Edward II

The Character of Gaveston

Gaveston's role and position in the play, 'Edward II', has a likeness to the role of the Fool in 'King Lear', although a bit remote. Like the Fool, Gaveston departs in about the middle of the play, and like Shakespeare, Marlowe also has to bring in younger Spencer to feed the king's humour. But Gaveston also harks back to the Marlowe of 'Tamburlaine'. He is painted in full grandeur and stands as an example of pagan sensuousness. His anti-Christian hedonism is the chief demerit which the Bishop of Coventry detests. Marlowe, however, maintains a sensitive balance in the play: he does not overwork this antago between the Christian and the pagan.

The pagan elements in Gaveston also reflects Marlowe's Renaissance tempera-ments. To quote Mr. R.S. Knox, the lines of Gaveston beginning 'Music and poetry is his delight etc', "glow with that sensuous paganism in which Marlowe's own Renaissance temper delighted." The speech shows Marlowe at his best in its compact portraiture of a pagan imagination fired by fancy. He shall arrange Italian masks

for the King at night and in the daytime, he shall make his pages walk before him like the 'sylvan nymphs' He's men, clad like satyrs, shall display the quaint country dance before him.

Edward II is, aesthetically, a mature play than even Dr. Faustus. Here the playwright's intention is to blend polemics with passion, political propriety with personal affiliation. The Gaveston-theme has been powerfully woven into the political and historical matrix of the play. Marlowe assigns the theme of love between Gaveston and Edward a central place in the first half of the play. Gaveston impatiently quits to England for her sake, but "that it harbours him I hold so dear" it betrays total identification that disregards all other values:

> The King, upon whose bosom let me die,
> And with the world be still at enemity;"

Mr. Clemen seems to be too hasty in classifying the long speeches having emotional overtones as 'set speeches'. Gaveston's impassioned lines reflect an attitude of total plunge, complete surrender.

The first Act initiates the repeal of banishment order on Gaveston and a consequent disturbance in the body-politic. The barons resent and argue with the king

While Gaveston is restive to join his love:
"I can no longer keep me from my lord" No sooner does he enter than the controversies become polarised. The king, like Gaveston, falls headlong for him. He rejects the barons' demands; his wife and even the health of the state is of no importance; no consequence. He becomes unabashed and wilful and says:

"Ere my sweet Gaveston shall part from me,
This isle shall fleet upon the ocean."

Mr. Clemen remarks,
"King Edward, ~~whom~~ whom we put into the play is more as a passive than an active character." But King Edward is, throughout assertive, dominating and even ~~overpowering~~ overbearing. On the other hand, it is Gaveston that is 'passive than an active Character'. He responds to the changed situations of his life like an idle and indolent aesthetic. He rejects the tag-rag common people like the traveller or rider as useless rides on the wings of fancy:

"These are not men for me
I must have wanton poets, pleasant wits," he says.

It would be wrong to distrust Gaveston's treatment is being purely satirical, for it must be borne well in mind that Marlowe was a stark Champion of the renaissance. The play, though regarded as merely chronicle, also seems to comment on the sharp opposition between political morality and aesthetics.

The End