



takes us, a world of evil and corruption deeper and darker than that of Richard II. The turning point of Edward's fortunes comes with the death of Gaveston. Temporarily his fortunes recover with the victory of Boroughbridge, but the beginning of his end is the escape of Mortimer to France. Act IV shows Edward's defeat and capture by the forces led by Mortimer and Isabel.

The change in Mortimer's character and Isabel's does not agree with the details in the history. Marlowe does this deliberately. The change is introduced to add pity and terror to Edward's end, to assist in the swing from detestation and contempt of Edward when abusing his power, to pity Edward when he has fallen from high estate. As soon as Edward is defeated and the power falls into Mortimer's hands, he becomes a Machiavel. "feared am I more than loved." One of the maxims attributed to Machiavelli was that - "It is better for a Prince to be feared than loved." At the height of his power he boasts that he makes Fortune's wheel turn as he pleases. When Edward's murder is brought to him, he sees that his end is in sight. There is no moral compunction but mere acquiescence in the decree of an arbitrary fate:

Base fortune, now I see, that in thy wheel





There is a point to which when men aspire  
They tumble headlong down."

Isabel plays the Machiavel. Cruel as well as unfaithful, she has nothing to learn in the art of turning and dissembling. In public she is full of concern for the state of the country and the king's misfortunes, of thanks to "the God of Kings" and "Heaven's great architect." In private, there is no villainy of Mortimer's which she does not aid and abet.

It adds to the horror that in the last two acts Edward is never brought face to face with his two tormentors. The fear of their cruelty preys upon his mind in prison, fear as much for his son as for himself. At the end Edmund is as terrified as helpless, and as lonely as Faustus. But he is not penitent. Neither is Shakespeare's Richard II. Like Lear these two characters "did ever slenderly know themselves". Unlike Lear, they never come to know themselves. The chronicles present us with a penitent Edward, but this was not to Marlowe's purpose. Edward's thoughts are of Mortimer and Isabel, of his own sorrows, his 'guiltless life', his 'innocent hands' and of the safety of son. The humiliation and murder of Edward are narrated in full by the chronicles. The details are sordid, pitiless and horrible. And Marlowe leaves out little. In a short last scene





Mortimer and Isabel meet their doom. The young king Edward takes control. In his words there is grief for his father and righteous anger for the murderer. But the words enforce the feeling that the dramatist does not deeply feel the sacredness of loyalty and that the tragedy is in the main a personal tragedy. Without wider repercussions. It is thus clear that 'Edward II' is a tragedy woven out of historical materials subjected to the process of elimination and inclusion.

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