DIFFERENT BUT THE SAME:

EXAMINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN *EDWARD II* AND *RICHARD II*

By

Gabrielle Joy Durrett

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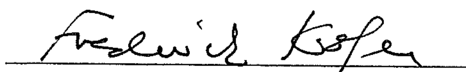

Dr. Frederick Kiefer
Department of English

Abstract

Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II* and William Shakespeare's *Richard II* have many elements in common. The similarities between the two works are significant enough to warrant suspicion that Shakespeare may have "borrowed" from *Edward II* when he wrote his play. This thesis explores the similarities and differences between *Edward II* and *Richard II*, discusses whether or not there is a connection between them, and ties these similarities and differences to Marlowe and Shakespeare's choices as playwrights.

Over the centuries, scholars have attempted to calculate how much Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare influenced each other during their overlapping careers. This endeavor has been challenging for two major reasons. First, it is difficult to establish hard facts about the two playwrights' relationship. Second, it is tough to know for certain which lines and themes in the works of Marlowe and Shakespeare were borrowed from or inspired by works written by the other playwright. Ultimately, determining the exact level of influence that one play or playwright had on another play or playwright is challenging. The best course of action is to examine the issue of Marlowe and Shakespeare's influence on one another from the perspective of continuing the discussion rather than seeking a firm conclusion.[1] It is from this perspective that the relationship between Marlowe's *Edward II* and Shakespeare's *Richard II* should be examined.

Edward II and *Richard II* both follow the typical conventions of the British history play, which became popular in late Elizabethan England.[2] In one of his articles, Miles Taylor explains that the English history play did not depend on strict fact; it was often poetic and inventive and was frequently used to communicate a moral message. Later, history plays came under fire for their inaccuracy, but in Elizabethan times, perfect accuracy was not the point. Many critics have noted that both Marlowe and Shakespeare took liberties with the historical accounts of what occurred in the lives of Edward II and Richard II. These liberties were perfectly acceptable during their time because Marlowe and Shakespeare were simply following the classic criteria of the British history play.

Edward II differs slightly from the format of the English history play because of its relatively low levels of political commentary and its focus on Edward and Gaveston's relationship. Tracey Tomlinson explains that English history plays usually focused on political

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[1] Robert A. Logan, *Shakespeare's Marlowe* (Aldershot, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 1-2.
[2] Miles Taylor, "The End of the English History Play in "Perkin Warbeck,"" *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 48.2 (2008): 395.

issues: "The English history play [has a] long tradition as a forum for political commentary and analysis of topical events."[3] In other words, it was typical for an English history play to contain an examination of current political issues through the lens of the past. As a result, it is somewhat surprising that *Edward II* does not have much political commentary. A potential reason behind this lack of criticism in the play is that many writers during that time period were afraid to say overtly negative things against the current monarch out of fear for the consequences.[4] The lack of political commentary is not the only reason why *Edward II* is slightly unusual for an English history play; the play is also abnormal because of its focus on Edward and Gaveston's love. While the political situation is an important element of the story, the primary concern of the play is Edward's love for Gaveston. Although there is some unhealthy manipulation within Edward and Gaveston's relationship, their love for each other is clearly genuine. When asked by Mortimer Jr. how he can love someone like Gaveston, Edward replies: "Because he loves me more than all the world."[5] This moment of earnestness shows the sincerity of Edward's love and the unlikelihood that he will give up that love for the sake of the nobles. Every action Edward takes in the play is driven by his love for Gaveston, which makes him a fairly sympathetic character, especially towards the end of the story. This focus on Edward's love makes *Edward II* a different kind of English history play.

In contrast, Shakespeare's history play *Richard II* focuses on issues of the state and contains some potential political commentary. This focus makes sense considering the classic criteria of the British history play at the time. Shakespeare had to be particularly careful in

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[3] Tracey E. Tomlinson, "The Restoration English History Plays of Roger Boyle, Earl of Orrery," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 43.3 (2003): 560.
[4] Marcia Lee Metzger, "Controversy and "Correctness": English Chronicles and the Chroniclers," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 27.2 (1996): 449.
[5] Christopher Marlowe, *Edward the Second: the Revels Plays*, ed. Charles R. Forker (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1994), 1.4.77.

dealing out any form of political commentary in his play because his chosen subject was somewhat delicate. Since Bolingbroke was a relative of Queen Elizabeth, Shakespeare had to write the story carefully in order to avoid political consequences.[6] He could not make Bolingbroke a hero or a villain because neither option would satisfy the queen. If Bolingbroke was a villain, there was a risk that Elizabeth would be upset about the negative depiction of her distant ancestor. If he was a hero, there was a risk that Elizabeth would be upset about the positive depiction of overthrowing the king, the rightful ruler.[7] In order to avoid these two potentially explosive situations, Shakespeare carefully manipulated the historical accounts of Richard and Bolingbroke in his play so that neither character was completely right or wrong. Bolingbroke was both a power-seeker and a well-intentioned member of the nobility. Richard was both an incompetent king and a wrongly-dethroned monarch. As a result of Shakespeare's decision to focus *Richard II* on the political issues of its historical period, the play's reader does not get to know Richard in the same way that the reader gets to know Edward. Richard is more distant and kingly while Edward is sliced open and laid out for the reader to examine.

Even though *Edward II* and *Richard II* focus on different topics, the similarities between the overarching stories of the two plays suggest a significant connection between them. A casual reader of both works can easily notice the plot similarities. Both *Edward II* and *Richard II* are stories of a king whose negligence and general incompetence leads to his deposition and execution. Both kings are influenced by poor advisors to make decisions that hurt the kingdom. These decisions lead the members of the nobility to take action against the king. One nobleman in particular stands out from the rest: in *Edward II*, that man is Mortimer Jr.; in *Richard II*, that man is Bolingbroke. These men have been personally wronged by the king and they work against

[6] Corey McEleney, "Bonfire of the Vanities: Pleasure, Theory, Shakespeare," *Differences: a Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 24.1 (2013): 146-47.
[7] McEleney, "Bonfire of the Vanities," 147.

him with more dedication and vehemence than any of their fellow noblemen. Ultimately, they defeat the king and have him executed in secret. Since these significant plot points of *Edward II* are repeated in *Richard II*, it is probable that Shakespeare was heavily influenced by *Edward II* when he wrote his play.

While the similarities between *Edward II* and *Richard II* argue for a link between the two plays, the differences between them suggest variances in the two playwrights' respective mindsets. For example: in *Richard II*, Bolingbroke successfully overthrows the monarch and becomes the new king. In *Edward II*, Mortimer Jr. successfully overthrows the monarch only to be beheaded by the new king, Edward III. This major difference between the two stories can be attributed to the difference in history, but another potential reason behind these starkly different endings is the alternate perspectives of Shakespeare and Marlowe on history and kingship.

Edward II covers a time period of around 1307 CE – 1330 CE. Marlowe's primary source of material for the play was Holinshed's *Chronicles*, but he took minor details of the play from other sources. Even though decades pass within play's timeframe, Marlowe chose not to represent this passage of time. He may have made this choice because showing the passage of time was not necessary to telling the story properly and could have distracted from the action. Irving Ribner explains: "By this compression and rearrangement of his sources, Marlowe achieved an economy and effectiveness which had not been seen in a history play."[8] In other words, Marlowe successfully manipulated accounts of historical events in a way that had not been previously explored to create a streamlined story. Once again, he ignored the conventions of the history play to tell the story in his own style. Shakespeare would later utilize this method when he wrote *Richard II*.[9]

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[8]Irving Ribner, "Marlowe's *Edward II* and the Tudor History Play," *ELH* 22.4 (1955): 245.
[9] Ribner, "Marlowe's *Edward II*," 244.

Marlowe uses several classic ideas in *Edward II*, but the one that he uses the most is the concept of Fortune and her wheel. The effects of Fortune's wheel can be seen throughout the play: Edward II goes down the wheel and loses everything as Mortimer goes up the wheel and practically becomes the new king, but just as Mortimer celebrates after reaching the top, Edward III goes up by taking charge and ruling on his own, which results in Mortimer going down the wheel and getting beheaded. Neither Edward II nor Mortimer Jr. gets what he wants and both men meet unpleasant ends. Mortimer Jr. begins the story as a decent man who wants to protect England and right the wrongs committed by the king. By the end of the story, he is a corrupt and selfish traitor. A view that Marlowe may have developed over time was the idea that kingship and the pursuit of power could be damning concepts: anyone who could not wield absolute power would pay for it on Fortune's wheel. Even Mortimer, a seemingly virtuous man, could not remain virtuous when there was a large amount of power at stake. He and Isabella were both destroyed by their pursuit of power, just as Edward was destroyed because he could not properly wield his power. Since none of them used power to its fullest extent, they all died.

Similar to *Edward II*, *Richard II* also deals with the issue of power, but it focuses more on the transfer of kingship from one person to another than on individuals' abilities to wield power. Shakespeare moved away from the central romance of Marlowe's play and instead focused on the political drama of Richard II's life[10] that led to the end of total English unity.[11] Shakespeare wrote *Richard II* according to the general guidelines of the traditional English history play and used its story to comment upon the current political situation. When Shakespeare wrote his play, Elizabeth I was experiencing some minor controversy because of

[10] Meredith Skura, "Marlowe's *Edward II*: Penetrating Language in Shakespeare's *Richard II*," *Shakespeare Survey* 50 (1997): 41.
[11] McEleney, "Bonfire of the Vanities," 147.

uncertainty concerning the line of succession.[12] In his article about Elizabeth I, John King notes that while Elizabeth was venerated for her commitment to her virginity, as time progressed people started to get worried about whether or not she would ever give birth to potential heirs.[13] As a result, some people compared Elizabeth to Richard II, who also had no children to succeed him. While there is no definite proof that Shakespeare intended to reference this controversy in *Richard II*, the connection between the content of the play and the context of the period suggests that he may have at least been influenced by it.

Shakespeare's purpose in writing *Richard II* was not simply to reference the current political situation but also to express his view of kingship, much like Marlowe did in *Edward II*. McEleney writes: "*Richard II* represents the dethroning of a monarch on the charges of economic and political wastefulness."[14] Essentially, Richard's inability or unwillingness to manage his and the kingdom's resources leads to his deposition. As stated earlier, when Shakespeare was writing *Richard II*, he had to be careful to show Richard's incompetence as a king while not endorsing Bolingbroke's actions against him. One way Shakespeare handled this problem was by showing the aspects of Richard's character and behavior that made him unworthy to be king. McEleney points out that Richard's problems largely boil down to wastefulness. Firstly, there is Richard II's economic wastefulness. Much like Edward II, Richard likes to buy many expensive things. Forker notes: "Richard was notorious for extravagant gifts, banquets and entertainments, and for luxurious clothing."[15] This excessive spending strains the common people and England as a whole. Shakespeare used Richard's actions in this matter to

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[12] William Shakespeare, *Richard II*, ed. Charles R. Forker, Arden Shakespeare (London: Thomson Learning, 2002), 5.

[13] John N. King, "Queen Elizabeth I: Representations of the Virgin Queen," *Renaissance Quarterly* 43.1 (1990): 36, 40.

[14] McEleney, "Bonfire of the Vanities," 138.

[15] Forker, ed., *Richard II*, 237.

show that a king cannot be wild with his money; he must be smart and put his people first. Secondly, Richard has a problem with political wastefulness. He spends too much time on unnecessary wars and listens to corrupt advisors instead of people who actually know what they are doing. Shakespeare pointed to Richard's weakness and incompetence as an example of what not to do.

There is one more potential reason behind Shakespeare's decision to focus on the political elements of Richard II's life instead of following in Marlowe's footsteps and emphasizing a romantic storyline. Shakespeare wanted to write a play that seriously discussed this tragedy from the perspective of how it damaged England as a nation. McEleney states: "The ideological question that *Richard II* poses is this: what were the forces that caused England to divide internally?"[16] Essentially, the entire play may have been a warning to Elizabeth and the monarchs who would come after her to avoid political and economic wastefulness so that England would remain united under a strong ruler.

Marlowe and Shakespeare's differences in worldviews are not just reflected in their plays' themes, but in their plays' characters as well. Throughout their careers, the two playwrights took alternate approaches to character development. Lawrence Danson argues: "Shakespeare's characters may undergo radical shifts in apparent identity; while Marlowe's heroes amaze or dismay us by the sheer tenacity of their will to be always themselves."[17] In other words, Marlowe's approach to storytelling often emphasized the lack of change in his characters, while Shakespeare's approach to storytelling typically involved a character change of some kind. Danson's statement is both correct and incorrect when applied to *Edward II*. Regardless of all the pain and suffering he endures over the course of the story, Edward never wavers in his love for

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[16] McEleney, "Bonfire of the Vanities," 147.
[17] Lawrence Danson, "Continuity and Character in Shakespeare and Marlowe," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 26.2 (1986): 217.

Gaveston or in his determination to love publicly. Even when he is tormented in the days leading up to his death, Edward's certainty never falters: "O Gaveston, it is for thee that I am wronged; / For me, both thou and both the Spencers died, / And for your sakes a thousand wrongs I'll take" (5.3.41-43). Essentially, Edward realizes and accepts that his pain is the result of his love for Gaveston and his later love for the Spencers. Despite all of his suffering, Edward endures and remains confident in his choice of lovers. In this sense, Danson's description of Marlowe's character development style perfectly describes King Edward. When this description is applied to other characters, it begins to lose some of its accuracy.

Although Edward remains the same throughout the play, at least in his affections, Mortimer changes drastically. At the beginning of *Edward II*, he seems a fairly decent man. As the play progresses, Mortimer becomes hate-filled and power-hungry in his pursuit of the throne. Fuller argues: "Mortimer's engagements begin in honesty and honor. But irascibility quickly leads to more active opposition."[18] Essentially, Mortimer begins the play as a good man, but quickly becomes corrupt due to his angry disposition. What starts as a mission to put Edward on the right track quickly becomes an operation to solidify Mortimer's own power. A similar situation occurs in Isabella's story, as well. The audience feels sympathy for her at the beginning of the drama because she desperately wants Edward's love but never gets it. Unfortunately, Isabella's kind nature goes down the drain when she forms an alliance with Mortimer that leaves her just as corrupt as he is. This change in her character tragically leads to Isabella's imprisonment and presumed death on the order of her own son. In *Edward II*, significant change occurs in both Mortimer and Isabella. This level of character development is unusual for Marlowe and is actually reminiscent of Shakespeare's writing style. While there is much

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[18] David Fuller, "Love or Politics: the Man or the King? *Edward II* in Modern Performance," *Shakespeare Bulletin* 27.1 (2009): 84.

evidence from *Edward II* and *Richard II* to suggest that Shakespeare was heavily influenced by Marlowe when he was writing his play, this character development in *Edward II* implies that Marlowe was also influenced by Shakespeare when he was writing *his* play. Charney observes: "In *Edward II*, Marlowe is moving in a distinctly Shakespearean direction."[19] Marlowe may have "borrowed" Shakespeare's skill in writing dynamic characters in order to enhance *Edward II*.

Meanwhile, Shakespeare's dynamic characters remain ever-present in *Richard II*. Bolingbroke's moral descent parallels Mortimer's, but it is not as drastic. Bolingbroke begins the play as a good-intentioned person but becomes reprehensible and power-hungry as the story progresses. He does not fall quite as far as Mortimer because of his slight affection and respect for Richard as his cousin. Anthony B. Dawson and Paul Yachnin say: "[Bolingbroke's] guilt seems genuine, and indeed haunts him at moments in the two plays that follow and that bear his name."[20] Despite his actions and ambitions, Bolingbroke appears to genuinely feel sorry for his crimes, which is more than can be said of Mortimer. Just as Bolingbroke changes over the course of the play, Richard changes as well. He begins the story as a self-centered monarch with no care for his country. He is even despicable enough to cover up his responsibility in the death of the Duke of Gloucester. Everything Richard does turns his people and the audience against him. Dawson and Yachnin observe: "[Richard's] reliance on unworthy counsellors and his callous response to the news of Gaunt's illness all tend to siphon away [the audience's] sympathy."[21] Essentially, Richard's cruel actions and lack of intelligence leave him unsympathetic. He is a horrible king and the plot to depose him is set into motion by his own poor decisions. But as the play progresses and Richard is made to endure more and more unpleasant situations, the king

[19] Maurice Charney, "Jessica's Turquoise Ring and Abigail's Poisoned Porridge: Shakespeare and Marlowe as Rivals and Imitators," *Renaissance Drama* 10 (1979): 43.
[20] William Shakespeare, *Richard II*, ed. Anthony B. Dawson and Paul Yachnin (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 75.
[21] Dawson and Yachnin, ed., *Richard II*, 69.

starts to change. Dawson and Yachnin argue: "Shakespeare, without losing sight of [Richard's] extravagance and occasional mawkishness, seems nevertheless intent on transforming a mean-spirited and immature king into something of a tragic figure."[22] Although much of Richard's negative personality does not completely disappear, his suffering brings out another side to him. He boldly defends himself when the murderers come to kill him, which gives Richard a brave and tragic end to temper the weight of his crimes. *Richard II* definitely supports Danson's claim that Shakespeare's characters often change during the course of their plays.

Another change Shakespeare made was altering the relationship between the two male leads. The relationship between Edward II and Mortimer Jr. is similar to the relationship between Richard II and Bolingbroke, but many aspects of the two relationships differ. Both pairs engage in a rivalry that results in Mortimer and Bolingbroke attempting to take the crown from their respective kings. They operate under the lie that they are doing the right thing, even though their real motivation is their own ambition. They have their kings executed and Edward and Richard die as martyrs, even though they began the story as incompetent and unsympathetic monarchs.[23] Charney observes: "Both [Edward and Richard] manage to evoke pity and compassion for their sorrowful and pitiful ends, abased and humiliated like Christian martyrs."[24] Despite their grating personalities, the two kings endure so much suffering that the audience feels for them by the end of the play. On the surface, the stories of Edward, Mortimer, Richard, and Bolingbroke parallel each other. Their stories' differences lie in the personalities and strategies of Mortimer Jr. and Bolingbroke.

[22] Dawson and Yachnin, ed., *Richard II*, 69.
[23] Danson, "Continuity and Character," 226.
[24] Maurice Charney, "Marlowe's *Edward II* as Model for Shakespeare's *Richard II*," *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama* 33 (1994): 38.

Edward and Mortimer's animosity begins quite early in the play when Mortimer challenges the king's decision to bring Gaveston back into the country. While the rest of the nobles are angry about Edward's resolution, Mortimer is more furious than any of them. There are several reasons why his wrath is so much greater than the wrath of the other barons. First there is Mortimer's angry personality. After Edward and Gaveston's relationship starts causing trouble, all of the nobles are upset, but it is Mortimer Jr. who Warwick advises to calm down (1.1.120). Mortimer pursues Edward more fiercely than the other barons because his rage is far greater than theirs. He even goes so far as to attack and wound Gaveston during a confrontation, leading Isabella to refer to him as "furious Mortimer" (2.2.85). A second reason behind Mortimer's intense pursuit of Edward and his throne is Isabella. After Mortimer Jr. learns of Isabella's loveless marriage, he quickly becomes her confidant and works on her behalf. At first, this alliance leads Mortimer to try to find a compromise that will resolve the country's political problems without bloodshed. As Edward and Gaveston become more petulant, Isabella becomes more willing to take action against them. As she becomes more willing, so does Mortimer. Eventually, Isabella gives up on Edward entirely and engages in an affair with Mortimer. Once she agrees work with him against her husband, Mortimer no longer has any reason to hold back. In other words, Isabella's sympathetic grip on Mortimer gives him another emotional motive to go after Edward and Gaveston. The third reason why Mortimer takes Edward's actions more personally than the other characters resides in Edward's refusal to ransom Mortimer Sr. Out of a desire for revenge, Mortimer resolves to sell his land so that he can buy soldiers to fight the king. Mortimer is angry before this incident, but his father's poor treatment pushes him over the edge and makes raising an army seem like the best option to get what he wants.

Viviana Comensoli offers another, less likely explanation. She writes: “[Mortimer’s] love relationship with Queen Isabella always takes second place to his desire to overthrow Gaveston, suggesting an unconscious fear of his own homoerotic impulses.”[25] Essentially, Comensoli argues that Mortimer’s anger comes from his inward fear of his homosexuality. Comensoli observes that Mortimer uses more homophobic epithets than any other character when referring to Gaveston, such as “minion” and “base.” This use of language reflects his own doubts about his sexuality and the pressure he feels to conform to the heterosexual norm. This pressure leads him to force others to conform to the heterosexual norm. Even though Mortimer insists that it is not Gaveston’s sexuality that bothers him, he criticizes Gaveston’s effeminate clothing choices, which are tied to his sexuality. Comensoli’s thoughts about this issue are intriguing, but speculative. It is possible that the source of Mortimer’s hatred for Edward and Gaveston stems from fear of his own sexuality, but without clearer evidence from the text, there is no way to know for certain.

While Edward and Mortimer’s relationship contains an intense amount of white-hot rage, Richard and Bolingbroke’s relationship is slightly more reserved. Richard knows that Bolingbroke would make a better king than he would, so the king plots against him. Meredith Skura argues: “Richard is not just worried that Bolingbroke wants to steal the crown; he is afraid that the English want him to do so.”[26] Richard knows that Bolingbroke would make a better king than he would, so he plots against him. Ultimately, Richard’s jealousy leads him to orchestrate events in his favor so that Bolingbroke is banished and therefore no longer a threat. Bolingbroke’s dislike of Richard probably begins when the king prevents him from getting married. This action against Bolingbroke combined with his banishment and Richard’s harsh

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[25] Viviana Comensoli, “Homophobia and the Regulation of Desire: A Psychoanalytic Reading of Marlowe’s *Edward II*,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 4.2 (1993): 187.
[26] Meredith Skura, “Penetrating Language,” 50.

treatment of the realm prompts Bolingbroke to rebel against the king. Just as Richard feared, Bolingbroke's popularity and competence allows him to rally forces to his side and take the kingdom.

When the situation becomes bad for Richard, Bolingbroke acts in a gentlemanly manner towards the king to suit his own ends, as is evident in the abdication scene. In *Edward II*, Mortimer is open about his feelings and is often brutally honest about his distaste for Gaveston and Edward. In contrast, Bolingbroke takes a more diplomatic approach. As he nears Richard's castle, he sends a message ahead of him: "Henry Bolingbroke / On both his knees doth kiss King Richard's hand / And sends allegiance" (3.3.35-37). In other words, Bolingbroke uses his message to insist that he is not a traitor; he simply wants the king to right his wrongs. Although Bolingbroke later makes it clear that he intends to take military action if Richard does not consent to his terms, he does it in a way that seems respectful—he literally kneels when Richard comes to talk with him. Richard is aware of the falseness of his actions: "Me rather had my heart might feel your love / Than my unpleased eye see your courtesy" (3.3.192-93). In other words, Richard recognizes that Bolingbroke's courtesy is only outward and that his purpose is to take the crown. Even though Richard acknowledges the falseness in Bolingbroke's actions, it does not lessen the impact they have on the plot of the play. In *Edward II*, Mortimer frequently acts out of self-interest and seeks power, just like Bolingbroke, but he generally does not bother attempting to hide his intentions. When he does attempt to hide them, it rarely convinces anyone. His approach to gaining power leads to his downfall in the final act when he is executed by Edward III, who is abundantly aware of Mortimer's true motivations. Bolingbroke is more intelligent than Mortimer, which he demonstrates through his flawless manners. His courtesy enables him to force Richard into giving up his crown without making it look like he is doing it for his own

benefit. Thanks to his endeavors, Bolingbroke successfully deposes Richard, executes him, and becomes the new king with few consequences, at least within this play.

Ultimately, the major differences between the relationships of Edward II to Mortimer Jr. and Richard II to Bolingbroke reside in the differences between Mortimer and Bolingbroke. Mortimer is an angry power-seeker who does not effectively hide his ambition, while Bolingbroke is a cunning power-seeker who keeps his desires hidden beneath a pious front. These differences between the two characters are largely due to Shakespeare's previously-mentioned need to make Bolingbroke less of a villain than Mortimer. Since Shakespeare was using *Edward II* as a template for *Richard II*, he could have made Bolingbroke very similar to Mortimer Jr. Due to the risky political waters of the time, Shakespeare altered the character type slightly so that Bolingbroke was more noble and sympathetic than Mortimer. Even though he does not fully condone Bolingbroke's actions against his king, Shakespeare does have the character take action in a way that is respectable, even if it is only outward. Bolingbroke's decisions are made somewhat more legitimate through his apparent trust in a higher power: he insists that he would never go against divine will (3.3.18-19). Forker argues: "[Bolingbroke] regards himself, at least for the moment, as a man of destiny, a figure whom greater powers have singled out to be the deliverer of the nation."[27] Essentially, Bolingbroke knows better than to deny the king's divine right to rule, so he manipulates this idea of a higher power by suggesting that if he became the new king, it would be because God or some type of powerful being wanted him to become king. Despite implications that Bolingbroke's ambition is the true reason behind his actions against Richard, Bolingbroke's insistence that he would not act against divine forces legitimizes his right to the throne both to the characters in the play and to the audience of Shakespeare's day. Through this manipulation of Bolingbroke's character, which he deliberately

[27] Forker, ed., *Richard II*, 23.

made different from Mortimer's character, Shakespeare successfully walked the political tightrope by making Bolingbroke's actions seem less heinous and more justified.

Bolingbroke is not the only character in Richard II who is significantly different from his *Edward II* parallel. Another major difference comes in the form of the two queens: Queen Isabella and Queen Isabel. The most significant variance in their stories is their relationships with their husbands and their purposes in their respective stories. Both queens are pained by their plays' events, but react differently to them.

Isabella's issues reside in her loveless marriage with Edward and the barrier that Gaveston puts between them. She appears to genuinely love her husband at the beginning of the story and grieves when he rejects her: "He'll ever dote on Gaveston, / And so am I for ever miserable" (1.4.185-86). No matter what she does, Isabella knows that Edward loves Gaveston more than her. At first, she tries to support her husband despite the pain that he causes her. After a time, Isabella not only turns against Edward but also engages in an affair with Mortimer Jr. as the two of them work together to bring the king down. Initially, her purpose in the play is to provide another reason for the audience and the nobles to dislike Edward. Later Isabella's purpose is the same as Mortimer's: to illustrate that obvious ambition and the inability to wield power can be the downfall of anyone who aspires to rule. She plays an important role in her husband's deposition and execution and as a result is imprisoned and probably killed by her son.

In contrast, Queen Isabel from *Richard II* serves the completely opposite purpose. She exists to make Richard a more sympathetic character. Again, aside from Bolingbroke's random accusation about Richard's favorites coming between the king and the queen, there is little evidence of dysfunction in Richard and Isabel's relationship. Isabel is a quiet and largely absent character for the first section of the play. As the situation gets worse, Isabel starts to succumb to

her grief and becomes more vocal in her unhappiness. She is unable to find enjoyment in life, which is evident in her response when one of her Ladies suggests that they tell stories of joy or grief to entertain themselves: “If of grief, being altogether had, / It adds more sorrow to my want of joy. / For what I have I need not to repeat” (3.4.15-17). Isabel’s sorrow at her husband’s misfortune is so overwhelming that she cannot even bear to hear a sad story. Her importance to the play does not become clear until she and her husband share a tender moment and Richard tells her to return to France for her own safety. Isabel begs him to let her travel with him: “Then wither he goes, thither let me go” (5.1.85). Her pleading and obvious love for Richard force the audience to see Richard in a different light. The audience now has to look at him from Isabel’s perspective, and Isabel only sees his admirable qualities, not his flaws. This brief romantic scene is the closest *Richard II* ever gets to the love storyline of *Edward II*. Isabel’s unconditional love for her husband and her desire to stay with him regardless of the consequences contrast starkly with Isabella’s multiple betrayals. While Marlowe uses Isabella to illustrate Edward’s failings, Shakespeare uses Isabel to show that Richard is not as unlikeable as everyone believes.

Finally, the last groups of characters that are significantly different from each other in both plays are the king’s favorites. In *Edward II*, this group consists largely of Baldock and Spencer Jr.; in *Richard II*, this group contains Bushy, Bagot, and Green. Both groups serve as bad advisors to their kings, which ultimately results in their deaths. The most significant difference between Edward’s favorites and Richard’s favorites is their role in the story. While the Spencer and Baldock serve to further the romantic plotline of *Edward II*, Richard’s three favorites are there as the king’s friends. Both groups exist to reveal something about their kings’ characters.

After Gaveston is killed, Edward seeks comfort in the form of Baldock and Spencer, especially Spencer. Leonora Leet Brodwin suggests that even though Edward's love for Spencer. cannot compete with his love for Gaveston, Edward engages in a relationship with him to make a point to the nobles. Brodwin argues: "Edward is motivated by the sole desire to prove his sovereign right to love."[28] In other words, Edward has very little desire to be king, which is what the barons want. All Edward wants is to have the freedom to be in a relationship with whomever he pleases. His romance with Spencer exists to make the nobles understand that he has no intention of going along with them and that all he really cares about is his romantic freedom. Marlowe uses Spencer and Baldock to reveal what is most important to Edward and to give the king a moment of bold defiance before his capture and execution.

In contrast, Bushy, Bagot, and Green's relationship with Richard is a friendship and nothing more. Bolingbroke's random accusation of sexual impropriety aside, there is no indication that these three characters have the romantic relationship with Richard that Spencer and Baldock have with Edward. Meredith Skura observes: "Richard's trio of minions is unimportant and erotically neutral compared to Edward's Gaveston – it is hard to imagine Richard wishing to be 'another Bushy' or 'another Bagot' for example."[29] Essentially, Richard's relationship with his favorites does not have the same sexual overtones as Edward's relationship with Gaveston. Despite Bushy, Bagot, and Green's apparent unimportance throughout most of the play in the romantic area, Skura notes that their friendship with the king is more important to Richard than might be expected. When Richard learns that all three of his favorites have been beheaded, he descends into a despair deeper than any he had previously occupied: "Our lands, our lives and all are Bolingbroke's, / And nothing can we call our own but death" (3.2.151-52). In

[28] Leonora Leet Brodwin, "*Edward II*: Marlowe's Culminating Treatment of Love," *ELH* 31.2 (1964): 153.
[29] Skura, "Penetrating Language," 47.

this moment, Richard temporarily gives up hope because of his grief over the loss of his friends. Essentially, it is through the deaths of Bushy, Bagot, and Green that Shakespeare reveals the extent of the king's love for these characters, which in turn makes Richard a slightly more sympathetic character. Just as Richard and Isabel's tender exchange allows the audience to see the king from an alternate perspective, Richard's grief over the loss of his friends reveals how much he cared about them and gives the audience another reason to care about him.

The similarities and differences between Marlowe's *Edward II* and Shakespeare's *Richard II* are not limited to the overarching themes and characters of the two plays; they are also evident in several specific scenes. The scenes with perhaps the most obvious similarities are the deposition scenes. Both *Edward II* and *Richard II* contain a section in which the king is forced to give up his crown. The two scenes are similar because both kings are forced to relinquish their crowns and as a result, they experience parallel emotions. The two scenes are also significantly different because of the processes of the depositions, Mortimer and Bolingbroke's strategies, and the ultimate reasons why the two kings give up their crowns.

In *Edward II*, Leicester, Trussel, and the Bishop of Winchester apprehend the king and try to force him give up his crown. Edward goes through a variety of feelings as he tries to decide what to do. Initially, he boldly claims that the gods themselves will make Isabella and Mortimer suffer for their crimes against him: "For such outrageous passions cloy my soul, / Full oft am I soaring off to heaven / To plain me to the gods against them both" (5.1.19-22). In other words, Edward believes or pretends to believe that Mortimer and Isabella's crimes against him are transgressions against gods that deserve to be punished by gods. Edward expresses the idea that a king's power is divine; if someone threatens the king, that person threatens the higher power that watches over the king. Whether Edward actually believes in these "gods" is up for

debate, but regardless of his own feelings on the matter, he thinks that the Bishop, Leicester, and Trussel will be intimidated by his threat of divine wrath. Unfortunately, Edward's words have little to no effect on Mortimer's men.

Ironically, even though Edward has lost his power at this point, he is more of a king now than at any other point in the play. He boldly insists upon his divine right to rule and commands a stronger presence than ever before in the story. Brodwin argues: "[Edward] consciously affirms the principle of his sovereignty only after it has forever lost its living potency."[30] Essentially, it is only after Edward has lost his loved ones and his power that he starts acting like a king and attempting to take charge like a king. Unfortunately, this effort is too late to have an effect on his doom.

Edward brings up the point that a deposition is not even necessary, since he is now king in name only: Mortimer and Isabella hold all of the power. The only reason why Mortimer is pressuring Edward to give up the crown is out of a desire for greater legitimacy, not out of a need for more power. Mortimer controls everything, but he fears being marked as a traitor. In order for his crusade to gain legitimacy, Mortimer needs Edward to officially give up the crown. Mortimer Jr.'s goal in *Edward II* is the same as Bolingbroke's goal in *Richard II*: to depose the king in a way that will be accepted by the nobility and average citizens.

Edward takes off his crown and puts it back on again in a motion that symbolizes his indecision. First, he removes the crown as he reflects on the inevitability of his death. Even though Edward realizes that his fate is sealed, he puts the crown back on his head in a pointless attempt to remind Mortimer's men that he is their true king. Despite his helplessness, Edward refuses to back away from his crown. It is not until Leicester threatens to deny Edward's son the right to be king that Edward finally gives in and resigns. Ultimately, Edward relents because his

[30] Brodwin, "Marlowe's Culminating Treatment of Love," 154.

son is his only remaining means of leaving a legacy of kings. If his son does not ascend the throne, Edward will have nothing left to make him significant to history. To protect his son and his legacy, Edward relinquishes what kingly pride he has left and resigns. The former king asks the Bishop to send a message to his child: "Commend me to my son, and bid him rule / Better than I: yet how have I transgress'd" (5.1.121-22). As he gives up his crown, Edward has a brief moment in which he finally admits that he could have ruled better. This moment is quickly followed by a contradictory denial of responsibility, but this small instant nevertheless reveals that a part of Edward realizes that he was not a good king and hopes that his son will learn from his mistakes.

The deposition scene in *Edward II* is significant for three reasons. First, it reveals the value that Edward places on the continuation of his legacy through his son. He clearly believes that the important part of a king's legacy is not simply his actions during his reign, but also the heirs who will inherit the throne. Even when Edward knows that his life is going to end soon, he holds out hope that his son will be able to rule and continue his legacy. Secondly, the deposition scene explains Mortimer's strategy to legitimize his claim to the throne by forcing Edward to resign. William B. Kelly argues: "In order to usurp kingly power [Mortimer] must remove the present king without disturbing the monarchy's structure."[31] In other words, the key to Mortimer's success is getting Edward to resign so that a new king can take his place and rule with the full power of a monarch. Ultimately, Mortimer's strategy is not successful, in contrast to Bolingbroke's strategy in *Richard II*.

The deposition scene in *Richard II* has several elements in common with the deposition scene in *Edward II*, but it also has several elements that are not present in the other scene. Like Edward, Richard expresses his wrath through references to his supposed divine right to rule. In

[31] William B. Kelly, "Mapping Subjects in Marlowe's *Edward II*," *South Atlantic Review* 63.1 (1998): 13.

contrast to Edward, Richard does not have an heir to whom he can pass on his legacy; he gives up his crown out of despair, not hope.

The deposition scene begins after Northumberland approaches the castle where Richard is hiding. The king admonishes the man for not kneeling before him: "We thought ourself thy lawful king. / And if we be, how dare thy joints forget / To pay their awful duty to our presence" (3.3.74-76). Essentially, Richard is angry that he is not being given the full respect that he, as a king, deserves. The word "lawful" points out the legal element of being a monarch. Richard feels that he has the lawful right to rule and that Bolingbroke and his followers are illegally taking that away from him. The king puts even further emphasis on this point when he claims, much like Edward, that God gave him his kingship and that only God can take it away from him: "Show us the hand of God / That hath dismissed us from our stewardship" (3.3.77-78). Although Richard's true beliefs on the subject are unclear, he nevertheless rages against Bolingbroke's men by claiming that his crown is God-given and that God himself will send armies to destroy them. Like Edward, Richard seeks to intimidate his opponents through religious rhetoric. Also like Edward, he does not succeed. Charney argues: "Like Edward in his change of fortune, [Richard] answers adversity only with lyrical speculations and stoic endurance."[32] In other words, Richard and Edward are similar in their impotent wordplay; all they have left is their ability to speak and accuse because they do not have the power to do anything else.

Northumberland quickly cuts in and insists that Bolingbroke does not want to take away what is rightfully Richard's, only what is rightfully his: "His coming hither hath no further scope / Than for his lineal royalties" (3.3.112-13). In other words, Northumberland claims that Bolingbroke has a legal right to the crown because he is Richard's true heir. This claim brings up an aspect of kingship that *Edward II* also discussed: the line of succession. In *Edward II*, the

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[32] Charney, "*Edward II* as Model for *Richard II*," 38.

importance of the line of succession is displayed through Edward's certainty that his son will continue on his legacy. The line of succession is also significant in the other play because it ultimately gives Edward III the power he needs to deal with Mortimer Jr. and Isabella. In *Richard II*, Richard has no children, so the question of who will rule when he dies is important. According to Charles Forker, historically speaking, Bolingbroke was actually considered a potential successor for King Richard at one point. In the play, this fact gives Bolingbroke's claim to the throne some legitimacy. Bolingbroke's strategy goes back to the earlier discussion of Mortimer's methods versus Bolingbroke's methods. Mortimer has little legitimate right to the throne and does a poor job of gaining more legitimacy. As a result, Edward III successfully executes him once he comes to power. On the other hand, Bolingbroke is far smarter than Mortimer. He knows that in order to avoid rebellion and keep his power he needs to be the legal monarch. His semi-legitimate claim to the throne eases his followers' consciences and appeases any troubled citizens. Bolingbroke's status as a potential successor also served to appease Queen Elizabeth when *Richard II* was first performed. Charney observes: "*Richard II* most closely resembles *Edward II* in the deposition scene, a dangerous and potentially seditious scene that did not appear in print until the Fourth Quarto of 1608."[33] As was discussed earlier, Richard II's deposition was a tense subject to write about because Elizabeth, the current monarch, was related to Bolingbroke. With this scene, Shakespeare gives Bolingbroke some legitimacy so that he will not be considered a traitor.

Richard agrees to adhere to Bolingbroke's demands. This reluctant acceptance of his situation quickly turns into self-pity and despair: "I'll give my jewels for a set of beads, / And my large kingdom for a little grave, / A little, little grave, an obscure grave" (3.3.147). In this statement, Richard descends into depression because he is giving up his kingship in exchange for

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[33] Charney, "*Edward II* as Model for *Richard II*," 36.

nothing but death. Just as Edward realizes in his deposition scene that he is probably going to be executed, Richard also begins coming to grips with the fact that not only is he going to die, but he is going to die in obscurity. His reference to his grave as "little" emphasizes his fear of his own insignificance once he is no longer king. Richard's fear of obscurity is slightly mimicked in *Edward II* when Edward gives up his crown in exchange for his son's right to rule. Edward's motivation is rooted in his desire to be remembered. If his son does not reign after him, Edward would no longer have a concrete mark on the future of England, would not have a legacy, and would not be remembered.

Northumberland encourages Richard to leave the castle and accompany him to see Bolingbroke and Richard reluctantly agrees. When Bolingbroke insists that he is only there to claim what is his, Richard points out that Bolingbroke already has what he wants: "Your own is yours, and I am yours and all" (3.3.197). In other words, Bolingbroke does not need to ask for anything because he has already taken everything by force, including Richard himself. Much like in *Edward II* when Edward points out that Mortimer is already a king except in name, Bolingbroke has the power of a monarch. Also like Mortimer, Bolingbroke insists on taking action to legitimize his power and claim to the throne by forcing Edward to resign. Backed into a corner and not wanting to be killed, Richard reluctantly agrees to relinquish the crown into Bolingbroke's hands.

Later, during Richard's deposition, Bolingbroke ensures that everything is legal and proper so that his ascension to the throne will go well: "Fetch hither Richard, that in common view / He may surrender. So we shall proceed / Without suspicion" (4.1.156-58). Bolingbroke arranges for Richard to give up his crown in the view of witnesses so that his story will have support. Here Bolingbroke succeeds where Mortimer fails. Mortimer tries to legitimize his right

to the throne, but does it too sloppily for it to be effective. Bolingbroke, on the other hand, carefully plans out every detail so that his kingship will be legitimate in the eyes of everyone.

Just as Edward handles the crown before finally resigning, Richard briefly handles his crown when he holds it out to Bolingbroke, almost like a challenge. After some back-and-forth, Richard gives up, hands the crown to Bolingbroke, and relinquishes his command. As he resigns, Richard states again that Bolingbroke is probably going to have him killed, but this time he sounds like he wants to die: "Long mayst thou live in Richard's seat to sit, / And soon lie Richard in an earthy pit" (4.1.218-19). Now that Richard has officially been deposed, all he wants is to die and let his humiliation be over.

But Bolingbroke's careful strategizing will not let Richard rest yet; he has Northumberland insist that Richard must confess his crimes against England. The reason behind this move is stated explicitly: "By confessing them, the souls of men / May deem that you are worthily deposed" (4.1.226-27). Once again, Bolingbroke's cunning is on display. Legally deposing Richard is not enough; Bolingbroke has to ensure that public opinion is in his favor in order to make his new position as king secure.

Just as Edward has a brief moment in which he acknowledges his mistakes, Richard also has an instant of guilt. Richard admits, albeit indirectly, that he has behaved poorly towards his country when he responds to Northumberland's demand that he confess his crimes: "Must I ravel out / My weaved-up follies? Gentle Northumberland, / If thy offences were upon record, / Would it not shame thee in so fair a troop / To read a lecture of them" (4.1.227-32). Essentially, by stating that no one's errors sound positive when read aloud, Richard acknowledges that he has made mistakes. Just like in *Edward II*, this moment quickly passes and Richard goes back on the

offensive, but for a few lines, Richard actually seems to understand that he has committed crimes against his country.

The deposition scenes in *Edward II* and *Richard II* have many similarities and differences. In some ways, the two scenes mirror each other: both kings handle the crown, both kings insist that they are the true ruler, both kings despair in light of their impending deaths and both kings have small moments in which they acknowledge their failings. The two scenes also have several differences that tend to either reflect differences in circumstances or differences in personalities. While both kings realize on some level that they are going to die, Edward has slightly more hope because his son will continue his legacy, while Richard has no hope at all because he has no heir and no friends. As a result, he has lost his legacy along with any reason to keep fighting.

The deposition scenes are not the only pair of scenes in *Edward II* and *Richard II* that share similarities but also possess crucial differences. Another set of scenes with these qualities are the kings' death scenes. Marlowe and Shakespeare execute their kings with the same goal in mind: to make Edward and Richard more sympathetic to the audience. Despite this similarity, the methods of execution and the discussions prior to the executions are significantly different.

Edward II's death scene is arguably one of the most famous scenes of the play. The real-life death of King Edward made an impact on historical accounts and that impact is evident in the play. Edward's death scene begins when an assassin named Lightborn enters the dungeon where the former king is being kept. Lightborn's name is most likely either deliberately ironic, considering that he kills Edward in a dark dungeon, or a reference to the name "Lucifer." When Lightborn approaches Edward, he is falsely kind and expresses sadness after hearing the story of how the former king has been treated: "O speak no more, my lord; this breaks my heart" (5.5.70).

His sympathy is cruel and Lightborn sadistically draws out their exchange by pretending to care. Suddenly the situation turns violent when Lightborn convinces Edward to lie down on a bed and has one of his men hold him down with a table and a featherbed. Lightborn stabs the former king through with a spit. While the play is not explicit about where the assassin stabbed him, the assumption considering the placement of the table and the bed and considering that Lightborn is trying not to leave any marks on Edward's body is that Edward is stabbed through the anus as a cruel parody of the homosexual act of making love. Danson argues: "The symbolism of the killing is in effect a capturing of Edward's identity by the world that opposes him."[34] In other words, Lightborn takes Edward's identity as a bold homosexual man and corrupts it into something painful and twisted to make his death a kind of punishment. Edward screams loudly and dies. His manner of death, which was the same in the play as it was in real life, makes the audience pity Edward and feel sympathy for him in light of his excessive suffering. Since the death is horrifying, it emphasizes the tragedy of Edward's story and pulls at the audience's heartstrings.

Richard's death in *Richard II* also serves to gain the audience's compassion, but it accomplishes it in a way that is not nearly as brutal as Edward's death. Unlike *Edward II*, the scene begins with Richard imprisoned, musing to himself about his situation. As he is thinking, Richard considers his relationship with time: "I wasted time, and now doth Time waste me" (5.5.49). As he is closing in on the end of his life, Richard once again has a small moment in which he regrets his wasteful tendencies. He notes that his own life is now wasting away as a result of his actions.

When the keeper of the stables is rude to Richard, the former king loses his patience and attacks him, which prompts the murderers, Exton, and the servants to enter and assault him. The

[34] Danson, "Continuity and Character," 226-27.

resulting fight marks the most significant difference between Edward's death scene and Richard's death scene: the way the two former kings die. Richard grabs a weapon from one of the servants and kills two men before finally being stabbed by Exton. As he dies, Richard boldly declares that he is going to heaven and that Exton will be condemned to hell for killing him: "That hand shall burn in never-quenching fire / That staggers thus my person. / Mount, mount, my soul! Thy seat is up on high" (5.5.108-09, 111). Although Richard is not a wildly religious person, he calls on religious imagery to deal out his kingly wrath on Exton. He again declares his divine right to be king and condemns Exton to hell for bringing a permanent end to his reign. This death in the heat of battle contrasts sharply with Edward's harsh penetration. While Edward's death highlights his helplessness, Richard's death highlights his bravery. Charles Forker argues: "When Richard manfully strikes down two of Exton's assistants, Shakespeare leaves us with the impression of a man who finally claims the martial tradition of his royal ancestors."[35] Essentially, the unlikeable and unworthy king from earlier in the play is replaced with a man who fully embraces every aspect of his identity, albeit a little late. Despite the differences between them, Edward's death scene and Richard's death scene serve the same purpose: to make the title characters of the plays more sympathetic. The audience feels compassion for Edward at the end of his life because his death is horribly painful and cruel and because it does not fit his crimes. The audience feels sympathy for Richard at the end of his life because he displays kingly bravery in the face of his impending death. In other words, Marlowe and Shakespeare use different tactics to achieve the same goal: to gain audience sympathy for largely unsympathetic characters.

In addition to the similarities and differences in the plays' themes, characters, and scenes, there are also similarities and differences in certain sections of the plays' texts. There has been

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[35] Forker, ed., *Richard II*, 44.

some debate over the years about whether Shakespeare and Marlowe are the real authors of their works and if there might have been some overlap between them. In other words, were any of Marlowe's works written by Shakespeare and were any of Shakespeare's works written by Marlowe? Lately, new evidence has come to light that Marlowe may have contributed to Shakespeare's *1 Henry VI* and *2 Henry VI*. Hugh Craig uses methods such as comparing the texts of the two plays to Marlowe function words to discover the likelihood that certain sections of the two Shakespeare plays were written by Marlowe. He observes that in several parts of *1 Henry VI*, Shakespeare used phrases such as "aid me in this enterprise,"[36] which is identical to a passage from *Doctor Faustus*, and "lofty-plumed crest,"[37] which consists of a word grouping that can be found in several Marlowe plays but no other Shakespeare play. Using similar methods to analyze *2 Henry VI*, Craig concludes that there are sections of the play that highly resemble Marlowe's writing, such as the Cade Rebellion storyline, which bears a resemblance to Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*. Craig argues: "If Shakespeare wrote these scenes [in *2 Henry VI*,] he was imitating Marlowe's diction and syntactic habits as well as responding to [Marlowe's] rampant individualism in attitudes and dramatic characterization."[38] In other words, the theory that Shakespeare wrote sections of *2 Henry VI* in a way that was similar to Marlowe's style and personality is less likely than the theory that Marlowe wrote these sections of the play. Gary Taylor agrees with Craig's argument: "Unless Craig's evidence can be discredited, Marlowe will be added to the list of Shakespeare collaborators."[39] Thanks to Craig's research and discussion on the subject, Marlowe now receives credit for his role in writing *1 Henry VI* and *2 Henry VI*.

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[36] Hugh Craig, "The Three Parts of *Henry VI*," in *Shakespeare, Computers, and the Mystery of Authorship*, ed. Hugh Craig and Arthur F. Kinney, (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 60.
[37] Craig, "The Three Parts of *Henry VI*," 60.
[38] Craig, "The Three Parts of *Henry VI*," 76.
[39] Gary Taylor, review of *Shakespeare, Computers, and the Mystery of Authorship*, by Hugh Craig and Arthur F. Kinney, *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 24 (2011): 200.

Thomas Merriam also discusses the subject in his article about determining the probability of who wrote each play that is attributed to Marlowe or Shakespeare. Merriam uses several different strategies, such as tracking the frequency of certain letters and certain function words. Ultimately, he concludes that *Edward II* was almost definitely written by Marlowe and *Richard II* was most likely written by Shakespeare. While Shakespeare probably collaborated with Marlowe when he wrote *1 Henry VI* and *2 Henry VI,* Merriam is fairly certain that *Edward II* and *Richard II* were written by Marlowe and Shakespeare respectively.[40]

In addition to influencing each other through direct collaboration, Marlowe and Shakespeare also influenced each other by borrowing language from the other artist's plays and using it in his own plays.

In *Edward II*, there is evidence that Marlowe was influenced by Shakespeare. One piece of evidence is Marlowe's method of creating history plays. Forker says: "*Edward II* took up the Shakespearean fashion of adapting materials from Holinshed and other historical sources to the stage."[41] In other words, Marlowe started following Shakespeare's trend of taking Holinshed's historical accounts and turning them into plays. This borrowing is one way in which Shakespeare influenced Marlowe.

Other instances in which Marlowe borrowed from Shakespeare can be seen in the text of *Edward II*. One example is the use of certain objects as symbols. Forker explains: "Cedar trees and eagles are linked as symbols of hierarchical priority. Marlowe picks up the Shakespearean association."[42] Essentially, Marlowe adapted the symbols that Shakespeare had already used in *3 Henry VI* to fit his needs in *Edward II*. In *3 Henry VI*, the symbols were used by the Earl of

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[40] Thomas Merriam, "Heterogeneous Authorship in Early Shakespeare and the Problem of *Henry V*," *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 13.1 (1998): 18-19, 26.
[41] Forker, ed., *Edward II*, 18.
[42] Forker, ed., *Edward II*, 24.

Warwick to describe his own imminent death: "Thus yields the cedar to the axe's edge / Whose arms gave shelter to the princely eagle."[43] The intention behind the references is to indicate that Warwick used to be grand and respected, but now he has been metaphorically cut down. In *Edward II*, the symbols of the cedar tree and the eagle are used in a different context. These symbols are displayed on Mortimer's shield when he and the other barons are called to give honor to Gaveston. Mortimer describes it for Gaveston and the king: "A lofty cedar tree fair flourishing, / On whose top branches kingly eagles perch, / And by the bark a canker creeps me up / And gets unto the highest bough of all" (2.2.16-19). In other words, Mortimer is criticizing Gaveston's relationship with Edward by comparing Edward to an eagle perching at the top of the tree and comparing Gaveston to a caterpillar that slimily worked his way up to the top.

Just as Marlowe borrowed from Shakespeare when he wrote *Edward II*, Shakespeare also borrowed from Marlowe. In *Richard II*, there is a scene in which Richard looks at his face in a mirror. He says: "Was this face the face / That every day under his household roof / Did keep ten thousand men?" (4.1.281-83). This passage bears a striking resemblance to a passage from a Marlowe play called *Doctor Faustus*. In that play, a character looks at Helen of Troy and says: "Was this the face that launched a thousand ships / And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?"[44] Since both sentences begin with "Was this the face that" and both sentences are questions, it seems likely that Shakespeare took some inspiration from *Doctor Faustus* in this passage. Charles Forker argues that the similarity between the two sentences may have been an intentional attempt to connect the two situations. He observes: "The symbolic link between the mythical Helen whose beauty burned Troy and the monarch whose deposition became the catalyst for a

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[43] William Shakespeare, *Third Part of King Henry VI*, ed. by Harold F. Brooks and Harold Jenkins (Cambridge, MA and London: Methuen and Harvard University Press, 1964), 5.2.11-12.

[44] Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, ed. Roma Gill (London: A & C Black, 1968) 13.88-90.

civil war might have occurred to many in Shakespeare's audience."[45] In both situations, the face in question sparked war and destruction. Forker argues that by echoing Marlowe's phrasing, Shakespeare may have been trying to foreshadow the grim results of Richard's deposition. Marjorie Garber suggests an additional purpose to Richard's echo of *Doctor Faustus*: "This celebrated Marlovian line in the deposition scene suggests something about Richard's own view of his fall: it is a catastrophic event that will change the world."[46] In other words, Garber sees Richard's echo of this famous line as an indication of the king's ego. He feels that his deposition will have a devastating effect on England because he sees himself as the most important part of it.

In addition to Shakespeare referencing Marlowe's other works, he also specifically uses elements of *Edward II* in *Richard II*.

One similarity between the two plays is the use of the myth of Phaëton, who was the son of a god in Greek mythology. Forker explains: "[Phaëton] borrowed his father's chariot, which drew the sun across the sky, and, losing control of the horses, was carried close to the earth, almost burning it up."[47] The point of the story was that Phaëton acted without thinking and nearly caused disaster.

In *Richard II*, Richard describes himself as Phaëton: "Down, down I come, like glist'ring Phaëton, / Wanting the manage of unruly jades" (3.3.178-79). This description works for Richard for three reasons. First, the sun was a well-known symbol for Richard. Second, Phaëton's reckless behavior reflects Richard's poor choices. Third, Phaëton's inability to remain in control of the horses is similar to Richard's inability to remain in control of the nobility.

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[45] Forker, ed., *Richard II*, 408.
[46] Marjorie Garber, "Marlovian Vision/Shakespearean Revision," *Shakespearean Criticism* 128 (1979): 4.
[47] Forker, ed., *Richard II*, 355.

In *Edward II*, Warwick refers to Gaveston as Phaethon, a variation on the same name: "Ignoble vassal, that like Phaethon / Aspir'st unto the guidance of the sun" (1.4.16-17). In this context, the barons are about to capture Gaveston because they dislike his low class and his influence on the king. Warwick compares Gaveston to Phaëton because he believes that both men suffer from unearned self-confidence and pride. Phaëton believed that he could do his father's job and he almost destroyed the earth. Similarly, Gaveston believes that he can gain prestige through his relationship with the king and Warwick fears that this closeness between the two men will lead to the destruction of the king and the kingdom.

Both *Edward II* and *Richard II* reference Phaëton/Phaethon in their texts. While the contexts for each situation are slightly different, they both share the intention of criticizing a character's poor behavior. While the existence of this comparison in both plays may be a coincidence, it could also be another way in which Shakespeare was inspired by *Edward II*.

There are many more small similarities like these that imply a connection between the two plays. Forker notes that it is doubtful that all of the similarities were mere coincidences.

When *Edward II* and *Richard II* are performed today, the people in charge of the productions get to choose which story elements to change and which elements to keep the same. Sometimes there is some overlap in the decisions that are made in different productions of each play. In other words, the tactics that are employed in a production of *Edward II* occasionally end up being a part of a production of *Richard II*. These similarities between the different stage interpretations of the plays reflect some of the similarities between *Edward II* and *Richard II*.

In his article about *Edward II* on stage, David Fuller argues that part of the difficulty of staging Marlowe's play resides in the sets. While the original production of *Edward II* would not have used painted scenery, many productions today use them to provide the audience with some

context, to make a point about the play, and a variety of other reasons. In *Edward II*, descriptions of the surroundings can be vivid and it is tempting for directors to aim for historical accuracy. Fuller believes that trying to make the sets realistic can distract from the poetic aspects of the scene: "The difficulty is to avoid being so realist as to overwhelm poetry with history—the archetypal (Hell) with the actual (a dungeon)."[48] In other words, Marlowe's descriptions of the various locations in *Edward II* cause some debate among people who want to stage the play because Marlowe tends to mix history with symbolism to create the right atmosphere.

Fuller also observes that people who direct *Edward II* have a number of symbolic options open to them when dealing with important characters. For example, Lightborn is a dark character who could represent various evil or twisted mythological and theological figures. He is occasionally portrayed as a version of the devil because of his evil personality and his name's similarity to the name "Lucifer" (i.e., light-bearer). Since he is often interpreted as a corrupted version of homosexual love, Lightborn is also sometimes presented as a twisted version of Gaveston. In the Prospect Theatre Company's production of *Edward II*, directed by Toby Robertson in 1969-70, Edward gave Lightborn a portrait of Gaveston. The director's intention behind this action was to connect Lightborn and Gaveston in the audience's mind. Right before Edward was pinned down, Lightborn kissed him as part of a cruel parody of Edward's relationship with Gaveston.

Another production that linked Lightborn and Gaveston was David Bintley's ballet version of *Edward II*. In the ballet, Lightborn was portrayed as a sinister lover. His accompanying music and choreography was similar to Gaveston's music and choreography. There were even a few productions in which Lightborn's connection to Gaveston was emphasized more dramatically. Fuller observes: "In some productions the effect is heightened by

[48] Fuller, "*Edward II* in Modern Performance," 88.

having Gaveston and Lightborn danced by the same performer."[49] Essentially, David Bintley decided to highlight Lightborn's perversion of Edward and Gaveston's love by practically replacing Gaveston with the assassin.

Interestingly, the decision to have the same dancer play both Lightborn and Gaveston is mirrored in some productions of *Richard II*. A Royal Shakespeare Company production directed by John Barton involved the actors playing Richard and Bolingbroke switching roles for every performance.[50] The purpose behind the switch resided in the idea that Richard and Bolingbroke were engaged in a competition. Charles Forker argues: "The struggle between the two contenders for the throne became less a matter of contrasted personalities than of 'a conflict of roles.'"[51] In other words, one of them was a king, one of them was a man, and both were struggling to see who would end up with each role. Having both actors play both characters emphasized the fluidity of their roles and how relatively easy it would be for their roles to switch.

Other productions of the two plays highlighted different aspects of the stories. The Globe Theatre's 2003 production of *Edward II*, directed by Timothy Walker, portrayed all of the characters negatively, playing up their bad qualities. This decision left the audience feeling unsympathetic for any of the people in the play. Fuller argues: "There was nothing idealistic about the lovers. While Gaveston was the proud corruptor of a light-brained king, the barons were no better."[52] Essentially, Edward, Gaveston, Mortimer, and the barons have few good qualities and the negative aspects of their personalities are enhanced so that the audience will not have sympathy for any of them. The Globe Theatre's choice on this issue was a bit harsh. Although the majority of the characters in *Edward II* are not always likeable, they all have

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[49] Fuller, "*Edward II* in Modern Performance," 109.
[50] Forker, ed., *Richard II*, 104-05.
[51] Forker, ed., *Richard II*, 104.
[52] Fuller, "*Edward II* in Modern Performance" 100-01.

moments throughout the play when they are relatable and sympathetic. If these moments are largely glossed over and the play focuses on the characters' unlikeable traits, then the audience is not likely to see the moral nuances of Edward and Mortimer's struggle for the crown.

An additional change in the Globe Theatre production of *Edward II* was the reason why the barons dislike Gaveston. Fuller writes: "What was particularly deleterious were more additions implying that the barons' objections to Gaveston were objections to homosexuality."[53] In *Edward II*, it is made quite clear through Mortimer Sr.'s comment, "The mightiest kings have had their minions," that the barons' issues with Gaveston are his low birth and his negative influence on the king, not his sexuality (1.4.390). The Globe Theatre's decision to have the nobles mock Gaveston with obviously homophobic taunts seems to go against the play's original intention.

Nicholas Hytner's take on *Edward II* at the Royal Exchange Theater both paralleled and differed from the Globe Theatre's interpretation of the play. Hytner also decided to portray the barons as explicitly homophobic and made them highly unsympathetic. Also like the Globe Theatre production, Hytner's interpretation of *Edward II* showcased Edward and Gaveston's often unlikeable personalities and their general disregard for England as a whole. In contrast to the other production, he made the two men sympathetic despite their flaws by contrasting them with the barons. While Hytner's interpretation of *Edward II* took some liberties with the play, it gave the audience a reason to sympathize with Edward even though he was, in Charles Forker's words: "boyish in certain gleeful moments, petulant and viciously ruthless in others."[54] In this production of the play, Edward's childish and occasionally unpleasant personality was offset by his harsh treatment at the hands of the nobles, just as it was in the original play. Hytner's

[53] Fuller, "*Edward II* in Modern Performance," 101.
[54] Forker, ed., *Edward II*, 112.

production also contained an interpretation of Lightborn that resembled the interpretation from David Bintley's ballet. When Lightborn was killed shortly after he murdered Edward, he fell on top of the former king's dead body in a pose that was reminiscent of a lovers' embrace.

Over the years, there have also been a variety of different productions of *Richard II*. Of these interpretations, Deborah Warner's production in 1995 was particularly significant for several reasons. It stood out for the way it portrayed Richard and Bolingbroke's relationship. Warner decided that Richard genuinely cared about Bolingbroke and that their relationship was close at first. Forker observes: "Richard's ever-present tears gave the breakdown of good relations with Bolingbroke the semblance of a 'wrecked love affair.'"[55] Essentially, Warner made Richard's story even more tragic through Bolingbroke's betrayal of a man who sincerely cared about him. Although this take on Richard and Bolingbroke's relationship did not quite work with the original play, it gave the audience another reason to sympathize with Richard and made his ending more tragic. This play is also significant because of its unique choice concerning Richard's personality. Since Richard was played by Fiona Shaw, an actress, the director decided to use Shaw's gender as a method of surprising the audience's preconceived notions about the play and making Richard childlike. Although this interpretation of Richard's character does not quite work with the original text of the play, Warner's decision on this issue, much like her choice concerning Richard and Bolingbroke's relationship, served to make Richard a more sympathetic character.

Another interesting production of *Richard II* was directed by Ariane Mnouchkine in 1981. Mnouchkine chose to incorporate elements of various Asian styles of performance and music because of her negative views of western types of acting. Dawson and Yachnin observe: "Convinced that western acting is contaminated by 'psychological venom,' she wanted to break

[55] Forker, ed., *Richard II*, 110-11.

away from realism by using Asian theatrical forms."[56] In other words, Mnouchkine decided that the western styles of acting carried too much psychological baggage, so she turned to a different style to express the play differently. She changed the original text of *Richard II* to fit her vision. One of these changes was to shift the focus of the play away from the national issues and towards movement and objective emotional states. Ultimately, the play was much more about form than substance because of Mnouchkine's desire to make the play universal. She felt that *Richard II* needed to be separated from British history and psychology in order for other cultures to relate to its story.

While Mnouchkine's production was unique and mesmerizing, it slightly erred in assuming that the play could not have a universal impact as a traditional production. Mnouchkine believed that *Richard II* would not be applicable to the lives of people from a variety of different countries unless it was separated from British nationality, which seems like a broad assumption. *Richard II*'s story of the deposition of an incompetent monarch can be relatable to a variety of cultures, even if they do not share the exact same psychology as the British. One example of a production that reached a different group of people was the Prospect Theatre Company's rendition of *Richard II* in 1968. Dawson and Yachnin describe the production as "traditionally conceived" with few new elements added.[57] Despite the classic style of the production, this play earned an intense emotional reaction from the audience when it was performed in Bratislava. After the recent events in the country, including the Prague spring, the idea of the English soil representing home and freedom in *Richard II* emotionally affected the audience because they could relate it to their experiences. Even though the people of Bratislava probably had a limited understanding of the context of the play, it affected them because they could relate to its themes.

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[56] Dawson and Yachnin, ed., *Richard II*, 95.
[57] Dawson and Yachnin, ed., *Richard II*, 98.

It is for this reason that Mnouchkine's belief that *Richard II* needed to be more relatable may not be as true as she thought. Overall, Mnouchkine's interpretation of *Richard II* is a vibrant and bold take on the play, but the assumption behind one of the director's core ideas is questionable.

While Mnouchkine tried to stay away from psychology and British nationalism, other directors chose to interpret *Richard II* in ways that emphasized politics. One such director was Ron Daniels, who produced the play for the Royal Shakespeare Company in the 1990s. Daniels decided to make Richard a bold and dominant man while Bolingbroke was fairly weak in comparison. In this version of the play, Northumberland was Richard's true adversary; he manipulated Bolingbroke into pursuing the throne. The result of these choices was an unsympathetic Richard. Dawson and Yachnin argue: "There could be no tragedy when such a domineering, tyrannical Richard was reduced to a foetal position. That leader simply had to go."[58] Even the elements of the play that made Richard more sympathetic did not significantly affect the emotions of the audience of this production because Richard was too ostentatiously unlikeable and bad for the kingdom. Daniels deliberately played with the personalities of the different characters to give *Richard II* a slightly different political message: just about everyone is corrupt or incompetent. While this interpretation provides an interesting look at how the story of *Richard II* can be manipulated to fit other political ideas, it does not follow Shakespeare's apparent original intentions for the play.

Ultimately, *Edward II* and *Richard II* have many similarities and many differences. Their similarities reside in their general storylines, which largely match up with each other, especially in the major plot points and several specific characters and scenes. In the end, the sheer number of similarities between the two plays makes it likely that Shakespeare was heavily influenced by Marlowe's *Edward II* when he wrote *Richard II*.

[58] Dawson and Yachnin, ed., *Richard II*, 103.

Various critics of the two plays hold differing opinions of the level of influence that Marlowe had on Shakespeare. Some critics, like Hardin Craig, argue that the primary reason for the similarities between the two plays is that the two storylines originate from similar historical situations: "The subject of *Richard II* is so closely parallel to that of *Edward II* that Shakespeare must have been put to it to avoid repetition."[59] In other words, the elements that the two plays have in common are the result of storylines that naturally mirror each other, not the result of Shakespeare "borrowing" elements from *Edward II*. While Craig makes a valuable point that some of the similarities between the two plays are due to the stories the playwrights chose, it seems unlikely that Shakespeare was not influenced by Marlowe's *Edward II* in any way. The two plays have far too many commonalities for them all to be coincidences.

Other critics express alternate opinions. When Harry Levin discusses Marlowe's influence on Shakespeare in his article, "Marlowe Today," he insists: "To be sure, *Richard II* would be unthinkable without the example of *Edward II*."[60] Essentially, Levin's argument is that if Marlowe had not written *Edward II*, *Richard II* would not have existed, at least not in its current form. On the other hand, Levin also adds that while Shakespeare's *Richard II* was profoundly influenced by *Edward II*, Shakespeare had the skill to take Marlowe's work and create something just as good yet significantly different.

Many more critics have weighed in on the issue. In one of his articles, Thomas Merriam suggests that Marlowe had an important impact on Shakespeare's early plays. Maurice Charney argues that Marlowe's influence on Shakespeare, especially in *Richard II*, is more specific: "We know that Shakespeare generally avoids borrowing directly from Marlowe. Instead, he does something much more fundamental: he uses Marlowe's play as a model or prototype for his

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[59] Hardin Craig, "Shakespeare's Development as a Dramatist in the Light of his Experience," *Studies in Philology* 39.2 (1942): 233.
[60] Harry Levin, "Marlowe Today," *The Tulane Drama Review* 8.4 (1964): 23.

play."[61] Essentially, Charney speculates that instead of directly taking *Edward II* and changing it to fit his goals, Shakespeare used similar structure, characters, and situations from the Marlowe's play in a way that fit with the story he wanted to tell. In another article, Charney describes Marlowe as Shakespeare's rival and claims that Shakespeare was mildly intimidated by Marlowe's skill. As a result, Charney argues: "Marlowe influenced Shakespeare, but Shakespeare recoiled from that influence."[62] In other words, Shakespeare was heavily indebted to Marlowe's plays and regretted that debt. Charney essentially credits Marlowe for some of Shakespeare's advances as a playwright by claiming that it was Shakespeare's efforts to shake off Marlowe's influence that led him to explore other dramatic avenues.

Irving Ribner agrees with Charney's argument: "Since *Richard II* represents a crucial stage in Shakespeare's own development as a writer of tragedy we must conclude that the lessons Shakespeare learned from *Edward II* were to influence the greatest achievements of his later career."[63] Essentially, Ribner argues that Shakespeare learned various techniques from *Edward II* that he used and developed for the duration of his career. While Ribner may be overstating the situation, he echoes Charney's earlier comments that part of the reason why Shakespeare became an amazing playwright is because of Marlowe's influence on him. Despite their tendencies to exaggerate a bit, both Charney and Ribner come up with valuable speculations about Shakespeare's professional relationship with Marlowe. These speculations can potentially provide insight into the impact that *Edward II* had on *Richard II*. The only problem with their arguments is that there is minimal evidence to back them up. Shakespeare may have been intensely influenced by Marlowe, to the extent that it motivated him to become a

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[61] Charney, "*Edward II* as Model for *Richard II*," 31.
[62] Charney, "Rivals and Imitators," 35.
[63] Irving Ribner, "Marlowe and Shakespeare," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 15.2 (1964): 53.

better playwright, but historians still know so little about Shakespeare's thought process to say whether or not these speculations have merit.

Meanwhile, Meredith Skura disagrees with the two critics, arguing that while *Edward II* definitely had an impact on *Richard II*, she would not go so far as to agree with Charney and Ribner's ideas on the subject. Skura describes *Richard II* as a "complicated response" to *Edward II*.[64] The implication behind her article is that the differences between *Edward II* and *Richard II* are the result of Shakespeare's attempts to improve the elements of *Edward II* that he disliked. Skura argues: "Shakespeare transcends the personal, contextualizing abdication in a universe that makes moral and political sense."[65] In other words, Shakespeare chose to ignore the more personal themes of *Edward II* to write a realistic and morally ambiguous play about deposing a monarch. Skura's analysis is intriguing because it suggests that Shakespeare examined *Edward II* and decided to change it into what he thought was a better play.

Ultimately, unless some new "lost journal" that belonged to Shakespeare or Marlowe turns up, it is unlikely that critics will ever know for certain the true extent of the influence that *Edward II* had on *Richard II*. Based on the evidence that can be gleaned from the two plays and other sources, Marlowe and Shakespeare definitely influenced each other. That influence is seen through the similarities and differences between these two plays. But even as Marlowe and Shakespeare influenced each other, they also maintained their own separate views and goals, which resulted in many of the differences between the two plays. In the end, *Edward II* and *Richard II* are two distinct but similar stories written by two distinct but similar playwrights.

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[64] Skura, "Penetrating Language," 41.
[65] Skura, "Penetrating Language," 41.

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