretics and a text on “the reign of the Turks” and other “oriental” religions’, suggests that ‘*Edward II* was thus bound [...] not as a play but as a theological-judicial text – a treatise (if you will) that explores the rightness of

p. 10; Shephard, ‘Sexual Rumours’, pp. 103–104); Ralf Hertel argues that ‘the case of the oversexed but inept King Edward might bring about a demystification of the erotic cult of Elizabeth’ (*Staging England*, p. 221); Dennis Kay sees Edward as ‘a negative exemplum, being defined negatively in terms of the well established cult of Queen Elizabeth’ (‘Marlowe, *Edward II*, and the Cult of Elizabeth’, pp. 3–4); Ronald Knowles suggests that the play engages with Catholic resistance theory in its depiction of Edward II’s deposition and Edward III’s election (‘Political Contexts’, p. 105 and *passim*). On the ways in which drama more broadly was ‘periodically [...] appropriated as an instrument of power’, see Wiggins, *Drama and the Transfer of Power*, p. 113 and *passim*.

⁹⁰ Burnett, ‘*Edward II* and Elizabethan Politics’, pp. 93–94.

⁹¹ Hillman, *Shakespeare, Marlowe and the Politics of France*, p. 73; see also Stewart, who argues specifically that the *Histoire Tragique* ‘shapes and informs Marlowe’s play’ (‘Edoüard et Gaverston’, p. 110).

⁹² Perry, ‘Politics of Access’, p. 1056; for parallels between Edward and James, see Hopkins, ‘Marlowe and the Succession’, p. 184 and ‘Englishmen Abroad’, pp. 336–337; Kewes, ‘Marlowe, History and Politics’, p. 142; Normand, ‘What Passions?’

⁹³ Stevens, ‘*Edward II*: A Stage History’, p. 47.

⁹⁴ Martin, ‘Accidents Happen’, p. 101.

Edward's torture and horrific death'.⁹⁵ Siobhan Keenan, meanwhile, has called attention to the summary of the play written by the magistrate John Newdigate.⁹⁶ Newdigate's summary is dated 14 May 1601, three months after the Earl of Essex's failed attempt to overthrow Elizabeth, and it seems clear that his choice to read, digest, and summarize the play was based on its 'newly topical' nature: as well as Marlowe's play, Newdigate's reading material for April and May 1601 included an unspecified history of Edward, Holinshed's account of Richard II's reign, and others 'known for being active in shaping a commonwealth and/or its laws'.⁹⁷ As Keenan argues, 'this suggests that Newdigate was interested in Marlowe's history of Edward II not simply as literature or entertainment but as a work with topical lessons to teach about government'.⁹⁸ Unsurprisingly, his summary 'focuses more on the downfall of Edward and Mortimer than on the tragedy of Piers Gaveston'. Keenan rightly suggests that this is 'because their stories of misused and usurped power were more topical in the aftermath of the Essex rebellion and/or because he thought their tales offered the more significant moral lessons for contemporary readers, demonstrating the dangers of excessive or misdirected passion and ambition, respectively'.⁹⁹ To this I would add the fact that neither Marlowe nor his printer (who did not mention Gaveston in the title of the play) encourages his readers to see the play as Gaveston's tragedy, and nor is this common in early modern accounts: Michael Drayton's verse tragedy of Gaveston, *Peirs Gaveston*, is an anomaly compared to the numerous treatments of Edward's fall as tragic and to the popularity of the tragedy of Mortimer found in the *Mirror for Magistrates* (first printed 1559)

In light of this sustained critical attention, although Marlowe is far from being the writer who draws most attention to the contemporary political relevance of Edward's reign, it is relevant to make a few observations. Although modern criticism has substantially complicated Irving Ribner's argument that 'The most common political doctrine proclaimed' in early modern English history plays is 'that of the absolute authority of the King, his responsibility to God alone for his deeds, and the sinfulness of any rebellion against him, no matter what the provocation', there are certainly aspects of *Edward II* that reinforce 'the sinfulness of any rebellion against' the monarch, or at least betray Marlowe's awareness that dramatizing deposition is a politically risky act.¹⁰⁰ Edward's nobles are initially not referred to as 'rebels', but this word is first deployed by Gaveston after his capture, and by Edward after Gaveston's

⁹⁵ Masten, 'Bound for Germany', 17–19.

⁹⁶ Keenan, 'Reading Marlowe's *Edward II*'.

⁹⁷ Keenan, 'Reading Marlowe's *Edward II*', pp. 454–455.

⁹⁸ Keenan, 'Reading Marlowe's *Edward II*', p. 455.

⁹⁹ Keenan, 'Reading Marlowe's *Edward II*', p. 457.

¹⁰⁰ Ribner, *English History Play*, p. 309. For explicit counter-arguments, see, for example, Brumble, 'Personal, Paternal and Kingly Control'; Knowles, 'Political Contexts'; Weil, *Christopher Marlowe*, p. 82.

murder.¹⁰¹ Similarly, Edward's favourites are more frequently 'flatterers' and less frequently 'minions' as the play progresses. Perhaps most interestingly, no specific reasons are adduced for Edward's deposition: his complaint, 'Ah, Leicester, weigh how hardly I can brook / To lose my crown and kingdom without cause' is arguably justified in the face of Marlowe's decision to refrain from relating legal reasons for the deposition of a monarch.¹⁰² This also represents a departure from Marlowe's sources – as Forker notes, 'Edward's failure of self-knowledge here is notable, especially considering Holinshed's statement that "he knew he was false into this miserie through his owne offenses"' – which further justifies explaining it in terms of the political sensitivity of representing deposition.¹⁰³ Despite this, however, 'the absolute authority of the King' is frequently called into question. As shown in Chapter 4, Marlowe's Edward is frequently distracted from his royal duties by his favourites and his emotions towards them. In addition to this, Isabella is given a speech that explicitly censures Edward as a 'Misgoverned King', 'Whose looseness hath betray'd thy land to spoil' and who is the cause of civil war.¹⁰⁴ But Isabella's speech is cut short, a device which reveals Mortimer's control over her but which perhaps also functions to prevent her from going so far as to advocate deposition.

Drayton, too, exercises caution concerning the reasons for Edward's deposition. As Kathleen Tillotson notes, he avoided narrating Richard II's deposition altogether in his 1597 collection of verse letters, *Englands Heroicall Epistles* (despite featuring a pair of letters between Richard and his wife Isabel), and his earliest representation of Edward's deposition (in the epic *Mortimeriados*, first printed 1596) is couched 'in emotional and not argumentative terms, with no account of the procedure and no speech from those responsible'.¹⁰⁵ His second version of this scene in the revised version of *Mortimeriados*, *The Barrons Wars in the Raigne of Edward the Second* (1603), does include a short justificatory speech from Adam Orleton, the Bishop of Hereford – an approach convincingly read by Jean R. Brink as 'subversive' in its 'refusal to take sides' – but this is followed by a cautionary stanza.¹⁰⁶ The tone of this stanza is most forceful in Drayton's further revision of *The Barons Warres* for his 1619 *Poems*:

Much more he spake; but faine would I be short,
To this intent a Speech delivering;
Nor may I be too curious to report,
What toucheth the deposing of a king:
Wherefore I warne thee Muse, not to exhort

¹⁰¹ Marlowe, *Edward II*, II.v.6, III.i.101.

¹⁰² Marlowe, *Edward II*, V.i.51–52.

¹⁰³ Marlowe, *Edward II*, V.i.52n.

¹⁰⁴ Marlowe, *Edward II*, IV.iv.9–11.

¹⁰⁵ Tillotson, 'Drayton and Richard II'; see also Brink, *Michael Drayton Revisited*, pp. 44–47.

¹⁰⁶ Brink, *Michael Drayton Revisited*, p. 69.

The after-Times to this forbidden thing,
 By Reasons for it, by the Bishop layd,
 Or from my feeling what he might have sayd.¹⁰⁷

Drayton's anxiety here is evident: he is concerned to stress that in depicting Edward's deposition, he is not attempting to 'exhort / The after-Times' to follow in the footsteps of the fourteenth-century nobles.¹⁰⁸ His treatment of Edward's death is similar, condemning his murderers in part for setting a precedent for regicide: Edward begs them, 'O be not Authors of so vile an Act, / [...] Which after-Time with Horror shall distract, / When Fame shall tell it, how you kil'd a King'. Future criminals, he says, will be emboldened by this: 'they shall count their Wickedness scarce sinne, / Compar'd to that, which done by you hath bin.'¹⁰⁹ This treatment is similar to Elizabeth Cary's, who exclaims following her account of the murder that 'It had been happy if such a Villany had never gain'd knowledge or imitation in the World: since it came to be entertain'd as a necessary servant of State, no man that runs in opposition, or stands in the way of Greatness, is almost secure in his own house, or among his Friends or Servants.'¹¹⁰ In addition to these cautious treatments of the events of Edward's life, Kelly Quinn argues that 'Drayton's 1619 revisions to [*The Legend of Pierce Gaveston*, itself a revised version of *Peirs Gaveston*] seem designed to prune resemblances to James I' – while noting, crucially, that 'Latter-day revisions do not necessarily mean [...] that resemblances were intentional'.¹¹¹

The revisions made by Francis Hubert to his narrative poem on Edward's reign demonstrate a similar awareness of his poem's political sensitivity, and of the fact that its relevance to contemporary politics may have increased since it was written. Written in the 1590s, the poem initially circulated only in manuscript because it was (in the words of Lawrence Chapman, who printed an authorized version of the poem in 1629) 'by supreamest Authoritie forbidden to bee printed', presumably owing to the seditious potential of Edward's story during the Elizabethan succession crisis.¹¹² Revised versions, which also circulated in manuscript, refer to James as monarch rather than to Elizabeth. When one of these versions was printed without Hubert's authorization in 1628, he panicked and hastily revised it, bringing out an authorized version in 1629. The preface to the 1629 edition stresses that it is not a topical Jacobean or Caroline composition ('It was conceived and borne in Queene Elizabeths time, but grew to more

¹⁰⁷ Drayton, *Barons Warres*, 5.9, ll. 65–72.

¹⁰⁸ See Brink, *Michael Drayton Revisited*, pp. 37, 67.

¹⁰⁹ Drayton, *Barons Warres*, 5.62, ll. 498–496.

¹¹⁰ Cary, *History of the Life*, fols. 2Q2^r–2Q2^v.

¹¹¹ Quinn, 'Mastering Complaint', p. 446; on the didacticism of Drayton's Gaveston poems, see Brink, *Michael Drayton Revisited*, p. 108.

¹¹² Hubert, *Historie*, p. 287. David Wootton appears to be unaware of this early date of composition, citing Hubert's poem as 'Anon' and claiming on the basis of the 1628 printed version that it was 'obviously written with Buckingham in mind' ('Francis Bacon: Your Flexible Friend', p. 202.n. 6).

maturitie in King JAMES's'), and announces Hubert's intention 'to vindicate both It and my Selfe from those grosse and sencelesse Errours wherewith that false Bastard [i.e. the 1628 edition] was too foulie deformed'.¹¹³ Yet while some revisions appear aimed at reducing the poem's potentially inflammatory content (the derogatory description of Gaveston as 'French by his birth and french by his behaviour' is cut, presumably to avoid insulting Charles I's French queen) and some at stressing that Edward's transgressions should not be emulated (Hubert adds a section entitled 'Noli Peccare', comprising seven stanzas each offering a different reason to 'Forbeare to Sinne'), others move to foreground the poem's applicability to contemporary politics.¹¹⁴ As Perry shows, 'The additions shift the focus of the King's narrative from his own fall to the execution of the Spencers and this in turn provides an occasion to meditate upon the mutability of fortune for royal favourites... Where the Elizabethan version of the poem tends to gloss the story by blaming flattery or wicked counsel for the problems that beset monarchy, Jacobean additions tend to shift the focus more directly onto the problematics of royal character'.¹¹⁵

Hubert's opening stanzas, present in both the 1628 and 1629 versions, set out the way in which he expects his poem to be read:

In which Discourse, if I shall hap to touch
 Those faults, that in our time are frequent growne,
 Let not the gauld offender, winch or grudge:
 For I intend a private wrong to none:
 Onely I would have those same errours knowne;
 By which the State, did then to ruine runne,
 That (warn'd by theirs) our age like sins might shun.
 [...]
 And thou (great King) that now dost weild our State,
 Building on that, which former times did square,
 Oh let it not be thought to derogate
 From thy perfections, (admirable rare)
 If I some errors of these times declare:
 Sure never State was so precisely good,
 But faults have scap'd, which could not be withstood.¹¹⁶

Edward's reign, then, functions as a warning to the present age, its ruler, and his favourites; and any criticism of Charles is to be taken as constructive, not seditious. Having set out this disclaimer, Hubert proceeds to draw out numerous general, didactic statements from Edward's example. Following his account of the developing friendship and love between the young

¹¹³ Hubert, *Historie*, p. 2.

¹¹⁴ Hubert, *Historie*, pp. 170–171.

¹¹⁵ Perry, *Literature and Favoritism*, p. 212.

¹¹⁶ Hubert, *Deplorable Life*, stanzas 4–6.

Edward and Gaveston, in a possible reference to James's foolishness in allowing his son to become friends with the Duke of Buckingham, he admonishes:

Princes, that doe intend your Heires such good,
As shall enable them for to succede,
And no way to disparage their high blood:
Oh, let it be your most respective heed,
To sow their tender yeares with vertues seede.¹¹⁷

Similarly, he extrapolates lessons from Edward's preference for young favourites – 'oh the quiet of that happy land, / Where aged Nestors beare the chiefest sway' – and, building on the conflation of Gaveston with anti-courtier sentiment discussed in Chapter 4, uses him as an example to demonstrate that fashionable courtiers should not be trusted ('Therefore let kings preferre them that are plaine').¹¹⁸ Young monarchs, he claims, need the advice of older counsellors due to their innate tendency to sin: 'Youth apt to stray, is easily led awry, / We fall by Nature, what needes flattery'.¹¹⁹ While none of these generalized statements address contemporary issues directly, it is precisely their lack of specificity that invites the reader to apply the lessons of Edward's reign to other political situations, as early modern readers of history were in any case disposed to do.

Hubert shares both his generalized didacticism and his politicized revision process with Elizabeth Cary. While Cary's history of Edward II was finally printed in the 1680s because of its relevance to the Exclusion Crisis (with the cuts to the octavo version probably having been made to emphasize that relevance), it was composed because of the story's relevance to the 1620s, 'with a French-born Queen, England in conflict with France, the King at odds with his Parliament and a powerful favourite in the form of the Duke of Buckingham'.¹²⁰ Cary reworked her history in manuscript, which Karen Britland shows was occasioned by a desire 'to intervene in the urgent debates of the 1620s about the limits of monarchical authority and the position of royal favourites [...] the revised version of the history is interesting for its introduction of more precise technical terms concerned with absolutist rule'.¹²¹ Like Hubert, she frequently makes generalized statements on 'Princes', to the extent that Janet Starner-Wright and Susan Fitzmaurice argue, 'Cary's idea of history emphasizes a moral or didactic function rather than the transmission of facts'.¹²² In addition, as Britland argues, Cary's use of the historic present

¹¹⁷ Hubert, *Deplorable Life*, stanza 33.

¹¹⁸ Hubert, *Deplorable Life*, stanzas 158, 81.

¹¹⁹ Hubert, *Deplorable Life*, stanza 73.

¹²⁰ Skura, 'Elizabeth Cary and Edward II', p. 83; see also Britland, 'Kings Are But Men', pp. 34–42; Perry, *Literature and Favoritism*, p. 188.

¹²¹ Britland, 'Kings Are But Men', p. 48.

¹²² Starner-Wright and Fitzmaurice, 'Shaping a Drama Out of a History', p. 80.

arguably foregrounds the contemporary relevance of the story she recounts.¹²³ Her focus is on the management of favourites. She argues against the raising of low-born favourites ('Persons of meaner condition and birth exalted above proportion, as it taxeth the Kings Judgment, impaireth both his safety and Honour') and cautions against singular attachments ('Neither is it proper, that the principal Strengths and Dignities should be committed to the care and fidelity of one man onely'), refusing to absolve the monarch of responsibility for his favourite's transgressions.¹²⁴ However, she ultimately refrains from explicitly concluding that Edward's deposition was justified, calling it 'no more than a mere Politick Treason, not more dangerous in the Act than in the Example', and lamenting that it provided a precedent for subsequent depositions: 'in his [Edward's] consenting [to his deposition] with a dangerous example to his Successours, he had both their Power and his own Guilt made evident to Posterity; which might have made the practice more frequent and familiar'.¹²⁵ As observed in Chapter 4, this is a common feature of early modern accounts of Edward's reign: with the exception of those whose specific purpose is to encourage the deposition of the current monarch, they engage in sustained criticism of Edward's actions but refuse to condone his deposition.

The incorporation of Edward into the *Mirror for Magistrates* tradition also warrants attention here. As Lily B. Campbell's work has shown, the *Mirror* self-consciously foregrounds its political relevance: William Baldwin's preface 'To the nobilitye and all other in office' makes clear that 'the tragedies of the *Mirror* were chosen for their usefulness in teaching political truth, rather than for their historical importance'.¹²⁶ However, Richard Niccols's 1610 revival of the *Mirror*, titled *A Winter Nights Vision* – the first *Mirror* text to include Edward II – fits uneasily into this tradition, as Paul Budra explains:

Niccols dedicated his edition to Lord Charles Howard, the Earl of Nottingham, with an introductory verse that was a banal and sycophantic plea for patronage [...] Instead of displaying a critical mirror to a flawed magistrate, Niccols begs his favour. He presumed that his subject material would not be read as reflecting upon its titular reader, that the material was safe, apolitical, and quaint [...] Howard was not a magistrate to be swayed by the weight of exempla; he was a nobleman to be entertained with a collection of reassuringly familiar biographies that culminated in a comic vision of the reign of Elizabeth [the poem 'Englands Eliza'].¹²⁷

¹²³ Britland, 'Kings Are But Men', p. 38.

¹²⁴ Cary, *History of the Life*, fols. 2M^v–2N^r.

¹²⁵ Cary, *History of the Life*, fol. 2L2^v.

¹²⁶ *Mirror for Magistrates*, pp. 54, 65–66; see also Campbell, 'Tudor Conceptions', pp. 291–292; Zocca, *Elizabethan Narrative Poetry*, p. 58.

¹²⁷ Budra, *De Casibus Tradition* pp. 32–33.

In addition, Budra argues that the dream vision device with which Niccols chose to open the poem ‘identified what followed as poetry, not history’.¹²⁸ Budra’s opposition here is between entertainment and a useful fund of examples: Niccols’s *Mirror* was newly framed as the former, rather than the latter. Budra suggests that it is perhaps as a result of this move away from a ‘critical mirror’ (which made it ill-suited to ‘a class that read history specifically for its practical political lessons’) that *A Winter Nights Vision* was not a commercial success.¹²⁹

Niccols was no stranger to political allusions and criticism in poetry: several of his other poems are specifically anti-court. ‘The Beggars Ape’ (1627), whose animal characters correspond to specific courtiers, condemns the court as a place where ‘Onely they rise that can by guilefull wit / Serve their owne turne with gainefull benefit’; and ‘The Cuckow’ condemns sexual transgression and fashionable dress at ‘the bower of blisse’, an allegory for Westminster.¹³⁰ Moreover, as Glyn Pursglove points out, ‘To write in praise of Elizabeth was, for [Niccols] and for others, very frequently a means of articulating implicit criticism of James and his court’¹³¹ – an observation which seems relevant to *A Winter Nights Vision*, which concludes with the panegyric ‘Englands Eliza’. His poem on Edward contains elements of the condemnation of sexually transgressive courtiers found in ‘The Cuckow’: describing Gaveston, he writes ‘In Court the leprous spots of his delights / Unto the Palace wals so fast do cleave’.¹³² However, Niccols takes no clear position on the validity of resistance to royal authority. It would be ‘base’, he suggests, for Edward to ‘submit’ to his subjects’ will, and the executions of his nobles are necessitated by their rebellious behaviour: ‘O age infortunate, when subjects pride / Did force their Sovereigne to such deeds of woe’.¹³³ Later, however, Niccols condemns Edward for this decision:

Imprudent Prince, since rage did lift thy hand
To lop the pillers of thy kingdome downe,
On whose supportfull powers thy State should stand;
Looke for a ruthlesse ruine of thy crowne.¹³⁴

As a result, the poem has no clear didactic message, aside from a few generalized pronouncements about flattery and ‘dissimulation’ which could be read as oblique hints to James VI and I about the evils of relying on favourites’ counsel.¹³⁵ Niccols’s changes to earlier *Mirror*

¹²⁸ Budra, *De Casibus Tradition*, p. 35.

¹²⁹ Budra, *De Casibus Tradition*, pp. 37–38.

¹³⁰ Niccols, *Selected Poems*, pp. 6–7, 10; Niccols, *Beggars Ape*, fol. B2^v.

¹³¹ Niccols, *Selected Poems*, p. 6.

¹³² Niccols, *Mirour*, fol. 3A2^v.

¹³³ Niccols, *Mirour*, fol. 3A7^r.

¹³⁴ Niccols, *Mirour*, fol. 3A7^r.

¹³⁵ Niccols, *Mirour*, fols. 2Z8^r–2Z8^v.

poems can also be seen as reducing their didacticism. Several cuts are made to the poem on Richard II, removing such phrases as ‘Let Princes therfore vertuous life embrace / That wilfull pleasures cause them not to blunder’ and ‘See princes, see the power wherof we boste / Whome most we truste, at nede do us betray, / Through whose false faith my land and life I lost’.¹³⁶ It seems likely that these omissions are primarily related to versification rather than political content, since Niccols regularizes the original ten-line stanzas to eight lines. However, since the final couplet of the original stanzas tends to extrapolate a didactic political message from the events relating in the preceding lines, this regularization does affect the poem’s political tone, and contributes to the move away from a ‘critical mirror’ that Budra has identified.

Conclusion

The above analysis has suggested agreement among early modern writers regarding certain lessons to be drawn from Edward’s reign, all of which concern favourites. Edward is almost universally criticized for having chosen young favourites, raised their social status disproportionately, and relied excessively on their advice over that of others. It has also demonstrated the continuing relevance of Edward’s story to contemporary political issues at multiple points during the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As the first English King to be deposed, he was a vital precedent for any subsequent arguments about deposition or succession, whether his example was to be avoided or emulated. And his reputation for sexual transgression – which was historiographically agreed, following Marlowe, to have involved sexual and romantic relationships with his favourites – also gave his story unique potential as a political exemplum, particularly during the reigns of Elizabeth I and James VI and I when similar rumours were circulating.

Recognition of these multiple facets of political resonance is central to explaining and contextualizing the ‘heightened interest in Edward II’s story during the late Elizabethan and Jacobean periods’ identified by Kirk Melnikoff.¹³⁷ Melnikoff suggests that this ‘heightened interest’ derived in part from ‘a larger cultural obsession with historical narratives of civil war and deposition’. In addition, however, this chapter has demonstrated a persistent ‘cultural obsession’ with Edward’s story as a ‘historical narrative’ of favourites with excessive political power and intimate access to the monarch. This is particularly applicable to texts of the period that Melnikoff cites. As such, this ‘heightened interest in Edward II’s story’ arguably also derived

¹³⁶ Compare ‘[Tragedy 5]’, *Mirror for Magistrates*, pp. 111–118 (ll. 9–10), to Niccols, *Mirour*, fol. X3^r; and ‘[Tragedy 5]’, ll. 78–80, to Niccols, *Mirour*, fol. X3^v.

¹³⁷ Melnikoff, ‘Introduction’, p. 5; see also Callaghan, ‘Terms of Gender’, pp. 281–282; Ribner, ‘*Edward II* and the Tudor History Play’, pp. 244–245.

from its heightened political relevance to issues of favouritism. Writers across genres, meanwhile, worked to maintain that relevance through contemporary political allusions.

But treating Edward's story as a political exemplum was not without its dangers. Early modern writers clearly recognized the inescapable specific circumstances of Edward's reign: his story connoted deposition whether any given writer wanted it to or not, meaning that those writers who were not using it to support a pro-deposition argument still had to negotiate its seditious potential. In light of this, it seems clear that the ambivalence and polyvocality of early modern historiography discussed in the previous chapter is a central factor in enabling the diversity of political uses of Edward's story that I have analysed here. The fact that both pro- and anti-Edward arguments coexist in chronicles enabled polemical writers from any party to use Edward's reign as a supporting argument – even when their direct opponents were using it too. Edward's story was not a universal metonym for 'deposition is viable'; exhortations to remember his example could and did have opposite meanings in different contexts, and arguments about the interpretation of historical events were played out in the pages of pamphlets. As such, the history of Edward and his favourites as political exempla is an important reminder that the early modern 'use of history' doctrine did not inevitably result in a consensus over the didactic significations of each historical figure or event. History was a fund of examples, but the meaning examples were not pre-emptively solidified: the hermeneutic agency of individual writers in drawing out the implications of each historical example, and working to frame them as endorsing a particular political course of action, was an essential part of the process that made history useful.

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Chapter 6 – ‘No escape now from a life full of suffering’: Edward II’s Sensational Fall

Abstract

This chapter analyses accounts of Edward’s deposition and his subsequent imprisonment. I argue that early modern chroniclers exercised creative agency in selecting their sources for this period of Edward’s life, prioritising engaging anecdotes, emotionally compelling detail, and narrativity. In particular, they selected sources which facilitated the construction of Edward II’s reign as a *de casibus* narrative: a popular narrative structure characterized by the image of an ever-rotating ‘wheel of fortune’. Analysis of narratives of Edward II’s fall thereby enables us to appreciate the literary motivations of early modern chroniclers, and the way these motivations shaped their research process as well as their writing.

Keywords

Chronicles, *De casibus*, deposition, Fortune, Geoffrey le Baker, imprisonment

Introduction

In addition to the trend towards sensationalized, emotionally engaging narratives of Edward’s reign observed in previous chapters – epitomized in particular by the increasing consensus concerning the sexual nature of Edward’s transgressions, and the increasing romanticization of his relationships with his favourites – numerous vivid, sensational, circumstantial details and anecdotes cluster around accounts of Edward’s treatment during and after his deposition. As well as creating an exciting narrative, these details function to elicit sympathy for Edward – resulting in a demonstrable shift in authorial tone around the point of his capture by Isabella and Mortimer’s allies, from condemnation of Edward’s own actions to condemnation of his deponents and keepers. These details overwhelmingly originate in one text: the extraordinarily, atypically sympathetic account of Geoffrey le Baker’s *Chronicon*. Composed in Latin at some point during the period 1347–1360, and based (le Baker claims) on the eyewitness testimony of his patron, Sir Thomas de la More, the *Chronicon* is a narrative crafted to inspire sympathy for Edward’s suffering. In its presentation of Edward as a proto-martyr, it is very much in step with its political context: at the time le Baker was writing, Edward III was engaged in an attempt to have his father canonized. In its demonization of Adam Orleton, Bishop of Hereford, and of Edward’s wife Isabella, the *Chronicon* also appears to be designed to exonerate

de la More (who attended Edward's deposition) and possibly also to clarify the innocence of Edward III himself.

Although le Baker's *Chronicon* was not printed until 1603, the late sixteenth-century chroniclers Raphael Holinshed and John Stow had access to the text in manuscript, and it clearly captured their imaginations.¹ Through their popular texts, which used le Baker as a major source, details such as Edward's grief-stricken reaction to his deposition and his various ill-treatments at the hands of his keepers entered the common currency of the retelling of his narrative in both short and long chronicles, and in the poetry and drama they influenced. Importantly, however, neither Stow nor Holinshed used le Baker as their sole source for Edward's reign. Instead, both writers followed other sources up to the point of Edward's deposition, at which point they switched to relying almost exclusively on le Baker. These decisions can partly be attributed to scholarly rigour: both Holinshed and Stow produced meticulously researched texts based on multiple sources, and Holinshed in particular foregrounds many areas of historiographical debate.² However, they should also be considered decisions motivated by these writers' consideration of their readers in two senses.

Firstly, le Baker's account of Edward's deposition and its aftermath provided a number of easily extractable anecdotes: from the forced shaving of Edward's beard, to the attempts to kill him with noise and strong smells, to the ambiguous note sent to his keepers which could be interpreted as an order to kill him or an order to avoid it, the *Chronicon* was a mine of exciting and memorable details. As Gransden writes, le Baker clearly 'loved good stories'.³ By not relying on le Baker for the whole of their accounts of Edward's reign, Stow and Holinshed preserved sensational details that the *Chronicon* omits – most notably Edward's sexual transgressions – while making use of sensational details unique to it, enabling them to create the most exciting accounts possible.

Secondly, and more importantly, switching to reliance on le Baker at the point of Edward's deposition enabled both writers to craft a more compelling narrative structure which aligned Edward's reign with *de casibus* literature: a narrative mode popular in late medieval and early modern Europe, which originated with Boccaccio's *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium*. Following Boccaccio's example, *de casibus* narratives recounted the lives of people who ascended Fortune's

¹ On Stow's sharing of manuscripts, see Beer, *Tudor England Observed*, pp. 11–15.

² See, for example, the accounts of Andrew Harclay's peace treaty with Scotland and of Isabella's reasons for remaining in France in 1325–1326 [Holinshed, *Chronicles* (1587), VI, section 10/pp. 333, 336]. On the historiographical polyvocality of Holinshed's *Chronicles* more broadly, see Patterson, *Reading Holinshed's Chronicles*. On Samuel Daniel's similar approach to using multiple sources, see Godschalk, 'Daniel's *History*', pp. 54–57.

³ Gransden, *Historical Writing*, II, p. 78.

wheel to a high social status – with accompanying happiness, success, and wealth – before a catastrophic fall. This mode of literature was exemplified in late medieval and early modern England by John Lydgate’s *Fall of Princes* (a translation of Boccaccio written over the period c. 1431–1439) and the *Mirror for Magistrates* texts: a series of collections of narrative poems assembled and developed by a loose syndicate of writers (initially led by the printer William Baldwin) and first printed in 1559. As Paul Budra observes, these *de casibus* collections and others like them had ‘the purpose of demonstrating by the weight of the accumulated example that a falling pattern is typical of the lives of great persons’.⁴

By rejecting le Baker’s sympathetic account of Edward’s life during his reign, and only following his narrative from the point of Edward’s deposition onwards, Stow and Holinshed could shape their accounts into a *de casibus* structure: they could condemn Edward for his transgressions as he rose towards the top of Fortune’s wheel, then create a sympathetic narrative of his fall. They could thereby afford their readers the ‘pleasure of outrage’ at Edward’s transgressive behaviour and of emotional engagement with his suffering, as well as the pleasure of pattern recognition and of anticipating a narrative trajectory they knew well – and, following Budra’s point about ‘the weight of the accumulated example’ and the specific association of *de casibus* narratives with royalty, that they already expected for a royal figure.⁵ The choice of Stow and Holinshed to switch source texts at this point also, of course, impacted subsequent narratives; notably, the ‘equivocal’ perspective and ‘switch[es] of allegiance’ that many critics have observed in Marlowe’s *Edward II* can be partly attributed to the shift of sympathies that Marlowe found in his two principal sources.⁶

The significant impact of le Baker’s sensational account of Edward II’s fall – both in terms of its set-piece anecdotes, and in terms of the way it facilitated a *de casibus* narrative structure – is revealing of the processes and priorities that shaped the construction of historical narratives in early modern England. The work of writers to craft their historical accounts into sensational narratives with a *de casibus* trajectory is central to what I call the *literary transformation* of the narrative of Edward II: the emphasis and foregrounding of details which contribute to an exciting, enjoyably readable narrative, often but not always at the expense of verifiable historical

⁴ Budra, *De Casibus Tradition*, p. 18; see also Zocca, *Elizabethan Narrative Poetry*, p. 6; Axton, *Queen’s Two Bodies*, p. 107.

⁵ Sirluck, ‘Marlowe’s *Edward II* and the Pleasure of Outrage’; Budra, *De Casibus Tradition*, pp. xiii, 85–87, 92; Patch, *Goddess Fortuna*, pp. 59–60, 164–166; Waith, ‘Shadow of Action’, p. 61.

⁶ Melnikoff, ‘Introduction’, p. 1; Bartels, *Spectacles of Strangeness*, p. 148. On the moral/emotional structure and perspective of Marlowe’s *Edward II*, see also Anderson, *Performing Trauma*, p. 96; Bevington, ‘*Mankind*’ to Marlowe, p. 235; Sales, *Christopher Marlowe*, p. 132; Berdan, ‘*Edward IP*’, p. 200); Deats, ‘Marlowe’s Interrogative Drama’, p. 108; Kocher, *Christopher Marlowe*, p. 207; Donno, ‘“Admiration” and “Commiseration”’, p. 376; Ribner, ‘*Edward II* and the Tudor History Play’, p. 246.

fact. The romanticization of Edward and Gaveston's relationship and the popularity of Ranulf Higden's description of Edward's character, as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, are examples of this; the latter is evidence that, as John Taylor writes, 'Higden knew how to amuse as well as how to instruct'.⁷ As Daniel Woolf's research indicates, early modern readers were attracted to these sensational and emotional details: a late seventeenth-century reader of various chronicles highlighted points such as Edward's construction of a chantry for Gaveston's soul and his penetrative murder, as well as similar details outside of Edward's reign such as Eleanor Cobham's sexual transgressions.⁸ In this chapter, I argue that by reading narratives of Edward II and examining how accounts of his fall were constructed, we can observe early modern writers' awareness of their readers' desires and priorities in the form and content of their historical accounts. This work can be observed across genres, and it prompts us – as I will argue, in this chapter and in the following one – to rethink our understanding of generic demands and boundaries in relation to chronicles, and to consider how productive a literary reassessment of them might be.

Deposition

Adam Murimuth's *Continuatio Chronicarum* (written in Latin around 1337, and based on Murimuth's own observations as a diplomat in Edward II's service) depicts Edward's reaction to his deposition as grief-stricken. Murimuth describes how Edward, 'with tears and lamentations, responded [to the news of his deposition] that he felt much pain because he deserved thus towards the people of his realm' (*Quibus auditus, ipse cum fletu et ejulatu respondit quod ipse multum doluit de eo quod sic demeruit erga populum sui regni*).⁹ Geoffrey le Baker subsequently used Murimuth's text as a source, combining it with what he claimed was the eyewitness testimony of his patron Thomas de la More to create a highly emotional account. The Bishops of Winchester and Lincoln (the former attended by de la More) travel ahead of the deposition party and, along with the Earl of Leicester, cajole Edward with promises of honourable treatment, assertions that 'reject[ing] his temporal kingdom for the peace of his subjects' 'would be greatly to [his] credit with God', and threats to disinherit his sons if he does not comply. Edward responds with a mixture of resignation and heartbreak:

By these and other bullying threats and promises the pious heart of the King was won over, and, not without sobs, tears, and sighs, he climbed down and took the bishops' advice. Knowing that a good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep,

⁷ Taylor, *Universal Chronicle*, p. 46.

⁸ Woolf, *Reading History*, pp. 90–92.

⁹ Murimuth, *Continuatio Chronicarum*, p. 51.

he was more ready to end his life as a follower of Christ than to look with the eyes of a living body upon the disinheritance of his sons or a lengthy civil war in his kingdom.

Finally that detestable envoy, Adam Orleton of Hereford, brought to the secret quarters of the King the other envoys, whom he placed in order in the King's chamber according to their rank, while keeping for himself with everyone's permission the part which he had laid claim to long ago. At length his royal majesty wearing a black gown came out of his inner chamber and showed himself to his servants, but then, being conscious of the reason for which they had come, in the shock of sorrow he lost his wits and collapsed in a heap on the floor. The Earl of Leicester and the Bishop of Winchester rushed to his aid and just managed to lift up the semi-conscious King. When he had somehow recovered his wits and his strength as before, Adam of Hereford addressed him. With remarkable effrontery he showed no confusion in dealing with the mind of the King and explaining to him why the envoys had come, even though he believed that the King hated him above all other men. Then the Bishop of Hereford added that the King should resign his crown to his firstborn son. If he did not do this, he would be forced after his own dethronement to endure the sight of the nobles choosing as King the man they thought fitter to govern the land. After hearing this, the King with tears and lamentations replied that he was deeply sorry that the people of his kingdom had been so antagonised by him that they were tired of his rule, but finally he did also add that he was very pleased that his son was so acceptable to the people that they wished to have him for their King.¹⁰

Le Baker's account bears quoting at length in order to demonstrate his consistently melodramatic representation of Edward's emotional reaction to his deposition. His performative grief – expressed through numerous types of audible lamentation, mourning dress (*togam nigram induta*) and collapse (*corruit*) – functions simultaneously to elicit sympathy from the reader and to portray Orleton as cruel in his 'effrontery' (*impudencia*) and lack of compassion.¹¹ In addition, le Baker highlights Edward's forbearance in the face of grief through the word 'somehow' (*utcumque*) and by prefixing the mention of his 'sobs, tears and sighs' (*singultibus, lacrimis et suspiriis*) with the phrase 'not without' (*non sine*), presenting these emotional factors as setbacks to be overcome. This forbearance and selflessness prompts le Baker to compare Edward to the 'good shepherd' Christ, one of many similar allusions in le Baker's text which will be discussed more fully below, as well as in Chapter 7 with reference to Edward's death.

These details of Edward fainting, lamenting, and wearing mourning robes became standard attributes of the deposition scene in early modern texts.¹² Their appearance in

¹⁰ Le Baker, *Chronicle* (2012), pp. 26–27, trans. by Preest.

¹¹ For full Latin quotation, see le Baker, *Chronicon* (1889), pp. 27–28.

¹² For fainting, see, for example, Meriton, *Anglorum Gesta*, fol. I10^r; van den Bos, *Florus Anglicus*, fol. G1^v; Drayton, *Barons Warres*, 5.11, l. 82; Baker, *Chronicle*, fol. U1^r. For lamentation, see, for example, Hardyng, *Chronicle*, fol. Y7^r; Vergil, *Anglica Historia*, chap. 18; Stow, *Chronicles*, fol. Y7^v; Holinshed, *Chronicles* (1587), VI, section 10/p. 340;

Marlowe's *Edward II* (derived directly from Holinshed and Stow) was both a consequence of and a contributing factor towards their widespread popularity. As in le Baker, Marlowe's Edward performatively acts out his loss of kingship and his all-consuming grief from the moment he is arrested at Neath Abbey. The party who arrive to arrest Edward and his favourites encounter a tableau of despair, with Edward slumped in the lap of the Abbot – 'the emblematic moment of Edward's defeat' – before Edward, in the words of Forker's stage direction, 'throws off his disguise' in a theatrical reveal.¹³ By doing so, he commands the attention of both his captors and the audience, manipulating the scene to his advantage as best he can despite his loss of power: in Bruce R. Smith's words, 'This scene is typical of how Edward stage-manages his downfall with such stunning effect.'¹⁴

Marlowe's deposition scene suggests the influence of le Baker, via Holinshed or Stow, in Lancaster's opening line: 'Be patient, good my lord, cease to lament.'¹⁵ This instruction suggests that Edward is visibly mourning, and is displaying a lack of 'patience' in his passionate grief. Edward's behaviour during the protracted deposition process, however, represents a departure from Marlowe's sources. As Meredith Skura points out, 'In the Elizabethan chronicles Edward's deposition and imprisonment had led to the moral closure of confession': the King of the chronicle accounts, however sorrowfully, ultimately acknowledges his faults and resigns himself to losing the crown to his son, inspiring readers' pity for his grief but also for his noble, self-sacrificing behaviour.¹⁶ Marlowe's Edward, however, is indecisive, garrulous, self-centred, and morally ambiguous. 'By changing Edward's response', Forker observes, 'Marlowe chooses [...] to emphasize the "marvelous agonie" of which Holinshed speaks [...] The more violent passions – self-pity, unreasoning anger, and personal hurt – rather than moral growth or sacramental desecration become the focus of Marlowe's handling of the deposition'.¹⁷ As Forker persuasively argues, this shift of emphasis functions 'to emphasize power dominating weakness and the turbulent emotions thereby generated'. In addition, presenting Edward as imperfect and exasperating in this scene militates against the shift in authorial sympathy which Marlowe found in his sources around the point of Edward's deposition (as a consequence of their switch to reliance on le Baker as a source). Although Marlowe's play contains a similar shift, he maintains

Drayton, *Barons Warres*, 5.11–23, ll. 81–184; Heath, *Englands Chronicle*, fol. L4^v. For mourning robes, see, for example, Drayton, *Barons Warres*, 5.5, l. 33; Niccols, *Mirour*, fol. 3B3^v; Baker, *Chronicle*, fol. U1^r; van den Bos, *Florus Anglicus*, fol. B1^v.

¹³ Cole, *Marlowe and the Renaissance of Tragedy*, p. 100; Marlowe, *Edward II*, IV.vii.97.

¹⁴ Smith, *Homosexual Desire*, p. 219.

¹⁵ Marlowe, *Edward II*, V.i.1.

¹⁶ Skura, 'Elizabeth Cary and Edward II', p. 89.

¹⁷ Marlowe, *Edward II*, p. 59; see also Cole, *Marlowe and the Renaissance of Tragedy*, pp. 114–115; Merrix and Levin, 'Richard II and Edward II', p. 5; Ribner, *English History Play*, p. 136.

some consistency by continuing to simultaneously foreground Edward's flaws and elicit audience sympathy for him, even if the weighting of emphasis has shifted from the former to the latter. Moreover, Marlowe's deposition scene provides a means for Edward to continue commanding attention and 'stage-manag[ing] his downfall'; as Bruce R. Smith and Roger Sales have noted, the scene resonates with the established preference of Marlowe's Edward for theatricality.¹⁸ Edward's vacillation over whether to willingly resign the crown provides him with the opportunity to delay his deposition; to command Winchester and Trussell back and forth despite his loss of royal authority; to indulge in hyperbolic rhetorical condemnation of his deponents ('Isabel, whose eyes, being turned to steel, / Will sooner sparkle fire than shed a tear'); to instruct the audience and his on-stage observers on their sympathetic emotional responses ('What, are you moved? Pity you me?'); to demonstrate his piety, albeit with a request that God make him unworldly, which ironically misses the point of what should be a self-sacrificing effort of renunciation ('Now, sweet God of Heaven, / Make me despise this transitory pomp'); and to belatedly construct an identity as a concerned father ('Let not that Mortimer protect my son; / More safety is there in a tiger's jaws, / Than his embracements').¹⁹ Notwithstanding Edward's clear emotional suffering in this scene, there is an equally clear thread of self-indulgence which is forced not by the absent Mortimer, but by the continually and excessively present Edward.

Imprisonment

Following his deposition, Edward was imprisoned in Kenilworth Castle, possibly moved to Corfe Castle, and definitely relocated to Berkeley Castle, where he died in September 1327. There is evidence that sympathy for Edward's imprisonment arose during his lifetime: for example, an Anglo-Norman poem composed around 1326–1327 (and found in the same manuscript as the *Anonimale Chronicle*, a copy of the Short Version of the Anglo-Norman prose *Brut*) castigates Isabella for her role in his imprisonment, pointedly still referring to the deposed Edward as 'King'.²⁰ Once again, however, these sentiments gained historiographical popularity not via these contemporaneous texts but via le Baker, who is responsible for stories of Edward's ill-treatment while imprisoned at Kenilworth, Corfe, and Berkeley. It is possible that he was inspired to interpolate these stories by the Anglo-Norman poem known as the 'Lament of Edward II' (written between 1327 and 1350, and attributed, almost certainly erroneously, to Edward himself); in this poem, Edward complains, 'Every day my strength is sapped in prison by

¹⁸ Smith, *Homosexual Desire*, p. 219; Sales, *Christopher Marlowe*, p. 130. See also Merrix and Levin, 'Richard II and Edward IP, who emphasise the formulaic theatricality of the deposition process in Marlowe and Shakespeare.

¹⁹ Marlowe, *Edward II*, V.i.104–105, 102, 107–108, 115–117; Lunney, 'Edward II and Early Playhouse Audiences', p. 34; Wessman, 'Edward II as Actaeonesque History', pp. 29–30.

²⁰ 'Against the Queen', fol. 4^v. Title from Dean and Boulton, *Anglo-Norman Literature*, no. 88.

those who are evildoers' (*Tut dis enfleble en fermerye / Sui par ceaux qe felons sunt*). However, there is no hard evidence for le Baker's familiarity with this text.²¹

Le Baker sometimes attributes Edward's mistreatment to Adam Orleton via Queen Isabella (her actions are attributed at one point to 'the advice of her cunning master the Bishop') and sometimes to Isabella herself, who 'found it hard to bear that the life of the husband she hated so deeply had been prolonged all this time'.²² Though Edward is relatively well-treated at Kenilworth, orders are soon given to 'two evil knights, Thomas Gournay and John Maltravers', to move him around in order that 'no friend or neutral was allowed access to him or came to know where he was spending any length of time'.²³ Once removed from Kenilworth, le Baker states hyperbolically, Edward has 'no escape now from a life full of suffering' (*securus de vita plena doloris*).²⁴ Subsequently he experiences a sensational catalogue of abuses:

The inhumanity of his tormentors towards him was worse than that of wild beasts. He was not allowed to ride except at night, or to see anyone, or to be seen by any friend. When he did go riding, they compelled him to go thinly clad and bareheaded. When he wished to sleep, they would not let him. They prepared for him not food which he liked but food which he loathed. They contradicted his every word. They falsely declared that he was mad. In short, they opposed his wishes in everything, so that he might soon die of cold or lack of sleep or uncooked and uneatable food or at least of melancholy when he caught some common illness.²⁵

Here le Baker opposes the reality of Edward's treatment to what is expected; he stresses, for example, that he is 'not allowed to ride *except* at night' (*equitare non licebat nisi de nocte*), and that he receives '*not* food which he liked *but* food which he loathed' (*non quales volebat sed quos nausiabat cibos ipsi preparavere*).²⁶ This culminates in the assertion that 'they opposed his wishes in everything' (*in omnibus sue voluntati se ipsos contrarios exhibuere*), presenting Edward's imprisonment as a situation of absolute hardship.

This distinction between expectation and reality is similarly highlighted in a later scene of mockery:

that villain Gournay made a crown out of hay and, daring to touch the Lord's anointed, put it on the head which once had been consecrated with holy oil,

²¹ 'Lament of Edward II', stanza 11.

²² Le Baker, *Chronicle* (2012), pp. 28, 30, trans. by Preest.

²³ Le Baker, *Chronicle* (2012), p. 28, trans. by Preest.

²⁴ Le Baker, *Chronicle* (2012), p. 29, trans. by Preest; Le Baker, *Chronicon* (1889), p. 30.

²⁵ Le Baker, *Chronicle* (2012), p. 29, trans. by Preest.

²⁶ Le Baker, *Chronicon* (1889), p. 30; emphasis added.

while the knights mocked him and said in bitter irony, ‘Avaunt, sir King’, which is to say ‘Proceed, my lord King.’²⁷

Here, once again, the crown of hay is juxtaposed against ‘the head which once had been consecrated with holy oil’ (*capiti, iam dudum per oleum sanctum consecrat*), while the ‘bitter irony’ (*ironia nimis acerba*) of the knights’ mocking courtesies – Edward is not being treated as a king, and cannot proceed as he wishes – depends for its function on the gulf between Edward’s status and his treatment.²⁸

In addition, the image of the false crown alludes to Jesus’s crown of thorns, suggesting a Christ-like endurance in the face of adversity and reflecting the similar image used in the deposition scene. Le Baker ultimately concludes that Edward’s miraculous survival – not only of mistreatment, but of attempts to poison him – is probably the result of divine intervention: ‘as I more truly believe, the Almighty on high kept his confessor for a more public martyrdom’ (*quod verius credo, manifestiori martirio suum confessorem Altissimus reservavit*).²⁹ When imprisoned at Berkeley, Edward is ‘shut up to exercise the virtue of patience like an anchorite’ (*ubi paciencie exercens virtutem reclusus, ut anacorita*), a religious image which le Baker expands by comparing him to ‘the blessed Job’ and reporting that ‘he waited for the heavenly kingdom to replace the earthly.’³⁰ Edward even uses Jesus as a model, ‘suffer[ing] with patience the loss of his royal crown and liberty out of his love for Jesus Christ, the poor crucified one’.³¹ The anecdote of the false crown appears in many later texts, but few other writers foreground its Christological associations. Marlowe’s *Edward II* preserves many details of le Baker’s narrative of Edward’s imprisonment (via Holinshed and Stow), and several critics, notably Mathew Martin and Patrick Ryan, have usefully outlined the full Christological implications of the way Edward’s imprisonment is depicted in the play.³² In his narrative poem on Edward’s reign (written c. 1597–1600), meanwhile, Francis Hubert specifically points out the Christological elements of Edward’s mistreatment (again drawn ultimately from le Baker’s account) in order to blame his torturers for their blasphemy.³³

Le Baker’s account is also notable for its narrativity, in which these frequent biblical allusions play a role. Discourse markers indicate that the story of Edward’s deposition,

²⁷ Le Baker, *Chronicle* (2012), pp. 29–30, trans. by Preest.

²⁸ Le Baker, *Chronicon* (1889), p. 31.

²⁹ Le Baker, *Chronicle* (2012), p. 29, trans. by Preest; Le Baker (1889), p. 30. For the trope of ‘the King’s resistance to death’, see Anderson, *Performing Early Modern Trauma*, p. 113; Smith, ‘*Edward II*, 5.3.23’, p. 68; Marlowe, *Edward II*, V.v.1–12.

³⁰ Le Baker, *Chronicle* (2012), p. 30, trans. by Preest; Le Baker, *Chronicon* (1889), p. 31.

³¹ Le Baker, *Chronicle* (2012), p. 27, trans. by Preest.

³² See Martin, ‘Plays of Passion’; Hopkins, *Christopher Marlowe*, p. 42; Ryan, ‘*Edward II* and the Medieval Passion Play’; Chism, ‘Marlowe’s Medievalism’, p. 98; Stymeist, ‘Status, Sodomy, and the Theatre’, p. 246.

³³ Shakespeare, *Richard II*, IV.i.160–162; Hubert, *Deplorable Life*, stanzas 545–546.

imprisonment, and death has been constructed as a coherent literary account. Le Baker begins the section with, ‘Then [*Tunc*] began the final persecution of Edward, which continued until his death’; and we are told that ‘First’ (*Primo*) his captors assail him with the stench of dead bodies, but ‘those tyrants, seeing [*videntes*] that the stench could not of itself cause the death of a very strong man’, decided to kill him by suffocation and penetration.³⁴ It seems plausible that this narrativity contributed to the popular and influential nature of le Baker’s depiction of Edward’s reign, along with its sensational and entertaining nature. In addition, le Baker’s account contains various self-contained anecdotes which proved easy to extract for use in later texts. An account of Edward’s forcible shaving proved particularly popular:

The enemies of God cast about for a means of disguising Edward so that he might not be easily recognized by anybody. They hit upon the idea of both cutting his hair and shaving his beard. So, when on their journey they came to a ditch in which water was running, they commanded Edward to dismount for a shave. They sat him on a molehill and the barber brought a basin of cold water which he had taken from the ditch. When the barber and the others said that cold water should be quite good enough for the occasion, Edward said, ‘Willy-nilly, we’ll have some hot water for my beard,’ and that his promise might come true, he began to weep copiously.³⁵

Edward’s witty reply, and his neat means of twisting the situation to his advantage – though abused, he regains control over his circumstances through control over his bodily functions – appear to have made this anecdote popular, since it appears in numerous other chronicle accounts.³⁶ All of these maintain Edward’s tearful reaction, except for one atypical independent continuation of the prose *Brut*, written in Anglo-Norman around 1377 and found in Corpus Christi College, Oxford, MS 78. The writer appears to have had access to le Baker’s *Chronicon*, resulting in a strongly royalist tone, as can be seen in the following passage:

And on their return from their entertainment, Gourney, the traitor, insultingly told him how he [i.e., Edward] had previously savagely slandered and insulted him in the presence of great lords, and on that account he would now give him his reward, and with his knife he pitilessly took off the King’s beard. Then the King said humbly, as one who showed no malice, ‘Thomas, you do me this dishonour against your faith, for which deed vengeance will rebound on you, for Holy Writ forbids that either King or priest be touched with intent to harm, because they are anointed.’³⁷

³⁴ Le Baker, *Chronicle* (2012), p. 32, trans. by Preest; for Latin see le Baker, *Chronicon* (1889), p. 33. I have deviated from Preest’s translation here in order to retain the participle ‘seeing’ (*videntes*), thus preserving the text’s narrativity and clear temporal trajectory.

³⁵ Le Baker, *Chronicle* (2012), p. 30, trans. by Preest.

³⁶ For example, Stow, *Chronicles*, fol. Z2^v; Daniel, *Collection*, fol. R3^r; van den Bos, fol. G2^r; Sandford, *Genealogical History*, fol. 2R1^v; Heath, *Englands Chronicle*, fols. L5^r-L5^v.

³⁷ Galbraith, ‘Extracts from the *Historia Aurea* and a French *Brut*’, p. 216.

In this account the shaving of Edward's beard is not a pragmatic decision to disguise him, but a moral affront, a symbolic punishment for the crimes Gourney accuses him of having committed. As such, the power dynamic shifts: while in le Baker's account Edward is a victim of superior physical force, here he is offered the chance to present an alternative interpretation of events, removing Gourney's justification for shaving him. Like this writer's account of Edward's murder (discussed in Chapter 7), this anecdote excises any elements which might present Edward as weak, submissive, or emotionally incontinent. Rather than resorting to tears –which elicit sympathy, but nonetheless present Edward as passionate, and may remind the reader of his reputation for excessive emotion rather than rational political rule – Edward in this passage remains confident of his enduring status as anointed King, and of his right to the accompanying courtesies.

Importantly, le Baker also frequently focuses on the sympathy that Edward's peers, subjects and observers feel towards him. This manifests in relation to his imprisonment – he is kept at Corfe only 'until some townspeople got to know of it and made plans to set him free and take him overseas, just as he wished' – and also in relation to his grief for separation from Isabella.³⁸ Compared to a 'second Orpheus' who sings 'Countless' 'songs of love [...] with pleading voice, but in vain', Edward 'complained of no misfortune except that his wife, whom he was not able not to love, did not want to see him, although he had lived a widower from her embraces for more than [a] year, and that she did not allow their son, the new King, or any of their children to give him the comfort of their presence.'³⁹ Le Baker sets out the pity inspired by this – both real and potential – in some detail:

This love shown by the despondent Edward and his patience in adversity awoke such pity in the Earl his guardian and in both their households that they did not omit to send messages of the despairing love of the noble lord for his wife to a heart that was harder than an adamantine anvil. For the queen was stirred not to love by these messages but to anger, for the iron lady in her secret thoughts began to be very afraid that the church, with its customary pity for the pitiful, might one day actually compel her to share again the bed of the husband she had repudiated. For she thought that a man who, by his endurance of adversity and the rich fragrance of all his virtues, had brought his own enemies, whom she herself had placed as attendants over him, to take pity on him, would be much

³⁸ Le Baker, *Chronicle* (2012), p. 29, trans. by Preest.

³⁹ Le Baker, *Chronicle* (2012), pp. 27–28, trans. by Preest. Although Orpheus was associated with sex between men in this period (see Mills, *Seeing Sodomy*, chap. 3; Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, X, pp. 70–71), it seems unlikely that le Baker intended to invoke this association, given the lack of references to Edward's sexual transgressions elsewhere in his text. However, his reference to Orpheus may have carried these connotations for subsequent readers, particularly as the consensus concerning the sexual nature of Edward's relationships with his favourites developed further.

more likely to arouse the pity of men who did not know him and who were the very pupils of pity.⁴⁰

This passage is an example of le Baker's tendency to set out ideal emotional responses as a guide for his readers. Here, he describes Edward's situation with emotive juxtapositions – he shows 'love' (*amor*) despite being 'despondent' (*languentis*), and 'patience' (*paciencia*) despite 'adversity' (*adversis*) – before indicating the causal effect of that situation on his keepers' emotional reactions: Edward's qualities themselves become the subject of the verb 'awoke', demonstrating that they directly inspired pity.⁴¹ It is particularly notable that Isabella is afraid of pity from religious quarters; alongside the biblical allusions discussed above, this contributes to le Baker's representation of Edward as a Christ-like martyr worthy of veneration. Through dramatizing Isabella's fear in this regard, le Baker also emphasizes the fact that even her employees – 'his own enemies, whom she herself had placed as attendants over him' – pity Edward, thus further encouraging the reader's sympathy. Despite the potential of these details to elicit sympathy for Edward, however, neither Stow nor Holinshed retained them in their accounts of Edward's reign; I would suggest that this results from the potential inconsistency between Edward's sexual transgressions during his reign (which Stow and Holinshed draw from other sources than le Baker) and the chaste faithfulness to Isabella that appears in le Baker's account.

Edward's story as *de casibus* narrative

The *de casibus* mode is the most common narrative structure into which accounts of Edward II's reign are shaped; as Eugene Waith pointed out in 1964, the events of his life 'lent themselves readily' to this narrative form.⁴² As the many representations of Edward as repentant (and the political uses analysed in Chapter 5) suggest, medieval and early modern writers did not neutralize the didactic potential of Edward's story when they fit it into a *de casibus* framework: to suggest that his fall was the natural consequence of 'a falling pattern [...] typical of the lives of great persons' was not to suggest that he was blameless.⁴³ This does not mean that there is no room for ambiguity regarding the relative extents to which Fortune and Edward's personal flaws are responsible for his downfall; and we should acknowledge that sympathetic depictions of the deposed King help to militate against condemnations of him expressed earlier in the narration of

⁴⁰ Le Baker, *Chronicle* (2012), p. 28, trans. by Preest.

⁴¹ Le Baker, *Chronicon* (1889), p. 29.

⁴² Waith, 'Shadow of Action', p. 61; Budra, *De Casibus Tradition*, p. 18.

⁴³ See Walker, 'Remembering Richard', pp. 25–26. The earliest text to present Edward as repentant is the 'Lament of Edward II', an Anglo-Norman poem probably written before 1350 which purports to have been written by Edward during his imprisonment (see *Lament of Edward II*; Valente, 'Lament of Edward II' p. 422; Smallwood, 'Lament of Edward II'; Tyson, 'Lament for a Dead King'). The poem was almost certainly not written by Edward; rather, it represents a didactic complaint against the changeable nature of fortune in which 'his fall is meant as a lesson for us all', typical of Anglo-Norman lyric and probably influenced by Boethius's *Consolatio*.

his reign, when he was at the top of Fortune's wheel. However, the use of *de casibus* elements in accounts of Edward's reign should not be seen primarily as attempts at exoneration.

Instead, I would argue, the use of these elements should be seen as an example of the use of literary techniques in chronicles, and as part of the 'literary transformation' with which this book is concerned. As discussed in Chapter 3 with reference to the romance genre, Tricia McElroy writes persuasively of the way in which early modern 'Historical writing [...] is filled with generic forms – some obvious, others more inconspicuous – that arrange historical facts into shapes and patterns that help us to perceive and comprehend the past.'⁴⁴ The treatment of Edward's story in chronicles appears to indicate recognition of how his story can be aligned with the 'shapes and patterns' of the *de casibus* mode.⁴⁵ This begins with the Anglo-Norman prose *Brut* chronicle (composed c. 1333–1347), but becomes more explicit in early modern texts, often taking the form of describing Edward's life as a 'tragedy' (a concept closely associated with *de casibus* in the early modern imagination) and of emphasizing the metabasis (the shift from a higher to a lower status, a crucial aspect of *de casibus* literature) inherent in his story.⁴⁶ Emphasis on the *de casibus* elements of Edward's story should be seen as a creative decision made with readers in mind: it creates a clear narrative arc with which readers would likely have been familiar from literary texts, enhancing the pleasurable readability of accounts of his reign. In addition, it can be considered a sensationalizing technique in that it usually involves (indeed, to an extent requires) the emphasis of Edward's transgressions while King and of his sufferings when deposed.

The first implicit alignments of Edward's story with the *de casibus* mode occurred in genealogical rolls produced during his reign, before his deposition and death. Olivier de Laborderie argues that 'it is probably not fortuitous that we find in three rolls written between 1321 and 1327 [...] a Wheel of Fortune explicitly warning kings against the vanity and instability of earthly power.'⁴⁷ Not all genealogical rolls include a depiction of the Wheel of Fortune, but these three rolls, produced during the latter part of Edward's reign, all do. Although it is possible that the makers of some of these rolls included the Wheel of Fortune as a reference to the executed Thomas of Lancaster (Edward's cousin, beheaded for leading an opposition army in the civil wars of 1321–1322) rather than as a warning to Edward – the rolls in question are, after all, 'also the first rolls to represent Thomas of Lancaster' – it does not seem likely that this

⁴⁴ McElroy, 'Genres', p. 268.

⁴⁵ See Cooper, *Shakespeare and the Medieval World*, p. 139.

⁴⁶ Budra, *De Casibus Tradition*, chap. 3; Quinn, 'Mastering Complaint', p. 443; Cooper, *Shakespeare and the Medieval World*, pp. 139–155; Campbell, 'Tudor Conceptions', pp. 296–298. See also Patch, *Goddess Fortuna*, p. 55.

⁴⁷ de Laborderie, 'New Pattern For English History', p. 56.

applies to all three rolls mentioned by de Laborderie. In particular, it seems unlikely that the makers of the roll known as ‘the Chaworth roll’ intended their readers to draw a moral or teleological *de casibus* message from Lancaster’s execution: the roll was produced for a patron with connections to the Lancaster family, and fails to mention his execution at all.⁴⁸ The example of the Chaworth Roll, then, may well support de Laborderie’s suggestion that the inclusion of the Wheel of Fortune on rolls produced during the period 1321–1327 was ‘a veiled threat to Edward II, who is portrayed in all [genealogical roll] continuations that cover his reign as having been influenced by evil counsellors and as having abused his power’.⁴⁹

Many other accounts of Edward’s reign align his story with the *de casibus* mode through the technique of detailing his previous and current situation in order to highlight the contrast between them, and thus the metabasis that has taken place. In the *Brut*, for example, the chapter on Edward’s deposition and subsequent imprisonment is entitled *How Kyng Edward was put adoune* (‘How King Edward was put down’).⁵⁰ The phrase *put adoune* presents his deposition as a spatial movement between hierarchical layers, emphasizing his transfer from a high estate to a lower one. This shift is also highlighted by the words attributed to William Trussell at the end of his renunciation of homage to Edward on behalf of the people of England, which explicitly state both Edward’s loss of royal status and its replacement with ‘no special position’: *fro þis day afterward 3e shulle nouzt be cleymede Kyng, neiþer for Kyng bene holde; but fram þis tyme afterward 3e shul bene holde a singuler man of all þe peple* (‘from this day forward you shall not be proclaimed King, nor held to be King; but from this time forward you shall be held to be a man with no special position, one of the people’).⁵¹

The *de casibus* elements found in Holinshed’s *Chronicles* can be partly attributed to the influence of the *Brut*. They are also derived from Polydore Vergil’s *Anglica Historia* (c. 1512–1513), which encourages a *de casibus* interpretation of Edward’s deposition: ‘Having heard the ambassadors, Edward could not restrain his tears. Now he saw the maxim proven by his own example, that nothing is more piteous than a happy man transformed into a wretch’ (*hominem ex beato miserum fieri*).⁵² Like the *Brut* writer, Vergil identifies Edward’s former and current state in order to highlight the gulf between them. In addition, by presenting Edward’s life as ‘proof’ of a

⁴⁸ *Chaworth Roll*, pp. 19–20.

⁴⁹ de Laborderie, ‘New Pattern For English History’, p. 56.

⁵⁰ *Brut*, p. 241. For reasons of concision, the Long Version is referred to simply as the *Brut* in this book, since this is the version that exerted by far the most influence on Edward II’s reputation. Quotations from the *Brut* are taken from the Middle English Common Version.

⁵¹ *Brut*, p. 242; ‘Singular, adj. (and adv.) and n.’, *OED Online* (1911).

⁵² Vergil, *Anglica Historia*, chap. 18, trans. by Sutton.

‘maxim’ (*verum*; Sutton’s translation could also be rendered ‘he saw it proven *to be true*’⁵³), Vergil frames the story as one part of the ‘accumulated example[s]’ that function together to demonstrate *de casibus* teleology.⁵⁴

The 1577 and 1587 Holinshed texts refer to Edward as an ‘infortunate Prince’, highlighting the adverse role of Fortune in his reign.⁵⁵ Abraham Fleming repeats this term in his interpolations to the 1587 edition, ending the narration of Edward’s reign with the sentence, ‘Thus far infortunat Edward the second’: the concept of ill fortune thus comes to summarize Edward’s reign.⁵⁶ A further Fleming interpolation exclaims upon Edward’s deposition:

Ah lamentable run from roialtie to miserable calamitie, procured by them
cheefelie that should have beene the pillars of the Kings estate, and not the
hooked engins to pull him downe from his throne!⁵⁷

Like the *Brut*, Fleming employs spatial imagery to demonstrate Edward’s metabasis, while also providing a guide for the reader’s emotional response (‘lamentable’) and displacing his condemnation of Edward’s nobles into a more generalised complaint about the inevitability of *de casibus* structure in the lives of kings.⁵⁸ Holinshed and Fleming’s treatment of Richard II’s reign is similar, indicating that the alignment of particular reigns with the *de casibus* mode is common to the two deposed kings. The 1577 edition repeats the word ‘infortunate’ to describe Richard’s ‘chance’, and highlights the general moralistic applicability of the situation: ‘But such misfortune (or the like) oftentimes falleth unto those princes, which when they are aloft, cast no doubt for perils that maie follow.’⁵⁹ Similarly, he describes Richard as ‘translated from principallitie to prison, & to fall from honor into horror’, using alliteration and assonance to highlight his transition between opposing states.⁶⁰

These observations indicate that in some cases, poets and dramatists who constructed *de casibus* accounts of historical figures should be seen as responding to *de casibus* elements in their chronicle sources, rather than as newly applying this narrative structure to their sources’ accounts.⁶¹ For example, Shakespeare’s Richard II famously anticipates his own *de casibus* story prior to his deposition (‘I’ll give my jewels for a set of beads, / My gorgeous palace for a

⁵³ ‘2 verus [CL]’, *Dictionary of Medieval Latin*.

⁵⁴ Budra, *De Casibus Tradition*, p. 18.

⁵⁵ Holinshed, *Chronicles* (1587), VI, section 10/p. 342.

⁵⁶ Holinshed, *Chronicles* (1587), VI, section 10/p. 342.

⁵⁷ Holinshed, *Chronicles* (1587), VI, section 10/p. 340.

⁵⁸ Cole, *Marlowe and the Renaissance of Tragedy*, p. 105.

⁵⁹ Holinshed, *Chronicles* (1577), IV, section 1/p. 1116.

⁶⁰ Holinshed, *Chronicles* (1587), VI, section 12/p. 501.

⁶¹ As David Bevington has explored, *de casibus* elements in English drama also derive in part from the morality play tradition (Bevington, *‘Mankind’ to Marlowe*, p. 235).

hermitage, / My gay apparel for an almsman's gown', etc.).⁶² Marlowe's *Edward II* similarly calls attention to the metabasis inherent in the plot, both through Edward's complaints about the disparity between his royal status and the conditions of his imprisonment ('Within a dungeon England's king is kept'; 'They give me bread and water, being a king') and through more generalized observations about the inevitability of a *de casibus* pattern in the lives of kings (Edward asks the Abbot of Neath, 'what is he whom rule and empery / Have not in life or death made miserable?', and Leicester, on seeing him, quotes Seneca's *Thyestes*: 'Whom the rising sun has seen high in pride, him the setting sun has seen laid low').⁶³ Several critics have noted the importance of visual and theatrical elements – the contrast between 'ceremony' and 'bareness' – to foregrounding this sense of metabasis on stage, while Ruth Lunney argues that Marlowe's murder scene (analysed in Chapter 7) also constitutes 'an extreme version of the fall from high estate'.⁶⁴ However, Marlowe (unlike Holinshed, one of his principal sources) does not accompany this with any emphasis on the repentance which was an expected element of the *de casibus* mode, resulting in a representation of Edward's fall which is not morally didactic. This can be contrasted with Hubert's account – written shortly after Marlowe's play – whose narrator initially states that Edward was 'cast by Fortune downe' before correcting himself: 'Did I say Fortune? nay by Folly rather, / By unrespect unto the rules of State'.⁶⁵ Hubert's poem, like other early modern literary accounts of Edward's reign, also details his metabasis at great length ('Now of a Cushion thou must make a Crowne, / And play the mock-king with it on thy hed, / And on the earth thy Chaire of State sit downe', etc.).⁶⁶ Neither Hubert's most recent editor, Bernard Mellor, nor any recent editor of Shakespeare's *1 Henry IV* appears to have noted the close echo between these lines and Falstaff's ('This chair shall be my state, this dagger my sceptre, and this cushion my crown').⁶⁷ It is likely that Shakespeare's play preceded Hubert's poem; as such, the reference to Edward 'play[ing] the mock King' seems clearly intended to evoke Falstaff. Edward is not just descending from royalty to a 'mock King': he is descending from an office that commands respect to a disreputable comic figure who commands ridicule, a transition not without a touch of poignant comedy.

⁶² Shakespeare, *Richard II*, III.iii.146–153.

⁶³ Marlowe, *Edward II*, V.iii.19, V.v.61; IV.vii.14–15, 53–54 (trans. by Forker); Zucker, *Stage and Image*, p. 115. See also Bevington and Shapiro, 'What Are Kings, When Regiment Is Gone?'; Hopkins, *Christopher Marlowe, Renaissance Dramatist*, p. 59; Kurokawa, 'De Casibus Theme and Machiavellism'; Hakim, 'Marlowe on the English Stage', p. 69; Hattaway, *Elizabethan Popular Theatre*, p. 142. For other examples of the use of Edward's story to demonstrate the likelihood of metabasis in the lives of kings and princes, see Drayton, *Mortimeriados*, ll. 1779–1785; Cary, *History of the Life*, fol. 2K2^r.

⁶⁴ Zucker, *Stage and Image*, p. 115; Bevington and Shapiro, 'What Are Kings, When Regiment Is Gone?', p. 275; Hakim, 'Marlowe on the English Stage', p. 69; Lunney, '*Edward II* and Early Playhouse Audiences', p. 35.

⁶⁵ Hubert, *Deplorable Life*, stanzas 1, 2.

⁶⁶ Hubert, *Deplorable Life*, stanzas 506–508.

⁶⁷ Shakespeare, *1 Henry IV*, II.v.381–382.

As alluded to above, by far the most influential early modern English *de casibus* text was the *Mirror for Magistrates*, a group of poems with which Edward has a complex relationship.⁶⁸ Roger Mortimer features as the subject of one of the poems in the original version of the *Mirror*, which briefly mentions Edward as having been non-specifically murdered ‘through his meanes’.⁶⁹ The full title of Marlowe’s *Edward II* (‘with the tragicall fall of proud Mortimer’) gestures towards the continuing recognizability of Mortimer’s character in the late sixteenth century, and his continuing association with the *de casibus* mode; this is reflected in Mortimer Junior’s function as a *de casibus* voice within the play (‘Base Fortune, now I see, that in thy wheel / There is a point, to which when men aspire, / They tumble headlong down’).⁷⁰ Following this, both Hubert’s poem on Edward’s reign and Michael Drayton’s *Peirs Gaveston* (1594) employ conventions of the *Mirror*, and may represent attempts to insert these figures into the *Mirror* tradition: according to Lily B. Campbell, ‘By 1587 a good many hopeful poets were apparently writing poems in the manner of the *Mirror* tragedies’.⁷¹ Both poems begin with the protagonists being summoned from death to tell their stories, and contain generalized laments on worldly mutability, both typical aspects of *Mirror* poems.⁷² However, Edward himself was not incorporated into a volume explicitly bearing the *Mirror* title until Richard Niccols’s 1610 version, titled *A Winter Nights Vision*.

The ‘Argument’ to Niccols’s poem attributes Edward’s fate to Fortune, and focuses more on the sympathetic aspects of his fall than on his transgressions. His recall of Gaveston from exile is mentioned but not (at this stage) condemned, and the only description of his behaviour with even potential negative connotations is Niccols’s comment that ‘the angrie King / Vowes his revenge’ on Gaveston’s death; later he is ‘folorne’ and ‘betrai’d’, killed ‘by violent hand’, and the poem begins by summoning ‘his wronged ghost’.⁷³ The poem is thus framed from the outset as recounting Edward’s fall to elicit sympathy for him, not to demonstrate the just retribution he received for his transgressions. The expectations this creates are borne out by the rest of the poem: Edward expresses very little repentance, and the account of his mistreatment after his deposition is introduced as a consequence of Fortune’s ‘utmost hate’.⁷⁴ Niccols gives numerous examples of metabasis: on Edward’s capture prior to his deposition, the narrator states, ‘*Leister*, thy King is now thy captive made,’ and Trussell’s renunciation of homage is

⁶⁸ For a textual history of the *Mirror*, see Budra, *De Casibus Tradition*, pp. 11–13.

⁶⁹ [‘Tragedy 2’], *Mirror for Magistrates*, pp. 82–89 (ll. 38–39).

⁷⁰ Marlowe, *Edward II*, V.vi.58–60.

⁷¹ *Parts Added to The Mirror for Magistrates*, p. 9; see also Zocca, *Elizabethan Narrative Poetry*, pp. 78–79 and n. 41; Quinn, ‘Mastering Complaint’, pp. 443–444.

⁷² Hubert, *Deplorable Ljfe*, stanzas 15–16; Hubert, *Historie*, stanza 519; Drayton, *Peirs Gaveston*, ll. 13–18, 1122–1228; see Zocca, *Elizabethan Narrative Poetry*, pp. 80–81.

⁷³ Niccols, *Mirour*, fol. 2Z8^r.

⁷⁴ Niccols, *Mirour*, fol. 3B4^v.

described in similar terms: ‘Leaving his liege that was of most command / The most dejected subject of this land.’⁷⁵ These depictions of metabasis appear to be primarily intended to elicit sympathy: Edward becomes not just a ‘subject’, but ‘the most dejected subject of this land’, and his transference from ‘stately steed’ to ‘beast foresworne’ is marked by references to emotional and physical pain (his ‘woefull head’ is uncovered, and ‘sharpe windes [...] / with their nipping cold [augment] my woes’).⁷⁶ Ultimately, therefore, Niccols’s poem has more in common with other *de casibus* treatments of Edward than it does with other *Mirror* poems: in his sympathetic treatment of Edward’s deposition and imprisonment in particular, Niccols is firmly in line with his contemporary historiographers.

Conclusion

The depictions of Edward II’s fall analysed in this chapter should be seen in the context of medieval and early modern history-writing as a whole, its literary nature, and the way in which its writers constructed historical narratives with their readers in mind. Just as I suggested in Chapter 3 (in line with Tricia McElroy’s work on Holinshed) that early modern historical narratives take on the ‘shapes and patterns’ of the romance genre, here I have argued that they also take on the ‘shapes and patterns’ of *de casibus* narratives. As Budra has shown, this narrative shaping drew on a culturally understood predisposition of historical narratives, enhancing the pleasurable recognizable nature of this particular choice of narrative trajectory.⁷⁷ Moreover, framing their historical narratives as *de casibus* stories enabled writers to do two things in particular to make these narratives more attractive to readers.

In the case of Edward II, firstly, this narrative framing enabled writers to treat his reign as a cautionary tale: several writers draw out the exemplary potential of Edward’s story, encouraging their readers to make ‘profitable use’ of it.⁷⁸ Secondly, and more importantly, it offered writers an opportunity to elicit sympathy for the fallen Edward – creating an emotionally engaging narrative – without appearing to condone his earlier transgressive behaviour. The tendency for sympathy post-deposition that we see in narratives of Edward II is not confined to his reign: in Holinshed’s account of the reign of Richard II, the King is criticized for ‘insolent misgovernance, and youthfull outrage’ but his deponents are subsequently damned for their

⁷⁵ Niccols, *Mirour*, fols. 3B3^r, 3B4^v; see also 3B5^r. Niccols also emphasizes the *de casibus* elements of Thomas of Lancaster’s execution through metabasis (fol. 3A7^v), and alters the existing *Mirror* poem on Richard II to foreground this theme further: ‘Who for their prince a prison dyd provide’ becomes ‘Who for their Prince no Palace did provide, / But prison strong’ ([‘Tragedy 5’], *Mirror for Magistrates*, pp. 111–118 (l. 84); Niccols, *Mirour*, fol. X4^r).

⁷⁶ Niccols, *Mirour*, fol. 3B5^r.

⁷⁷ McElroy, ‘Genres’, pp. 268, 271–272; Budra, *De Casibus Tradition*, pp. xii–xiv, 14–15, 17–18.

⁷⁸ For example, Holinshed, *Chronicles* (1587), VI, section 10/pp. 318, 325, 331; Martyn, fols. N1^r, N3^v.

‘unnaturalness, or rather tigerlike cruelty’.⁷⁹ Annabel Patterson has suggested that this turn towards sympathy is ‘an expression of Holinshed’s own [deliberately politically balanced] “indifferency”’; I would suggest that in addition to this, it reflects a consciously constructed *de casibus* narrative form.⁸⁰ Its effect is that, once deposed, these monarchs become both didactically useful – perfect for conveying a generic message about the mutability of worldly power – and, crucially, are more safely sympathetic figures.

It is essential to emphasise that the framing of Edward’s story as a *de casibus* narrative was not just achieved through the language writers chose; it was achieved through the *sources* they chose. Although le Baker’s sympathetic account does not mention Fortune or encourage a *de casibus* interpretation of Edward’s reign, its existence was still conducive to the shaping of later accounts into a *de casibus* narrative structure, since it provided a conveniently sympathetic source to which writers could switch their reliance at the point of Edward’s deposition. When we analyse historical narratives, then, we need to consider this overlooked aspect of chroniclers’ agency: they selected their sources as much for the potential they offered to construct a compelling narrative as for their reliability, factual content or (as discussed in previous chapters) the ideological stances they facilitated. Selection of sources was a creative process as much as it was an epistemological and political one, and understanding this can help us to further appreciate the role of the chronicler and the literary nature of their task.

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⁷⁹ Holinshed, *Chronicles* (1587), VI, section 12/pp. 507–508.

⁸⁰ Patterson, *Reading Holinshed’s Chronicles*, p. 116.

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Chapter 7 – Beyond Sexual Mimesis: The Penetrative Murder of Edward II

Abstract

This chapter investigates how a consensus developed that Edward II was murdered by anal penetration with a red-hot spit. I question its interpretation by scholars as a self-evidently sexually mimetic, punitive murder method: in fact, the earliest accounts of this murder present it primarily as painful, torturous, and undetectable through outward inspection. Importantly, too, these earliest accounts emerge *before* the formation of a consensus on whether Edward's transgressions were sexual, let alone whether they specifically constituted sex with men. This analysis prompts a reassessment of the place of this narrative in the history of queer sexuality, and of the murder scene in Marlowe's *Edward II*, while also further illuminating the literary priorities of medieval and early modern chroniclers.

Keywords

Christopher Marlowe, homosexuality, prose Brut, red-hot poker, sodomy

Introduction

Modern historians and contemporary sources overwhelmingly agree that Edward II died in Berkeley Castle on 21 September 1327. (The exception is Ian Mortimer, who maintains that Edward was secretly kept at Corfe after a staged funeral aimed at forestalling further rescued attempts, with the prospect of restoring him to the throne used as 'a potent threat to the young Edward III'.¹ However, this argument has not been widely considered convincing; I share J.R.S. Phillips's sense that 'It is hard to see what advantage would be gained by such a tactic.'²) There is less historiographical consensus concerning how Edward died.³ Here contemporary sources differ, and are clearly inflected by the politically sensitive nature of the event. Phillips's meticulous assessment of the evidence leads to the plausible conclusion that 'It seems more likely that he was murdered, probably by suffocation, and with the intention of leaving no outward mark on his body'.⁴ But by the mid-fourteenth century, the story that he was in fact murdered by anal penetration with a red-hot spit was already taking hold.

¹ Phillips, *Edward II*, p. 577; see Mortimer, 'Death of Edward II'.

² Phillips, *Edward II*, p. 580.

³ See Phillips, *Edward II*, pp. 560–565, for an overview of the evidence regarding Edward's death.

⁴ Phillips, *Edward II*, p. 563.

This chapter will not attempt to draw a firm conclusion regarding the manner of Edward's death. Instead, it will assess the medieval and early modern historiography of the event, analysing the way in which a consensus was reached, and the effects of this consensus on Edward's historiographical reputation. In particular, I suggest that close reading of the earliest accounts of the penetrative murder invites us to reassess the significations of this narrative, and to question the presumptive interpretation of it as self-evidently sexually mimetic. This reassessment might prompt us to rethink the place of this murder narrative, and of images of mimetic punishment more broadly, in the history of sex between men: like Chapter 3's analysis of the love between Edward and Gaveston in medieval and early modern accounts, this opens up a wider space for responses of sympathy and pathos than has hitherto been acknowledged. Moreover, given the centrality of this murder to literary criticism of Marlowe's *Edward II*, a reassessment of the historiography to which Marlowe responded can also enable us to reframe our discussion of this play – not least by contributing to the question of whether or not the penetrative murder of Edward takes place on stage.

Development of a consensus

Early texts frequently refuse to specify the manner of Edward's death. The Latin chronicle attributed by its eighteenth-century editor to Robert of Boston, composed around 1368, notes simply that 'Lord Edward, formerly King, in the evening healthy [*sanus*] in Berkeley castle, was found dead the next day'; the Bridlington Chronicle (composed *c.* 1361–1372) reports that he 'died in Berkeley castle'.⁵ The Short Version of the prose *Brut* (composed in Anglo-Norman after 1333, but earlier than the more popular and sensational Long Version, which was composed in Anglo-Norman between 1333 and 1347) varies between manuscripts in its presentation of Edward's death: the version in Brotherton Collection MS 29, known as the *Anonimalle Chronicle*, states that 'the King became ill [at Berkeley] and died', consistent with the writer's general unwillingness to cover politically sensitive topics;⁶ while another states that he died of grief (though Phillips notes that this 'might also be taken to mean that he died in pain').⁷

Two roughly contemporary sources do mention the rumour of murder, indicating that Edward's death was immediately the subject of speculation. The chronicle written at Lanercost Priory in Cumbria sometime after 1346 (probably based on a contemporaneously composed

⁵ Boston, 'Chronicon Angliae', p. 131; 'Gesta Edwardi' [*Bridlington Chronicle*], p. 97.

⁶ For example, Adam Orleton's sermon prior to Edward's deposition is omitted, as is the controversy surrounding the pretender John Deydras (see Chapter 4), with the writer stating explicitly that Deydras's self-justification 'will not be put in my text or repeated' (*Anonimalle*, p. 95).

⁷ *Anonimalle*, p. 22; Phillips, *Edward II*, p. 561.

chronicle by Richard of Durham, now lost) reports, ‘The deposed King died soon after, either by a natural death or by the violence of others’ (*vel morte propria naturali vel ab aliis violenter inflictā*).⁸ The choice given suggests either that two different reports had reached the priory (located a long way from the events themselves), or that two conflicting rumours were generally prevalent. The writer’s refusal to endorse either possibility is likely to be indicative both of the confusion surrounding Edward’s murder and, again, of the issue’s obvious political sensitivity. Adam Murimuth, geographically and politically closer to the scene (in 1327 he held various ecclesiastical offices, had undertaken several diplomatic missions for Edward II, and was probably primarily based in Exeter and/or London⁹) offers more detail:

fuit mortuus Edwardus rex Angliae in castro de Berkeleye, in quo, ut praemittitur, fuit carceri mancipatus seu detentus invitus. Et licet multi abbates, priores, milites, burgenses de Bristollia et Gloucestria ad videndum corpus suum integrum fuissent vocati, et tale superficialiter conspexissent, dictum tamen fuit vulgariter quod per ordinationem dominorum J[ohannis] Mautravers et T[homae] de Gorneye fuit per cautelam occisus.

Edward the King of England died in Berkeley castle, into which, as was said before, he was transferred to be imprisoned or detained against his will. And though many abbots, priors, soldiers, burgesses of Bristol and Gloucester were called to see his uninjured body, and superficially looked at it, nevertheless it was said commonly that by the arrangement of Lords John Maltravers and Thomas Gurney he was killed by a trick.¹⁰

Murimuth focuses on the fact that nobody was allowed to examine Edward’s body at close quarters: his use of a subordinate clause beginning ‘though’ (*licet*) conveys a sceptical tone, as does the adverb ‘superficially’ (*superficialiter*). The issue of the physical appearance of Edward’s body is, however, crucial to the analysis of the version of Edward’s murder that is now best known: the story that Edward was murdered by anal penetration with a red-hot spit, and the potential of that method to leave no marks on the victim’s body.¹¹

There are no contemporary sources for the penetrative murder story. The earliest three texts in which it appears are the Anglo-Norman Long Version of the *Brut* (c. 1333–1347), the long ‘AB’ version of Ranulf Higden’s Latin *Polychronicon* (1340s), and John of Tynemouth’s Latin *Historia Aurea* (c. 1347).¹² It is highly unlikely that the *Historia Aurea* is the origin of the story: it would be a sensational addition, and Tynemouth’s text is, as Carl Horstmann summarizes,

⁸ *Chronicle of Lanercost*, trans. by Maxwell, p. 259; *Chronicon de Lanercost*, p. 260.

⁹ Kingsford and Childs, ‘Murimuth, Adam’.

¹⁰ Murimuth, *Continuatio Chronicarum*, pp. 53–54.

¹¹ Modern parlance commonly renders this murder method as ‘red-hot poker’. However, no medieval or early modern text uses the word ‘poker’ – which appears not to emerge in English until the sixteenth century (*OED Online*, 2006) – instead choosing the term ‘spit’ or ‘iron’.

¹² Marvin, ‘Albino and Isabelle’, p. 170; Higden, *Polychronicon*, VIII, p. 324; Tynemouth, *Historia Aurea*, fol. 228^v.

‘mostly excerpt’.¹³ The account in the *Historia Aurea* is also by far the least detailed. Tynemouth’s source must therefore have been the *Brut* or *Polychronicon*. It is not entirely clear which of these two texts was the earlier. According to Lister Matheson, the Long Version of the *Brut* was ‘generated between 1333 and 1350’, though John Taylor suggests convincingly, on the basis of its detailed account of the 1330s, that it was ‘compiled not long after 1333’.¹⁴ Taylor asserts that the AB version of the *Polychronicon* ‘probably belongs to the 1340’s’.¹⁵ Taylor also argues convincingly that John of Tynemouth did not have access to the AB *Polychronicon*, and instead used the earlier and shorter ‘CD’ version, which does not include the penetrative murder story.¹⁶ This leads me to conclude that Tynemouth’s source for this story must have been the Long Version of the *Brut*. This is not absolute evidence that the story originates in the Long Version of the *Brut* rather than the AB *Polychronicon*: just because Tynemouth could not access, or did not use, the AB *Polychronicon* in 1347 does not mean that it had not been written. However, other evidence strongly suggests that the story was created by the *Brut* writer. The Long Version of the *Brut* is, simply put, an inventive and sensational text. Julia Marvin has argued that the writer of this version deliberately and substantially reworked the Short Version of the *Brut*; in addition, they include many emotional and sensational details which Higden does not, including Edward’s grief at his deposition and imprisonment and the penetrative death of Humphrey de Bohun (discussed below).¹⁷ These tendencies make it very plausible that the writer of the Long Version of the *Brut* also invented the story of Edward’s murder by anal penetration with a red-hot spit.¹⁸

The scene, in the Middle English Common Version (the late fourteenth-century translation of the Anglo-Norman Long Version, which became overwhelmingly the most popular version), is as follows:

And when tyme was forto gone to bed, þe Kyng went unto his bed, and laye, and slepte faste. And as þe Kyng lay and slepte, þe traitoures, false forsuorne azeins her homage and her feaute, come priveliche into þe Kyngus chaumbre, and her company wiþ Ham, and Laiden an Hüge table oppon his Wombe, and wiþ men pressede and helde fast adoune þe iiij corners of þe table oppon his body: wherwiþ þe gode man awoke, and was wonder sore adrade to bene dede þere, and slayn, and turnede his body opsadoun. þe tok þe false tiraunt3, and as wode traitoures, an horne, and put hit into his fundement as depe as þai might, and toke a spete of Copur brennyng, & put hit þrou3 þe horne into his body, and

¹³ Horstmann, p. lxvi.

¹⁴ Matheson, *The Prose Brut*, p. 34; Taylor, ‘The French *Brut* and the Reign of Edward II’, p. 434.

¹⁵ Taylor, *Universal Chronicle*, p. 98.

¹⁶ Taylor, p. 98; Higden, *Polychronicon*, VIII, p. 324, n. 4.

¹⁷ Marvin, ‘Albino and Isabelle’, pp. 153–155; *Brut*, pp. 252–253.

¹⁸ Ian Mortimer (‘Sermons of Sodomy’, p. 51) draws the same conclusion, though not explicitly based on the same reasoning.

ofte-tymes rollede þerwiþ his bowailes; and so þai quellede here Lorde, þat noþing was perceyvede; and after, he was enterede at Gloucestr.¹⁹

And when it was time to go to bed, the King went to his bed, and lay there, and slept soundly. And as the King lay and slept, the traitors, false and forsworn against their homage and their fealty, came privately into the King's chamber, and their company with them, and laid a huge table upon his stomach, and with men, they pressed and held down the four corners of the table upon his body; whereat the good man awoke, and was wonderfully, sorely afraid that he would be killed there, and turned his body upside down. Then the false tyrants took a horn, and like mad traitors, put it into his anus as deep as they could, and took a burning copper spit, and put it through the horn into his body, and rolled his bowels with it many times; and so they killed their Lord, so that nothing was perceived; and afterwards, he was interred at Gloucester.

Regardless of the origin of this story, it is undeniable that its popularity was initially cemented by the Anglo-Norman Long Version of the *Brut*; by its Middle English translation, the Common Version; and by the AB version of the *Polychronicon*, which was (according to Taylor) 'extremely popular'.²⁰ That it became the accepted version of events within two decades is demonstrated by *The Prophecy of John of Bridlington*, a poem which was composed in the 1360s but purports to be a twelfth-century text accurately foretelling the future.²¹ This text gives a quasi-cryptic account of the murder which can be decoded to indicate the penetrative method: writing on Edward III, the writer predicts, 'his father will die, pierced in the dark' (*terebratus in atris*).²² The commentary makes this explicit, describing Edward II as having been 'killed in secret places, clearly in the anus or in the genital parts with a certain instrument, a horn or an iron' (*eum occiderant in locis occultis, scilicet in ano vel in locis genitalibus cum quodam instrumento, corneo vel ferreo*).²³

The inclusion of this story by Geoffrey le Baker, whose sympathetic *Chronicon* (c. 1347–1360) adds details such as Edward's loud cry of pain, was also very influential.²⁴ As discussed in Chapter 6, le Baker's account was heavily used as a source by early modern writers, including John Stow, Raphael Holinshed and Richard Baker, all of whose accounts of Edward's reign were popular in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.²⁵ As such, the vast majority of early modern accounts include the penetrative murder method. It even appears in brief accounts which include very few other details about Edward's life, suggesting that it took on the status of – if the pun

¹⁹ *Brut*, p. 253. This is a reasonably accurate translation of the penetrative murder in the Anglo-Norman Long Version, in which (as Marvin notes) Edward is 'horribly murdered in his bed, as specifically ordered by Mortimer, who "maunda la manere de la mort" (sent the manner of death) to his jailers, crushed under a table and sodomized with "vn broche de quiure bruillaund" (a burning copper spit).' (Marvin, 'Albine and Isabelle', p. 170.)

²⁰ Taylor, *Universal Chronicle*, p. 98. For an overview of the textual history of the *Polychronicon*, see pp. 89–109.

²¹ See Rigg, 'John of Bridlington's Prophecy'; Coote, 'Language of Power', pp. 24–25.

²² 'Prophecy of John of Bridlington', p. 131.

²³ 'Prophecy of John of Bridlington', p. 136.

²⁴ Le Baker, *Chronicle* (2012), p. 32, trans. by Preest.

²⁵ Stow, *Chronicles*; Holinshed, *Chronicles*; Baker, *Chronicle*.

can be excused – one of the most fundamental, essential facts about him. An anonymous verse chronicle composed around 1445, for example, devotes four of eight lines on Edward to describing his murder; by contrast, the verse on Richard II gives details of the Peasants' Revolt and the nobles who were put to death during his reign, but does not specify the manner of his death.²⁶ Of the minority of (usually short, sixteenth-century) chronicles that do not include the penetrative murder, the biggest proportion are those derived from Robert Fabyan's *Newe Cronycles of England and Fraunce* (composed c. 1504), usually via Thomas Lanquet and Thomas Cooper's *Epitome* (1549).²⁷ Unusually for a writer who clearly uses the *Polychronicon* as a source, Fabyan is reticent about the method of Edward's murder, stating only that 'the said Edward by the meanes of sir Roger Mortimer was miserably slayne'.²⁸ It is possible that Fabyan's choice to write in the vernacular played a role in this decision, as is suggested by the fact that of the two surviving Middle English translations of the *Polychronicon*, only the anonymous fifteenth-century translator mentions the murder method.²⁹ Fabyan makes it clear that Edward was murdered, demonstrating that the issue is not the political sensitivity of regicide. This raises the possibility that the gruesome, potentially sexually mimetic nature of the penetrative method (discussed fully below) influenced Fabyan's silence concerning it.

Precedents for penetration

How and why, then, did the writer of the Long Version of the *Brut* first introduce the penetrative murder story? Mortimer and Phillips both argue for the possible influence of accounts of the murder of the Anglo-Saxon King Edmund Ironside.³⁰ Following Edmund's death in mysterious circumstances, and given its suspiciously convenient political outcome for the Danish King Cnut, two competing stories emerged concerning his death. One version – recounted in Henry Knighton's Latin *Chronicon* (c. 1390–1395), in the fifteenth-century Latin chronicle attributed to John Brompton, and later in the *Brut* – describes how Edmund was invited to stay with Eadric Streona, ealdorman of Mercia, and, upon bending to inspect an ingenious mechanical statue of an archer that was placed in his chamber, was shot by it and

²⁶ Mooney, 'Lydgate's "Kings"', pp. 283–284). An analogous example in a later short verse chronicle can be found in John Taylor's *Memorial of All the English Monarchs* (1622), in which Edward's 'wretched Life, and lamentable end' are narrated sympathetically and his murder specified as penetrative and painful ('Into his Fundament a red hot Spit / Was thrust, which made his Royall heart to split', fols. E6^r–E6^v), while Richard II is quasi-comically 'Deposed, and at Pomfret knock'd ith'head' (fol. E7^r).

²⁷ A late anomaly is Caesar, *Numerus Infaustus*, in which Edward is 'barbarously and inhumanely stifled to death between two Pillows' (fol. F4^v). It is very unusual for an early modern text to offer an actual alternative murder method, rather than simply avoiding stating one altogether.

²⁸ Fabyan, *Prima Pars*, fol. 2L5^r.

²⁹ Higden, *Polychronicon*, VIII, 325.

³⁰ Mortimer, 'Sermons', pp. 51, 52; Phillips, *Edward II*, p. 564.

killed.³¹ The second version – reported by Henry of Huntingdon and William of Malmesbury (both writing in the early twelfth century) and later by Higden in his *Polychronicon* – features a story superficially similar to Edward II’s penetrative murder.³² Edmund was once again staying at the house of the treacherous Duke Eadric, when he got up in the night ‘to do the duty of nature’ (*ad requisita naturae*). Eadric’s son, hiding in the pit beneath the toilet seat, ‘struck the King twice with a sharp knife in the private parts, and leaving the weapon in his bowels, fled away’ (*regem inter celanda cultello bis acuto percussit, et inter viscera ferrum fugiens reliquit*).³³ It is significant here that neither of these sensationalized narratives reached the status of historiographical consensus: the disagreement between the *Brut* and the *Polychronicon*, the fourteenth century’s most popular historical texts, appears to have contributed to the dilution of both versions. Popular early modern historical writers tend to note the existence of historiographical debate without concluding in favour of either story.³⁴

Yet though this story might sound superficially similar to Edward II’s ‘red hot spit’ murder, there are a number of key differences. Accounts of Edmund Ironside’s death are impersonal, making no mention of his pain or distress; by contrast, the Long Version of the *Brut* notes that Edward *was wonder sore adrade to bene dede pere* (‘was wonderfully, sorely afraid that he would be killed there’).³⁵ More crucially, penetration does not even seem to be a truly fundamental aspect of the story in which Edmund is killed on the toilet, since this detail is not retained in every account. Holinshed’s 1577 *Chronicles*, for example, simply report that ‘king Edmund was slaine at Oxford, as he sat on a privie to doo the necessaries of nature’.³⁶ Historiography of Edmund’s murder, then, does not focus on its penetrative nature – which invites us to question Pierre Chaplais’s use of the analogue between the two murders to invalidate the interpretation of Edward’s as sexually mimetic.³⁷ Moreover, where accounts of Edward’s death devote most space to the logistics of the murder method, stories of Edmund focus on identifying his death as treason, and detailing the punishment of his murderers for treachery. For a hardy warrior King (as even short accounts describe Edmund) to be traitorously murdered in a compromising position is unfair and self-consciously bathetic: the story appears calculated to outrage its readers. This focus can be found not only in thirteenth-century accounts, but in early modern ones, usefully demonstrating the way in which earlier accounts

³¹ Freeman, *Norman Conquest*, I, pp. 713–714; *Brut*, pp. 119–121.

³² Freeman, *Norman Conquest*, I, p. 712; Higden, *Polychronicon*, VII, 104–106.

³³ Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, pp. 360–361.

³⁴ For example, Vergil, *Anglica Historia*, chap. 7; Holinshed, *Chronicles* (1577), I, section 5/p. 258; Speed, *History*, fol. 3Vr.

³⁵ Freeman, *Norman Conquest*, I, p. 712; *Brut*, p. 253.

³⁶ Holinshed, *Chronicles*, (1577), I, section 5/p. 257.

³⁷ Chaplais, *Gaveston*, pp. 112–113.

were read and interpreted by later writers. For example, the only detail of Edmund's death given in John Stow's *Chronicles* (1580) is that 'he was slayne by the *treason* of Edrike of Straton'; he then describes Eadric's punishment in comparatively far greater detail, using a moralistic tone to present his torture as deserved:

This Edrike was not long unrewarded according to his deserts [...] the Traytor was in the same Chamber tormented to death with firebrands and linkes, and then his feete being bounde together, he was drawne through the Streetes of the Citie, and cast into a ditch, called Houndes ditch, for that the Citizens there cast their dead Dogges, and such other filth, accompting him worthy of no better buriall.³⁸

Similarly, John Speed's *History of Great Britaine* (1611) contrasts Edmund's reputation ('renowned Edmund') with the bathetic nature of his death in 'a place for natures necessity', described as 'unworthy and disloiall'. The adjective 'unworthy' could be equally applied to Eadric's behaviour (unworthy of his rank, both in its treasonous nature and in its foul setting) and to the murder method (unworthy of its victim).

Only two accounts, Polydore Vergil's *Anglica Historia* (c. 1512–1513) and William Howell's *Medulla Historiae Anglicanae* (first printed 1679) suggest that Edward II's penetrative murder took place on the toilet, thereby retaining similar connotations. It is significant that – although Vergil's account was influential via Holinshed's *Chronicles*, and Howell's was popular (going through seven editions during the period 1679–1694) – this suggestion was not picked up by any other writers.³⁹ Far more typical are accounts like that of John Stow:

But these tyrants perceyving that this woulde not force hys death, one night being the xxii. of September, they came rushing in uppon him, as he laye in his bedde, with greate heavye featherbeddes, as mucche in weyghte as xv. menne coulede beare, wherwyth they oppressed and smothered him, into whom also they thrust a plummers yron, being made redde hotte up into his bowels, through a certaine instrument like to the end of a Trumpet, or glister pipe, put in at hys fundiment, burning thereby his inward partes, providing thereby least any wound being founde in the Kings bodye, they might be caused to aunsweare it. In this sort was this stoute King oppressed, crying with a lowde voyce, so that many as well within the Castell as without heard it, perceyving it was the cry of one that suffered violente deathe, which caused many of Berkeley (as they affirmed) to take compassion thereof, and to pray for the soule of him that was then departing.⁴⁰

³⁸ Stow, *Chronicles*, fols. I5^v–I6^r.

³⁹ Vergil, *Anglica Historia*, chap. 18; Howell, *Medulla Historiae*, fol. K10^r. Howell also describes Edmund's murder as penetrative, 'thrust into the body as he was easing nature' (fol. E10^v); Vergil offers this among various other possibilities (chap. 7).

⁴⁰ Stow, *Chronicles*, fols. Z3^r–Z3^v.

Stow's account – a typical early modern example – situates Edward's murder in his bedchamber, and combines logistical details of the murder method with emotional details intended to elicit sympathy: the reaction of the Berkeley townsfolk to Edward's cry of pain ('compassion' and prayer) serves as a model for reader response. These aspects find no analogues in accounts of Edmund Ironside's murder.

It is also important to question how similar the two murder methods really are. More importantly, Edmund's murdered body is not described: without assertions to the contrary, it must be assumed that an anal knife- or spear-wound, inflicted from a dark privy without the luxury of precision, would be messy and bloody. Conversely, stories of Edward II's murder frequently go to great lengths to describe its invisible nature. The *Brut* takes pains to point out that the red-hot spit was inserted through a horn, so that no marks were left on the skin: *and so þai quellede here Lorde, þat noþing was perceyvede* ('and so they quelled their Lord, so that nothing was perceived').⁴¹ Although the *Polychronicon* does not include this detail of the horn, it is significant that it quickly became an accepted part of the penetrative murder narrative despite this.⁴² Even Henry Knighton, who relies almost entirely on Higden's text as a source, deviates at this point to include it – suggesting that the calculated invisibility of Edward II's murder was perceived to be an essential, integral part of the narrative.⁴³ In addition, although this detail is absent from the most recent English translation of Geoffrey le Baker's *Chronicon*, le Baker's text *does* include it: in the original Latin, his account of Edward's murder reads 'cum ferro plumbarii incense ignito trans tubam ductilem ad egestionis partes secretas applicatam membra spiritualia post intestinas combusserunt'.⁴⁴ While David Preest translates the Latin word *tubam* as 'the tube leading to the secret parts of his bowels', *tubam* can also mean 'tube' in the inorganic sense of 'pipe'.⁴⁵ It could also be translated as 'trumpet' or 'horn'; certainly Holinshed, translating le Baker in 1577, referred to 'the pipe of a trumpet'.⁴⁶ It seems clear, therefore, that le Baker's text does also constitute a reference to the penetrative murder method as invisible, leaving no outward marks.

⁴¹ *Brut*, p. 253.

⁴² For examples of this detail in early modern texts, see (for example) Stow, *Chronicles*, fol. Z3^v; Hubert, *Deplorable Life*, stanza 579; Niccols, *Mirour*, fol. 3B7^r. Although Cary does not narrate the penetrative murder specifically (see below), she does also note that 'all agree that he was foully and inhumanly murther'd, yet so, that there was no visible or apparent signe which way 'twas acted' (*History of the Life*, fol. 2Q2^s). See below for a detailed consideration of this aspect of Edward's murder in Marlowe's *Edward II*.

⁴³ Knighton, *Chronicon*, p. 446.

⁴⁴ Le Baker, *Chronicon*, p. 33.

⁴⁵ Le Baker, *Chronicle* (2012), p. 32, trans. by Preest.

⁴⁶ Holinshed, *Chronicles* (1577), IV, section 1/p. 883.

The small proportion of texts that narrate the penetrative murder without specifying that it left no outward marks are either very short or copied almost verbatim from Higden.⁴⁷

In the original story in the *Brut*, the writer's focus on the unseen nature of Edward's murder may have been inspired by Murimuth's focus on the lack of opportunities to closely examine his body (described above). From a literary perspective, the *Brut* writer could also postulate this method plausibly: there is a limit to the amount of suspicion that could be cast on the story of a murder that leaves no visible trace. Indeed, the sheer density of logistical detail and causal reasoning in the *Brut* account (Edward awakes to find himself being crushed by the table, leading him to fear for his life, so he turns onto his front, thereby enabling his murderers to insert the spit) does, I think, suggest a kind of thinking-through of the sequence of events, and an effort to make the story as plausible and logical as possible. The story of the death of Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester – who also became associated with penetrative murder, as Michael Evans has noted – is instructive in this regard.⁴⁸ Humphrey's penetrative murder originates in Georges de Chastellain's *Temple de Bocace* (1463):

[he was] laid out stark naked on a bed, tied with cords [...] Making cries and groans as if to pierce the heavens, and, laid on his knees and elbows, he had a cow's horn, pierced at the end, placed in his fundament, through which was passed a burning-hot iron spit, passing as far as the heart, so as to appear that his death had come naturally, for he was placed naked on a bed between two sheets to give that impression.⁴⁹

This story subsequently appears in one of the related set of fifteenth-century English texts known as the 'London chronicles' (this one composed around 1496), which again specifies the invisible nature of the murder: 'when he was founded deed he was laide opyn [open], that all men myght behold hym [...] but no wounde nor tokyn of wounde cowde be persauved upon hym'.⁵⁰ Evans considers various reasons for the invention of this story with regard to Humphrey. He argues convincingly that sexual humour in the vein of Chaucer's *Miller's Tale* 'seems unlikely, given the otherwise reverential tone of the accounts' and given that Humphrey was not associated with any kind of sexual transgression.⁵¹ Although 'death through extreme suffering might confer sanctity on the victim', a suggestion consistent with the fact that 'Both Edward and Humphrey are known to have enjoyed posthumous unofficial cults of sainthood', this is

⁴⁷ Short texts include Hardyng, *Chronicle*, fol. Y8r; van den Bos, *Florus Anglicus*, fol. G2v; Meriton, *Anglorum Gesta*, fol. I10r; Stevenson, *Florus Britannicus*, fol. F^r. Near-verbatim copies of Higden include Otterbourne, *Duo Rerum Anglicarum Scriptores*, I, p. 113; Burton, *Chronica*, III, p. 355.

⁴⁸ Evans, *Death of Kings*, pp. 124–134.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Evans, *Death of Kings*, p. 126.

⁵⁰ *Chronicles of London*, p. 157.

⁵¹ Evans, *Death of Kings*, p. 130.

rendered problematic by the lack of any precedent for a saint being murdered by anal penetration with a red-hot spit.⁵² The conclusion Evans arrives at is that these writers chose to ascribe this murder method to Henry owing to their need for invisibility:

Humphrey was almost certainly not murdered. Having set up a packed parliament at which to try him, Suffolk was hardly likely to kill him before proceedings began. Hence there was a need for the new regime to promote a murder story involving means that would leave no outward mark.⁵³

It seems reasonable to suggest that a similar need for ‘a murder story involving means that would leave no outward mark’ prompted the choice of a similar method for accounts of the death of Edward II – who, while, he probably *was* murdered, was apparently not perceived to have died in a sufficiently exciting way for the sensational tone preferred by the *Brut* writer. Having been invented for Edward, ‘the story was probably ‘borrowed’, either intentionally or via popular rumour [...] and moulded to fit the circumstances’ of Humphrey’s death.⁵⁴ Subsequently, Forker argues, the staging of Edward’s murder in Marlowe’s *Edward II* (c. 1591–1592) influenced the staging of Humphrey’s murder in Shakespeare’s *2 Henry VI* (c. 1591).⁵⁵

These significant differences between the deaths of Edmund Ironside and Edward II do not rule out the possibility of influence. The most pertinent similarity between the two accounts is that they share a sensational nature: both are exciting, lurid anecdotes crafted with readers in mind. As mentioned above, Julia Marvin has argued convincingly that the writer of the Long Version of the *Brut* made a ‘deliberate effort’ to alter the narrative found in the Short Version:

The judicious revision of source material, along with compilation of material from many sources, was, after all, a preeminent form of literary activity in the Middle Ages. The kind of writing labelled history was by no means immune to intention, opinion, taste and imagination.⁵⁶

This ‘literary activity’, and these decisions made for reasons of creativity, almost certainly influenced the enormous popularity of the Long Version of the *Brut*. Moreover, there is evidence to strongly suggest that sensation-seeking characterized medieval historiography of Edward’s reign more widely – and this can further illuminate the significations of Edward’s murder. A pertinent example is the story of the death of Humphrey de Bohun (Earl of Hereford) at the battle of Boroughbridge in 1322. The *Brut* offers a gruesome yet exciting version of his death:

⁵² Evans, *Death of Kings*, pp. 128–129.

⁵³ Evans, *Death of Kings*, pp. 131–132.

⁵⁴ Evans, *Death of Kings*, p. 134.

⁵⁵ Marlowe, *Edward II*, pp. 35–36.

⁵⁶ Marvin, ‘Albion and Isabelle’, pp. 153–154.

amonge oþere, Sir Humfray de Bohoun, Erl of Herford, a worþi knyght of renoune þrouzout al Cristendome, stode & fau3t with his enemys apon þe brigge. And as the noble lorde stode and fau3t oppon þe brugge, a þef, a ribaude, scolkede under þe brigge, and fersly wiþ a spere smote the noble knyght into þe fondement, so þat his bowailles comen out þere. Allas þe sorwe! for þere was slayn þe floure of solace and of comfort, & also of curtesye.⁵⁷

among others, Sir Humphrey de Bohun, Earl of Hereford, a worthy knight of renown throughout all Christendom, stood and fought with his enemies upon the bridge. And as the noble lord stood and fought upon the bridge, a thief, a ribald, skulked under the bridge, and fiercely, with a spear, smote the noble knight in the anus, so that his bowels came out. Alas, the sorrow! for there the flower of solace, comfort and courtesy was slain.

The visceral detail and emotional lament of this account can be contrasted with the *Polychronicon*, which briefly notes that ‘Andrew de Harclay, running from the party of the King, killed the Earl of Hereford on this bridge’.⁵⁸ Later texts display a clear preference for the more sensational version of Bohun’s death: significantly, even writers whose texts are largely based on the *Polychronicon* (such as Knighton’s *Chronicon* and Thomas Burton’s chronicle of Meaux abbey) chose to follow alternative sources for this episode, retaining the penetrative story.⁵⁹

J.R.S. Phillips has suggested that the story of Edward’s penetrative murder ‘might have been a literal or poetic revenge for [Bohun’s] death’.⁶⁰ This comparison is instructive in terms of the historiographical preference for sensational narratives, but it is not clear whether the relationship between the two stories is as direct as Phillips suggests. There is only one text (the commentary to a Latin verse epitome composed around 1399) which employs the phrasing commonly used for Bohun’s death (*inter celanda nature confossus ignominiose peremptus est*) to narrate Edward’s murder.⁶¹ More problematically, both stories appear in Geoffrey le Baker’s *Chronicon*, which is sympathetic to both Bohun and Edward: on the death of the former, described as ‘the most pious [or righteous] Earl Humphrey’ (*piissimus comes Humfridus*), he exclaims, ‘Alas!’ (*proth dolor!*)⁶²

As le Baker’s description of Bohun as *piissimus* – a superlative indicating piety, righteousness, patriotism or chivalry – indicates, Bohun’s death also provides an instructive point of comparison for Edmund Ironside’s murder. Both are presented as the lamentable death of a brave warrior by sneaky, treacherous means. Le Baker additionally specifies that the groin is ‘a

⁵⁷ *Brut*, p. 219.

⁵⁸ Higden, *Polychronicon*, VIII, p. 312.

⁵⁹ Knighton, *Chronicon*, p. 425; Burton, *Chronica*, p. 342. For other examples of the penetrative story see, for example, le Baker, *Chronicle*, p. 13; Walsingham, *Historia*, fol. H5^v.

⁶⁰ Phillips, *Edward II*, p. 564, n. 260.

⁶¹ *Book of British Kings*, p. 86.

⁶² Le Baker, *Chronicon* (1889), p. 14, my translation. I have deviated from Preest’s translation for accuracy here.

private part where soldiers are not usually protected', suggesting that Bohun's killer unfairly exploited a universal weakness. The *Brut*, too, emphasizes Bohun's chivalrous qualities, as seen above: for example, he is described as *a worþi knyght of renoune prou3out al Cristendome* ('a worthy knight of renown throughout all Christendom'). Indeed, a further, even closer analogue for Bohun's death can be found in the story of a Viking who valiantly kept the bridge at the Battle of Stamford Bridge against the entire English army, until he was stabbed from below: as well as the near-identical scenario, this narrative has a very similar emphasis on the victim's bravery and his death by underhand means unworthy of his military prowess.⁶³ I would suggest that influence between the stories of the Stamford Bridge Viking, Edmund Ironside, and Humphrey de Bohun can be postulated much more plausibly and directly than between any of these stories and that of Edward II's penetrative murder.

Sexual mimesis

Of course, the echoes between the stories of Edmund and Edward should not be entirely ignored. As the above analysis indicates, the *Brut* writer would have come across two competing stories about Edmund Ironside in their sources. Both suited the sensational nature of the narrative. While he chose to use the mechanical archer story to recount Edmund's death, the anally penetrative story remained as a 'spare'. One possibility is that the writer – requiring a sensational but plausibly invisible murder narrative for Edward II – remembered the story of Edmund's death by anal penetration reported in some of their sources, and, deciding it was too good to waste completely, edited it to suit the story of Edward. This choice may also have been influenced by the story's sexually mimetic potential. As seen in Chapter 2, the Long Version of the *Brut* does present Edward as sexually transgressive. It is also unusual in arguably presenting Edward as complicit in his own anal penetration. Awakening to find that his captors are trying to smother him with a table, Edward *turnede his body opsadoun* ('turned his body upside down'), effectively allowing the insertion of the spit.⁶⁴ Although, as discussed above, I would suggest that this detail should be partly read as the *Brut* writer's effort to create a plausible sequence of events, it could also be interpreted as Edward inviting his own penetrative murder just as he invited anal sex during his life – and thus as implying that his sinful sexual practices constituted an effective 'invitation' to retributive murder. This could be seen to align Edward's story with the *contrapassi*

⁶³ Freeman, *Norman Conquest*, III, p. 369–370. Freeman notes that 'The story is found in the Abingdon Chronicle' and 'in William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon, with some variations.'

⁶⁴ *Brut*, p. 253.

of Dante's *Inferno*, in which 'divine retribution assumes the form of...the just punishment of sin effected by a process either resembling or contrasting with the sin itself'.⁶⁵

However, my consideration of other possible factors *before* sexual performativity is deliberate. Edward's historiographical reputation (as previous chapters have made clear) undeniably emphasizes the closeness of his relationships with his male favourites. Combined with – and perhaps influencing – the historiographical acceptance of the 'red hot spit' story, this focus on sexual transgression has led historians to over-emphasize the sexually mimetic aspect of his murder. Marvin notes in passing that the penetrative murder was 'probably envisioned by whoever conceived of it (whether murderer or fabricator of the story) as retribution for the King's relations with Piers Gaveston'; the word 'probably' and the lack of evidence offered is indicative of the extent to which this interpretation has become received wisdom.⁶⁶ Similarly, W.M. Ormrod calls the penetrative murder story an 'anal rape narrative' which 'places the King in a submissive role as (unwilling – or willing?) recipient of sexual domination'.⁶⁷ This is a valid potential reading, but it is not – as I have suggested – the story's only signification.

Moreover, it is essential to remember that the penetrative murder narrative emerges at a point where the historiographical consensus that Edward's transgressions were sexual at all – let alone that they specifically constituted sex with his male favourites – was very much still emerging. Assertions that this story definitively constitutes 'anal rape' represent responses not just to the narrative in the *Brut* itself, but to the entire body of medieval and early modern historiography of Edward: many scholars have, I would argue, interpreted the *Brut* in light of the subsequent consensus concerning sexual transgression that it helped to create. If we instead consider the *Brut* in its own context, we find only the very beginnings of this emergent consensus: as detailed in Chapter 2, the earliest unequivocal description of Edward as sexually transgressive is in the prose text *The Prophecy of the Six Kings*, popularized by the *Brut* itself. Robert Mills also has recently challenged the assumption that anal sex between men was inevitably associated with punitive impalement in the medieval mindset, Dante's *contrapassi* notwithstanding.⁶⁸ I am not arguing that the penetrative murder narrative has no sexually performative potential, but that situating it in its historical context (when Edward's reputation for sexual transgression was not fixed) and its literary context within the *Brut* (which foregrounds

⁶⁵ Lansing and Barolini, *Dante Encyclopedia*, p. 190.

⁶⁶ Marvin, 'Albion and Isabelle', p. 172 n. 92.

⁶⁷ Ormrod, 'Sexualities', p. 39.

⁶⁸ Mills, *Seeing Sodomy*, pp. 278–279.

the method's invisible and painful, torturous nature) can help us to remain alert to its multiple significations, among which punitive sexual mimesis has not always been foremost.

Even after the *Brut*, only two other texts could, in my view, be interpreted as foregrounding the murder's sexual performativity beyond its other significations. Marlowe's *Edward II* is one: as detailed more fully below, Marlowe presents a seductive murderer who in modern productions is often double-cast with the actor playing Gaveston. In the entire period considered for this study, only one text *explicitly* presents Edward's penetrative murder as punitive and sexually mimetic: Michael Drayton's narrative poem 'Poly-Olbion' (1612). In 'Poly-Olbion', Drayton states that Edward, 'For that preposterous sinne wherein he did offend, / In his posterious parts had his preposterous end.'⁶⁹ 'Preposterous' here indicates an inversion of order, with connotations of monstrousness and perversity: Edward's sexual behaviour is the opposite of correct behaviour (a sense bolstered by Drayton's presentation of Edward as the receptive partner in anal sex in his 1594 poem *Peirs Gaveston*, as analysed in Chapter 4), and his murder is an indecorous end for a king.⁷⁰ This sentiment is conspicuously unique, and doubtless influenced by the unequivocal sexual transgression Drayton had presented in his depictions of Edward elsewhere. It is in effect the exception that proves the rule, demonstrating that the interpretation of Edward's penetrative murder as punitive sexual mimesis was available to early modern writers and readers: in light of this, it is notable that no other writers chose to state this interpretation explicitly.

Pain and torture

Far more than sexual performativity, early modern texts in particular encourage the interpretation of Edward II's penetrative murder as painful and torturous. That this was understood to be an accepted and integral aspect of Edward's narrative is demonstrated by a set of verse couplets summarizing the reigns of English monarchs found in various fifteenth-century commonplace books and miscellanies, whose writer chose to highlight this over many other details as part of a very short summary of Edward's reign:

Carnarvan natus Edwardus secundus amatus,
Ingratis gratus est morte gravi cruciatus.

At Carnarvan was born beloved Edward II
He was pleasant to the ungrateful, and tortured to a painful death.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Drayton, 'Poly-Olbion', XVII.199–200.

⁷⁰ 'Preposterous, adj.', *OED Online* (2007); Drayton, *Peirs Gaveston*, ll. 277–282.

⁷¹ Ricart, *Kalendar*, p. 12. For a fuller textual history of these couplets, see the Appendix.

The prevalence of this theme (in early modern texts at least) is due in large part to the influence of Geoffrey le Baker's account:

And so on 22 September they suddenly seized him as he lay on his bed, and smothered and suffocated him with great, heavy mattresses, in weight more than that of fifteen strong men. Then, with a plumber's soldering iron, made red hot, and thrust through a horn leading to the secret parts of his bowels, they burnt out his inner parts and then his breath of life. For they were afraid that if a wound was found on the body of the King, where friends of justice are accustomed to look for wounds, his torturers might be compelled to answer for an obvious injury and suffer punishment for it.

In this way the knight, for all his strength, was overpowered. His loud cries were heard by men inside and outside the castle, who knew well enough that someone was suffering a violent death. Many people in Berkeley and some in the castle, as they themselves asserted, were awoken by his dying shouts and took compassion on the sufferer, making prayers for the holy soul of one emigrating from this world. Thus the kingdom of the angels in heaven received one hated by the world, just as it had hated his master Jesus Christ before him. First it received the teacher, rejected by the kingdom of the Jews, and then the disciple, stripped of the kingdom of the English.⁷²

Le Baker focuses here on the weight of the mattresses with which Edward is smothered; on the invisible nature of the murder, necessitated by the certainty that 'friends of justice' would punish the perpetrators if it were discovered; on the pain he experiences before dying ('his inner parts' are burned before he dies); and on his dying scream. This latter detail, invented by le Baker, appears in many later texts. Le Baker delineates the effects of Edward's cry: it directly resulted in 'compassion' and 'prayers', a description of contemporary reactions that sets out a guide by which the reader is also expected to respond. Marlowe, presumably inspired by Holinshed and/or Stow, indicates that Edward should cry out on being murdered through Matrevis's exclamation: 'I fear me that this cry will raise the town, / And therefore, let us take horse and away.'⁷³ As Brian Walsh notes, this is an arresting moment with the potential to 'shock playgoers into a moment of collective attentiveness'.⁷⁴ Several critics have suggested that this moment in Marlowe's play may have influenced the reference to Edward's enduring 'tragicke cry' in George Peele's poem *The Honour of the Garter* (1563).⁷⁵ I would suggest, however, that the presence of this detail in chronicles means that Peele need not necessarily have obtained it from Marlowe. Moreover, although Peele apparently refers to an auditory memory ('even now me thinkes I

⁷² Le Baker, *Chronicle*, trans Preest, p. 32. I have deviated from Preest's translation here to amend 'the tube' to 'a horn' (see above).

⁷³ Holinshed, *Chronicles*, (1587), VI, section 10/p. 341; Stow, *Chronicles*, fol. Z3^v; Marlowe, *Edward II*, V.v.113–114.

⁷⁴ Brian Walsh, 'Marlowe and the Elizabethan Theatre Audience', p. 75.

⁷⁵ Peele, *Honour of the Garter*, fol. C^r; see (for example) Anderson, *Performing Early Modern Trauma*, p. 114; Stevens, 'Edward II: A Stage History', p. 48; Tromly, *Playing With Desire*, p. 132.

heare’), this need not be taken literally: he might just as well be referring metaphorically to a ‘tragicke cry’ echoing down the ages. The same should be said of the inclusion of this detail in Drayton’s poem *The Barons Warres* (1603) and Thomas Deloney’s 1602 poetry collection *Strange Histories, of Kings, Princes, Dukes Earles, Lords, Ladies, Knights, and Gentlemen* (in which Edward’s ‘most lamentable cries’ resound for a gruelling three stanzas: ‘long it was before the time he dyed’); both writers may have drawn their representations of Edward’s death from any number of accounts, including but not limited to Marlowe’s play.⁷⁶

Drayton’s account of Edward’s murder in *Mortimeriados* (the poem he later revised as *The Barons Warres*) does not explicitly state that Edward cried out, but is nonetheless focused on its painful nature. His statement that Edward was penetrated with a ‘burning yron’ is immediately followed by an exclamation: ‘O payne beyond all paine, how much thou art! / Which words, as words, may verbally confesse, / But never pen precisely could expresse.’⁷⁷ Drayton also calls attention to the *method* of the murder specifically, suggesting to the reader that the means by which Edward was murdered – not the simple fact he was murdered – should be considered particularly noteworthy and cruel:

O let his tears even freezing as they light,
By the impression of his monstrous payne,
Still keepe this odious spectacle in sight,
And shew *the manner how* the King was slaine,
That it with ages may be new againe⁷⁸

The near-universal inclusion of the penetrative murder in early modern texts suggests that other writers and readers shared Drayton’s conviction that ‘the manner how the King was slaine’ was of key historiographical importance. At least one of Drayton’s readers appears to have been extremely struck by the ‘manner’ of Edward’s death. Elizabeth Cary, in her prose history of Edward’s reign (written *c.* 1627–1628), is unusual in not specifying that Edward was murdered by penetration, but her treatment of the murder clearly alludes to it – and it seems to have horrified her:

it may be better past over in silence, than so much as touch’d; especially since if it were in that cruel manner, as is by the major part agreed on, it was one of the most inhumane and barbarous acts that ever fell within the expression of all our *English* Stories; fitter rather to be pass’d over in silence, than to be discours’d, since it both dishonoureth our Nation, and is in the Example so dangerous. It seems *Mortimer* was yet a Novice to *Spencer’s* Art, of that same *Italian* trick of

⁷⁶ Drayton, *Barons Warres*, 5.66–67, ll. 521–536; Deloney, *Strange Histories*, fol. B8^v.

⁷⁷ Drayton, *Mortimeriados*, ll. 2056–2058; c.f. similar sentiment in *The Barons Warres*, 5.65, ll. 517–520.

⁷⁸ Drayton, *Mortimeriados*, ll. 2059–2063; in *The Barons Warres* the equivalent line refers, more obliquely, to ‘the foulness of their Deed’ (5.67, l. 536).

Poysoning, which questionless had wrought this work as surely, with a less noise, and fewer agents: It had been happy if such a Villany had never gain'd knowledge or imitation in the World: since it came to be entertain'd as a necessary servant of State, no man that runs in opposition, or stands in the way of Greatness, is almost secure in his own house, or among his Friends or Servants.⁷⁹

All of Cary's sources explicitly include the penetrative method, so it seems clear that this is what she means by 'that cruel manner, as is by the major part agreed on' – as is also demonstrated by her earlier reference to the invisibility of the murder method (see above) and her allusion to the story of Edward's scream (in her suggestion that another method would have resulted in 'less noise'). Her text certainly foregrounds the horror of Edward's murder: as well as 'inhumane and barbarous', she suggests it was unprecedented and unspeakable, both due to its abject cruelty and to the fact it sets a dangerous political precedent. It seems, however, that her lack of explicit narration of the penetrative method struck the publisher or editor of the octavo version of her history as odd or incomplete. The preface states that, 'Our Author closes his [sic] History without declaring the Particulars of the Murder of this Prince, wherefore I shall give you an account thereof, as I find it set down by the aforesaid Sir *Richard Baker*.⁸⁰ This addition, presented as a rectification of a perceived omission, indicates that the penetrative murder was, by the 1680s, an expected component of any account of Edward's reign.

Marlowe's murder scene

The scene in Marlowe's *Edward II* in which Edward is murdered has provided fertile grounds for literary critics exercised by its abject nature and the ways in which it defies interpretation and articulate response.⁸¹ As Ruth Lunney argues, however, the horror of Marlowe's murder scene (whatever precise nature that horror may take) was, in its contemporary context, entirely apposite: for an early modern audience, Edward's story was a 'cautionary tale' to which 'reacting with horror was an appropriate and quite conventional response'.⁸² In fact, such a reaction 'had both aesthetic and didactic satisfactions: the audience was called on to indulge in the pleasures of participating in the sensational, as well as the pleasures of self-righteousness. These were the excitements of the playhouse.'

⁷⁹ Cary, *History of the Life*, fols. 2Q2^r–2Q2^v.

⁸⁰ Cary, *Unfortunate Prince*, fol. A3^r.

⁸¹ Clare, 'Marlowe's "Theatre of Cruelty"', pp. 81–82; Leech, 'Power and Suffering', p. 195; Martin, 'Traumatic Realism', p. 36.

⁸² Lunney, '*Edward II* and Early Playhouse Audiences', pp. 35–36. See also Pearson, 'Audience as Witness', pp. 102–104, who sees the murder scene as 'an unexpected emotional eruption' which disrupts the audience's 'expectation of peaceful resolution'.

My ambivalent reference to the nature of the horror that is staged in *Edward II* is deliberate. It is probably no exaggeration to say that the question of how Edward dies in Marlowe's play – whether Marlowe intended the penetrative murder to be staged, and whether this took place in the early modern theatre – has attracted more critical attention than any other aspect of the historiography of Edward II. What the text specifies is as follows: Lightborn, the man Mortimer has employed to murder Edward, requests a red-hot spit, a table, and a featherbed.⁸³ When he comes to murder Edward, he instructs Gurney and Matrevis, 'Run for the table,' and then tells them to 'lay the table down, and stamp on it'.⁸⁴ The spit is not mentioned again in the script or the stage directions. Edward dies with a cry loud enough that Matrevis fears it will 'raise the town'.⁸⁵

It is this omission of the spit from the script (and given its unequivocal presence in Marlowe's sources, it is fair to call it an omission) that has provided critics with their most plausible argument against the early modern staging of the penetrative murder. As Thomas Anderson points out, 'Marlowe has Lightborn systematically instruct Matrevis and Gurney how to smother Edward so as not to bruise the body', but gives no such attention to the presumably more tricky act of inserting a red-hot spit through a horn into Edward's anus.⁸⁶ Andrew Hadfield has argued that, if the script is taken at face value, 'then Edward has been pressed to death', a punishment inflicted on those who refused to enter a plea at a criminal trial, thus avoiding being found guilty and ensuring the transfer of property to their heirs.⁸⁷ Stephen Orgel agrees, suggesting that modern critics' insistence that Marlowe's play does stage the penetrative murder is a sign that 'we want the murder to be precisely what Marlowe refuses to make it: a condign punishment, the mirror of Edward's unspeakable vice'.⁸⁸ For Christopher Shirley, meanwhile, the ambiguity of the murder scene – with penetration omitted from the script, but present in the minds of audience members who knew their history – 'stages a critique of the jurisprudential effort that categorizes Edward and Gaveston as sodomites': 'Marlowe's stage omission, flickering in and out of sight, parallels Edward's putative sodomy'.⁸⁹

⁸³ Marlowe, *Edward II*, V.v.29–30, 33.

⁸⁴ Marlowe, *Edward II*, V.v.109, 111.

⁸⁵ Marlowe, *Edward II*, V.v.113.

⁸⁶ Anderson, 'Surpassing the King's Two Bodies', p. 595.

⁸⁷ Hadfield, 'Death of Edward II', p. 41.

⁸⁸ Orgel, *Impersonations*, pp. 47–48.

⁸⁹ Shirley, 'Sodomy and Stage Directions', p. 284.

In the face of these arguments, the majority of critics still argue that Marlowe intended Edward's penetrative murder to be staged.⁹⁰ Charles Forker, editor of the 1995 Revels edition, inserts a stage direction (after Lightborn's instruction to 'lay the table down, and stamp on it') which reads, 'Using the table and featherbed to hold him down, they murder EDWARD, who screams as the spit penetrates him.'⁹¹ Martin Wiggins and Robert Lindsey, in the 2003 New Mermaids edition of the play, also argue for its staging, but 'precisely because it is obscene': the audience need to see 'the unspeakable physical reality' of the penetrative murder in order to avoid 'all too easily rationalis[ing it] as talion punishment'.⁹² Orgel's argument above – that this stance on the staging of the murder results from a desire to make Edward's death 'a condign punishment' – relies upon the penetrative murder story being definitively punitive and sexually mimetic. But as I have shown above, this interpretation is not uncomplicatedly justified by the historiography that preceded Marlowe; and as I will show below, the extent to which Marlowe himself encourages this interpretation within his play is not absolute. More than by a desire to make Edward's murder a 'condign punishment', it seems to me that argument for the staging of the penetrative murder can be justified by evidence within Marlowe's text.⁹³ The wider historiography of Edward, with which this book has dealt, provides further supporting evidence for an argument already justified by the play itself.

Lightborn – Marlowe's 'ahistorical' invented murderer, whose name derives from that of Lucifer and may be drawn directly from a devil in the Chester mystery cycle – provides veiled references to the method by which Edward will be murdered from his initial scene.⁹⁴ When Mortimer asks, 'And hast thou cast how to accomplish it?', Lightborn replies, 'Ay, ay, and none shall know which way he died.'⁹⁵ Accounts of Edward's penetrative murder consistently stress the fact that it left no external marks: this is, historiographically speaking, an essential aspect of the story. Being smothered or pressed to death by a table might provide similar invisibility, but is not similarly historiographically established as an invisible murder method – or as Edward's murder method. As such, this line of Lightborn's constitutes Marlowe's first hint to those audience members familiar with the penetrative murder story. Lightborn then lists the methods by which he has previously murdered people, 'several of which involve invading the orifices of

⁹⁰ Melnikoff goes so far as to refer to the fact of the staging as 'infamous' ('Introduction', p. 1), which rather undermines its contested status.

⁹¹ Marlowe, *Edward II*, V.v.112–113.

⁹² Wiggins and Lindsey, 'Introduction', p. xxxvi.

⁹³ For arguments in favour of staging the penetrative murder, see (for example) Tromly, *Playing With Desire*, pp. 128–130; Pasquarella, *Marlowe's Representation of Love*, pp. 173–174; Smith, *Homosexual Desire*, p. 220.

⁹⁴ Marlowe, *Edward II*, p. 78; Anderson, *Performing Early Modern Trauma*, p. 97; Cooper, *Shakespeare and the Medieval World*, p. 121; Ryan, 'Edward II and the Medieval Passion Play', p. 472; Shirley, 'Sodomy and Stage Directions', p. 287; Sales, *Christopher Marlowe*, p. 115.

⁹⁵ Marlowe, *Edward II*, V.iv.23–24.

passive victims', such as the ears and mouth.⁹⁶ 'And yet,' he says, 'I have a braver way than these'. When Mortimer (in Tromly's apt words) 'reaches for the bait' – 'What's that?' – Lightborn teasingly withdraws: 'Nay, you shall pardon me; none shall know my tricks.'⁹⁷ While this scene does work if taken at face value – demonstrating Lightborn's sinister guardedness and his threatening capacity to exceed even Mortimer's control – Marlowe's choice to dangle the murder method just out of reach here surely relies for its full, teasing impact on the audience's knowledge or suspicion of the method to which he is referring. Lightborn's choice of adjective, 'brave', points (in its early modern meaning) to the theatrical ingenuity of the method he has chosen, and constitutes a further hint to the audience that Edward's death will take the sensational, dramatic form they expect.⁹⁸ The tension mounts as the audience anticipates the inevitable penetrative murder, but has confirmation of it continually offered and withdrawn. Lightborn's false words of reassurance to Edward in the murder scene function in a similar way: 'These hands were never stain'd with innocent blood, / Nor shall they now be tainted with a king's.'⁹⁹ Again, these words depend for their full, chilling effect on the audience's knowledge that what Edward takes as reassurance is in fact confirmation of the worst. Lightborn is not lying – there will be no blood – but is in fact gesturing once again towards a murder method which was continually associated with invisibility. Such double-bluffing is consistent with Lightborn's pride in his choice of murder method, evident from his earlier conversation with Mortimer and from his comment to Matrevis and Gurney following Edward's death: 'Was it not bravely done?'¹⁰⁰ Here the word 'brave' recurs, confirming that Lightborn has indeed executed the murder he was planning all along.¹⁰¹

The very fact that Lightborn keeps referring (explicitly or not) to the *method* of Edward's murder calls as much attention, if not more, to the means by which his death is achieved as to the fact that he dies. This, again, is consistent with the way in which Edward's story is told in the early modern period: the method of his murder is mentioned in the majority of cases, receiving a disproportionate amount of historiographical coverage. While not every audience member can have been familiar with this aspect of Edward's reputation, these hints do not only work for those who 'know Holinshed' or the longer, more expensive chronicles:¹⁰² as shown above, the penetrative murder story appears to have been considered one of the most essential aspects of

⁹⁶ Tromly, *Playing With Desire*, p. 128; Pearson, 'Die With Fame', p. 109.

⁹⁷ Marlowe, *Edward II*, V.iv.36–38; Tromly, *Playing With Desire*, p. 128; Stevens, 'Edward II: A Stage History', p. 47.

⁹⁸ Anderson, *Performing Early Modern Trauma*, p. 98; Belt, 'Anti-Theatricalism and Rhetoric', p. 157. On the broader significance of Lightborn's showmanship, see Clark, 'Marlowe and Queer Theory', p. 238.

⁹⁹ Marlowe, *Edward II*, V.v.80–81.

¹⁰⁰ Marlowe, *Edward II*, V.v.115.

¹⁰¹ Pasquarella, *Marlowe's Representation of Love*, p. 174.

¹⁰² Tromly, *Playing With Desire*, p. 129; see also Shirley, 'Sodomy and Stage Directions', p. 288.

Edward's story, included or referenced in even the briefest of historical texts. Essential too was the scream which accompanied it. Marlowe's inclusion of this detail, like his references to the invisibility of Edward's murder, demonstrates his thorough engagement with the penetrative murder story. For audience members familiar with Edward's historiographical reputation, these details would have called the penetrative murder to mind, adding to the expectations already created by Lightborn's continual references to the method. Forker is right to describe Edward's penetrative murder as 'notorious', and to argue that 'Elizabethan audiences [...] would have expected to see it represented'.¹⁰³ In Jonathan Crewe's words, 'Even if the stage directions leave something to the imagination, they nevertheless script a scene that already exists in the contemporary public mind: if crucial details are left out, the equally crucial apparatus is specified.'¹⁰⁴

For this is the most decisive argument: the spit of Marlowe's sources is not entirely absent from his play. On the contrary, Lightborn asks for it earlier in the murder scene: 'See that in the next room I have a fire, / And get me a spit, and let it be red-hot.'¹⁰⁵ The fact that it does not recur explicitly in a stage direction or verbal command should not allow us to simply erase these lines. As Forker says, 'From the perspective of modern theatrical practice, Q's stage directions are deficient in numerous places'.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, 'If the playwright had intended not to show it, there would be little reason for having the murderer mention his weapon during his preparations, thereby setting up a disappointing anticlimax': Lightborn's lines can be seen as the early modern equivalent of Chekhov's gun.¹⁰⁷ It is fair to accept that a stage direction is missing, as is extremely common in early modern playtexts, but we do not need to conclude that its absence renders the text hopelessly ambiguous. The evidence cited above strongly suggests to me that it is overwhelmingly likely that Marlowe intended the penetrative murder to be staged, and that it was staged in early modern productions of *Edward II*.

Among critics who agree, many have argued (or assumed) that Marlowe's murder scene functions in the play as mimetic punishment for Edward's sexual relationship with Gaveston. This was first proposed by William Empson, who argued in 1946 that, 'The obscene torture by which [Edward] is [...] killed is an appalling parody of the homosexual act', while noting that 'This does not mean that Marlowe agreed with his audience that the punishment was

¹⁰³ Marlowe, *Playing With Desire*, V.v.30n.

¹⁰⁴ Crewe, 'Disorderly Love', p. 393; see also Anderson ('Surpassing the King's Two Bodies', p. 596), who proposes the idea of 'the unwritten script of the play' which partially rests on 'the force of cultural memory'.

¹⁰⁵ Marlowe, *Edward II*, V.v.29–30.

¹⁰⁶ Marlowe, *Edward II*, V.v.30n.

¹⁰⁷ Marlowe, *Edward II*, V.v.30n; Menzer, 'Marlowe Now', p. 362.

deserved'.¹⁰⁸ Charles Masinton went further, arguing that in addition to the symbolic spit, 'The feather-bed calls to mind Edward's soft, pleasure-loving nature, and the table that is used to crush him brings to mind his docile, masochistic attitude and his submissive role as Gaveston's lover.'¹⁰⁹ More recent critics agree: for Gregory Bredbeck, 'The murder of Edward by raping him with a red-hot poker – quite literally branding him with sodomy – can be seen as an attempt to 'write' onto him the homoeroticism constantly ascribed to him.'¹¹⁰ As detailed in Chapter 5, Jeffrey Masten interprets the decision to bind a copy of the play with theological and juridical texts as suggesting that the play could be read as 'a treatise (if you will) that explores *the rightness* of Edward's torture and horrific death' – a view which implies, though Masten does not stress it explicitly, a belief in the potentially punitive nature of the penetrative murder.¹¹¹ Assessing critical views like these, Stephen Guy-Bray retorts that 'there is no real basis for thinking that an Elizabethan audience would have been as homophobic as a twentieth-century critic'.¹¹² Guy-Bray's argument is deliberately provocative – but this is, frankly, understandable, given the homophobic tone of Empson and Masinton's critical treatments. Moreover, I would suggest that considering the Elizabethan audience's experience of the play does provide justification for Guy-Bray's contention that Marlowe's contemporary audience would not have felt 'the punishment was deserved'.

As I have argued, medieval and early modern accounts of Edward's murder usually foreground its torturous nature and its invisibility more than its sexual mimesis. Many elements of Marlowe's play continue this trend. Firstly, he foregrounds the invisible nature of the penetrative murder: Lightborn assures Mortimer that 'none shall know which way he died', and is subsequently concerned that Edward's body not be bruised by the table.¹¹³ As Emily Bartels argues, 'Rather than fitting the crime, the punishment fits Mortimer's need for a murder and murderer that finally cannot be detected, like the "unpointed" message, "*Edwardum occidere nolite timere bonum est*", that covers its treasonous tracks'.¹¹⁴ Secondly, any condemnation of Edward's behaviour in the play is significantly diminished by the sympathy he commands for his love and grief for Gaveston (see Chapter 3) and for his mistreatment while imprisoned (see Chapter 6), as well as by his scream of pain. This is enhanced by the fear he expresses in the murder scene;

¹⁰⁸ Empson, 'Two Proper Crimes'.

¹⁰⁹ Masinton, *Marlowe's Tragic Vision*, p. 111, quoted by Guy-Bray, 'Homophobia', p. 127.

¹¹⁰ Bredbeck, *Sodomy*, p. 76; see also Boyette, 'Wanton Humour', p. 48; Callaghan, 'Terms of Gender', p. 287.

¹¹¹ Masten, 'Bound for Germany'; emphasis added.

¹¹² Guy-Bray, 'Homophobia', p. 126.

¹¹³ Bredbeck, *Sodomy*, p. 76.n. 58; see also Cunningham, 'Renaissance Execution and Marlovian Elocution'.

¹¹⁴ Bartels, *Spectacles of Strangeness*, p. 159; Marlowe, *Edward II*, V.iv.9, 11. This cryptic Latin message literally translates as 'To kill Edward do not fear is good'; it is translated in the play both as 'Fear not to kill the king, 'tis good he die' and 'Kill not the king, 'tis good to fear the worst'. For more information on the origin of this message, see the Appendix entry for le Baker, *Chronicon*.

Marlowe's play is decidedly ambivalent about whether Edward has a 'good death' by early modern religious standards.¹¹⁵ Although he states his intention to die well, urging Lightborn to 'let me see the stroke before it comes, / That even then when I shall lose my life, / My mind may be more steadfast on my God', many critics seem to forget that his last words are those of fear.¹¹⁶ It is true that 'just before he is killed, Edward cries, "Assist me, sweet God, and receive my soul" [...] echoing Christ's last words on the cross, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit"; but his actual final words are, "O spare me! Or dispatch me in a trice!", a panicked exclamation which distracts his mind from piety, and which is followed by a wordless scream.¹¹⁷ Overall, Tromly's assessment of the tone of Marlowe's murder scene seems most apt:

While some of the visual imagery of the scene does have analogues in punitive Christian iconography (e.g., medieval representations of hell in which sodomites are impaled on spits), the play as a whole does not present the relationship of Edward and Gaveston as intrinsically sinful, and the extreme pleasure which Lightborn takes in murdering Edward renders the victim pitiable and the justice dubious [...] Edward's pain will not be moralized away.¹¹⁸

Tromly's reading of the murder scene here is useful because of his efforts to contextualize it within the play as a whole.¹¹⁹ My aim here has been not only to build on this contextualization, but to augment it, incorporating Edward's wider historiographical reputation as a valuable consideration when interpreting Marlowe's murder scene. Marlowe did not find an uncomplicatedly punitive murder in his sources, and it therefore makes sense that he did not invent one.

Conclusion

With all this said, sex is clearly not absent from Marlowe's murder scene. As many critics have noted, Lightborn conducts Edward's murder as 'an almost unendurable seduction of sorts', inviting him to 'Lie on this bed, and rest yourself awhile' and employing a combination of 'feigned sympathy, soothing comfort, and transparent lies' in order to '[toy] quasi-sexually with his human object'.¹²⁰ The penetrative nature of the earlier murders he narrates, and indeed the

¹¹⁵ On what constitutes a 'good death', and Marlowe's engagement with it in his other plays, see McCarthy, 'Marlowe's *Ars Moriendi*'.

¹¹⁶ Marlowe, *Edward II*, V.v.75–77; Bevington, 'Christopher Marlowe: The Late Years', p. 219; Martin, 'Plays of Passion', p. 89; Ryan, 'Edward II and the Medieval Passion Play', p. 488.

¹¹⁷ Marlowe, *Edward II*, V.v.110; Martin, 'Plays of Passion', p. 89; Atwood, 'All Places Are Alike', p. 66.

¹¹⁸ Tromly, *Playing With Desire*, p. 130.

¹¹⁹ For a similar treatment, see Lunney, 'Edward II and Early Playhouse Audiences', p. 31. Lunney reads Marlowe's murder scene in the context of other 'cautionary tales' in Elizabethan drama, concluding that 'the impact of Edward's death' is 'more disturbing and challenging' than 'that of other deserved deaths in sixteenth-century plays', encouraging the audience to grieve for the murdered King.

¹²⁰ Marlowe, *Edward II*, V.v.71 and p. 79.

sexual potential of the verbs ‘die’ and ‘kill’, also establish the association of his murders with sex, and there is arguably a frisson of pleasure in his assurance that ‘ne’er was there any / So finely handled as this King shall be.’¹²¹ The parallels between Lightborn and Gaveston also lend a sexual element to the murder scene, since Gaveston is unequivocally established in the play as Edward’s sexual partner: both characters function as ‘vice’ figures, and there is good evidence to suggest that they were played by the same actor in early modern productions, as they frequently are in modern ones.¹²² Several critics have also seen Marlowe’s choice to shift Edward’s prison to a sewer, where he is showered with ‘filth’, as calling anal sex to mind, though Patrick Ryan argues that this is also potentially Christological.¹²³ With these features of Marlowe’s murder scene in mind, it should be noted that he encourages the interpretation of the penetrative murder as sexually mimetic more thoroughly than his sources. Yet as I have argued, it does not follow that he therefore necessarily presents the penetrative method as punitive. As Darlene Farabee argues – in a sentence that could equally be applied to the *Brut* and to the many other texts (analysed above) which foreground pain and torture more than sexually mimetic punitivity – ‘Edward’s grisly execution is, as orthodox interpreters of the play have correctly insisted, iconographically “appropriate”, but this very appropriateness can only be established *at the expense of every complex, sympathetic human feeling evoked by the play.*’¹²⁴

The specificity of Edward’s painful, torturous, invisible murder, and its distinction from the tradition of Edmund Ironside’s death, is perhaps best observed through an anomalous example. An independent continuation of the *Brut*, written in Anglo-Norman around 1377, offers an unusual account of Edward’s murder:

they [Edward’s keepers] assisted him royally at the table, but they put fast-acting poison in his soup, which began to work quickly, and he cleared the table to go to void himself, because he could not keep down the meat. And so he repaired to his bed and, understanding the false plotting of his enemies, he gave great and hideous sighs, and lamented. And the enemies assailed him strongly to hasten his death. He jumped out of his bed all naked and they held him forcibly with an iron bar and he loudly cried, ‘Hail Mary, I cry to you for mercy!’ This cry was heard through all the town, and so the traitors talked loudly of how to bring him down, and some held him by the tender parts and the others by a cloth around his bottom. And so they struck the noble king to the ground and, to be sure of his death, pushed a horn in his private parts and through this horn a

¹²¹ Pearson, ‘Die with Fame’, p. 109; Shirley, ‘Sodomy and Stage Directions’, p. 287; Marlowe, *Edward II*, V.v.38–39.

¹²² Deats, ‘Marlowe’s Fearful Symmetry’, p. 248; Pasquarella, *Marlowe’s Representation of Love*, pp. 167–168; Tromly, *Playing With Desire*, p. 129.

¹²³ Stymeist, ‘Status, Sodomy, and the Theater’, p. 245; Crewe, ‘Disorderly Love’, pp. 395–396; Ryan, ‘*Edward II* and the Medieval Passion Play’, p. 476. For an exploration of the multiple significations of sewers in early modern England, see Foley, ‘Tactical Engagements with Sewers’, p. 8.

¹²⁴ Farabee, ‘Critical Backstory’, p. 39; see also Anderson, *Performing Trauma*, p. 116.

burning iron and burnt him through all his body. Who has ever heard of such wicked treason and torment done to any king by his lords without reason or process of law, or any martyr delivered up to such a vile death?¹²⁵

Probably influenced by le Baker's description of Edward in his death scene as a 'knight' (*miles*) who is 'overpowered' (*obruitur*) despite his 'strength' (*strenuissimus*), the writer presents Edward as far from passive. Aware of his situation rather than surprised in bed, he attempts to fight his attackers despite his literal naked vulnerability, but is defeated by being unfairly outnumbered and assailed in a cruel and undignified manner. The image of him being 'held [...] by the tender parts' (*ly treerount par les tendres membres*) could be perceived as sexualised, but in this context it principally functions to suggest that Edward's attackers took advantage of his nakedness and subjected him to a painful attack unworthy of his valiant attempts to fight them. As such, this scene has closer parallels with the death of Edmund Ironside than any other accounts of Edward's murder. Yet even in this account, Edward's pain is foregrounded through his loud cry (*hautement cria*) and the detailed depiction of a murder that 'burnt him through all his body' (*just il ars par tout le corps*). This is the treacherous murder of an honourable man, but its primary significations remain those of horror and torture.

The penetrative murder narrative in its earliest forms, then, foregrounds the emotional and physical suffering that Edward endured; and, as emphasized earlier, it originated at a point where there was no clear consensus that Edward was sexually transgressive at all, let alone that he engaged in sex with men. The interpretation of this narrative as sexually mimetic and punitive by many scholars is nonetheless thoroughly understandable – both because we are all writing in the aftermath of the formation of a consensus that Edward's relationships with his male favourites were sexual, and because later and better-known texts (like Marlowe's *Edward II* and Drayton's *Poly-Olbion*) were responding to that consensus when they depicted his murder. But it remains the case that the place of the narrative of Edward's murder in the history of queer sexuality is not primarily that of an example of oppression, cruelty, or sadistic 'condign punishment'; it is that of readers being invited to feel horror and pity for a sexually transgressive figure. And in constructing an original narrative that elicited that horror and pity, the writer of the Long Version of the prose *Brut* was consistently retaining the sensational tone of their entire chronicle: participating in the literary craft of history-writing that this book has observed throughout.

¹²⁵ Galbraith, p. 217. See Chapter 6 for details of this manuscript.

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Conclusion: The Literary Transformation of History

Abstract

This conclusion explores the implications of this study for two key areas of scholarship: the study of Marlowe's *Edward II*, and our understanding of medieval and early modern history-writing. I argue for the productive potential of acknowledging the extent to which the medieval and early modern writing of history was a literary process, one significantly shaped by literary techniques and literary texts. Medieval and early modern writers constructed historical accounts in all genres – chronicles and political texts as well as drama and poetry – for an imagined reading public. In this way, writers' consideration for imagined readers – based on knowledge of the actual tastes of the reading public – directly shaped the reputations of historical figures.

Keywords

Edward II, Christopher Marlowe, chronicles, historiography

Introduction

By the end of the seventeenth century, Edward II had been historiographically established as an exemplum of utterly ineffective rule – led astray by the poor advice of controlling favourites, but also by his own uncontrollable emotional attachment and sexual attraction to them – whose life ended with a pathetic series of ordeals at the hands of his captors and an agonizing, torturous anally penetrative murder. He was remembered equally for his irresponsibility as a reigning monarch and for his sympathetic, suffering humanity as a deposed King. When I set out to trace the process by which Edward acquired his early modern reputation, this apparently contradictory legacy was not what I expected to find. Based on modern assumptions about past narratives of love and sex between men, I was anticipating a pattern of moralizing which led to the incorporation of Edward into a lineage of sexually transgressive figures whose sins were unambiguously condemned; while based on the received understanding of the relationship between chronicles and history plays or poems, I was expecting to confirm Maureen Godman's claim that that 'Marlowe made a personal drama out of the uncohesive mass of detail which constituted the large chronicles'.¹ What I found, however, was this: the majority of significant changes in the historiography of Edward and his favourites

¹ Godman, 'Stow's *Summarie*', p. 161.

can be summed up as part of an overall increasing emphasis on features of the text that enhance reading pleasure. This trend – which, I have argued, can be considered a move towards the literary – is what unites the outrageously condemnable King Edward and the pathos-inducing deposed Edward. During the period 1305–1697, accounts of Edward’s reign increasingly emphasize what can be broadly summarized as the exciting and the emotional: his intensely close relationships with his favourites; his devastating grief at Gaveston’s death; his theatrical sorrow at his deposition; his abject misery and degrading treatment while imprisoned; the fear and pain he experiences through a torturous and sensational murder. Small details and extractable anecdotes endure from text to text because they are memorable, exciting and enjoyable for the reader. Writers also emphasize the overall narrative structure of Edward’s reign as a *de casibus* one: this enables readers to predict its trajectory, engaging them both through the pleasure of having their expectations fulfilled and through a growing sense of inevitability and impending doom. The anticipation of Edward’s *de casibus* fall and (in later texts) of his anally penetrative murder creates an awful suspense that commands the reader’s attention.

Illuminating Marlowe

These findings have important implications for the study of Marlowe’s *Edward II*. I have deliberately considered Marlowe’s play almost exclusively in the context of other accounts of Edward’s reign, as one way of emphasizing my point that analysing *Edward II* as a stage in a process of historiographical reputation-building – as opposed to the culmination of a process whereby ‘chronicle sources’ are transformed into ‘literary outputs’ – can enhance our understanding of its significance. But by way of highlighting the usefulness of this study to literary critics of Marlowe’s work, I want also to draw out those conclusions here.

There are several aspects of the play which, I would suggest, might be interpreted differently if they are considered in the context of other accounts of Edward’s reign. As I argued in Chapter 7, the historiographical consensus concerning the penetrative nature of Edward’s murder should be seen as a compelling argument in favour of its being included – and staged – in Marlowe’s play. Similarly, the moral ambivalence of the play, which has attracted substantial critical commentary, can – as I have suggested – be partly attributed to the choice made by Holinshed and Stow, the writers of Marlowe’s source texts, to begin relying on Geoffrey le Baker’s sympathetic account of Edward’s life at the point of his deposition. It seems likely that this was motivated by two factors: le Baker’s text was by far the most detailed, sensational and emotionally compelling treatment of these events available to Holinshed and Stow, and its representation of Edward’s abject misery facilitated a *de casibus* narrative structure. The shift in

Marlowe's play and its resulting equivocation, then, results from an identical shift in his main sources: a shift with literary motivations.

Our understanding of the significance and impact of Marlowe's play is also enhanced by appreciating its influence on the nature of Edward II's sexual reputation. Not only was *Edward II* perhaps pivotal in cementing Marlowe's reputation as a dramatist during or shortly after his lifetime;² it is also a historiographically innovative and influential text. As I showed in Chapter 2, while other late sixteenth-century texts stated that Edward's behaviour was sexually transgressive and that these transgressions were encouraged by his favourites, Marlowe's *Edward II* was the first text to represent Edward and his favourites as unequivocally engaged in sexual relationships. By doing this, Marlowe initiated a significant historiographical shift. After Marlowe, texts of all genres are significantly more likely to present Edward and his favourites (particularly Gaveston) as engaged in a sexual relationship; to mention sexual transgression explicitly and to link this to Gaveston; to romanticize Edward and Gaveston's relationship; and to use the terms 'Ganymede' and 'minion'.

This influence must, in part, have resulted from the play's popularity in print, which itself 'might also have been linked to the play's continued presence on the professional stage'.³ Melnikoff argues that Marlowe's play both 'benefited from' and contributed to the 'currency' of Edward's story in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. I would argue, further, that Marlowe played a large role in creating a climate of enthusiasm for Edward's story in the first place: his play presented that story as emotionally compelling and politically relevant, fostering an appetite for further accounts and creating an environment in which the play then flourished in print and performance. In other words, Marlowe's *Edward II* played a major part in creating its own conditions for success. Political conditions were, clearly, also ripe for the play and the poetry it influenced: as I showed in Chapter 5, Edward's story was perceived by many late Elizabethan and Jacobean subjects to provide a salient parallel for the 'age of overmighty favourites' in which they lived.

Literary transformations

The most influential texts in the shaping of Edward's historiographical reputation – the Long Version of the *Brut* (c. 1333–1347), Ranulf Higden's *Polychronicon* (1340s), Geoffrey le Baker's *Chronicon* (c. 1347–1360), Thomas Walsingham's *Chronica Maiora* (1390s), Robert Fabyan's

² Stevens, 'Edward II: A Stage History', p. 43.

³ Melnikoff, 'Introduction', pp. 3–5.

Newe Cronycles (c. 1504), Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1577 and 1587) and Marlowe's *Edward II* (c. 1591–2) – were, without exception, long and detailed accounts which supplement the facts of Edward's reign with exciting, emotionally compelling details and crafted narrative structure. The account of Edward's reign in le Baker's *Chronicon* in particular sits alongside other prose texts which are hard to generically classify, like Elizabeth Cary's politically and psychologically engaged prose histories of Edward's reign (seen by Louise Schleiner as proto-novelistic, and by Janet Starner-Wright and Susan Fitzmaurice as reflecting her work as a dramatist); both could reasonably be described as historical fiction.⁴ Nor were excitement, sensation and emotion confined to longer texts: as Barrett L. Beer argues of John Stow, writers of shorter chronicles 'assumed that the audience for the cheaper abridgements was about as much interested in trivia as the wealthy buyer of [longer texts like Stow's] *Annales*'.⁵ An extreme example of this can be seen in the popular rhyming couplets quoted in Chapter 7, which summarise Edward's reign in terms of his birthplace, his favourites and his painful death.⁶

The popularity of accounts characterised by narrativity, sensation and emotional engagement – and the prioritisation of this content in shorter, as well as longer texts – demonstrates, simply put, that this is what many readers wanted. Moreover, it demonstrates that writers of all genres were thinking about their readers. Julia Marvin has recognised this in the Long Version of the *Brut*, and John Taylor in the *Polychronicon*; here, however, I want to argue for it as a wider phenomenon that was central to the priorities of writers of historical accounts'.⁷ Clearly, the demands of the textual marketplace – in both manuscripts and printed books – were seen not just in terms of popular desire for information on historical events, but in terms of demand for enjoyable historical narratives which would communicate history in an engaging way. When writers were putting together new historical narratives, they looked to sources with these features – and importantly, they looked not just to sources from their own genre, but to other genres, and to the general climate of historiographical opinion surrounding particular figures or events that had been created by multiple texts.

It might well be objected: who, if not readers, *could* writers be writing for? The question is an apposite one; yet as Marvin has pointed out, scholars have often assumed that writers of history have made changes to the broadly accepted narrative because they must not have had

⁴ Schleiner, 'Lady Falkland's Re-entry into Writing', p. 210 (see Britland, 'Kings Are But Men', p. 32, on the gendered ideologies this classification may reflect); Starner-Wright and Fitzmaurice, 'Shaping a Drama Out of a History'; Raber, 'Introduction', pp. xxiv–xxv. On the psychological realism of Cary's text, see Skura, 'Elizabeth Cary and Edward II', pp. 87–89.

⁵ Beer, *Tudor England Observed*, p. 54.

⁶ Ricart, *Kalendar*, p. 12. For a fuller textual history of these couplets, see the Appendix.

⁷ Marvin, *Albine and Isabelle*, p. 154; Taylor, *Universal Chronicle*, p. 46.

access to a particular source, or because they must have used a source which has now been lost. There has, historically, been a reluctance to appreciate the role of creativity in shaping these historical narratives: as Marvin persuasively argues, ‘Human agency should not always and only be an explanation of last resort’.⁸ This ‘agency’, I contend, should be seen as incorporating selection of sources, negotiation of politically sensitive but engaging details, strategic use of sexual vocabulary, narrative form and narrative content. And it should be contextualized by consideration of what motivated it: namely, by understanding that writers of chronicles had a deep appreciation of what their readers desired, demanded, expected, and purchased.

The process by which Edward II’s reputation took shape during the four centuries following his death can, therefore, be seen as a literary transformation of history. But in pointing this out, I also want to argue for a literary transformation of a different kind.

Throughout this book, I have undertaken close reading of texts of all genres. That chronicles are texts worthy of such an approach may seem obvious, but it is a position that is still treated as suspect or revolutionary in some scholarly quarters. Igor Djordjevic, for example, asserts that ‘Annabel Patterson’s *Reading Holinshed’s Chronicles* has *appropriated* the chronicle narrative as a field of literary analysis’; similarly, William Marx describes Paul Strohm’s approach to Richard II’s reign as ‘*challenging* in the way it investigates a range of material traditionally regarded as “sources” and “documents” [including chronicles] using [...] techniques for the interpretation of literary texts’.⁹ Consideration of the decisions made in the historiography of Edward II, however, indicates that a large proportion of the historical writers who contributed to that historiography were (as Marvin says of the writer of the Long Version of the *Brut*) ‘deeply aware of history as a literary genre’.¹⁰ This is enormously pertinent to the trends that have been observed in this book, which make most sense when viewed as creatively motivated, reader-focused alterations. I began my opening chapter by arguing that any consideration of Edward II’s historiographical reputation must pay attention to the changing terminology with which sexual transgression has been discussed and expressed; I want here to stress that we must also consider narrative structure and devices that encourage emotional engagement with the text. Writers’ choices in favour of these literary features have influenced their representation of Edward II and his favourites, and as such, they have shaped his historiographical reputation.

⁸ Marvin, ‘Albine and Isabelle’, p. 154.

⁹ Djordjevic, *Holinshed’s Nation*, p. 1; Marx, ‘Reception and Revision’, p. 53. Emphasis added.

¹⁰ Marvin, ‘Albine and Isabelle’, p. 182; see also Levy, *Tudor Historical Thought*, p. 19, for a comparable insight on Fabyan.

These observations should, I believe, complicate our understanding of the relationship between chronicles and ‘literary texts’. This is not just because any terminological schema that suggests chronicles are not ‘literary’ is (as I have argued) inadequate; it is also because appreciating the influence on chronicles of dramatic texts and of concern for the reading public forces us to challenge the assumptions that endure among literary critics about the relationship between chronicles and history plays or poems. In particular, it calls into question what we might call the ‘source/output dichotomy’ in the study of drama and poetry that engages with history: the assumed monodirectional flow of historical ‘information’ from chronicle to drama or poem, and the often unthinking characterization of chronicles as factual ‘source material’ from which dramatists and poets moulded structured narratives with emotional trajectories. Godman’s claim that ‘Marlowe made a personal drama out of the uncohesive mass of detail which constituted the large chronicles’ is just one example of these assumptions, which tend to draw on a value-laden schema in which the dramatist/poet is the artist seeking emotional engagement from their audience, and the chronicler the collator of historical fact for fact’s sake.¹¹ Some critics have usefully troubled this dichotomy: notably, Joan Parks and Lisa Hopkins have both analysed the ways in which Marlowe’s *Edward II* engages with and reshapes the ideas of nationhood, public and private space which he found established in early modern chronicles; Georgia E. Brown discusses the play’s participation in the ongoing process of negotiating gendering of political values; and Mary-Rose McLaren reads Shakespeare’s plays as responding to and developing the images and conceptualisations of royalty that are articulated not just in early modern printed chronicles, but in the manuscript family of London chronicles that came before them.¹² However, wider acknowledgement of its insufficiency within the field of literary studies has the potential to be genuinely productive. In reality, as I have shown, Marlowe’s chronicle sources were far from uncohesive: they were crafted narratives whose writers chose their details and their sources carefully to create an enjoyable account for their imagined readers. Moreover, Marlowe was not the end-point of a process whereby a mass of facts was moulded into a finished literary product: his play went on to influence chronicles in its own right.

As such, the case of Edward II’s reputation should encourage us to rethink the place of early modern chronicles in literary scholarship, and of early modern drama and poetry in historical scholarship. Chronicles were not merely ‘sources’ for plays and poems; instead, all of these genres occupied a more complex position as stages in the process of constructing historical

¹¹ Godman, ‘Stow’s Summarie’, p. 161.

¹² Parks, ‘History, Tragedy and Truth’; Hopkins, ‘Englishmen Abroad’, p. 329 and *passim*; Brown, ‘Tampering with the Records’; McLaren, ‘Making Men Out of Kings’.

narratives and creating cultural preoccupations with particular historical episodes. Kirk Melnikoff has suggested that Marlowe's *Edward II* 'came to stand as a successful historical narrative in its own right'; this observation should be taken seriously, and should prompt us to reexamine what we mean when we refer to a 'historical narrative' in an early modern context.¹³ This reassessment will, of necessity, require a concurrent reassessment of disciplinary boundaries and techniques: the application of close textual analysis to chronicles and other historical texts, and the scrutiny of the historiographical impact of drama and poetry. If we are to fully appreciate how historiographical reputations took shape in the medieval and early modern period – or, to put it another way, how medieval and early modern history was written – our scholarship must undergo a literary transformation of its own.

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¹³ Melnikoff, 'Introduction', p. 4.

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Appendix: Accounts of and allusions to Edward II's reign, composed 1305–1697

Abstract

This appendix collates newly researched editorial detail for 130 accounts of, and allusions to, Edward II's reign written during the period 1305–1697 – representing the vast majority of texts addressing Edward II that were composed in England during this period. The table details each text's textual history; languages and available translations; sources; and significance for the study of Edward II's reputation. Since many Latin chronicles of Edward's reign were last printed in the nineteenth century, and manuscript material in particular has been subject to confusing nomenclature, this appendix provides a clear and up-to-date reference guide with which scholars can inform their reading of any of any of these texts.

Keywords

Chronicles, historiography, bibliography, manuscripts, textual history

Introduction

This table provides a short guide to the accounts of, and allusions to, Edward II's reign that were written in England during the period 1305–1697. (Texts written in France that exerted demonstrable influence on English texts are also included; as John Taylor has persuasively argued with reference to the fourteenth century in particular, 'In a century when there was still a French dimension to English history, and when England was militarily and culturally involved with France, any account of English historical literature must take account also of narratives originating outside England itself'.¹) It details each account's textual history; its language and any translations; its relationship to other accounts, in terms of sources and texts that used it as a source; and its importance to the development of Edward II's reputation.

Texts are listed in alphabetical order of author; anonymous works are listed under 'Anon', in alphabetical order of title. Each text is listed under the title and author by which it is generally known to historians and literary critics; any alternative titles and authors are listed under 'Textual history'. In the index, texts with known authors are listed under the author in the 'Author' column of this table; anonymous texts are listed under the title in the 'Title' column of this table.

¹ Taylor, *English Historical Literature*, p. 2.

References to numbers of early modern printed editions indicate only those printed during the period 1305–1697. For reasons of brevity, details of specific manuscripts are given only when all or part of a text is unavailable in print, or when the titles given to printed versions of manuscripts are confusing or ambiguous. References to printed texts are given in short form in the table; full references are given in ‘Works Cited’.

Texts in the ‘Sources’ and ‘Used as source by’ column are ordered alphabetically. Where several texts are listed in the ‘Sources’ column, if one is used significantly more than the others, I have underlined it to indicate this. The majority of texts also contain original material, and the lists in these two columns should not be taken as exhaustive; I have included a text in those columns only when its reliance on another text is either obvious and not in doubt, or there is sufficient evidence to plausibly suggest it as a possibility.

Many of these texts are still little used, and their sources and significance have not been well understood, in part because of confusing nomenclature or textual histories. I hope this guide will, as well as providing a reference point for the development of Edward II’s reputation, also encourage other scholars to use these often interesting but infrequently read texts.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

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Index

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Note: Primary texts are listed under their authors (with the exception of anonymous or multi-authored texts), and are included in this index if they are discussed in the main text of the book. For a full overview of accounts of and allusions to Edward II's reign in texts composed during the period 1305-1697, see Appendix. Page numbers in italics refer to the Appendix; page numbers in bold and italics refer to the main Appendix entry for a primary text.

Achilles: 58, 105

Actaeon: 86-88

Alexander the Great: 57, 71, 110

Annales Londonienses: 43-44, 71, 74, 103, **289**

Annales Paulini: 103-04, 140, **289**

Anonimale Chronicle, *see Brut Chronicle*

Anti-court discourse: 52-56, 141-42, 203-06; *see also* Minions

Antitheatricalism: 139, 151

Aquinas, Thomas: 25, 43 n. 36

Augustine, St: 163

Ayscu, Edward, chronicler: 58-59, **303**

Bacon, Francis: 111, 112

Bacon, Nicholas: 182

Baker, Geoffrey le, chronicler: 17, 81 n. 44, 216-28, 236, 246, 254-55, 258-59, 279-80, **304-05**

Baker, Richard, chronicler: 90, 115-17, 167, 196-97, **303**

Baldock, Robert: 13, 119

Bancroft, John, playwright: 90, **306**

Barnfield, Richard, poet: 57-58

Beast allegory: 70-75, 92, 205-06

Bel, Jean le, chronicler: 47-50, **306**

Bewitchment *see* Witchcraft

Bible: 44 n. 37, 105-09, 115 n. 49, 192, 225

Boccaccio, Giovanni, poet: 217

Bohun, Humphrey de, Earl of Hereford: 12-13, 253-55

Boroughbridge, Battle of: 12-13, 253-55

Boston, Robert of, chronicler: 242-43, **306**

Brady, Robert, pamphleteer, politician and physician: 195-96, **307**

Bridlington Chronicle (Gesta Edwardi de Carnarvan): 242-43, **291**

Brut chronicle

independent continuation (Corpus Christi College, Oxford, MS 78): 226, 269-70, **292**

Long Version (Anglo-Norman and English translation): 17, 19-21, 37-38, 71-75, 104-05, 154, 197, 230-31, 244-54, 271, 280-82, **293**

Short Version (Anglo-Norman): 243, 245, 253, **294**

Buckingham, George Villiers, first Duke of *see* Villiers, George

Burghley, William Cecil Lord *see* Cecil, William

Burton, Thomas, chronicler: 18, 43-47, 162, 254, **307**

Caesar, Charles, chronicler: 52, 247 n. 27, **308**

Cary, Elizabeth, writer: 20-21, 90, 103, 110-12, 115, 123, 153-54, 167, 194-95, 201, 204, 251 n. 42, 260-61, 280, **309**

Castleford, Thomas, chronicler: 25 n. 38, **309**

Catholic Church: 119-20, 182-83, 185, 197 n. 89; *see also* Pope

Catholic League (France): 54-55, 188-90

Cecil, William, Lord Burghley: 182, 185-86, 197 n. 89

Chaucer, Geoffrey

The Miller's Tale: 41, 252

The Parson's Tale: 25 n. 38

Charles I, King of England: 28, 153-54, 193-97, 202-03

Christ *see* Jesus

Chronicles *see* History; titles/authors of individual works

Chronicle of the Civil Wars of Edward II: 107-09, **295**

Churchill, Winston, chronicler: 113, **310**

Civil war

English Civil War: 193-94

in reign of Edward II: 12, 200, 229; *see also* Boroughbridge, Battle of

Clare, Margaret de: 12, 121, 157

Cobham, Eleanor: 218

Cooper, Thomas, chronicler: 77-79, 163-64, 247, **321**

Corpus Christi College, Oxford, MS 78: 226, 269-70, **292**

Courtiers *see* Anti-court discourse

Crouch, Nathaniel, chronicler: 180, **325**

Daniel, Samuel, chronicler: 58, 90-91, 115-16, 216 n. 2, **310**

De casibus, narrative structure: 21, 28, 215-18, 228-36, 278, 279, 308, 329; *see also* Boccaccio; *Mirror for Magistrates*

Dekker, Thomas, writer: 142

Deloney, Thomas, poet: 259-60, **311**

Deposition *see* Edward II; James II; Richard II

Dispenser, Hugh, the elder: 12-13, 72, 93, 127-28, 139-40, 149, 152-56, 181, 184-86

Dispenser, Hugh, the younger: 18, 137-38, 156, 261, 296, 306, 308, 322

crimes: 140 n. 5, 320

death: 13, 48-50

Edward II, influence over: 12-13, 42-43, 77, 90, 139-40, 149, 152-55, 162-68, 303

Edward II, relationship with, sexual: 47-50, 90, 117-19, 315

exemplum, political: 56, 127-28, 181, 184-86, 191-93, 195, 197 n. 89

Devereux, Robert, Earl of Essex: 186, 199

Deydras, John, royal pretender: 162, 243 n. 6, 297

Drama: 22-23, 25-27, 84, 93-94, 117, 123-24, 139-40 n. 4, 197 n. 89, 232, 268 n. 119, 278-83; *see also* Genre; Marlowe, Christopher

Drayton, Michael, poet: 22, 90 n. 85, **311-13**

The Barrons Wars in the Raigne of Edward the Second: 200-01, 259-60, **312**, see also *Mortimeriados*

Edward II, relationship with Piers Gaveston, romantic: 103, 110, 112, 121-23, 126-27, 148

Edward II, relationship with Piers Gaveston, sexual: 50-51, 89-90, 143-47, 159, 257

Englands Heroicall Epistles: 89, 200, **311**

The Legend of Pierce Gaveston: 127, 144-45, 201, **312**, see also *Peirs Gaveston*

Mortimeriados: 200, 260, **312**, see also *The Barons Warres*

Peirs Gaveston: 50-51, 89, 103, 110, 112, 121-23, 126-27, 143-48, 159, 199, 233-34, **312**, see also *The Legend of Pierce Gaveston*

Poly-Olbiom: 89, 143, 257-58, **313**

Dudley, Robert, Earl of Leicester: 83-84, 148, 182-86; see also *Leicester's Commonwealth*

Edmund II (Edmund Ironside), King of England: 248-50, 253, 255, 269-70

Edward I, King of England: 11-12, 38, 107-09, 154, 196-97, 297

Edward II, King of England

biography: 11-13

canonization: 46, 216, 316; see also martyr

character: 77-78, 160-68

Christ, comparisons to see Jesus

coronation: 104, 137-38, 140, 156-57

death: 16, 18, 22, 28-29, 88, 184, 189-90, 198, 201, 225, 241-271, 280, 289, 290, 294, 295, 297, 305, 306, 314, 321, 323, 324, 326; see also *Brut Chronicle*; Higden, Ranulf; Holinshed, Raphael; Marlowe, Christopher

deposition: 10, 13, 27-28, 41, 54, 167-68, 177, 180-81, 183-97, 199-201, 204-05, 207-08, 215-22, 228-36, 243 n. 6, 278-79, 311, 316, 331

exemplum, political: 10, 21-22, 27-28, 60, 111-13, 127-28, 152-56, 159-60, 165-68, 177-208; see also Charles I; Elizabeth I; Henri III; James VI and I; James II

homosexuality see relationships with favourites, sexual; sexual transgression

imprisonment: 13, 28, 46, 215-17, 222-34, 269, 289, 296, 302, 311

martyr: 216, 224, 270; see also canonization

relationships with favourites, romantic: 22, 27, 56-58, 101-29, 144-59, 193, 277-79; *see also* Friendship; Gaveston, Piers

relationships with favourites, sexual: 10-11, 15-19, 22-25, 26-27, 35-94, 101-04, 111-12, 120-23, 128-29, 138-39, 141-51, 155-60, 166-67, 179, 187-88, 190-93, 198, 217, 227 n. 39, 255-58, 266-71, 277-79; *see also* Despenser, Hugh; Gaveston, Piers; Marlowe, Christopher; Sex

sexual transgression (non-specific): 35-61, 69-80, 162, 195, 228, 256-57, 270-71, 311, 315, 329; *see also* Despenser, Hugh; Effeminacy; Gaveston, Piers; Lechery; Minions; Riot; Sex; Sodomy

wars *see* Boroughbridge; Civil war; Scotland

wife *see* Isabella, Queen of England

Edward III, King of England: 13, 41-43, 114-15, 216, 221-22, 241, 303, 306, 331

Edward VI, King of England: 183-84

Effeminacy: 46-47, 52-53

Elizabeth I, Queen of England: 56, 84, 156 n. 72, 178, 181-87, 190, 197-99, 202, 205-06; *see also* Cecil, William; Devereux, Robert; Dudley, Robert; Hatton, Christopher

D'Épernon, Jean Louis de Nogaret de La Valette, Duc de *see* Nogaret, Jean Louis de

Epitome, historical: 14 n. 8, 77-79, 247, 251, 254, 258, 280-81, 291, 317, 321, 331

Erasmus, Desiderius: 153

Essex, Earl of *see* Devereux, Robert

L'Estoile, Pierre de, diarist: 53-54

Exclusion Crisis: 193-95, 204; *see also* James II

Fabyan, Robert, chronicler: 46, 75-79, 247, 280, 282 n. 10, 313, 326

Favourites: 82, 298, 325; *see also* Baldock, Robert; Villiers, George; Cecil, William; Despenser, Hugh (elder); Despenser, Hugh (younger); Devereux, Robert; Dudley, Robert; Edward II; Elizabeth I; Gaveston, Piers; Hatton, Christopher; Henri III; Henry VIII; James VI and I; Minions; Nogaret, Jean Louis de; Richard II; Sejanus; Stewart, Esmé

attractiveness: 158-60

choice of: 141-43, 148-50, 203-08

counsel: 152-55, 165-68, 230

discourse of, early modern: 93, 111-13, 152-56, 177-81, 207-08

friendship, incompatibility with: 111-13

- terminology for: 51-61
- theatrical type: 117
- witchcraft, accusations of: 148-50
- Flattery: 56-57, 82, 87, 152-54, 195, 200, 202, 206
- Fleming, Abraham, chronicler: 147, 231, **318**
- Flores Historiarum*: 40-41, 72, 92, 140, **326**
- Fortune: 187, 231-34; *see also De casibus*
- Foxe, John, chronicler: 75-76, **314**
- Fragmenta de Bellis Et Causis Bellorum Civilium Tempore Edwardi II*: 107-09, **295**
- Friendship: 10, 21, 57-58, 109-13, 157 n. 74
- Froissart, Jean, chronicler: 47-50, 156 n. 72, **314**
- Ganymede: 54, 80-82, 84-85, 89-91, 145
- Gaveston, Piers: *306, 310*
- attractiveness: 138, 143-44, 159-601
- birth, foreign: 54, 139-42, 189, 202
- crimes: 139-41, *300, 301*
- death: 12, 18, 106-07, 114-17, 119 n. 67, 125-26, 159, 196-97, 199, 200, 218, 234, *293, 294, 295, 306, 323*
- Edward II, influence over: 12, 38, 46, 56-57, 75-80, 86-87, 144-68, 230, *302*
- Edward II, relationship with, brotherhood: 16, 103-05
- Edward II, relationship with, friendship: 105-13, 203
- Edward II, relationship with, romantic: 85, 101-02, 105, 113-29; *see also Friendship*
- Edward II, relationship with, sexual: 16, 46-47, 50, 57, 75-94, 122-23, 141, 144-47, 159-60, 266-69
- exemplum, political: 54-55, 56, 83-84, 128, 179-90, 193-94, 195-200, 203; *see also Anti-court discourse*
- exile: 12, 38, 103-04, 107, 110, 118-20, 121-24, 126-27, 165, 189
- favours, financial: 141

favours, political: 12, 107-09, 137-38, 156-57

 pride: 12, 137-38, 139-41, 157 n. 75, **301**

status, social: 56, 109, 138, 139, 162, 185

wife *see* Clare, Margaret de

witchcraft *see* Witchcraft

Genealogical rolls: 229-30, **294**

Genre: 11, 14, 22-23, 84, 93-94, 103, 127-29, 218, 229, 235-36, 280-83; *see also* Drama; History

Gesta Edwardi de Carnarvan (Bridlington Chronicle): 242-43, **291**

Goats: 70-75

Gournay, Thomas, murderer: 223-24, 244, 262, **311**

Grafton, Richard, chronicler: 75-76, 78-79, 149, **315**

Guisborough, Walter of, chronicler: 107-09, **316**

Gurney, Thomas, *see* Gournay, Thomas

Hainault, John, Count of: 13

Hall, Edward, chronicler: 56

Hatton, Christopher: 197 n. 89

Hayward, John, chronicler: 187, **317**

Henri III, King of France: 53-56, 83, 149, 187-90, 198; *see also* Nogaret, Jean Louis de; L'Estoile, Pierre de

Henry VI, King of England: 183-84, 185

Henry VIII, King of England: 55-56

Hercules (mythology): 57, 110

Heresy: 40, 47-50, 148, 198; *see also* Templars

Hero and Leander (mythical lovers): 85, 110; *see also* Marlowe, Christopher

Heywood, Thomas, chronicler and playwright: 46-47, 75, **317**

Higden, Ranulf, chronicler: 248, 254, **318**

Edward II, character of: 38, 46, 77-78, 138, 160-63

Edward II, death of: 244-47, 251

Histoire Tragique et Memorable, de Pierre de Gaverston: 50 n. 59, 54-55, 188-90, 198 n. 91, **295**

History *see also* Genre; Methodology

discipline, academic: 10-11, 22-23, 25, 36, 94, 102, 104, 256-57, 281-83

political/moral use of: 58, 76, 177-208, 235

reading of, medieval/early modern: 14, 21-22, 23, 73, 89, 91-94, 218

writing of, medieval/early modern: 13-15, 23, 41, 84, 90-94, 116-17, 127-29, 137-39, 167-68, 208, 215-19, 228-29, 235-36, 253-57, 277-83

Holinshed, Raphael, chronicler *see also* Fleming, Abraham, chronicler

Edmund II (Edmund Ironside), representation of: 248-49

Edward II, character of: 164-65

Edward II, death of: 251, 265

Edward II, deposition of: 200, 216-18, 228, 230-31, 235-36

Edward II, relationship with Piers Gaveston: 126, 147, 167-68

Edward II, sexual transgressions: 38-39, 59, 79-80, 93, 228

ideology: 20, 235-36

influence: 39, 59, 89, 153, 187, **318**

political allusions: 167-68

Richard II, representation of: 199, 235

Homosexuality *see* Edward II; Gaveston, Piers; James VI and I; Sex; Sodomy

Hooker, Richard, lawyer: 163

Howard, Robert, writer and politician: 195, **319**

Howell, William, chronicler: 249-50, **319**

Hubert, Francis, poet

de casibus narrative structure: 232-24

Edward II, imprisonment of: 225

Edward II, relationships with favourites, romantic: 103

Edward II, relationships with favourites, sexual: 89-90, 110, 146-47, 158

political allusions: 153, 201-04

textual versions: 147 n. 37, 201-04, **319**

witchcraft: 149-50

Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester: 252-53

Huntingdon, Henry of, chronicler: 248, 255 n. 63

Isabella, Queen of England, wife of Edward II

Edward II, deposition of, role in: 13, 41, 200, 216, 222-23, 228, 289, 297, 331

Edward II, relationship with: 12, 41, 48, 76, 84-85, 89, 90, 120-21, 124, 227-28, 296, 302

Mortimer, Roger, relationship with: 13, 89-90, 91, 320, 324, 327

James VI, King of Scotland / James I, King of England: 116, 127, 150, 157 n. 74, 159-60, 167, 182, 188, 190-93, 198, 201-07; *see also* Villiers, George; Lennox, Esmé

James II, King of England: 194-96; *see also* Exclusion Crisis

Jesuits *see* Catholic Church; Pope

Jesus: 106, 109

Edward II, comparisons to: 87, 220, 224-25, 228, 259, 267, 269

Knighton, Henry, chronicler: 248, 251, 254, **320**

Knights Templar: 43-44, 47, 148

Kyd, Thomas, playwright: 120

Lament of Edward II: 222-23, 228 n. 43, **296**

Lancaster, Thomas, Earl of: 12-13, 46, 81-82, 141, 191, 229-30, 234 n. 75, 295, 320, 331

Lanercost Chronicle: 103, 243, **296**

Langton, Walter, Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield: 11, 119, 154

Lanquet, Thomas, chronicler: 77, **321**; *see also* Cooper, Thomas

Last Kings of England see Prophecy of the Six Kings to Follow John

Lechery: 70-75, 87

Leicester, Robert Dudley, Earl of *see* Dudley, Robert

Leicester's Commonwealth: 83-84, 148, 182-85, **297**

Lennox, Esmé Stewart, Earl of *see* Stewart, Esmé

London Chronicles: 104, 252, 283, **297**

Machiavel, theatrical type: 117, 153

Malmesbury, William of, chronicler: 248 , 255 n. 63

Marlowe, Christopher

Dido, Queen of Carthage: 85, 120

Edward II: 20-23, 233, 278-80, **322**

Edward II, death of: 232, 253, 257, 259-60, 261-69, 270-71

Edward II, deposition of: 200, 220-22, 232

Edward II, relationships with favourites, political: 38-39, 52, 54-59, 60-61, 85, 105, 112-13, 117-18, 141-42, 153, 155, 157-58, 160, 197-200

Edward II, relationships with favourites, romantic: 57-58, 109-10, 112-13, 117-29, 147, 149, 157-58

Edward II, relationships with favourites, sexual: 57-58, 60-61, 82-90, 92-94, 141, 160, 262-63, 266-69

influence: 10-11, 14, 21-22, 58-59, 82-84, 88-90, 92-94, 116, 117, 121, 127-29, 253, 259-60, 279-80, 282-83

minion, use of term: 52, 54-61, 90

performance: 59, 124, 126, 198, 220-21, 232, 257, 259-60, 262-66, 279

political allusions: 58, 83-84, 93, 113, 186 n. 35, 197-200

sources: 21, 39, 52, 54-55, 126, 218, 220, 279, 282-83

structure: 218, 221, 279

Hero and Leander: 120

The Massacre at Paris: 55, 56, 119

Martyn, William, chronicler: 75-77, 164, **322**

Mazarin, Jules, Cardinal: 190

Merk, Thomas, Bishop of Carlisle: 194, **291**

Methodology: 11, 15-19, 21-25, 36, 94, 281-83; *see also* Genre

Minions: 51-61, 90-91, 93, 110-13, 124, 182, 200

Mirror for Magistrates: 199, 205-07, 217, 233-34, **324**; *see also* Niccols, Richard

Monmouth, Geoffrey of: 70-72

Montaigne, Michel de: 111

More, Thomas de la: 216, 219, *304*, *323*

Mortimer, Roger, the elder: 57-58, 147

Mortimer, Roger, the younger: 120, 141, 157

Edward II, role in death of: 245 n. 19, 247, 260-65, 267, *297*

Edward II, role in deposition of: 13, 41, *297*

fall: 199, 233, *320*

Isabella, Queen of England, relationship with, political: 200, 222

Isabella, Queen of England, relationship with, sexual: 89-90, 91, *327*

Murimuth, Adam, chronicler: 154, 219, 243-44, 251, **323**

Mychell, John, chronicler: 78-79, **324**

Naunton, Robert, politician: 56, **324**

Neckam, Alexander, scholar: 81 n. 44

Niccols, Richard, poet

The Beggars Ape: 205-06

The Cuckow: 206

A Winter Nights Vision (Mirror for Magistrates continuation): 205-07, 234, **324**

Nogaret, Jean Louis de: 54, 188-90

On the Evil Times of Edward II: 37, **298**

Orleton, Adam, Bishop of Hereford/Winchester: 41-43, 200-01, 216, 219-20, 223, 243 n. 6, *306*, *326*

Ovid

Actaeon, metamorphosis of: 86-88

Orpheus, metamorphosis of: 227 n. 39

Parsons, Robert *see* Persons, Robert

Passions: 124, 155, 164-66, 183, 221, 226

Peele, George, poet: 259, **324**

Persons, Robert, Jesuit pamphleteer: 185-86, 194, **325**

Pope: 42, 44-45, 46, 119-20

Powderham, John, royal pretender *see* Deydras, John

Prickehare, John: 41-43

Prophecy of John of Bridlington: 75 n. 25, 161, 246, **299**

Prophecy of the Six Kings to Follow John: 37-38, 70-75, 92, **299**

R.B., chronicler (pseudonym of Nathaniel Crouch): 180, **325**

Reading, Robert of, chronicler: 40-41, 72, 92, 140, **326**

Reputation: 9-11, 14-15, 17-19, 29, 35, 84, 94, 193, 281-83; *see also* Edward II

Richard II, King of England: 181, 199, 206, 231-32, 234 n. 75, 235, 282, *316*, *328*, *329*

 death: 247, *323*

 deposition: 10, 180, 183, 185, 187, 190, 193, 194-95, 200

 favourites: 55, 88-89

Rievaulx, Aelred of: 109, 112-13

Riot: 36-39, 58-61

Rishanger, William *see* Trokelowe, John de

Sandford, Francis, herald and chronicler: 90-91, 93, **327**

Sardanapalus, legendary Assyrian king: *319*

Scotland: 38, 58-59, 71, 73-74, 158, 182-83, 191; *see also* James VI and I

Sejanus, Roman favourite: 51-52, 152

Sex: 23-25, 35-61, 69-94; *see also* Despenser, Hugh; Edward II; Elizabeth I; Gaveston, Piers; James VI and I

Shakespeare, William: 283

Henry IV Part 1: 233

Henry V: 89, 149

Henry VI Part 2: 253

Henry VI Part 3: 83

The Merchant of Venice: 157 n. 74

Othello: 149

Richard II: 88-89, 222 n. 18, 232

Romeo and Juliet: 122 n. 89, 149

The Taming of the Shrew: 120

Troilus and Cressida: 58, 124

The Winter's Tale: 120

Shore, Jane: 159

Sodomy: 16, 18, 25, 35-36, 39-51, 60-61, 79, 192, 308

Somers, John, pamphleteer: 194, 195-96, **327**

Speed, John, chronicler: 59, 249, **328**

Spencer, Hugh *see* Despenser, Hugh

Spenser, Edmund, poet

The Faerie Queene: 55

The Shepheardes Calender: 57-58

Stewart, Esmé, Earl of Lennox: 116, 191, 198

Stow, John, chronicler: 21, 78-79, 105, 147-48, 216-17, 228, 249-50, 280, **328**

Tanner, John, royal pretender *see* Deydras, John

Taylor, John, poet and chronicler: 247 n. 26, **329**

Templars: 43-44, 47, 148

Thomas of Woodstock: 55

Translation: 29, 38, 43-44, 49-50, 251, 267, 287

Trokelowe, John de, scribe: 114-15, **329**

Trussell, William: 222, 230, 234

Tynemouth, John of, chronicler: 244-45, **330**

Vergil, Polydore, chronicler: 79-80, 160, 164, 230-31, 249-50, **330**

Vice, theatrical type: 142 n. 17, 144 n. 27, 269

Villiers, George, first Duke of Buckingham: 153-54, 191-94, 202-04

Virgil (Publius Vergilius Maro), poet: 57-58

Vita Edwardi Secundi: 17, 103-07, 139, 147, **302**

Vulgate *see* Bible

Walsingham, Francis, politician: 188, 191

Walsingham, Thomas, chronicler: 54, 90-91, 115-16, 280, **331**

Warner, William, poet: 81-82, **331**

War *see* Civil wars; Scotland; Wars of the Roses

Wars of the Roses: 83, 181, 252-53

Warwick, Guy, Earl of: 12, 141

Wentworth, Peter, pamphleteer: 186-87, **332**

Witchcraft: 40, 147-50

Yelverton, Henry, politician: 191-93