Consider Edward II as a tragedy

:- Edward II has suffered a crisis of definition. The tragic impulse of the play doesnot derive from its hero, and as such, critics have hesitated to term it 'a tragedy' from a more orthodox point of view. The innate flow in Edward - a blind fatuity for Gaveston and young Spenser - provides the main thrust. But according to Knox, " The failing in him from which the catastrophe issued had little nobility about it : it was too much like mere foolishness." Edward's actions never look tragica - lly enhancing like those of the heroes of Shakespeare. In fact, Gaveston, the focal point of the King's values and the chief source of the conflict, has little sustaing power to lend any meaningful significance to the King's behaviour. He is mean and a cheat in his behaviour with the common people, silly and most unimpressive in his idle sensuousness. Naturally the King's reaction and defence appear dull and ineffective. But the King loves him dearly to the exclusion of everything and the Barons consider him to be a source of

infection for the body-politic of the state.

If we suspend one judgement for the while and consider this 'love' as the play's motive force, there emerges a pathetic image of Edward towards the end of the play. The first four Acts endeavour to isolate Edward and his minions. The Barons oppose them, the queen illicitly loves the young Mortimer and Kent and the Archbishop favour the Rebels. But Edward's soul is pledged to Gaveston and his ~~heinous~~ heinous and treacherous murder infuriates him. In Act III, 'Pry ~~not~~ earth, the common mother of us all' speech, he becomes conscious of his regality for the first time. He Chastises their Herald in terms that fully signify his acute awareness of his power and rank:

"Rebels, will they appoint their sovereign
His sports, his pleasures, and his company?"

This strain continues till the end and critics rightly concur in the opinion that Marlowe packs the minimum tragic intensity in the last two acts, espe-cially, in the last act.

In his long address to the Monk in Act Iv, we find his heckled and hurried by his trueness. Here is revealed an aspect of his personality that loved books, philosophy, art and

culture. He welcomes Spencer and Baldock to that sanctum of mental peace and individual pleasure where the 'life contemplative' is a heaven of peace and a heaven of repose. His line, ' O that I might this life in quiet lead !' reflects the balm of peace which the king desires.

In fact, the last two acts reveal Edward rising out of his crippling circumstances. His grief is like that of a wounded lion that rends the air with its outstretched paw, not an ordinary grief. His feelings are rent by the reversal of order. He, who is the king, is defunct, a shadow without substance:

" My nobles rule; bear the name of king
I wear the crown, but are controlled by them?"

The lines devoted to the deposition, the taking away of his crown have to echo from such scenes in Shakespeare's Richard II. Edward's royalty is now bereft of substance, for Mortimer rules the roost in England, and the king is unwilling to part with the crown. The scene is charged with natural feelings and sentiments. He overcomes these crippling reaction and prays;

Now sweet God of heaven,

Make me despise this transitory pomp,
And sit for age enthronized in heaven!"

At the end, the table turns. Mortimer and others who showed character and grit in their concerted effort to protect the state at the beginning, began to betray meanness and intrigue at the end. Plot, treachery, and heinous murder became their game. Very cleverly, Marlowe pitted against this the king's grandeur of feelings and growing insight. Lightborn tries to delude him with soft words, but the king has weathered enough of human intrigues to be swayed: "These looks of thine can harbour nought but death."

Marlowe, thus, makes Edward human. The play is not a tragedy in the classical sense as its hero dies, not fall from a great height. But it underscores the tragic sufferings of a king whom the state denied the freedom to love a man of his choice. It posits personal love and state loyalty in stiff opposition. Marlowe struggles here to blend the formal and the natural, the dictates of regality and the desires of the soul. Although yet in its infancy, the play describes the appreciation that H.C. Bradbrook bestows on the dramatist: "..... he was developing towards a more 'shep-penance' (that is more inclusive) style, for in Edward II, there can be found the most formalised qualities of feeling and the most naturally human."

The End

Pusho