"WHAT PASSIONS CALL YOU THESE":

Privacy and Metapoetic Foreignness in Marlowe's *Edward II*

By Per Sivefors

This essay argues that Marlowe's Edward II *engages with English history and politics through a metadiscussion of the rhetorical, linguistic and aesthetic foundations of vernacular culture. The play's frequent referencing of Latin, Italian and French suggests a distinction between a public and orthodox understanding of history and politics, and an artful Latinate idiom connected to notions of privacy and Ovidian poetics as well as to non-English, demonised languages. By enriching its modes of expression with snatches of other languages as well as multiplicitous references to specific Latin literary patterns,* Edward II *privileges the irresponsibly 'private' and hence distances itself from a vernacular construction of public history and affairs.*

Frequently, Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II* has caused critics problems due to its relatively bleak vision of English politics and history. Indeed, the play's seemingly amoral take on the reign of Edward even caused E. M. W. Tillyard, writing during the second world war, to seek the gist of the play elsewhere than in the political or historical. *Edward II*, Tillyard asserted, is "concerned nominally but not essentially with historical matter", and hence, "Marlowe shows no sense of national responsibility".[1] Even though more recent critics have been less prone to judgements on Marlowe's failure as a patriot, they often point out that *Edward II* shows little of the confidence in eloquence that distinguishes for example his own, earlier *Tamburlaine*. Neil Rhodes, for example, claims that the play's emphasis "is more upon rhetorical failure or impotence than deft repartee", and Mark Thornton Burnett argues

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[1] Tillyard 1944, 109. Tillyard, it should be added, claimed his verdict on Marlowe's responsibility to be objective rather than biased: "This is not to decry the play; it is only to suggest what the play is or is not" (1944, 109). But considering the fact that Tillyard's book appeared in 1944, the claim that Marlowe's irresponsibility was mere neutral fact has a remarkably hollow ring to it (at the height of a world war, who would wish to celebrate a poet that showed "no sense of national responsibility"?). In fact, Tillyard's debunking of Marlowe is the more efficient because he denies that it takes place.

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that "it is a phenomenon of general linguistic inadequacy that the play rehearses".[2]

In the present analysis, however, I will show that such judgements simplify the play's political and rhetorical concerns. Central to my analysis is the observation that *Edward II* sets up a metadiscussion on the language of poetry. Moreover, this metadiscussion is certainly connected to national politics, although not in the sense of orthodox 'national responsibility'. As this essay shows, *Edward II* is indeed concerned with historical matter, but does so via a focus on the aesthetic and linguistic dimensions of historical representation. Specifically, the play distinguishes between a Latinate language that stands in for the public and orthodox understanding of history and politics, and an artful Latinate idiom connected to notions of privacy and Ovidian poetics as well as to non-English, demonised vernaculars such as French or Italian. By enriching its modes of expression with snatches of other languages as well as multiplicitous references to specific Latin literary patterns, the play, I conclude, privileges the irresponsibly 'private' and hence distances itself from a vernacular construction of public history. Beginning by exploring the context of an emerging sense of privacy in Elizabethan England, the essay then discusses how the foreign in the play is entwined with a metapoetic idiom coloured by especially Ovid. In short, Marlowe's play may, from Tillyard's point of view, be 'irresponsible' – but certainly not because it is unconcerned with historical matter and the rhetorical representation of it.

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Over the last few decades, there has been a considerable amount of debate over the origins of privacy and whether such a notion in our sense did exist in the Renaissance. According to Jürgen Habermas's well-known formulation, a 'public sphere' based upon a separation of the public and private realms is typically an eighteenth-century bourgeois phenomenon, and it would therefore make little sense to apply such a model directly to a pre-Enlightenment context.[3] Moreover, Francis Barker, using a distinctly Foucauldian model for his analysis of *Hamlet*, suggests that in this play, "The public and the private as strong, mutually defining, mutually exclusive categories, each describing separate terrains with distinct contents, practices

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[2] Rhodes 1992, 104; Burnett 1998, 92.

[3] See *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Habermas 1989). Andrew Hadfield has argued that numerous texts from the sixteenth century share a desire "to help constitute and participate within a national public sphere", and Hadfield also questions Habermas's evolutionary and teleological theory as a historical model (Hadfield 1994, 5).

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and discourses, are not yet extant".[4] At the same time, it would be mistaken to claim either that there were no notions of privacy in the sixteenth century, or indeed that they were not changing. Peter Burke has pointed to how "the withdrawal of the upper classes" entailed the establishment of private areas, such as separate dining-rooms or 'drawing-rooms' (i.e. 'withdrawing-rooms') for the nobility.[5] This withdrawal was also connected to ideas of cleansing oneself from barbarism.[6] Furthermore, Philippe Ariès, who calls England "the birthplace of privacy", observes that diaries were widely kept since the late 1500s, and that solitude was slowly becoming a fashionable attitude, especially among the upper classes. Such taste, however, also depended upon the possibility of a *shared* loneliness: "People became so fond of being alone that they wished to share their solitude with a dear friend, a teacher, relative, servant, or neighbor – a second self" (5).[7]

To a large extent, *Edward II* registers these concerns, although, as I will argue, the play also challenges the structure that the concerns imply. Rather than opting for 'historical accuracy' in his depiction of the fourteenth century, Marlowe establishes an early modern image of friendship already in the play's first lines, where the exiled minion Gaveston is reading a letter from the King:[8]

> 'My father is deceased; come, Gaveston,
> And share the kingdom with thy dearest friend'. (1.1–2)[9]

Later, when they meet for the first time, the King clearly becomes Gaveston's 'second self' by appointing himself "thy friend, thy self, another Gaveston" (1.1.142). In other words, despite the shocking implication behind the idea of 'sharing' kingdoms with one's friend, the depiction of Edward's and Gaveston's friendship seems to reflect an emerging aristocratic taste for seclusion in the form of a shared isolation from the rest of the world.[10] At

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[4] Barker 1984, 34.

[5] Burke 1978, 271.

[6] Burke 1978, 270–81; Helgerson 1992, 240–45.

[7] Ariès 1989, 5. True, the idea of the friend as a second self was not new; even early humanists such as Petrarch had argued that "perfect and complete" friendship "means to love a friend as one's self" (Petrarca 1948, 118). I am, however, pointing to a change in social meaning and significance for the figure.

[8] As is well known, writing is ever present on the stage in Marlowe's play; this first letter is followed by a whole series of others, taken in various ways from sources such as Holinshed. For a specific study of the circulation of letters in the play, see Brailowsky 2012.

[9] Citations are to act, scene and line number and will appear parenthetically in the text. All citations to Marlowe's plays, including *Edward II*, are to the Revels Plays editions.

[10] Several discussions of the private and the public in *Edward II* have made use of the well-known 'king's two bodies' argument, sometimes to expand or reject it (see for example Bredbeck 1991, 50–60; Wessman 1999–2000, 6; Hillman 2002, 110; Anderson 2014, *passim*). First discussed in E. L. Kantorowicz's widely influential *The King's Two Bodies*

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least in Marlowe's play, however, Edward and Gavenston's relationship is far from the classical, Ciceronian understanding of "friendship of faultless men" as a cornerstone of political stability.[11] Needless to say, the relationshiops of the play are flawed, although the play as a whole does not necessarily distance itself from them or suggest that the alternatives are more attractive.

The emerging cult of solitude was becoming a conventional pose by the late sixteenth century, and the problematic of the private self was frequently reflected in for example portraits of the time. One such image, especially pertinent to the present context, is Nicholas Hilliard's miniature portrait of the Earl of Northumberland, in which the contemplative Earl is depicted in a garden, reclining alone in a melancholy, languid posture, hat and gauntlets tossed aside and a book by his head.[12] Apart from Marlowe's own connections to the Earl, reinforced by his alleged claim in 1592 that the Earl was "very wel known" to him, there is a verbal hint of *Edward II* in the Hilliard portrait too.[13] Above the earl, there is a strange object hanging from a tree: a scale, in which a globe-like sphere is held in balance by a feather. Under the latter is written the word *Tanti*, meaning "worth thus much" or

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(1957), which also contained an analysis of Shakespeare's *Richard II*, this doctrine was claimed to be a mystical and medieval remnant that distinguished between the body natural and the body politic; the ideal king brings these two bodies together in his rule. Although hailed by for example Foucault as a forerunner of his own *Discipline and Punish*, Kantorowicz's discussion of the king's two bodies doctrine has been strongly questioned, notably by David Norbrook, who points out that the doctrine was less important and considerably more problematic than Kantorowicz allows and that even royal servants often had a strong sense of the independence of the state from the monarch's person' (Norbrook 1996, 343). See also Lorna Hutson's 'Not the King's Two Bodies', which argues that the legal theories of Edmund Plowden, invoked by Kantorowicz to prove the indispensability of the king's body to sixteenth-century political theory, have been misunderstood and overemphasised by contemporary critics (Hutson 2001, 176–77). I wish to add to these comments that my own reading of *Edward II* sees the distinction between private and public as an *emergent*, not a residual phenomenon. Hence, although I do not reject for example Bredbeck's claim that the play makes the distinction private/public highly problematic, I see such claims from a different historical perspective.

[11] The phrase is Cicero's: "ab amicitiis perfectorum hominum" (*De amicitia* 26.100).

[12] For an analysis of this portrait, see Strong 158–59. Northumberland's image as a world-despising scholar was underlined by George Peele's eulogy to him in *The Honour of the Garter* (1593), which describes the Earl as a recluse who, from "the spacious pleasant fieldes / Of divine science and Phylosophie", beholds "the deformities / Of common errors and worlds vanitie" (Peele 1.245). Peele's poem also contains brief references both to Marlowe (1:246) and the death of Edward II (1.253).

[13] I owe this observation to Kuriyama 2002, 94; for another, more speculative discussion of Marlowe's relationship to Northumberland, see Nicholl 1992, 191–201. Marlowe's claim that he knew the earl can be found in a letter from Robert Sidney to lord Burghley, first published in 1976 by R. B. Wernham; a transcription of this letter is in for example Kuriyama 2002, 210.

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"thus much I count it". This verbal gesture of world-contempt is echoed in Gaveston's scorn for the people outside his own relationship to Edward:

> Farewell base stooping to the lordly peers;
> My knee shall bow to none but to the king.
> As for the multitude, that are but sparks
> Raked up in embers of their poverty,
> *Tanti!* I'll fan first on the winde
> That glanceth at my lips and flieth away. (1.1.18–23)

The foreign interjection, marked out by italics in the printed text, signals a retreat both from lords and common people. Hilliard, in his treatise on miniature painting, claimed that one characteristic of such painting was its detachment from the public, its preservation of faces in "priuat maner".[14] Since miniature pictures, often worn on the body in the form of lockets, were intended for one particular recipient rather than for the public, the onlooker became a sharer of the depicted person's passionate solitude. It is little wonder, then, that when Gaveston is later forced into another exile by the lords, he and Edward exchange their portraits in exactly this way: "Here, take my picture, and let me wear thine" (1.4.127).[15] Images could, in other words, symbolise, even replace, physical intimacy; and Gaveston's scornful *Tanti* suggests not only world-contempt but an intimate friendship to which that contempt is juxtaposed.[16]

It may in other words seem as if *Edward II* represents an emerging convention of solitude among the English aristocracy. But the play is, as I will show, more complex in its response to the issue of the private and the public. Importantly for the present discussion, while the exclamation *Tanti* establishes Gaveston as a person seeking a passionate solitude shared with the King, it also serves to identify him as an Italianate foreigner. As a word, *Tanti* does of course have a meaning in Latin, although, as Forker points out,

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[14] Hillyard 1981, 64.

[15] Discussions of miniature art have often focused on the public aspects of such privacy; Patricia Fumerton, for example, has pointed to the fact that prospective viewers of private portraits usually had to make their way through an elaborate structure of public rooms, a circumstance which created a double emphasis: "one moved inward, but inwardness could be reached only after running a gauntlet of public outerness" (Fumerton 1991, 71). However, the royal portrait in *Edward II* suggests a different use – a proof of intimacy, carried on body, that does not necessarily imply the kind of public context that Fumerton discusses.

[16] In a twentieth-century postmodernist transformation of that doubleness, Derek Jarman's film version of *Edward II* (1991) has Gaveston replace the *Tanti* with the rather more vernacular *Fuck'em*, an alteration that simultaneously emphasises Gaveston's lower-class origin and Jarman's own anti-rhetorical agenda. As Lisa Hopkins suggests, however, Jarman's change, "while amusing enough, entirely misses the point of its foreignness" (Hopkins 2010, 343) – a crucial feature of Gaveston's character.

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in the play it could also be "Marlowe's or perhaps the compositor's spelling of Italian "Tant è"", thus serving as "an early suggestion of Gaveston's foreign affectations".[17] Indeed, while Gaveston is certainly "from France" (cf. above), his Italian manners are often hinted at in the play – his arch-enemy Mortimer Junior disgustedly observes that he wears "a short Italian hooded cloak" and a "Tuscan cap" (1.4.412–13), and in one of the most famous lines in the play, to which I will return shortly, Gaveston wants to entertain the King with "Italian masques by night" (1.1.54).[18] Italian manners and culture certainly raised a great deal of ambivalence among the Elizabethans, and Roger Ascham's railing against Italianate manners in *The Scholemaster* or Thomas Nashe's exclamation in *Pierce Penilesse* that Italy was "the Apothecary-shop of poyson for all Nations' reflect not only the authors" disdain but also the fascination that the subject carried.[19] Especially after the Reformation, this mixture of abhorrence and attraction developed into a number of standard role models of degenerate behaviour. As Ian Frederick Moulton has shown, the two most common archetypal models of the Italianate tended to focus on the political and sexual aspects of degeneracy: "the scheming amoral Machiavellian and the perverse sodomite".[20] Arguably, Gaveston displays elements of both these models: in his advancement on the English territory, he recalls Marlowe's own Machiavel figure, who arrived in England to "frolic with his friends" (*Jew of Malta*, Prologue 4),[21] but his establishment of a private, intimate relationship with Edward also presents the audience with an image of the sodomite. By now, the critical accounts of sodomy and homosexuality in Marlowe's play would require a volume of discussion on their own.[22] Here, I wish only to avoid the quasi-biographical fallacies of seeing *Edward II* either as Marlowe's intentional questioning of normativity or the play's characters as the troubled voicings of Marlowe's own sexuality. In what follows, it will be suggested that the play's

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[17] Forker 1995, 142.

[18] For a perceptive discussion of Gaveston and especially Italianate clothing style, see Bailey 2007, 77–102. In particular, Bailey's insistence on "the potency of aesthetic defiance" in *Edward II* can, as my own reading suggests, be extended far beyond the realm of dress.

[19] Ascham 1904; Nashe 1966, 1.186.

[20] Moulton 2000, 117.

[21] Indeed, the word 'frolick' is often used to characterise Gaveston's relationship to Edward; Lancaster complains that the secretly returned minion "here in Tynemouth frolics with the king" (2.4.17), and the queen, who dejectedly anticipates a 'melancholy life', says of her husband: "let him frolic with his minion" (1.2.64–65). Gaveston himself claims that "the shepherd nipped with biting winter's rage / Frolics not more to see the painted spring / Than I do to behold your majesty" (2.1.61–63).

[22] For a recent, and thoughtful consideration of the homoerotic elements in *Edward II*, see Duxfield 2015, 127–35. A detailed overview of criticism is in Logan 2015, esp. 126–27 (n. 6).

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provocative thematisation of homoeroticism, privacy and the foreign instead arises from a preoccupation with aesthetic issues.[23]

Thus, although Gaveston is largely identified as an 'other', sexually and linguistically, there is little in the play to contrast with his otherness. Banishment and exile are not balanced by a positively charged English values, as in Shakespeare's *Richard II*, a play often thought to be influenced by Marlowe.[24] In the first act of Shakespeare's play, Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk laments in the wake of banishment:

> The language I haue learnt these forty years,
> My native English, now I must forgo,
> And now my tongue's use is to me no more
> Than an unstringed viol or a harp,
> Or like a cunning instrument cased up –
> Or, being open, put into his hands
> That knows no touch to tune the harmony. (1.3.159–65)

In *Edward II*, however, there is no such vernacular harmony even in the midst of the court. Besides Gaveston, with his foreign manners and exclamations, the Queen is labelled a "French strumpet" (1.1.145) by the King, who himself does not display much power in his use of English; and his main enemy, Mortimer Junior, who begins as a self-confessed patriot, turns out to be a villain full of Machiavellian deceit and trickery. This 'impotence' very much concerns the notion of public speech; but the words of Marlowe's play frequently work on a level that confounds accepted standards of public speech. From such a perspective, the rhetorical failures in Marlowe's play should not be seen in terms of artistic failure, but rather as a questioning of the norms upon which rhetorical success rested.

If this is the case, what was then a morally 'safe' language supposed to look like? In the *Basilikon Doron*, James VI of Scotland – whose similarities to Edward were commented upon at the time – gives some stylistic advice to his son and prospective successor:

> In your language bee plaine, honest, naturall, comely, cleane, short, and sententious; eschewing both the extreamities, aswell in not vsing a rusticall corrupt leid, nor yet booke-language, and Pen and Inke-horne tearmes, and least of all, mignarde and effeminate tearmes.[25]

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[23] It should be stressed once more that my perspective here is not 'formalist' in the sense that it sees issues of language and aesthetics as socially isolated phenomena. Rather, I focus on the central concern of a poetic language in *Edward II*, which I see as the basis of the play's thematisation of sodomy and foreignness.

[24] Forker 1995, 36–41.

[25] James 1599, sig. S4ᵛ. For an essay that places Marlowe's homoerotic depiction of Edward in the context of contemporary accounts of James VI of Scotland, see Normand 1996.

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This could be described as an artful warning against artfulness. Correct, legitimate language is implied to be both refined (since it is *not* the language of the 'rustical' people) and a bulwark against excessive learned subtlety, or, even worse, effeminacy. Hinting at the Puritan affection for plainness, the passage offers an illuminating point of comparison to *Edward II*, for while Marlowe's play certainly marginalises the 'rustical', its allegiances to the artful rather than the self-confessedly 'natural' places it on the side of 'book-language'.[26] But *Edward II* does not set up this conflict as an easy juxtaposition. If the play eschews the idea of a 'natural' language, users of 'book-language' such as the scholar Baldock are not necessarily viewed with sympathy either.

To understand how this complex issue works in the play, I now turn to the metapoetic dimension. Arguably, *Edward II* articulates its issues of foreignness, of the private and the public as a conflict over poetic and dramatic forms. Bruce Smith touches upon the subject when he suggests that Gaveston's first encounter on English ground nods at the genre of the vernacular morality play. Three poor men interrupt Gaveston's monologue with an offer of service, and Gaveston, as Smith points out, instantly falls into the role model of the Nice Wanton: he takes on two of the men, a horseman and a traveller, because they may entertain him with "lies at dinner time" (*Edward II* 1.1.31), but the third one, a weary soldier, is quickly rejected because he cannot provide such entertainment.[27] In other words, this scene is basically a set-up for a morality play; however, Gaveston's subsequent monologue not only represents him as a morality figure but actually transcends the morality pattern and establishes an alternative to it. Gaveston exclaims, "These are not men for me" (1.1.49) once the three are gone, and he gives a clear indication of his preferences in the following speech, which eloquently rejects the implied normativity of the microplay-in-the-play.[28] Gaveston's rejection of the morality situation therefore also turns the scene into a staging of literary judgement. Instead of homespun moralities, this is what Gaveston wants:

> I must have wanton poets, pleasant wits,
> Musicians that, with touching of a string,
> May draw the pliant king which way I please.
> Music and poetry is his delight;

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[26] As Patrick Cheney perceptively observes, "Marlowe almost certainly did not write a nationhood of the common people" (1997, 20).

[27] Smith 1991, 211.

[28] It can of course be argued that Gaveston's rejection of the morality setup is in itself a form of acknowledgement. For a study that stresses Marlowe's indebtedness to the morality tradition, see Ryan 1998; for an alternative view that considers the role of carnival and folk tradition in the depiction of Edward's fate, see Pettitt 2005.

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> Therefore I'll have Italian masques by night,
> Sweete speeches, comedies, and pleasing showes[.] (1.1.50–55)

As a piece of aesthetic propaganda, however, this passage is highly ambiguous. Gaveston may appear unsympathetic at this stage, but even his repulsiveness leaves issues unresolved, because he exudes the same paradoxical attraction as for example Machiavel in *The Jew of Malta*. The passage quoted above looks like a violation of the standard Horatian claim that poetry should teach and delight, for while it profusely represents delight, it says little or nothing of 'teaching'. Rather, Gaveston's vision of royal entertainment is rendered in Ovidian and suggestively homoerotic terms:

> Like sylvan nymphs my pages shall be clad,
> My men, like satyrs grazing on the lawns,
> Shall with their goat-feet dance an antic hay.
> Sometime a lovely boy in Dian's shape,
> With hair that gilds the water as it glides,
> Crownets of pearl about his naked arms,
> And in his sportful hands an olive tree,
> To hide those parts which men delight to see,
> Shall bathe him in a spring, and there, hard by,
> One like Actaeon, peeping through the grove,
> Shall by the angry goddess be transformed,
> And, running in the likeness of an hart,
> By yelping hounds pulled down, and seem to die.
> Such things as these best please his majesty. (1.1.57–69)

This extended and complex image, derived mainly from the *Metamorphoses*, is marked out as private in the sense that it is confined to a theatrical, lyrical representation whose intended audience is limited to the King and Gaveston himself. Its blatant eroticism suggests a language that 'works' not on the level of persuasive public speech, but on that of the peep show. Indeed, although it would be problematic to use the term 'pornographic' in the modern sense, the voyeuristic and detached spectatorial position that it shares with pornography is a recurring feature of the play.[29] The theatricality of Gaveston's vision only

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[29] For a rejection of the term 'pornography' in early modern contexts, see Moulton 2000, 8–15. Moulton claims: "It makes no more sense to speak of sixteenth-century English pornography than it does to speak of sixteenth-century English haiku. Neither of these genres existed in that culture, though that did not stop people from writing about sex or writing short striking poems" (2000, 15). However, this view of pornography as a 'genre' is misleading, since unlike the haiku pornography may be visual (images, films) as well as textual (stories, verses and so on). In other words, pornography cannot be reduced to a set of well-defined formal characteristics in the same way as the haiku. Moreover, Moulton tends to over-emphasise the differences between early modern erotic writing and contemporary pornography at the cost of any similarities (such as the voyeur position).

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adds to that impression, since theatre is posited here as a private and delegitimised form of 'delight' that involves only the two royal friends/lovers. It is from his very skill in letters that Gaveston constructs this model of friendship. As Alan Stewart notes, in the sixteenth century learning was becoming not only a way of gaining patronage: "it could also be a potential route for inscribing oneself as a friend".[30] The Ovidian dimension of this 'private delight' is unmistakable, since the dissolution of public fact into private story is highly characteristic of the *Metamorphoses*, and since Ovid's own voyeuristic delight in the human body is richly evident from the *Amores*, which Marlowe of course translated. Gaveston's representation of erotic entertainment thus evokes not just a morally acceptable, shared loneliness but a language of scandalous detachment that entwines literary and erotic experience without offering a clear ethical corrective. This experience is, to paraphrase Richard Helgerson, an 'anti-prodigal' experience in the sense that it presents the morally harmful without succumbing to the repentance compulsion that characterised poets of an earlier generation, such as Whetstone or Gascoigne.[31] It is true, as Mathew Martin suggests, that the staging of the Actaeon myth "seems to present the history of Edward's reign as the history of law, transgression, and punishment".[32] At the same time, characters like Mortimer Junior in the play hardly represent a positive value of repentance for past misdeeds; as will be apparent, Mortimer himself is exposed as a double-playing Machiavellian deceiver.

In other words, the play does not present a straightforward solution to the conflict between English nobility and Gaveston's Actaeonesque otherness. As Georgia Brown perceptively argues, "The play's specifically Ovidian moments question the very notion of an "Englishness" established on the suppression of the private and emotional spheres", and one such moment is Gaveston's monologue, whose "fantasies of metamorphic wantonness … parody *The Metamorphoses*".[33] I would like to expand the Ovidian implications of Brown's argument here, specifically with regards to Gaveston's monologue, since it will help me to elucidate the characteristically literary concerns that permeate the first scene's depiction of Gaveston.

As suggested, Gaveston is a user of foreign language who, in the course of the first scene, returns to England, rejects a morality narrative and conjures up poetic wantonness in elaborate terms. It could be claimed that this narrative is a blasphemous parody of another, more well-known one – the Biblical story of the Prodigal Son. But the text does little to encourage such a view. Even

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[30] Stewart 1997, 125.
[31] Cf. Helgerson 1976, 5.
[32] Martin 2015, 116.
[33] Brown 2002, 166.

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though Mortimer Junior later complains of the "prodigal gifts" (2.2.157) that Edward has lavished upon Gaveston, the adjective refers more to extravagance than to particular scriptural models. I would instead suggest that Gaveston represents the imagined return of another, considerably more secular character: Ovid. Renaissance authors, taking the cue from Ovid himself in his *Tristia*, often identified the banished Roman poet with the Actaeon of the *Metamorphoses*. For example, Marlowe's friend Thomas Watson said in his *Hekatompathia* (1582) that Ovid "applied this fiction [of Actaeon] vnto himselfe, being exiled (as it should seeme) for hauing at vnawares taken *Caesar* in some great fault".[34] In other words, to Watson Actaeon was, like Ovid, a pryer into the private areas of people in power, although Watson seems ambivalent about their actual guilt. As for the Actaeon myth in *Edward II*, it serves as an emblematic representation of the fate of Gaveston, who establishes a relationship with the King but is later killed for being a threat to the order dictated by the noblemen. However, it has been argued that Actaeon stands for Edward rather than Gaveston, since Actaeon was of royal descent and since Edward is later torn apart by "yelping hounds" – that is, the enraged noblemen.[35] Gaveston, though, is as much a victim of the barking dogs as Edward, and as François Laroque has pointed out, there is also an intriguing similarity between Gaveston's and Actaeon's names.[36] For reasons given above, Ovid is also implied in this equation. The Roman poet of course never returned from his exile, but, as Cheney has noted, Marlowe at this point converts tragedy into comic erotic myth. Actaeon, pursued by yelping dogs, only 'seems' to die, and he performs this show for the King's private pleasure, which is underscored by a latent sexual pun on the meaning of 'die'.[37] The Actaeonesque fiction of the *Metamorphoses* thus becomes an erotically charged 'happy end' with Gaveston returning as a voyeuristic Ovid who seeks to infuse the English morality stage with his own, irresponsible and Latinate brand of poetic representation.

It is this emphasis on the seeming, on the fictive, that separates Marlowe's play from the sources that he used.[38] In an important essay, Joan Parks has

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[34] Watson 1964, 45. As is well-known, the reasons behind Ovid's banishment were the *carmen*, his poetry, which did not fit into the new Augustan sense of morality, and the *error*, usually thought today to be political (Claassen 1999, 29). Marlowe's Gaveston makes the *carmen* more explicit than the *error* in his monologue.

[35] Sunesen 1954, 246; Deats 1980, 311.

[36] Laroque 2000, 168–69. For a third standpoint on this issue, see Wessman 1999–2000, which focuses on the image of Diana and argues that Gaveston "fulfills this Cynthian role as dreamer and impresario" (4).

[37] Cheney 1997, 165.

[38] For Marlowe's treatment of his sources, see Forker 1995, 41–66; Thomas and Tydeman 1994, 341–50.

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argued that Elizabethan historians such as Stow or Holinshed presented the simplicity of their language "as a sign of truth and objectivity", and they frequently did so by opposing their writings to 'poetry'.[39] I wish to add to her observation that early modern theorists tended to see history as 'substance' whereas poetry was literally the art of turning emptiness into words. In Thomas Blundeville's *The true order and methode of writing and reading histories* (1574), for example, the author/translator proposes that poets "doe make much of nothing" in their narratives, whereas history writers "ought not to fayne anye Orations nor any other thing, but truely to reporte such speach, and deede, euen as it was spoken, or done".[40] *Edward II*, by contrast to such perspectives, does not highlight artlessness as a desirable aesthetic option. Reversing the historiographic hegemony of substance and emptiness, the play's Ovidian moments underscore the difference to its sources. Hence, Marlowe's account of the historical events puts the narratives of its sources to use while rejecting the theoretical implications behind them, particularly the historians' self-confessed amalgamation of artlessness and veracity.[41] Roughly put, *Edward II* sets the 'artful' and foreign against the 'artless' and vernacular; but it also eschews the idea that the artful should be domesticated into public, humanist subservience. Indeed, expressions of artfulness are either politically dangerous or in need of instant qualification. The legitimising language of common truth and objectivity in other words gives way, as in Gaveston's monologue on the Italian masques, to the language of 'seeming deaths' and 'private pleasures'.

Moreover, as already suggested, this Ovidian language is intermingled in the play with the established image of Gaveston as a foreigner who violates social as well as literary taboos. But although his foreignness seems almost generic in its mixture of French and Italian markers, its different components have specific cultural significance as well. I have previously emphasised the 'Italianness' of Gaveston's appearance, but his French origin is also accentuated in the play. Marlowe's contemporaries often commented upon the linguistic contamination that the Norman invasion forced upon the Saxon English people, although defenders of the Saxon heritage such as Samuel Daniel usually tried to gloss over the impact of that invasion. As Daniel put it, "the accession of strange people, was but as riuers to the Ocean, that

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[39] Parks 1999, 284.

[40] Blundeville 1574, sig. E4[r–v].

[41] I should clarify, however, that the emphatically 'artless' language of the chronicles does by no means exclude the use of Latin; but when Latin is employed, such as in Abraham Fleming's additions to the 1587 edition of Holinshed, it usually involves a large amount of moralisation (cf. Forker 1995, 126) – a trait that, again, distinguishes *Edward II* from its sources.

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changed not it, but were changed into it".[42] In *Edward II*, however, the emerging master narrative of assimilation and anti-Frenchness is circumscribed in a blatant manner. Indeed, Gaveston's status as detached onlooker is sustained throughout much of the longish first scene. "I'll stand aside" (1.1.72), he says as the King enters with his noblemen, including the King's brother the earl of Kent as well as Gaveston's arch-enemies, Mortimer Senior and his nephew. The latter says to the King that he was sworn to Edward's father never to let Gaveston return to England, and the eavesdropping Gaveston exclaims: "*Mort Dieu!*" (1.1.89). Not only does this remark once again identify Gaveston as an 'other'; its sarcastic pun on Mortimer's name also serves to implicate Mortimer in the idea of the foreign and treacherous. (As if underscoring the punning character of Gaveston's exclamation, the lines immediately preceding and following his remark both mention Mortimer's name.[43]) Once again, the play suggests the *absence* of a firm vernacular ground – even Gaveston's worst antagonist is as 'foreign' as himself, and Mortimer the younger later becomes the play's chief conspirator against the realm.

Yet, while Gaveston at this moment is ostensibly detached from the rest of the characters, his lines also serve to transcend that visual boundary and underscore the intimacy between himself and the King. "Well done, Ned" (1.1.97), he comments when Edward rebukes the aggressive Mortimer. The colloquial name form 'Ned' transgresses the arrangement of the stage, separating Gaveston and Edward from the rest of the characters and challenging the notion of legitimate kingship. This pattern is reinforced as the noblemen – except the earl of Kent, Edward's brother – exit and Gaveston enters to the King. In an already-quoted line, Edward claims to be "another Gaveston". As his favourite approaches, the King even compares himself to a classical model of friendship – and love:

> Not Hylas was more mourned of Hercules
> Then thou hast been of me since thy exile. (1.1.143–44)

Hylas is the beautiful youth who was lured into a pool by the nymphs when searching for water, bitterly mourned by his lover Hercules. This reference to the 'famous friends' of the classics is very much a humanist convention; later in the play, Mortimer Senior gives a typical list of well-known male friends

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[42] Quoted in Jones 1953, 228.

[43] 'For *Mortimer* will hang his armour up'; "Well, *Mortimer*, I'll make thee rue these words" (1.1.88; 90). Marlowe later gives a widespread but false etymology of Mortimer's name: the Dead Sea (*Mortuum Mare* in Latin), connecting the Mortimer family to the crusades (2.4.21–23). In fact, the family name was derived from Mortemer, a village in Normandie; for a brief discussion of this etymology, see Forker 1995, 206.

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ranging from (again) Hercules and Hylas to Cicero and Octavius (1.4.390–96). Friendship, however, was generally assumed by the humanists to be a function of virtue; as Castiglione's *Courtier* put it, in Ciceronian fashion, "the friendship of the wicked, is no friendshippe".[44] By contrast, while paying lip service to the humanist idealisation of male friendship, Marlowe's King suggests that friendship – and even the erotic passion it includes in the play – can be separated from political virtue, since his own relationship to Gaveston in fact leads him to jeopardise the stability of his kingdom. This problematic is instantly exposed as Edward, under protest from his brother, starts to heap titles upon Gaveston:

> I here create thee Lord High Chamberlain,
> Chief Secretary to the state and me,
> Earl of Cornwall, King and Lord of Man. (1.1.153–55)

But the exact status of Gaveston's duties is wobbly at best – is he primarily secretary to the state or to Edward, or to both?[45] As Stewart points out, the implication of this scene is that "secretarial service to the state at the highest level has necessarily to be mediated in a personal relationship to the monarch".[46] Adding another facet to Stewart's analysis, I would argue that Gaveston's secretarial position also distorts the humanist ideal of the learned government official who combined skills in letters with political ability.[47] Gaveston is 'learned', but it is the supposedly immoral Ovid he cites; he is implicated in the convention of humanist friendship but is not a virtuous friend. The play also emphasises Gaveston's low social position, because Edward's brother says of the titles that the King heaps on his minion:

> Brother, the least of these may well suffice
> For one of greater birth than Gaveston. (1.1.157–58)[48]

Gaveston's rise to power may reflect the humanist dream that merit not noble birth should be decisive for political advancement; yet I would argue that the play reflects that dream in order to debunk it. True, as James Knowles points out, *Edward II* does pit an aristocratic system against one of ability or

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[44] Castiglione 1561, sig. P3[r].

[45] Critics have noted the possible sexual pun in the phrase "Lord of Man"; see note and reference in Forker 1995, 151.

[46] Stewart 1997, 179.

[47] One might even argue, with David Brumble, that Edward "eschews prudent counselors entirely" and "makes appointments to further his personal pleasure" (2008, 60). Reconciliation of the public and the private are not at stake so much as a rejection of the former.

[48] The extent to which Marlowe altered his sources – especially Holinshed – to lower Gaveston's social position has caused some critical debate (Duxfield 2015, 134). To my mind, it is at least safe to say Gaveston's low origin is a potent source of unease in the play.

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cunning.[49] But it should be added that the portrayal of Gaveston implies a rejection of the idea that ability should be used for social acceptance. Rather than placing themselves at the summit of established political hierarchy, Gaveston and Edward in effect withdraw from that hierarchy and place themselves as detached, scornful observers. (In what seems like an act of defiantly political – and anachronistic – anti-Catholicism, Edward throws the bishop of Coventry in prison, but he does so exclusively because the bishop is the cause of Gaveston's exile.) Later in the play, Mortimer Junior provides an apt image of this detachment when he says of Gaveston that

> Whiles other walke below, the king and he
> From out a window laugh at such as we. (1.4.415–16)

In fact, Edward's scorn extends to the idea of ruling itself. When challenged by the noblemen that he is an incompetent ruler, Edward simply responds by suggesting that they "make several kingdoms of this monarchy" (1.4.70) and share them between them,

> So I may have some nook or corner left
> To frolic with my dearest Gaveston. (1.4.72–73)

In this scene, Edward's and Gaveston's scandal is further underscored as Gaveston is presented sitting beside Edward on the throne in front of the noblemen. The stage space thus demonstrates both the intimacy of their relationship as well as its detachment from the public space of the barons (and, indeed, the audience). As Mortimer Senior acknowledges, this outrage combines sex and class:

> What man of noble birth can brook this sight?
> *Quam male conveniunt!*
> See what a scornful look the peasant casts. (1.4.12–14)

Apart from his disgusted observations on Gaveston's low birth, Mortimer Senior provides a Latin tag that translates literally "How badly they suit each other".[50] This tag is adapted from the story of Jupiter and Europa in Book 2 of the *Metamorphoses*: "Non bene conveniunt, nec in una sede morantur / maiestas et amor".[51] Love and political rule cannot go together, and Mortimer Senior emphasises the sexual passion between Edward and Gaveston by associating them with Jupiter, who famously dressed up as bull in order to abduct Europa. At the same time, just as in the list of famous male friends that I discussed above, Mortimer Senior acts the humanist, because he covers

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[49] Knowles 1998, 12–13.
[50] Forker 1995, 161.
[51] In Arthur Golding's translation: "Betweene the state of Maiestie and loue is set such oddes, / As that they cannot dwell in one" (Golding 1567, fol. 28ᵛ).

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up the homosexual relationship by seeing it through the lens of a heterosexual one. Moreover, he moralises Ovid by using the reference to the *Metamorphoses* as a condemnation of political imprudence. In that sense, his comments on Gaveston reflect the striving for control both of politically dangerous privacy and the need to impose moral lessons upon the Ovidian poetic representation with which that privacy is entwined. It is true, as Troni Grande observes, that Mortimer and his camp tend to use Latin as a kind of class marker – that they "wear their knowledge of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* like a badge of superiority".[52] However, Gaveston is at least as knowledgeable on the subject of Ovid as any of his enemies, and I would argue that the play explores the variety of uses to which Latin could be put rather than one single social meaning. As I suggest below, Ovidian Latin is even utilised to confer an ironic dimension upon the enemies of the King, so that their attempts at asserting superiority become rather hollow. In the passage cited above, Latin becomes an intrusive entity that both underscores Mortimer Senior's learning and the ambiguous status of that learning; for Mortimer Senior is hardly presented as the master of the situation any more than the rest of his party.

Thus, the issue of Ovidian, foreign-tainted intimacy is not limited to Gaveston's and Edward's relationship. Rather, the play's repeating structure suggests that such intimacy is threatening everywhere. When there is a decision to once more ostracise Gaveston, Edward accuses the Queen of being responsible for that decision and tells her to make the lords recall the decision if she wants to regain his love. The Queen, dismissed by the King as a "French strumpet", complains in an outburst of passion that the King has abandoned her in favour of Gaveston. Comparing herself to the "frantic Juno" abandoned by Jupiter (1.4.178), she wishes that "charming Circe" had changed her shape into a man and Hymen the marriage-god's cup "had been full of poison" (1.4.172; 174). This compendium of references to the *Metamorphoses* is entwined with eroticised privacy as Isabella draws Mortimer Junior aside to plead Gaveston's cause in a dumb show watched by the other lords. Mortimer, who subsumes to her persuasion, eventually becomes her lover. Hence, if Gaveston stages Italian masques by night and draws the King "which way he pleases", Isabella proves herself equally adept at this art, since she stages a show rooted in her own, Ovidian passion and thereby stirs her presumptive lover's sexual interest. Therefore, although the Queen superficially looks like a cliché of feminine behaviour (emotion, doting, subservience), I do not agree with Simon Shepherd's claim that her language is "private and non-functional".[53] Rather, her language is functional precisely because it is

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[52] Grande 1999, 191.
[53] Shepherd 1986, 191.

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private, since she manages rhetorically to use the realm of privacy to further her *own* interest as much as the King's. As Joanna Gibbs points out, by ingratiating herself both with the King and Mortimer, Isabella enables herself "to act on her own behalf" (169).[54]

Yet Isabella's strategy does little to diminish the King's interest in his minion. Indeed, his fervent exclamations for Gaveston – which liken his sorrow to "Cyclops' hammers" (1.4.312) relentlessly beating upon his heart – are so emotionally uncontrolled that the earl of Lancaster responds in repulsion: "*Diablo!* What passions call you these?" (1.4.318). Unlike Gaveston's French oaths, the Spanish expletive here becomes not so much a sign of foreign affectation as a noa word with which the unspeakably monstrous can be signified. Roger Sales astutely comments:

> Just as Sir Christopher Hatton demonised Catholicism by referring to it as "*diabolica*", so Lancaster is unable to find English words with which to express his disgust".[55]

The sexually and emotionally foreign can only be described in terms of the linguistically (and theologically[56]) foreign. But at the root of Lancaster's disgust is also a fear of political disunion, since Edward states in despair that he would gladly give his crown to Gaveston's enemies if that would bring his minion back (1.4.307–09).[57] In the play, the use of other vernaculars than English is usually linked to uncontrolled passion and/or a dangerous lack of concern for the public realm and dynastic succession.[58]

At the same time, *Edward II* does not only associate its own vision of a licentious, immoral and Ovidian-inspired English with the use of foreign vernaculars. The play also contrasts that vision to an institutionalised and socially acceptable use of Latin. A clear example of this is Baldock the scholar, who now enters the play together with Spencer, a nobleman who is later to replace Gaveston as Edward's favourite. While Gaveston states at the beginning of the play that he shall "bowe to none but to the king" (1.1.19), Baldock and Spencer indulge in conspiratorial gossip about noblemen and preferment. While these characters could be seen as repetitions of Gaveston,

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[54] Gibbs 2000, 169.

[55] Sales 1991, 131.

[56] Consider for example Richard Carew's characterisation of the Spanish language: "maiesticall, but fullsome … and terrible like the deuill in a playe" (1904, 292). The linking of the majestic, the diabolic and the Spanish also seems to be implied in Lancaster's remark.

[57] For the political significance of the crown in Marlowe's play, see Preedy 2014, esp. 270–73.

[58] Cf. Peele's *Edward I* (1593), in which Jone of Acone learns that she is the daughter not of the king but of "a leacherous Frier" (Peele 1953–70, 2.166). Falling down in a frenzy, Jone utters a couple of curtailed lines from Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, as if suggesting that threats to dynastic order can only be verbalised in non-English speech.

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Baldock to some extent comes across as his opposite. For unlike Gaveston, Baldock is an academic intent on social climbing. He is depicted in the play as the tutor of Lady Margaret De Clare, who is married to Gaveston, and "Having read unto her since she was a child" (2.1.30), he is now hoping for a post at the court. His use of language is therefore associated with a 'normal', heterosexual discourse – marriage, social acceptance – rather than the irresponsible homoeroticism of Gaveston.[59] Moreover, although both Gaveston and Baldock are of humble origins in the play, they have markedly different strategies for social advancement. Baldock is characterised by one of his enemies as a "smooth-tongued scholar" (4.6.57); Gaveston, on the other hand, is hardly smooth-tongued given his ability to incite controversy. Moreover, Gaveston's seductive Ovidian dumb shows are replaced by Baldock's and Spencer's impotent academic in-joking, as when Baldock claims to be far above the "formal toys" (2.1.44) of obsequious courtiers:

> I am none of these common pedants, I,
> That cannot speak without '*propterea quod.*' (2.1.52–53)

And Spencer Junior is in on the academic joke:

> But one of those that saith '*quandoquidem*'
> And hath a special gift to form a verb. (2.1.54–55)

There is an element of irony here: Baldock denies that he is a "common pedant", but his Latin phrase, which means "for this reason", is echoed by Spencer in another, which means basically the same thing. As Forker argues, the jocular piece of dialogue seems to imply some distinction between the two phrases; but the point, I would argue, is ultimately that academic Latin is exploited for its powerlessness.[60] The contrast between Baldock and Gaveston therefore also implies a linguistic and aesthetic conflict: academic verb-formers who seek official courtly preferment are nowhere as successful as Ovidian makers of masques who join with the King in withdrawing from the public. Hence, in *Edward II*, when Latin is integrated in a hierarchy of public acceptance and social advancement, it is also exposed as impotent. Indeed, to Baldock, withdrawal from the public is a non-entity – a presumptive court humanist in the style of Sir Thomas Elyot, he is virtually composed of his desire for social status.[61] In the play, the King later escapes

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[59] As for Lady Margaret, critics point out that her passion for Gaveston in fact repeats that of Edward for Gaveston verbally, and thus, heterosexual passion is circumscribed by male bonding (Shepherd 1986, 119) or even homosexual desire (Forker 1995, 70).

[60] Forker 1995, 187.

[61] Kate Bennett sees Baldock as "a type of Hypocrisy and a focus for anti-intellectual and anti-clerical satire" (1997, 484), but I would qualify her view somewhat. The depiction of

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from the pursuing noblemen together with Baldock and Spencer disguised in a group of monks. Edward rather incongruously asks his men for a philosophy seminar and thereby underscores his fervent desire for the private, the 'contemplative':

> Come Spencer, come Baldock, come sit down by me,
> Make trial now of that philosophy
> That in our famous nurseries of arts
> Thou sucked'st from Plato and from Aristotle.
> Father, this life contemplative is heaven –
> O that I might this life in quiet lead! (4.7.16–21)

Significantly, Baldock makes no response to this request; his erudition is of little meaning to him unless it furthers him socially. Instead, Edward's desire for learned conversation becomes a sign of degradation, as he reels further off into drowsiness and confusion. Once again, academic learning is depicted as powerless, and in the next moment, the betrayed King and his companions are discovered by the earl of Leicester and his companions.

At the same time, as in Gaveston's Italian masques, classical learning *can* work wonders, although interestingly enough, this learning is connected to theatricality and thus to literary and aesthetic issues. Moreover, such theatricality is usually confined to the private realm (as in the case of Gaveston and the King), but when it is not, it demands instant qualification or even denial. When Leicester captures the fugitive King, his reaction at this unguarded moment of excitement is to quote Seneca's *Thyestes*:

> Too true it is: *quem dies vidit veniens superbum,*
> *Hunc dies vidit fugiens iacentem.* (*Edward II* 4.7.53–54)[62]

However, Leicester immediately realises his *faux pas* and cuts off his resounding Latin: "But Leicester, leave to grow so passionate" (4.7.55). Leicester in other words acknowledges that the passionate language of theatricality threatens him even at the very moment of triumph. Evidently, the passion with which Latin is now associated is also linked to notions of effeminacy, for a couple of scenes earlier Mortimer Junior has set up a distinction between military virtue and feminine passion in an admonition to the Queen:

> Nay madam, if you be a warrior,
> Ye must not grow so passionate in speeches (4.4.14–15).

Baldock does not so much satirise *any* intellectual but the *humanist* intellectual whose career depended upon social climbing through competence.

[62] In Jasper Heywood's 1581 translation: "Whom dawne of day hath seene in pryde to raygne, / Hym ouerthrowne hath seene the euening late" (Newton 1581, fol. 31r).

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From this context, Leicester's denial of theatrical, passionate speech also becomes a way of averting effeminacy. But it also hints at the issue of Englishness, since Isabella is identified as non-English. Leicester's remark and his self-interruption thus suggest that passion is both un-English and not sufficiently masculine. The baron who captures Edward is in other words subtly depicted as a character where theatricality, effeminacy and un-Englishness threaten to erupt at any moment of excitement.

By contrast, the prime anti-theatricalist of the play is Mortimer Junior, the enemy of Gaveston who goes from being an honest patriot to a Machiavellian usurper conspiring with his mistress – the Queen – to overthrow the King. To depict Mortimer as Gaveston's enemy is, as Cheney points out, Marlowe's biggest alteration of his sources, especially Holinshed.[63] The aesthetic metadimension of Gaveston's and Mortimer's enmity is obvious, for while Gaveston stages Ovidian masques to please the King, Mortimer holds those same "idle triumphs, masques, lascivious shows" (2.2.156) in contempt. Indeed, as critics point out, the conflict between Gaveston and Mortimer contains arguments remarkably similar to those of anti-theatrical tract writers such as Gosson or Stubbes.[64] However, Mortimer's ostensible contempt for theatricality is compromised by his own actions, which show him to be as prone towards play-acting as his enemies (although Mortimer is more of a dissembler than Edward or Gaveston). Thus, while pamphlet writers such as Gosson generally wrote from a Puritan standpoint, Mortimer explicitly *plays* a Puritan. When he reveals his plans to dethrone the King's son and become the protector of the realm, he says, with a smattering of legal Latin, that he will manipulate the court proceedings by putting on the hypocritically modest manners of a nonconformist:

> And not unlike a bashful Puritan,
> First I complain of imbecility,
> Saying it is *onus quam gravissimum*,
> Till being interrupted by my friends,
> *Suscepi* that *prouinciam*, as they terme it,
> And to conclude, I am Protector now. (5.4.57–62)

'Imbecility' here means physical rather than mental weakness, and Mortimer claims that his post as protector will be too much of a burden given his bad health, whereupon his friends will emphasise that he has indeed accepted the duty. In other words, despite his ostensible anti-theatricalism, Mortimer becomes both an actor in and a director of a political show. But his deception does not stop at that; like the earl of Leicester before him, he is entangled in

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[63] Cheney 1997, 166.
[64] Belt 1991, *passim*; Goldberg 1992, 106.

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a passionate Latinity that also hints at effeminacy. A few lines later in his speech, Mortimer quotes the story of Niobe in the *Metamorphoses*: "*Maior sum quam cui possit fortuna nocere*" (5.4.67).[65] As critics point out, the dramatic irony here is that Niobe invites divine punishment by her hubris; but there is also the suggestion of a 'feminine' passion that is always on the verge of taking command. Unlike Leicester, though, Mortimer does not acknowledge this threat by correcting himself. The anti-theatricalists' argument against theatre as effeminising is thus turned against Mortimer himself. Indeed, there is also a hint of the 'perverse sodomite' in his lines

> I view the prince with Aristarchus' eyes,
> Whose looks were as a breeching to a boy (5.4.52–53)

– for Mortimer's positioning of himself as a stern, beating schoolmaster who is in power of the young King's body may also imply a sodomitical gaze, a threat of sexualised intimacy in the midst of public court proceedings.[66] In other words, for all his anti-theatrical sneers, Mortimer is ironically presented here as the exact target of the anti-theatricalists' arguments, particularly their already-mentioned conjunction of Machiavellianism, effeminacy and sodomy. As in several earlier scenes in the play, the presence of Ovidian poetry is entwined with the notion of a threatening privacy, amoral and seductively Latinate.

It is from this perspective that I want to interpret the possibly most famous passage in *Edward II* that deals explicitly with language and its public uses. Before claiming to act the Puritan, and in order to dispose with the captive King once and for all, Mortimer has devised an unpunctuated letter in Latin that can, depending on the reader's inflection, be read in two opposite ways:

> This letter, written by a friend of ours,
> Contains his death, yet bids them save his life.
> *'Edwardum occidere nolite timere, bonum est;*
> Fear not to kill the king, 'tis good he die.'
> But read it thus, and that's an other sense:
> *'Edwardum occidere nolite, timere bonum est;*
> Kill not the king, 'tis good to fear the worst.' (5.4.6–12)

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[65] In Golding's translation: "I am greater than that frowarde fortune may / Empeache me" (Golding 1567, fol. 70ᵛ).

[66] See Stewart 1997, 84–121. As Stewart argues, although the stereotypical image of the sadistic (and by implication homosexual) schoolmaster is a later construction sometimes superimposed upon early modern accounts, there was certainly an anxiety about the subject of education, beating and homosexuality; such anxiety would have been the more acute when it involved the issue of lineage (1997, 103–4).

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Readings of this passage often suggest that it expresses a concern with indeterminacy, and that Marlowe's radicalism would consist in his exposure of that indeterminacy.[67] Janette Dillon, for example, suggests:

> It is a remarkable moment that exposes the language of law, church and state as more dangerously open to corruption than any uneducated discourse could be.[68]

This argument may need some qualification. By the time when Marlowe wrote the play, Latin was no longer *the* language of either law, church or state. If anything, Mortimer's letter could be said to partake in a process of 'othering' Latin and centralising the vernacular that was already in full swing by the late sixteenth century.[69] My point is in other words that Mortimer illustrates the thesis, in the making by the 1590s, that Latin (as well as other languages) had already become less politically reliable than the vernacular. While Mortimer thus claims to be a patriotic defender of his country, he nonetheless comes ironically across as its main enemy. At the same time he has become a secret plotter against the King instead of the publicly sanctioned leader of the lords at the outset of the play. Mortimer – whom Deats terms, along with Isabella, "a pair of conniving, dissembling solipsists"[70] – in fact stages the whole conspiracy as one of concealment from the public, of physical intimacy and secret tokens:

> Within this room is locked the messenger
> That shall convey it [the letter] and perform the rest,
> And by a secret token that he bears,
> Shall he be murdered when the deed is done. (5.4.17–20)

Hidden messages thus carry other hidden messages; secret textual transactions only breed more blood-letting and confusion. The scene reads almost like a parody of humanist friendship, with its dedication to profitable, cultivated studying and reading together. At the same time, Mortimer's unpunctuated letter illustrates a humanist fascination with precisely the power of ambiguity, the power of languages to mean differently. In Roger Ascham's *A report and discourse … of the affaires and states of Germany* (1570), a report in the form of a letter to Ascham's friend John Astley from a diplomatic mission in the 1550s, there is a similar episode where the German emperor and the ambitious duke Maurice lure the landgrave into prison by an ambiguous letter, which promises that the landgrave should not be kept in

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[67] For a relatively recent example, see Haber, who argues that not only Mortimer but also Gaveston try to "manipulate and control indeterminacy" (2009, 34).
[68] Dillon 1998, 202.
[69] Blank 1996, 14–15; 41.
[70] Deats 1988, 256.

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einig, 'any' prison, although this word is surreptitiously changed to *ewig*, 'everlasting'.[71] In a suggestive moment of intimacy, Ascham receives a record of this 'pretty and notable' manipulation in his notebook from a reliably Protestant German preacher. Ascham muses:

> how soone *einig*, may be turned into *ewig*, not with scrape of knife, but with the least dash of pen so that it shall neuer be perceiued, a man that will proue, may easely see.[72]

True, the ambiguous message is in German rather than in the Latin of Mortimer, but since the duke Maurice in Ascham's account is associated both with Catholicism and Machiavellianism, the parallel is nonetheless suggestive. I would argue, therefore, that the German of Ascham's account plays the same role as Latin does in the scene featuring Mortimer's letter – they are both 'othered' languages in the sense that they are highlighted as examples of ominous ambiguity, and this othering process is fundamentally linked to the idea of concealment from the public. The token that Edward's murderer carries is hidden from view, and the dash of pen in the *Report* "shall never be perceived". Both texts, moreover, do reveal these secrets to their audience, although they do so from remarkably different points of view. As Stewart notes, Ascham's *Report* borrows its methodology from Cicero's *De Oratore*, with its insistence on truthfulness in history writing.[73] On the other hand, as I have previously suggested, Marlowe's play draws attention to its own artfulness and problematic relationship to veracity. The Latin of Mortimer, therefore, is not the Ciceronian Latin of 'truthful' history – it is, as his already-discussed quotation from the *Metamorphoses* reveals, an Ovidian, metamorphic idiom where nothing finally remains what it seems.

Not that order does not conclude the play. Indeed, with the possible exception of *Doctor Faustus*, no other play by Marlowe is so emphatic about its final levelling of transgression and disorder. Mortimer goes from being the representative of public order as a leader of the nobility to being literally alone with the Queen, while the young King Edward III finally enters surrounded by the lords and thus establishes what seems like a firm separation and ordering of the public and the private. Thus, the King, who discloses Mortimer's murderous conspiracy and sends him off to be beheaded, is, as Carla Coleman Prichard claims, "the one who restores order to the empire by normalizing relationships on both a public and a private level".[74] Unlike

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[71] Ascham 1904, 161.
[72] Ascham 1904, 161.
[73] See Stewart 1997, 157. Ascham claims that the first point of history writing is "to write nothyng false"; and the second, "to be bold to say any truth" (1904, 126).
[74] Prichard 1998, 30.

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Faustus, though, the ending of *Edward II* refuses any kind of metaphysical sanction: as David Bevington points out, the play's defence of kingship "never rests on divine right, but on the inner qualities of the young prince".[75] Moreover, the beheading of Mortimer is not really a 'restoration' of order, for within the world of the play, order is not initially presented as a condition that is first violated and then restored (as in *King Lear* or *Othello*). In fact, although the play opens with the briefest of invocations of dynastic order – "my father is deceased" – it immediately turns that order on its head, since Gaveston is outrageously invited to share the kingdom with his 'best friend', the King. The moral appeal of the ending therefore becomes less pronounced, since disorder is introduced without any firm prior establishment of an alternative. Order, in other words, is 'created' rather than 'restored', which potentially makes it the more arbitrary.

This conflict between the 'creation' and the 'restoration' of order also has a linguistic dimension, which is emphasised in early modern accounts of the boy King Edward III. In the 1520s, John Rastell's *Abridgement of the Statutes*, in a context of celebration of the English language, approvingly cited Edward's decree that all legal cases should be tried in English, and Rastell includes this event in his narrative as a direct forerunner of the "maruellously amended and augmentyd" English tongue under the early Tudors.[76] Linguistic order is here presented as an innovation rather than something restored from ancient times. However, a rough century later, John Hare could praise Edward "for *restoring* in a good decree the use and honour of the English tongue formerly exiled by Normanisme into contempt and obscurity".[77] *Edward II* falls almost exactly between these texts – in the midst of the gestation of a Golden Age myth according to which the honour of the English language, temporarily forgotten but always existing, was to be restored (rather than simply created) by the Elizabethans.[78] The boy King of Marlowe's play, with his reassuringly anti-French, anti-Catholic agenda, does share the English patriotism of Hare's characterisation. Yet, as represented in the play, his command of language comes nowhere near the heights of either Mortimer or Gaveston; instead, he "tears his hair and wrings his hands" (5.6.17), and in

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[75] Bevington 1968, 217.
[76] Quoted in Jones 1953, 88.
[77] Quoted in Jones 1953, 231; emphasis added.
[78] Among texts on Edward contemporary to Marlowe's, the anonymous play *Edward III* (1596), which is "full of Marlovian echoes" (Smith 1992, 309), makes a number of interesting nods in the direction of linguistic normalisation. When the king is enamoured with the Scots-speaking countess of Salisbury, he remarks that she "spoke broad, / With epithets and accents of the Scot; / But somewhat better than the Scot could speak" (Armstrong 1965, 102). Presumably, a non-regular kind of English would be less sexually attractive to the king unless it were a milder, 'better' form.

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the concluding lines of the play, he offers "these tears, distilling from mine eyes" (5.6.100) as witness of his grief for his father. Hence, the King's physical gestures of sorrow – which, as Forker points out, are Marlowe's invention[79] – suggest not only boyish insecurity but effeminacy as well.[80] Mortimer, the revealed enemy of the realm, is at least on the surface more manly than Edward III, and so, the play confounds any final linking of Englishness, masculinity and linguistic profligacy.

By its refusal to embrace the teleological and morally stable ground upon which late sixteenth-century ideas of the vernacular were footed, *Edward II* thus challenges not only early modern notions of the private and the public; via its interlinked metacritical notions of poetic expression, it also opposes its own view of the poetic vernacular to the idea that poetry should be a function of the public. I have argued that the thematic of withdrawal and privacy in Marlowe's play should be seen from the context of the emerging aristocratic idealisation of solitude in the late sixteenth century. However, the play's entwining of privacy and immoral artfulness suggests a form of withdrawal from the public that is not reconcilable with ideas of English as a politically unifying language. Issues of foreignness play into this conflict, and the French as well as Italian markers of *Edward II* are at the focus of the play, which thus addresses the issue of the foreign by presenting an ever uncertain vernacular ground.

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[79] Forker 1995, 314.

[80] As Marie Rutkoski argues, the prince inserts himself in a line of royal minions (including, of course, Gaveston) through his behaviour: "when we … see how the prince voluntarily classes himself in the very category he wishes to demolish, we realize that the role of the minion and the sexual discourse that surrounds it in this play cannot be banished easily" (2006, 286).

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