

**SUBJECT : ENGLISH**

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**TOPIC- EDWARD II**

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## **EDWARD II AS HISTORICAL / CHRONICLE PLAY**

Though the play has often been criticized on account of the nature of achievement and material, the chief merit of the play, "Edward II" lies in Marlowe's masterly and skilful dramatic use of historical events. Twenty three years of history are compressed in such a way that the events seem to pass credibly in something a short period of one year. We find Marlowe often making necessary changes in history for the sake of dramatic need and still more for the sake of compact plot. Holinshed's history is dull and uninteresting enumeration of

disjointed events, Marlowe on the other hand not only selects the important events, but also reshapes and joins them together as to impart actual dramatic effect.

In this play Marlowe relates us the facts ranging from Edward's accession in 1309 to the execution of Mortimer in 1330. The playwright's craftsmanship is seen in condensing and pruning the diverse and abundant materials of history, particularly all that refers to foreign politics like, the long war with Scotland etc. It appears as if all the events occur in one year. The duration of time between one event and other has frequently been abridged, often events occurring at different times have been presented as occurring simultaneously. Gavestone's banishment and recall from exile occur in the same scene despite of the actual gap of one year between the two. Again the events of three years between Gaveston's return from exile in 1309 and his final execution in 1312 are compressed in a few scenes only. Likewise, the events of some ten years are compressed in two scenes

which follow the arrest and execution of Gavestone. The Queen is also sent to France before the king defeats his barons on the battlefield of Boroughbridge, actually she went to France some three years after the battle. Lastly there is a gap of almost three years between the king's murder and Mortimer's execution. But in the play, King Edward III puts Mortimer's severed head on the hearse of his father.

Marlowe also does not portray his characters as the exact version of the figures of the history. In fact, King Edward II was not so great a voluptuary figure in his actual life as he has been presented in the play. Nor did he so ill-treat the Queen as he has been shown to do. Tout remarks, "He had no other wish than to amuse himself....If he did not like the work , he was not very vicious, he stuck loyalty to his friends and was fairly harmless, being no body's enemy so much as his own". It seems that Gavestone, too, was not such a deliberate mis- leader of the

king as Marlowe presents him to be. He was attached to the king as his friend from childhood and sincerely loved and admired him.

Some more digressions may be remarkable. Mortimer's down fall in the play has been treated too abruptly which is to serve a certain dramatic purpose. It reveals the great power and ability of young Edward III. The Queen is sent to the Tower by the order of her son in the same hour in which Mortimer dies. But actually she was granted a certain pension to live at one place where she was dutifully visited by her son once a year.

We can say that Edward II is unquestionably a great work of art as the first chronicle play. This play can be compared to Shakespeare's Richard II in respect of subject matter and the poetical utterances of the two kings. Edward II is prompted by his passions for the favourites, he neglects his duties as a king but he knows what he wants. Richard II on the other hand, is more refined but shows himself unable to take a decision. Edward II claims our sympathy in adversity while Richard II does not claim

such sympathy. Edward's death is horrible yet he achieves tragic dignity and majesty before his death. The last scenes of Marlowe's plays are more impressive and moving than Shakespeare's.

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