

University of Montana

ScholarWorks at University of Montana

Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, &
Professional Papers

Graduate School

1999

Gay revolte the Marlovian dandy in Edward II

Joshua Corey

The University of Montana

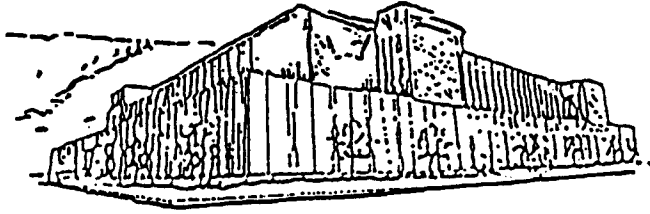
Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd>

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Corey, Joshua, "Gay revolte the Marlovian dandy in Edward II" (1999). *Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers*. 2430.
<https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/2430>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.



Maureen and Mike
MANSFIELD LIBRARY

The University of **MONTANA**

Permission is granted by the author to reproduce this material in its entirety,
provided that this material is used for scholarly purposes and is properly cited in
published works and reports.

*** Please check "Yes" or "No" and provide signature ***

Yes, I grant permission

No, I do not grant permission

Author's Signature _____

Date _____

5/25/99

Any copying for commercial purposes or financial gain may be undertaken only with
the author's explicit consent.

Gay Révolté:

The Marlovian Dandy in *Edward II*

by

Joshua Corey

B.A., Vassar College, 1993

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

The University of Montana

1999

Approved by:



Chair



Dean of the Graduate School

5-25-99

Date

UMI Number: EP34823

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



UMI EP34823

Published by ProQuest LLC (2012). Copyright in the Dissertation held by the Author.

Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.


All rights reserved. This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code



ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 - 1346

Corey, Joshua M., M.A., May 1999
English

Gay *Révolté*: The Marlovian Dandy in *Edward II*

Director: Casey Charles 

In Christopher Marlowe's play *Edward II*, the character of Gaveston—arrogant, satirical, homosexual, and a sharp dresser—prefigures the dandy as described in the nineteenth century by Charles Baudelaire. Writing in the twentieth century, Thorsten Botz-Bornstein describes the dandy as “an anarchist without enthusiasm. He respects the rules of aristocratic society and at the same time he does not respect them.” Gaveston is a figure of ironic rebellion, whose entirely performative identity threatens to undermine the security of a society ruled by hierarchies of sex, class, and birth. His rebellion in turn inspires the rebellion of King Edward, but unlike Gaveston, Edward is unable to free himself from an essentialist identification with his role as king. The play is Marlowe's most successful attempt to delineate a mode of heterodoxy that does not, like his other plays, simply become the affirming mirror-image of Elizabethan orthodoxy.

The dandy should aspire to be uninterruptedly sublime. He should live and sleep in front of a mirror.

—Charles Baudelaire, “My Heart Laid Bare”

The wealthy curled darlings of our nation.

—*Othello* 1.2.68

I. Introduction

What is most striking about the dandy is the paradox of his nature: as Thorsten Botz-Bornstein writes, he “is a man who is permanently *révolté* but who does not ask for a revolution. Just as Baudelaire founded his existence, as Sartre has shown, on the ‘sublimation de la jouissance,’ so the dandy founds his existence on the sublimation of revolt” (286). A rebel who follows the rules, an anarchist who does not in fact advocate anarchy, the dandy, by “camping up” the rules of social, political, and sexual hierarchies, calls those rules into question without risking a frontal assault on them. Such a player, such a dandy, is Piers Gaveston. Although the comparison is inexact and anachronistic, many of Gaveston’s most pointedly subversive attributes—his foreignness, his sardonic attitude, his elaborate dress, and his apparent homosexuality—are attributes similar to those of Baudelaire’s dandy.¹ Applying the ironic and paradoxical figure of the dandy to Marlowe seems appropriate: he was an author whose work and opinions challenged the state even as he served it as a spy; an author accused of atheism whose *Doctor Faustus* lends itself to the most conservative of Christian interpretations; an author who brazenly put his forbidden sexuality on display only to punish it in one of the most vivid and horrifying stage tableaux ever conceived.

King Edward, the ostensible hero of *Edward II*, wants to create a self unfettered by any of the rules and constraints normally imposed by society and culture; an identity that is

not defined by its relation to others. This ambition continues the overall Marlovian project inaugurated by Tamburlaine, but Edward's approach to realizing it differs considerably from his. Stephen Greenblatt writes that both Edward and Tamburlaine appropriate their sense of self from others; Tamburlaine "construct[s] himself out of phrases picked up or overheard" while Edward, though possessing "greater psychological complexity, can only clothe himself in the metaphors available to this station, though these metaphors—the 'Imperial Lion,' for example—often seem little applicable" (213). The difference goes deeper than Greenblatt acknowledges; whereas Tamburlaine appropriates his identity in a piecemeal fashion from disparate sources, Edward's self-fashioning is modeled on a single individual—Piers Gaveston. I will further argue that the character of Gaveston, as a dandy, creates an appearance of radical freedom from categories of relational identity. Edward's attempt to adopt the dandy's performative character for his own is doomed to failure, however, for Edward is unable to free himself from an essentialist conception of identity. His failure contrasts sharply with Gaveston's relative success as an ironic player of *Edward II's* games of sex and power.

II. And flout our train, and jest at our attire: the dandy defined

As described by Baudelaire, the dandy is a man of leisure, and dandyism is "an institution beyond the laws, [which] itself has rigorous laws which all its subjects must strictly obey" (26). At the same time, this institution is an "unofficial" one whose primary "doctrine" is defined as "the burning need to create for oneself a personal originality, bounded only by the limits of the proprieties. It is a kind of cult of the self. . . . It is the joy of astonishing others, and the proud satisfaction of never oneself being astonished. . . ."

[D]andyism borders upon the spiritual and stoical” (27-8). If dandyism is an institution, it is a paradoxical one: an institution of absolute individualism. Thorsten Botz-Bornstein claims that the dandy eludes rule-following, for his “existence is founded uniquely on a ‘way of being’ or on style but not on rules (not even on rules about a certain style).” Dandyism is a complex game:

The dandy *révolté* is an anarchist without enthusiasm. He respects the rules of aristocratic society and at the same time he does not respect them. This kind of game is very complex. It is much more complex than “ordinary” games of, for example, hypocrisy or dissimulation. The hypocrite’s game is founded on a quite simple rule, that of playing at being the contrary of what he really is. The dandy also plays at being what he is not but he leaves completely open both what he is and what he is pretending not to be. He is only what he plays, which means that his being is founded on nothing other than the game of dandyism. (Botz-Bornstein 286)

The dandy is a subversive figure. He is a social climber who follows the rules of aristocratic society to the letter, but in such a manner as to make those rules seem ridiculous. Baudelaire puts it this way: dandies “all partake of the same characteristic quality of opposition and revolt; they are all representatives of what is finest in human pride, of that compelling need, alas only too rare today, of combating and destroying triviality.” Baudelaire considers the dandy’s attack on “triviality” both revolutionary and quixotic. His description of how and why dandyism manifests itself seems particularly applicable to the unstable social and political order of *Edward II*:

Dandyism appears above all in periods of transition, when democracy is not yet all-powerful, and aristocracy is only just beginning to totter and fall. In the disorder of these times, certain men who are socially, politically and financially ill at ease, but are all rich in native energy, may conceive the idea of establishing a new kind of aristocracy, all the more difficult to shatter as it will be based on the most precious, the most enduring faculties, and on the divine gifts which work and money are unable to bestow. (28)²

In her book on the history of dandyism, Ellen Moers describes Beau Brummell, the

archetypal dandy, in these Baudelairean terms:

His arrogant superiority was an affirmation of the aristocratic principle, his way of life an exaltation of aristocratic society; but his terrible independence proclaimed a subversive disregard for the essentials of aristocracy. The dandy, as Brummell made him, stands on an isolated pedestal of self. He has no coat of arms on his carriage (indeed, Brummell kept no carriage), no ancestral portraits along his halls (and no ancestral halls), no decorations on his uniform (he had rejected the uniform), and no title but Mr Brummell, *arbiter elegantiarum* or, in the language of Brummell's day, "top of the male ton." (18)

I shall return to this. But while I am describing the dandy's characteristics, let me make two more perhaps self-evident points. The first regards his appearance. The dandy's dress must be gorgeous and he himself a peacock, though his "immoderate taste for the toilet and material elegance" is merely a symbol "of his aristocratic superiority of mind" (Baudelaire 27). Thomas Carlyle satirically supposes the dandy's dress to be more central to his being:

A Dandy is a Clothes-wearing Man, a Man whose trade, office, and existence consists in the wearing of Clothes. Every faculty of his soul, spirit, purse, and person is heroically consecrated to this one object, the wearing of Clothes wisely and well: so that as others dress to live, he lives to dress. . . . he is inspired with Cloth, a Poet of Cloth." (313)

Carlyle's dandy is interested principally in being looked at by a viewer who "would admit him to be a living object; or even failing this, a visual object, or thing that will reflect rays of light" (314). His qualities as a "thing" or "object" are given pride of place over his humanity. Carlyle's inimitable stand-in, Professor Teufelsdröckh, goes on to describe dandyism in terms more recognizably Baudelairean: "To my own surmise, it appears as if this Dandiacal Sect were but a new modification, adapted to the new time, of that primeval superstition, *Self-worship*" (315, italics in original).³ Pride in dress and personal appearance is thus established as central to the dandy's cult of individualism.

The second, obvious point that must be made about the dandy is that he is invariably

a male who affects feminine characteristics. Baudelaire's essay follows "The Dandy" with "Woman," and as he describes her she is far more of a "thing that will reflect rays of light" than the dandy is. Baudelaire simultaneously elevates and denigrates "Woman," nowhere more economically than in this sentence: "She is a kind of idol, stupid perhaps, but dazzling and bewitching, who holds wills and destinies suspended on her glance" (30). Baudelaire does not acknowledge any congruence between his idea of the dandy and his idea of "Woman," other than by following one chapter with the other. As we have seen, he plays down the importance of the dandy as lovely object, and makes the dandy's "material elegance" a mere symptom of his "superiority of mind." With "Woman," by contrast, appearance is essence: "Everything that adorns women, everything that serves to show off her beauty, is part of herself" (30) and "What poet, in sitting down to paint the pleasure caused by the sight of a beautiful woman, would venture to separate her from her costume?" (31). "Woman" is, according to Baudelaire, less substantial than her clothes:

No doubt Woman is sometimes a light, a glance, an invitation to happiness, sometimes just a word; but above all she is a general harmony, not only in her bearing and the way in which she moves and walks, but also in the muslins, the gauzes, the vast, iridescent clouds of stuff in which she develops herself, and which are as it were the attributes and the pedestal of her divinity; in the metal and the mineral which twist and turn around her arms and her neck, adding their sparks to the fire of her glance, or gently whispering at her ears. (31)

In the pages that follow, Baudelaire offers us numerous brilliant and vivid descriptions of women as sketched by Constantin Guys, the putative subject of his essay, but we see nothing comparable done for the dandy. He is perhaps for Baudelaire too serious a subject to be so illustrated. Another way of putting it is that everything Baudelaire wrote was a portrait of the dandy, for so he saw himself. But how is it that the dandy, who is described at one point as a hypermasculine "out-of-work Hercules" (29), participates in the feminine? In his book

on Baudelaire, Jean-Paul Sartre writes that “There was in Baudelaire a scarcely perceptible passage from the virility of dandyism to a sort of feminine coquettishness, to a feminine taste for clothes” (147) and adds, after citing a description of Baudelaire crossing the street, that said description “suggests the pederast rather than the dandy” (148). Sartre makes a distinction here between “virile” dandyism and feminine “pederasty” which is, I believe, illusory, calling the particular dandyism that Baudelaire displayed a “perverse and eccentric” one (152).⁴ But what actually sets it apart from “normal” dandyism, if there is such a thing? In his unusually close attention to appearance and “toilette,” in his rendering of himself into an object who is surely as much of an “idol” as any coquettish female, the dandy’s relationship to cultural associations of effeminacy cannot be denied. Writing in 1950, Sartre makes the leap from effeminacy to homosexuality as a matter of course; whether a sixteenth-century playwright was capable of making the same leap is a question more difficult to answer.

The link between an appearance of transgressive sexuality and the dandy’s *révolte* nature is fundamental. Just as the dandy subverts the serious rules of social hierarchy by turning them into a game, he also subverts norms of masculinity. The dandy accomplishes social subversion through his complete stylization of social norms:

In following the rules of society without enthusiasm the body of rules which constitute for the aristocrat a “serious reality” become for the dandy nothing more than a game. As a consequence, he is the only real player in society. In the end he plays *their* game but, because only *he* plays, it is always *his* game. This is the reason why he sees no necessity to fight for any particular game. He follows neither rule nor counter-rule but the absolute no-rule.” (Botz-Bornstein 288, italics in original)

Botz-Bornstein continues: “The essence of dandyism is a ruleless style which comes into being in the moment one sees the whole rule-loaded world as a game whose rules should be

followed and at the same time not be followed” (289). The dandy’s retreat into style turns the aristocrat’s “serious reality” into mere play, a situation which cannot but make the aristocrats extremely uncomfortable, if not indignant. And as Susan Sontag says in “Notes on ‘Camp,’” “To emphasize style is to slight content, or to introduce an attitude which is neutral with respect to content” (277). The “content” of aristocratic reality may not actually be a straw man, but it hardly matters: the dandy has created the appearance of insubstantialness. The dandy’s peculiar lightness, derived from “a very fine personal irony,” is what “gives him the air of the sovereign player of the game” (Botz-Bornstein 289).

The dandy’s sexuality is equally stylized, equally unnerving. Adopting a feminine style, in order to call the rules of masculinity into question, goes to the heart of the dandy’s praxis: camping it up. Susan Sontag calls camp “the modern dandyism” (288) and the dandy of old (the nineteenth century) “overbred. His posture was disdain, or else *ennui*. He sought rare sensations, undefiled by mass appreciation” (289, italics in original).⁵ Sontag is acutely aware of the ontological doubt that camp, in its artifice, provokes:

[T]he Camp sensibility is one that is alive to a double sense in which some things can be taken. But this is not the familiar split-level construction of a literal meaning, on the one hand, and a symbolic meaning, on the other. It is the difference, rather, between the thing as meaning something, anything, and the thing as pure artifice. (281)

camp drains “the thing” of meaning by putting “everything in quotation marks” (280),⁶ just as the dandy’s aristocratic mockery threatens “serious reality.” And Sontag, like Sartre, is quick to associate the cultivation of the camp sensibility with homosexuality; homosexuals are “an improvised self-elected class. . . who constitute themselves as aristocrats of taste” (290). The automatic linkage Sontag and Sartre make between dandiacal irony and a broadly defined stereotype of homosexuality seems questionable, to say the least,⁷ but the

widespread use of this kind of irony by gay men is undeniable. The classic example is the drag queen, with his ironic appropriation of the more hyperbolic tropes of feminine beauty, desirability, and identity. The point is not to perfectly mime the feminine; it is the imperfection of the imitation, achieved by irony, that implies a critique of substantive gender roles, and that makes it possible for the audience to see gender, and by extension identity, as unfixed and performative.⁸

One of the things drained of meaning by camp's "quotation marks" is subjectivity itself. David Bergman examines how the gay man's camp sensibility deconstructs ideological codes and the implications that has for personality:

Camp is the mode in which coding is most self-consciously played with and where the apparent emptying of self-expression is most conspicuous. Of course, by making these "culturally determined codes" self-conscious and conspicuous, gay writers destabilize them and open them to analysis and criticism. Thus the avoidance of "self-expression" becomes paradoxically a powerful expression of gay selfhood. One might say that camp is the post-structuralist mode *par excellence*. (105)

The dandy, though not necessarily homosexual, also seeks a paradoxical expression of selfhood by avoiding or ironizing conventional self-expression:

In the abolition of any trace of subjectivity from his own person, no one has ever reached the radicalism of Beau Brummell. With an asceticism that equals the most mortifying mystical techniques, he constantly cancels from himself any trace of personality. This is the extremely serious sense of a number of his witticisms, such as "Robinson, which of the lakes do I prefer?" (Agamben 53)

The dandy's pervasive and idiosyncratic irony is what makes him impossible to pin down, either sexually or socio-politically. Botz-Bornstein makes a careful distinction between the simplistic "reversive" irony of the snob (a social climber who imitates the dandy without possessing any of his lightness) and the much more complex "dispersive" irony of the dandy. The snob's irony of reversal is grounded in his fixed perceptions of the social milieu:

“The snob accepts the existence of only one world, with one social structure and one set of rules. . . . Since he accepts the existence of only one world, every ironical statement about this world will necessarily affirm the contrary, and this has the effect that his kind of irony can too easily be revealed as such” (293). The snob’s gestures toward lightness are too carefully calculated; he has no style because he spends all of his time “constantly ruminat[ing] upon strategies for getting more of it” (292). The dandy’s dispersive irony depends upon the acceptance of many possible worlds, an attitude acquired through the outsider status that his cultivation of an aristocratic bearing serves to simultaneously broadcast and mask:

He does not say ironically “A+” in order to imply simply “A-” (which would be the ironical mode of inversion. His ironically pronounced “A+” can mean “A+,” “A-,” “B,” “C” or all four together or simply nothing at all. He believes in neither rules nor structures and, as a consequence, even when speaking ironically of rules and structures, he will not suggest a simple anti-rule or anti-structure. (293)

As a social or political creature, the dandy’s utterances can range from the sincere to the sarcastic to the gnomic without pinning said utterance to a consistent self-image or societal role. As a sexual being, the dandy is capable of performing any combination—homosexual, heterosexual, or bisexual—without assuming those sexual modes as a fixed identity. It is his flexibility of assertion, not the assertions themselves, that defines him.

The paradoxical game of self that the dandy plays depends upon his emptying out all fixed categories of self. He achieves this through performance: by transforming himself into an object, or a master-mistress of passion, or by constantly speaking from a position of dispersive irony. Where, then, is the “real” self, if it exists? As Sartre puts it, speaking of Baudelaire, the dandy refuses to choose between either full *being* or full *existence*. By “being” (or essence), Sartre means “the obstinate, carefully defined mode of being which belongs to

an object,” while “existence” (or becoming) is “the mode of the presence of consciousness and freedom” (79). Suspended and paradoxical, the dandy cultivates instability, choosing neither pole. At times he seems to transform himself into an object without subjectivity (the Brummellian apotheosis), which would seem to be transforming himself into a creature of complete unreality. At other times he is a vigorous practitioner of pseudo-aristocratic identity practices, but the irony of his praxis prevents us from confidently asserting what constitutes his “consciousness.”

If there is a kind of radical freedom in the dandy’s refusal to choose, there is also an obvious risk of disintegration. Actually, controlled self-disintegration is the point, as demonstrated by the dandy’s peculiar asceticism, which is the process of refining all traces of essential selfhood out of existence. Baudelaire writes that the dandy must cultivate indifference; dandyism “is the joy of astonishing others, and the proud satisfaction of never oneself being astonished. A dandy may be blasé, he may even suffer; but in this case, he will smile like the Spartan boy under the fox’s tooth” (27-8). This cheerful asceticism is “[t]he distinguishing characteristic of the dandy’s beauty” and it “consists above all in an air of coldness which comes from an unshakeable determination not to be moved; you might call it a latent fire which hints at itself, and which could, but chooses not to burst into flame” (29). Asceticism and self-renunciation are a paradoxically crucial component of the putatively luxurious style that the dandy cultivates. Giorgio Agamben characterizes Brummell’s suppression of personality as ruthlessly ascetic, while Baudelaire sees the dandy’s praxis as comparable to that of priests and monks:

The strictest monastic rule, the inexorable order of the Assassins according to which the penalty for drunkenness was enforced suicide, were no more despotic, and no more obeyed, than this doctrine of elegance and originality, which also imposes upon its humble and ambitious disciples—men often full

of fire, passion, courage and restrained energy—the terrible formula: *Perinde ac cadaver!*” (28)⁹

The dandy’s terrible self-renunciation is what defines his paradoxical rebellion; it expresses his ultimate dissatisfaction for the world, and his (remarkably Marlovian) yearning for a transcendence that cannot be. Sartre calls it the expression of “non-satisfaction,” and his analysis inevitably reminds me of Tamburlaine’s Nature, who “Doth teach us all to have aspiring minds” and “Wills us to wear ourselves and never rest”:

[Baudelaire’s] non-satisfaction resulted rather from the consciousness that he suddenly acquired of man’s transcendence. Whatever the circumstances, whatever the pleasure offered, man was perpetually beyond them; he transcended them in order to attain other goals and finally in order to possess himself. (96)

Obviously, in such a system, the final possession of the self is endlessly deferred; the cycle of infinite desire leads rather to self-negation. Sartre’s model for this figure, and Baudelaire’s, is

Satan

who was vanquished, fallen, guilty, denounced by the whole of Nature, banned from the universe, crushed beneath the memory of an unforgivable sin, devoured by insatiable ambition, transfixed by the eye of God, which froze him in his diabolical essence, and compelled to accept to the bottom of his heart the supremacy of Good—Satan, nevertheless, prevailed against God, his master and conqueror, by his suffering, by that flame of non-satisfaction which, at the very moment when divine omnipotence crushed him, at the very moment when he acquiesced in being crushed, shone like an unquenchable reproach. In this game of “whoever loses wins,” it was the vanquished who, *precisely because he was vanquished*, carried off the victory. (emphasis in original, 99)

The above passage does little to accurately describe, say, Beau Brummel; but applied to a Marlovian dandy, or indeed the Marlovian hero in general, it seems apt. Victory in defeat is the only kind available to Marlowe’s Satanic, overreaching heroes; their victory, such as it is, is to retain their audience’s admiration and sympathy at the moment of their destruction, while leading the audience to “reproach” the system (political, theological, or sexual) that

enforced that destruction. It is a dramatically effective device upon which Marlowe hinged all of his plays. As a program of self-fashioning in the real world, however, it signals a conception of the self incapable of being reconciled with a world that demands political and sexual submission to higher authorities at every turn. This refused reconciliation is not stoicism, whose indifference masks an appeal to natural law or God, but asceticism.

Stephen Greenblatt has written that the apparent heterodoxy of Marlowe's heroes hides a rigid and reflexive adherence to orthodox structures of power (see my Conclusion below). I believe his assessment is accurate when applied to the other plays; but *Edward II*, which many scholars have conjectured is the last play Marlowe wrote, is something else again. In that play Marlowe created Gaveston (he *is* a creation, quite distinct from the historical, gentle-born Gaveston of the chronicles¹⁰) and his "second self," Edward, and in so doing created something new. Gaveston is a dandy, the ironic outsider/insider who, more than any other Marlovian hero, comes closest to genuine heterodoxy.

III. I have not seen a dapper jack so brisk: Piers Gaveston, Marlovian Dandy

Gaveston quickly establishes his ironic, aristocratic character in the opening scene of the play, where he is privileged as the play's Prologue or presenter. In that position, he demonstrates a few of the characteristics of the Machiavel who introduced *The Jew of Malta*, but much more than that he shows himself to be profoundly self-conscious of his own dramatic and theatrical importance. His opening speech thus deserves a close reading. His own name, first translated from the king's own mouth in the form of a letter, appears twice in the first five lines of the play:

"My father is deceas'd, come Gaveston,
And share the kingdom with thy dearest friend."

Ah, words that make me surfeit with delight!
 What greater bliss can hap to Gaveston
 Than live and be the favourite of a king? (1.1.1-5)

What greater bliss, indeed? Gaveston approaches the project of living and being the king's favorite as an opportunity for absolute fulfillment; for him there is nothing left to strive for. For Gaveston, to be a king's favorite is to be greater than any noble, even greater than any king. Later in the scene, when Edward offers Gaveston every extravagance of power, he replies:

It shall suffice me to enjoy your love,
 Which whiles I have, I think myself as great
 As Caesar riding in the Roman street
 With captive kings at his triumphant car. (1.1.170-73)

This Tamburlainean image is Gaveston's expression of the dandy's desire for "a new kind of aristocracy, all the more difficult to shatter as it will be based on the most precious, the most enduring faculties, and on the divine gifts which work and money are unable to bestow." (Baudelaire 28). In this case the "divine gift" is a king's love, presented at all times by Gaveston as a quality which ennobles its possessor far above those "Base leaden earls that glory in [their] birth" (2.2.74). In the king's "gracious looks/The blessedness of Gaveston remains/For nowhere else seeks he felicity" (1.4.120-22). Contrast this with Tamburlaine's figure for ambition: "The sweet felicity of an earthly crown." Gaveston constantly reaffirms that he is content to "share the kingdom," not swallow it whole; only once does he imagine himself in the king's place, when the barons attempt to bear him off to exile in Act 1, Scene 4:

Edward: Whither will you bear him? Stay, or ye shall die.
Gaveston: No, threaten not, my lord, but pay them home.
 Were I a king—
Mortimer: Thou villain, wherefore talks thou of a king,
 That hardly art a gentleman by birth? (25-29)

Gaveston is not making a statement of Tamburlainean ambition; he is simply trying to provoke the king into action and the barons into fury. More than anything, it is a demonstration of his ascetic cool, his “unshakeable determination not to be moved” (Baudelaire 29). By urging the king not to “threaten” when the king has in fact given what should be a powerful command, Gaveston shows his awareness of Edward’s weakness. That awareness makes Gaveston’s “Were I a king—“ all the more audacious, being as he is at the moment in the grip of men who he knows want to see him dead. Gaveston’s asceticism is even more impressive in his final scenes, when he is being harried to his death. After he is captured by Warwick, he is told that he will be hanged, not beheaded (the mode of execution reserved for those of noble or royal birth). Gaveston’s protest “My lord!” (2.5.25) seems less a protest against death than a protest against the low style of hanging, especially when put next to the brief, sardonic speech of resignation he makes a few lines later:

I thank you all, my lords. Then I perceive
That heading is one, and hanging is the other,
And death is all. (2.5.29-31)

Gaveston shows remarkable consistency in caring only for remaining in the king’s gracious looks; his last words are “Traucherous earl, shall I not see the king?” (3.1.15). To be regarded by the king is the linchpin of Gaveston’s dandiacal “superiority of mind.” Even the name of the king has talismanic power; told that Edward has asked to see him before he dies, Gaveston murmurs “Renowmed Edward, how thy name / Revives poor Gaveston” (2.5.42-3).¹¹ By the end of his life, Gaveston seems to have vampirically absorbed some of the king’s essence—the king who once declared himself to be “Thy friend, thy self, another Gaveston” (1.1.142). The combination of the king’s regard and Gaveston’s disdain for

anyone else's opinion is what puts him on another plane from the other characters, and is as much a part of the cool, alien quality they mistrust as his class, foreignness, dress, and homosexuality are.

Because *Gaveston* spends most of the play demonstrating his infuriating sense of superiority over the barons, Marlowe efficiently uses the Three Poor Men of the first scene to make it clear that *Gaveston* is not interested in leading any kind of peasants' revolution.

✂ He plays with the poor men's hopes with a dazzling and lofty amorality. At first he rejects their suits out of hand, with the exception of the potentially amusing "traveller" who "wouldst do well to wait at my trencher and tell me lies at dinner-time" (1.1.30-31). Then, even though the curse of the soldier "move me as much / As if a goose should play the porpentine, / And dart her plumes, thinking to pierce my breast" (38-40)—that is to say, it moves me not at all—*Gaveston* decides that "it is no pain to speak men fair; / I'll flatter these, and make them live in hope" (41-2). Except by degree, *Gaveston's* reflexive cruelty here does not appear to do much to distinguish him from *Matrevis* and *Gurney*, the king's jailers in Act 5. But there may be more motivating *Gaveston* than pure sadism. Here is what *Botz-Bornstein* has to say about the dandy's morality:

For the dandy the game never stops and all statements, be they moral or aesthetic, adopt a playful character. Is the dandy a misanthropist? He is and he is not. Virginia Woolf has characterized *Brummell's* morality when reporting that he once said: "If a man and a dog were drowning in the same pond he would prefer to save the dog if there was nobody looking. But he was still persuaded that everybody was looking" (*Beau Brummell* (New York: Remington & Hooper, 1930), p.7).

Virginia Woolf's statement implies that the dandy's playful attitude is founded on irony. He suggests that he could be a misanthropist, but at the same time, since the game never stops (everybody is permanently looking), he could not be a misanthropist. What he finally is remains open. (287)

In *Gaveston's* case, of course, everybody *is* permanently looking, and there are two

everybodies: he is regarded by the Poor Men, “that are but sparks / Rak’d up in the embers of their poverty” (1.1.20-21), and he is a player on a stage making asides to an audience. He plays with both audiences, encouraging the Poor Men to “wait here about the court” (48) and in the next breath telling the theater audience that “These are not men for me” (49). By keeping the Poor Men in hope, Gaveston creates an appearance of aristocratic concern for the poor in the world of the play; an appearance he immediately undermines with the audience. Gaveston makes a gesture toward rescuing the drowning man, only to tell the audience that he’d rather save the dog. Given that the Poor Men do not reappear, we have no real evidence to support whether or not Gaveston is as indifferent to “the multitude” as he claims to be, but the gesture he makes, at potential inconvenience to himself (will they not remember his promise that “If I speed well, I’ll entertain you all” (1.1.45)?), demonstrates his wish to follow aristocratic proprieties, even as he ironizes them by winking at the audience. The genuine aristocrats of the play care for the multitude no more than Gaveston does, using them only as tools in their political rhetoric (as when Mortimer tells Edward that “Ballads and rhymes [are] made of thy overthrow” (2.2.177).). Only Gaveston willingly reveals the hollowness of any supposed concern that the rich and powerful have for the poor and weak. His apparently casual cruelty is actually a studied ironizing of aristocratic *noblesse oblige*.

Gaveston’s obedience to the proprieties is always ironic, especially when he is in direct verbal or physical conflict with his aristocratic betters. For example, when he assaults the Bishop of Coventry, Gaveston tells the bishop that he is protected by his priestly status: “but for reverence of those robes / Thou shouldst not plod one foot beyond this place” (1.1.179-80). (Actually, given Gaveston’s love of rich Italian clothing, we might take

Gaveston's reservation of his threat with ironic literalness: Gaveston so covets or "reverences" the bishop's robes that he does not want to see them stained with blood.) Gaveston makes threats of deadly violence repeatedly to various characters throughout the play, but he never follows up on them. For example, when threatened by Mortimer, Gaveston declares "The life of thee shall salve this foul disgrace" (2.2.83). Mortimer then wounds him, and Gaveston is hustled off the stage before he can make any answer, according to Edward's command: "Convey hence Gaveston; they'll murder him" (2.2.82). Gaveston's bravado is pro forma here, almost comical, and we never see him do any more severe violence to his enemies than the beating he administers to Coventry (a beating which, administered to a Catholic bishop, would certainly appeal to Marlowe's Protestant audience). A lover, not a fighter, Gaveston will defend his honor when it is threatened, but he prefers to do it with rhetoric instead of arms. The insult that provokes Mortimer's attack lays claim to the form of aristocratic dismissal, a form that by the barons' standards he has no right to, which makes it doubly insulting. Gaveston proclaims an outrageous sense of superiority over those who traditionally outrank him:

Base leaden earls that glory in your birth,
 Go sit at home and eat your tenants' beef,
 And come not here to scoff at Gaveston,
 Whose mounting thoughts did never creep so low
 As to bestow a look on such as you. (2.2.74-78)

Mortimer's violent reply is curiously impotent; even though he succeeds in wounding Gaveston he looks foolish doing it. The barons are incapable of dismissing Gaveston as he does them; he is an irritant underneath their skins whose severity goes unexplained by simple jealousy. Gaveston's declared sense of superiority, absurd and impossible in the barons' eyes, nonetheless has a reality to it that can only be removed through Gaveston's death or

banishment. His nearness to the king, combined with his ironic and deviant sensibility, is a threat they take with leaden seriousness.

Gaveston savors the superiority granted him by the king's favor, and in the language of his first speech he intertwines that pleasure with the erotic pleasure he anticipates in his relations with the king:

Sweet prince I come; these, these thy amorous lines
Might have enforced me to have swum from France,
And like Leander gasp'd upon the sand,
So thou wouldst smile and take me in thy arms. (I.i.6-9)

Gaveston recasts the tale of Hero and Leander with himself as the male Leander and Edward as the female Hero, inevitably recalling Marlowe's own poem on the subject.¹² The relationship implied here is complex: although it seems to cast Gaveston as the dominant figure (the "top," if you will), his Leander "gasp[s] upon the sand," exhausted from the labor of his heroic swim, and relies upon a smiling Hero to take him in her arms and revive him. Bruce R. Smith sees a "master and minion" dynamic at work in the play, but lines like this prove that such a hierarchy is unstable, at best.¹³ What these lines do evidence is Gaveston's playful spirit; he is having fun with Edward's invitation to "share the kingdom with thy dearest friend" by imaginatively recasting their master-minion roles in an ambiguous way. This spirit of play inhibits any perception of Gaveston as a mere ambitious Machiavel, though that is a role he is willing to try on about forty lines later.

Gaveston's speech goes on to establish how closely his erotic pleasure in the king is related to his pleasure in being raised above all other men:

The sight of London to my exil'd eyes
Is as Elysium to a new-come soul.
Not that I love the city or the men,
But that it harbours him I hold so dear,
The king, upon whose bosom let me die,

And with the world be still at enmity.
 What need the arctic people love star-light
 To whom the sun shines both day and night?
 Farewell base stooping to the lordly peers;
 My knee shall bow to none but the king.
 As for the multitude, that are but sparks
 Rak'd up in embers of their poverty,
Tanti! I'll fawn first on the wind,
 That glanceth at my lips and flieth away. (1.1.10-23)

After comparing the sight of London to the Greek heaven (Gaveston is, with his classical tropes, constantly striking an Ovidian note), Gaveston revises his speech to make it clear that the capital is only interesting to him because it “harbours” the king. The temporary status implied by that word shows Gaveston’s recognition that, in theory at least, the court is not fixed in place but is wherever the king is.¹⁴ Gaveston then expresses his willingness to “die, / And with the world be still at enmity.” “Die” has at least three meanings here: to swoon, to actually die, and to achieve sexual climax. Gaveston’s willingness to swoon and die shows the paramount importance he puts on closeness to the king; in that closeness he achieves the summit of his ambition, which is to be placed beyond the restrictions and “enmity” of the world. Meanwhile, the sexual pun subversively turns the king into an object of onanistic pleasure, as the invocation of the Hero and Leander story did earlier. He then compares himself to “the arctic people” who scorn the lesser light of the stars (“the lordly peers”) in favor of a sun that “shines both day and night” (the king, in a trope that conveniently ignores the perpetual wintertime darkness of the arctic). By making himself out to be an arctic person, Gaveston emphasizes the alien status that makes the barons so uncomfortable; the trope also suggests the dandy’s ascetic “air of coldness which comes from an unshakeable determination not to be moved” (Baudelaire 29).

The last six lines quoted are probably the clearest statement Gaveston makes of his

ideology: his refusal to submit to the rules of the traditional aristocracy, and his refusal to recognize “the multitude” of commoners whose ranks he belongs to (at least in Marlowe’s universe; see Endnote 9). Instead, he will belong to the new aristocracy that he and Edward will create, or have already created. After he has dealt with the Three Poor Men, Gaveston vividly describes his vision of life in that world, a life of poetry, wit, music, and “Italian masques by night.” The willingness of Gaveston, a Frenchman, to bring Italian masques to England activates the audience’s broad prejudice against Italians as scheming Machiavels, even as Gaveston’s poetry leads them to delight in his vision. The wish for musicians and poets to “draw the pliant king which way I please” (52) strikes another strong Machiavellian note, though not one to my ears as loud as Mortimer’s soliloquy on pretending to decline the Protectorship, in which he muses, “Fear’d am I more than lov’d: let me be fear’d” (5.2.52). Mortimer’s rebellion is more conventional than Gaveston’s; it is a straight line toward power. Gaveston has no need for straight lines; in fact he never specifies any motive or goal to necessitate his manipulation of the king. Furthermore, the king’s constant demonstrations of affection for Gaveston would seem to make cynical manipulation unnecessary. Necessity is besides the point: Gaveston achieves all the power and nearness to the sovereign that he could desire almost immediately, without having to lift so much as a finger. “Drawing” the king is integral to Gaveston’s pleasure in the games of sex and power that he likes to play. He does it because he can, because he enjoys it, and his pleasure, never more obvious than in his imagining of Italian masques, is what makes the character of Gaveston so much more attractive than that of a second-rate Tamburlaine like Mortimer. It is the idlers, Gaveston and Edward, who get all of the best poetry in *Edward II*, not Mortimer, who is a more typical Marlovian overreacher; many of his lines are weak echoes of the “high astounding terms” of

Tamburlaine, while his frequent use of Latin in the “Fear’d am I more than lov’d” speech is reminiscent of Faustus.

Mortimer is Gaveston’s opposite and foil: a snob who plays the game of power with deadly, humorless seriousness. He has none of Gaveston’s lightness of touch, and appears to play the game quite joylessly, enjoying not the game itself but only the fruits of power that he briefly comes to possess. He takes even less pleasure in the tool of transgressive sexuality (his affair with the queen) that he uses to play the game, but seems to regard it as a distasteful necessity, whereas Gaveston positively celebrates his even more transgressive relationship with the king. Marlowe makes Mortimer and Isabel’s scandalous affair quite dull, scheming, and loveless in comparison to that enjoyed by Gaveston and Edward. Gaveston’s relationship with Edward is an end in itself; one that buttresses his sense of superiority, but that is also enjoyed for its own sake. He takes as much delight in imagining “Italian masques by night” as he imagines Edward will from the masques themselves:

Music and poetry is his delight:
 Therefore I’ll have Italian masques by night,
 Sweet speeches, comedies, and pleasing shows;
 And in the day, when he shall walk abroad,
 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;
 Sometimes 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 transform’d,
 And running in the likeness of an hart,
 By yelping hounds pull’d down, and seem to die.
 Such things as these best please his majesty. (1.1.53-69)

The real *jouissance* of Gaveston's poetry comes from his evocations of cross-dressing and homoeroticism. The younger men, "my pages," will be turned into nymphs, while older men, "like satyrs," chase the pages. Meanwhile the "lovely boy in Dian's shape," suggestively described as having "Crowns of pearl about his naked arms," is hiding "those parts which men delight to see." As Thomas Cartelli writes, Gaveston's discourse suggests a provocative move of marginal and transgressive pleasures into the mainstream:

What Marlowe aims at here is less a subversion of the conventional preference for the normative than a normalizing of the attractions of the deviant or unusual. He proceeds by making Gaveston the eloquent champion of desires and pleasures that are decidedly more "curious" than the mundane needs of three poor men. In offering a splendidly imagined representation of what life may resemble when the marginal becomes mainstream, Gaveston effectively depicts the normative as the product of a limited and limiting consciousness of life's possibilities: as something that may surely satisfy the desires of those who identify with his would-be servants, but that cannot satisfy men like him. (126)

What Cartelli calls the "normative" is the dull unitary world of the snob: "The snob is the aristocrat who accepts (and often also knows) only one world (his world) and who defends his position inside it" (Botz-Bornstein 292). By contrast, as already seen, the dandy's dispersive irony indicates a belief "in the existence of many possible worlds" (Botz-Bornstein 293). Here, Gaveston is working to include the broadest possible audience in a dandiacal discourse of dispersive pleasures—a homoerotic discourse which suggests that it is not "some men" who delight in a boy's private parts, but all "men." And yet he does not mean to include all men, but only those who are capable of sharing his vision—men who would delight to see the new aristocracy based not on birth or privilege, but on the ability to see more than a normative "limited and limiting consciousness of life's possibilities." Such men are rare, and Gaveston's use of the myth of Actaeon and Diana suggests that he is not unaware of the dangers that homosexual sybarites run in his society; the transformation of

Actaeon by an “angry goddess” foreshadows Isabella’s eventually successful efforts to have Gaveston pursued and killed. Like Actaeon, Gaveston is a spy and trespasser in the halls of power; one who takes erotic pleasure in his trespass.

Gaveston’s elaborate spectacle seems thoroughly camp in sensibility. While containing many of the trappings of pastoral (nymphs, satyrs, an olive tree, a spring), they are manifestly artificial. All of the people envisioned are either cross-dressers or possess exaggerated masculine characteristics (the extreme lust of satyrs with “their goat-feet” is proverbial). The living olive tree is transformed into a prop; the water is “gild[ed]”; the pearls are transformed into semen; and “One like Actaeon” is made into “the likeness of an hart,” presumably with an elaborate costume and/or headdress. “All Camp objects, and persons, contain a large element of artifice. Nothing in nature can be campy. . . . Rural Camp is still man-made” (Sontag 279, ellipsis in the original). And the artifice of gender is especially campy: “Camp is the triumph of the epicene style. (The convertibility of ‘man’ and ‘woman,’ ‘person’ and ‘thing.’) But all style, that is, artifice, is, ultimately, epicene. Life is not stylish. Neither is nature” (Sontag 280). The camp carnival that Gaveston envisions reproduces the dandy’s personal appropriation of feminine tropes on a larger scale. These tropes are tropes of feminine ornamentation and also tropes of the identification of Nature with the feminine. In fact, Gaveston’s stylized vision of Nature amounts to a portrait of Nature in drag, decorated with fake nymphs and satyrs, fields domesticated into “lawns,” blond hair that cosmetically “gilds the water,” and hand-held olive trees for props. The fakeness of this vision is part of its power to charm; it is like the drag queen, of whom “We are reminded only too often that this is a man dressed up” (Bergman 114), which modifies the threatening potential of gender transgression. The classical tropes of nymphs, satyrs,

Diana, etcetera, are an important element of this drag pastoral: “By alluding to the classical—and camp is highly allusive—drag forces the classical to participate in the grotesque” (Bergman 114). It is this mixture of the grotesque with the classical that gives Gaveston’s masque its carnival air of sanctioned transgression, which invites the audience to participate more deeply in the fantasy, and perhaps even allows them to share for a moment the dandiacal superiority of mind that will permit them to enjoy the “lovely boy in Dian’s shape.” The dandy projects his ironic vision of a world which inverts sexual categories into a theatrical space; he has stepped out of the personal lyric transformations of Hero and Leander into a dramatic space which incorporates spectators into his vision, as well as other players.

Gaveston’s epicenism is tremendously threatening to the established, masculinist order. Under arrest, he is himself cast as a cross-dresser by Lancaster in a virulently homophobic passage:

Monster of men,
That, like the Greekish strumpet, train’d to arms
And bloody wars so many valiant knights,
Look for no other fortune, wretch, than death.
Kind Edward is not here to buckler thee. (2.5.14-18)

Cast as a monstrous male Helen¹⁵ who has brought about the deaths of more deserving, “real” men (“valiant knights”), Gaveston has almost put himself outside of the barons’ discourse, and become literally unspeakable: “Lancaster, why talkst thou to the slave?” (2.5.19) demands Warwick. Gaveston, for his part, retains his irony; having been likened to a strumpet and accused of the unspeakable (“Corrupter of the king”), he chooses only to take exception to Mortimer’s characterization of him as a thief: “How mean’st thou, Mortimer? That is over-base” (2.5.70).

Several critics have used the passage in Act 1, Scene 4, where Mortimer Senior exhorts his nephew to “Let [the king] without controlment have his will,” invoking famous homosexual lovers of myth and history, as evidence that homophobia has no part in the barons’ hatred and mistrust of Gaveston. In fact, homophobia is a chief component of the anxiety Gaveston generates. Homophobia, however, is only the most significant component of the larger problem of Gaveston’s unfixed, performative selfhood. Mortimer’s petulant response to his uncle’s blandishments indicates that it is Gaveston’s epicene dandyism which provokes his hatred:

Uncle, his wanton humour grieves not me,
 But this I scorn, that one so basely born
 Should by his sovereign’s favour grow so pert,
 And riot it with the treasure of the realm
 While soldiers mutiny for want of pay.
 He wears a lord’s revenue on his back,
 And Midas-like he jets it in the court
 With base outlandish cullions at his heels,
 Whose proud fantastic liveries make such show
 As if that Proteus, god of shapes, appear’d.
 I have not seen a dapper jack so brisk;
 He wears a short Italian hooded cloak
 Larded with pearl; and in his Tuscan cap
 A jewel of more value than the crown.
 Whiles other walk below, the king and he
 From out a window laugh at such as we,
 And flout our train, and jest at our attire.
 Uncle, ‘tis this that makes me impatient. (1.4.401-18)¹⁶

Mortimer’s speech is a catalog of homophobic tropes, characterizing Gaveston as a “pert,” effete, lascivious, Italianate snob, scorning “soldiers” and “such as we,” and jesting “at our attire.” (Brummell: “Do you call that thing a coat?”) He unwittingly repeats one of Gaveston’s homoerotic tropes in the process: the “Italian hooded cloak / Larded with pearl” recalls the “Crownets of pearl” about the “naked arms” of the boy Diana. These tropes are very real, but indirect. The direct object of Mortimer’s “impatience” is Gaveston’s

appearance and dress. Gaveston's elaborate, expensive costumes are the signifiers of his "aristocratic superiority of mind." His dress threatens to elide class distinctions; not only does Gaveston wear "a lord's revenue on his back" (at once appropriating lordship and outdoing it), but "in his Tuscan cap" wears "A jewel of more value than the crown." "The liberal Earl of Cornwall" (2.1.10), with his conspicuous display of wealth in dress and his "rioting" with "the treasure of the realm," evokes the kingly display of power in excess that Stephen Greenblatt described in *Henry VIII*: "the sense of colossal waste, of inexhaustible appetite, of power utterly materialized in clothes and jewels" (29). This has the effect of calling attention to the weak foundations of power in Edward's kingdom, as David Thurn argues:

The figure of Gaveston, with all his extravagant adornments. . . may suggest that the trappings of royal power are themselves nothing more than stage contrivances invested with illusory authority. Even early on, Edward implies as much in his choice of verb when, in a moment of impetuous sobriety, he says he will make Warwick his "chiefest counselor," and promises that his "silver hairs will more adorn [the] court, / Than gaudy silks or rich embroidery" 1.4.344-46). Edward's minion is the more threatening because he presents the barons, despite their refusal to recognize it, with a kind of mirror image, exposing the ungrounded character of sovereign order. (129-30).

Ultimately, it is not Gaveston's impersonation of aristocracy/royalty or his homosexuality that causes the most unease in Mortimer; it is his changeability. Gaveston, though "one so basely born" is yet "Proteus, god of shapes," and a jester besides. Mortimer might look on an ambitious courtier as a dangerous rival, and might even take the steps he and the other barons take to have him removed, but would such a courtier, even one that "hardly art a gentleman by birth" (1.4.29) provoke such intense fear and loathing as Gaveston does? "The mightiest kings have had their minions" (1.4.390) says Mortimer Senior, but the word "minion," though used over and over again, is insufficient to categorize

Gaveston; he is something new. He plays the part of ambitious courtier, but has no real agenda outside of the pleasure of his Italian masques and the enjoyment of the king's love. He plays the part of a "homosexual," but is also happy to marry Lady Margaret. We never see them interact, but she does quote two lines of a letter he has written her :

The grief for his exile was not so much
As is the joy of his returning home.
This letter came from my sweet Gaveston.
What needst thou, love, thus to excuse thyself?
I know thou couldst not come and visit me.
"I will not long be from thee, though I die":
This argues the entire love of my lord;
"When I forsake thee, death seize on my heart". (2.1.57-64)

Perhaps Lady Margaret is being naive about Gaveston's real feelings for her. But the lines she quotes from his letter, with their hyperbolic invocations of love and death, are reminiscent of his first remarks about the king, "upon whose bosom let me die." This suggests the possibility that Gaveston takes as much pleasure in his love discourse to Lady Margaret as he does in that to Edward. Gaveston seems to find in the marriage to Lady Margaret that Edward has arranged for him yet another Protean opportunity to be neither wholly homosexual nor wholly heterosexual, but one capable of sliding between the two poles without participating in either of them as essential sexual identities.¹⁷

As Gaveston remarks not long before his death, "And though divorced from King Edward's eyes, / Yet liveth Piers of Gaveston unsurprised" (2.5.3-4). The Marlovian dandy shares that "joy of astonishing others, and the proud satisfaction of never oneself being astonished" with the Baudelairean one. He also has the Baudelairean dandy's quality of self-negation and self-stylization. With his clothes and masques, his irony and his sexuality, Gaveston transforms himself into an object of love, hatred, and spectacle. In so doing, he escapes the "lown" (1.4.82) relational identity mandated by his birth while refusing to stay

put in any new identity . Neither “noble-born” nor “princely born,” he is the aristocrat of ironic, mocking performance. That performance obscures our view of any “real” Gaveston that might have once existed. The exaggerated sense of self-importance that styles Gaveston’s actions takes center stage to such a degree that his importance becomes real: to Edward his worth “is far above my gifts,” and to the barons he is a scourge upon the kingdom, justly hated by the entire world: “Why should you love him whom the world hates so?” (1.4.76). The “world” proves stronger than the king, and so Gaveston is drawn to his destruction: literal death follows the death of essential identity. There is no “Gaveston,” only a wry and mocking “dapper jack” who lives like a stylish puppet in Edward’s affection and, “divorced from King Edward’s eyes,” dies outside it. There is a purity to Gaveston’s unwavering pursuit of style that Baudelaire would certainly approve. The king, “another Gaveston,” is unable to fully appropriate the severe freedom that Gaveston acquires through style, because he is unable to escape essentialist categories as easily. Every one of King Edward’s struggles to be free of his identities as (heterosexual) man and king, whether we call these identities relational or essential, results in a reestablishment of those identities by forces Edward does not control, whether they be his own desires or the actions of his enemies. His death is a macabre imposition onto his very body of his identity as king. Whatever else we might say about Gaveston’s fate, we cannot say it is a tragedy; for as Sontag writes, “Camp and tragedy are antitheses” (287). There is pathos, but no high seriousness or profound self-knowledge on the brink of death. Edward can escape neither high seriousness nor being. He might elude real self-knowledge at the end, but he cannot elude tragedy, and that tragedy is the counterweight to Gaveston’s world of absolute play.

IV. The court is naked: King Edward, dandy manqué

Edward's attachment to Gaveston is profound, and inexplicable to the other characters, leading Mortimer to call him "the brainsick king" (1.1.124). When Gaveston is banished, Edward's loneliness is expressed as a wild, almost pathological neediness:

Edward. My heart is as an anvil unto sorrow,
Which beats upon it like the Cyclops' hammers,
And with the noise turns up my giddy brain,
And makes me frantic for my Gaveston;
Ah, had some bloodless Fury rose from hell,
And with my kingly sceptre struck me dead,
When I was forc'd to leave my Gaveston!
Lancaster. Diablo! What passions call you these? (1.4.311-18)

Again and again Edward's words value Gaveston over his kingdom, his kingship, and even his own self—Gaveston is not elevated to the status of another Edward, but Edward elevates himself to become "Thy friend, thy self, another Gaveston" (1.1.142). Edward finds Gaveston's pose of lordly superiority to be entirely convincing. He deprecates the trappings of kingship, saying, "for but to honor thee / Is Edward pleas'd with kingly regiment" (1.1.164). In Edward's eyes, rulership of a kingdom is primarily useful as a tool to get him closer to Gaveston. Edward proclaims that he will sooner let "the sea o'erwhelm my land / Than bear the ship that shall transport [Gaveston] hence" (1.1.151-52). He uses a similar image in answer to the peers' demand for Gaveston's banishment: "Ere my sweet Gaveston shall part from me, / This isle shall fleet upon the ocean / And wander to the unfrequented Inde" (1.4.48-50). He is even willing to divide the kingdom up among his enemies, Lear-like, "So I may have some nook or corner left / To frolic with my dearest Gaveston."¹⁸

To Mortimer's question, "Why should you love him whom the world hates so?" Edward replies, "Because he loves me more than all the world" (1.4.76-7). As I have shown, this is quite true: in no one else does Gaveston seek "felicity." The king's favor is what

enables Gaveston to elevate himself above the run of both common men and noblemen alike, and it liberates him from social and sexual constraint. However, the sign of kingly power is not sufficient to guarantee this freedom. It is Gaveston's ironic performance of his various roles as favorite, *nouveau* noble, and homosexual—his dandyism—that makes him Edward's role model, and that leads Edward to value Gaveston "far above my gifts" (1.1.160). Edward struggles to follow Gaveston's lead, even after Gaveston is gone, by adopting new favorites who work at self-creation (though Spencer and Baldock lack Gaveston's light touch). Ultimately, however, Edward is weighed down by the demands of the role he was born into.

We see Edward the dandy-king most clearly in the vituperative accusations hurled at him by Mortimer and Lancaster regarding his conduct in the Scottish wars. In that scene, they accuse him of being a shadow king, one who has thrown away all of the attributes and trappings of genuine kingship. Lancaster points out that other kings do not properly acknowledge him as cousin: "What foreign prince sends thee ambassadors?" (2.2.169), while Mortimer reminds him that he has alienated commoner and noble alike: "Who loves thee but a sort of flatterers?" (2.2.170). Even the queen is now his enemy, implies Lancaster, for Edward has left her "all forlorn" (172). Mentioning the queen raises the specter of the king's sexuality, and Mortimer makes a resentful, homophobic speech that recalls his complaints to his uncle about Gaveston:




Thy court is naked, being bereft of those
That makes a king seem glorious to the world—
I mean the peers, whom thou shouldst dearly love;
Libels are cast against thee in the streets,
Ballads and rhymes made of thy overthrow. (2.2.173-77)

.
When wert thou in the field with banner spread?
But once; and then thy soldiers marched like players,

With garish robes, not armour; and thyself,
 Bedaub'd with gold, rode laughing at the rest,
 Nodding and shaking of thy spangled crest
 Where women's favours hung like labels down. (2.2.181-86)

Mortimer's metaphor transforms the peers into rich clothing—they are the outward trappings “That makes a king seem glorious to the world.” Without them, “Thy court is naked” and the king's glory is revealed as mere seeming. The clothing metaphor also signals the depth of Mortimer's resentment of Gaveston, who wears “a jewel of more value than the crown” in his “Tuscan cap.” As his strategic liaison with Isabella shows, Mortimer is at least partially aware of the link between sex and power, and is also aware of, or at least sensitive to, the link between power and dress. On one level, his trope of the naked court goes to tell Edward how weak a king is without the support of his barons. On another level, he has eroticized both the naked court/king and the peers/self that ought to cover that nakedness.

 Mortimer displays more sexual passion in this brief passage than he does in all of his interactions with Isabella. His jealousy is that of a spurned lover, who blames his rejection on a rival who apparently has a much better tailor than he does. Given Mortimer's intense homophobia (reinforced by the lines that follow), it is probable that his unacknowledged desire for Edward only goes to intensify his loathing for Gaveston and eventually the king himself.

Mortimer's rhetorical strategy is to turn the trappings of pleasure that the king has surrounded himself with against him. Earlier in the scene he tells the king that “The idle trumps, masques, lascivious shows / And prodigal gifts bestow'd on Gaveston, / Have drawn thy treasure dry and made thee weak” (2.2.156-58). Now he says that “Ballads and rhymes”—the “music and poetry” that Gaveston told us “is [the king's] delight”—have been transformed from instruments of pleasure into instruments of rebellion. Mortimer puts

dandyism and dress at the center of the king's failure to be a real king, which is to say, a real man. The king and his army "marched like players," treating war like a game. This is hugely offensive to Mortimer, who as a member of the warrior class takes war very seriously. By turning war into a game, Edward the dandy has put "war" in quotation marks, and that puts the institution of chivalry to which the barons belong in quotation marks too. As in his complaint against Gaveston, Mortimer emphasizes the king's "laughing." The ironic, mocking laughter of dandies like Gaveston and Edward haunts Mortimer, a "bloody man" that is hard to imagine smiling. (Mortimer's savage soldier's invective is reminiscent of Iago's resentment of the dandy-like Cassio, or Hotspur's rage at the "pouncet-box" messenger in *1 Henry IV*.) Even more offensive than the dandy's lightness and laughter is his subversion of gender roles—by depriving his soldiers of armor, Edward has effeminized them as well as himself with his "woman's favours." Mortimer is as offended by this as he is by seeing "soldiers mutiny for want of pay" while Gaveston "riot[s] it with the treasure of the realm" (1.4.404-405). This speech marks Mortimer's penultimate attempt to discourse with the king. After Gaveston's murder, and before the battle during which he is captured, Mortimer drops the venomous tone of his earlier complaints and asks, addressing the king by name for the first time, if Edward's desire to avenge his lover is more important to him than the kingdom:

Mortimer. Then, Edward, thou wilt fight it to the last,
 And rather bathe thy sword in subjects' blood
 Than banish that pernicious company?
Edward. Ay, traitors all! Rather than thus be brav'd,
 Make England's civil towns huge heaps of stones
 And ploughs to go about our palace gates.
Warwick. A desperate and unnatural resolution. (3.3.26-32)

Mortimer does not keep the moral high ground for long. The conflict between the barons

and the king usually comes down to a contest of wills, whether it is Edward's resolve to not "be brav'd," or Mortimer's "either have our wills or lose our lives" (1.4.46). After the king is deposed, Mortimer's greatest boast is "what I list command, who dare control?" (5.4.67). He has, at least temporarily, won the battle to go "uncontrolled."

Edward can never fully achieve the dandy's genuine lightness and irony because he cannot assume a purely performative identity as easily as Gaveston does. Where Gaveston's homosexuality is rendered somewhat ambiguous by his dalliance with Lady Margaret, and is perhaps partially a guise, Edward is completely committed to loving men; his wife is only of value to him as an instrument for retrieving his male lover from exile. Gaveston *plays* homosexual; Edward *is*.¹⁹ The closest Edward comes to Gaveston's sense of play is when he replaces Gaveston with Spencer, physically embracing him as a show of defiance toward the barons. This is not play, however, but the impulsive replacement of one crutch with another. Edward is also bound to his role as king in a way Gaveston is not bound to his roles as "Lord High Chamberlain," etcetera; the pressure on Edward to act like a king should is enormous. Edward tries to play with kingship, to lighten it, but instead of giving Edward the man ironic distance from King Edward, he only succeeds in emphasizing his weakness. Edward likens himself to a lion coming out of slumber, saying "Edward, unfold thy paws" (2.2.203), and then he tells Spencer Junior that "we have been too mild" (3.2.24). But there has been nothing "mild" about Edward's treatment of the barons; he has simply been overpowered by them. Roused to successful action against them, he fails to follow through by executing Mortimer, and instead lets him live on to depose Edward later. Vacillation is equally apparent in Edward's rhetoric of imperiousness and abdication. Unable to lighten the burden of kingship, Edward quickly turns from assumed haughtiness

(“It is our pleasure; we will have it so” (1.4.9)) to equally assumed humility: “It boots me not to threat; I must speak fair” (1.4.63) Edward says in aside before offering to “Make several kingdoms of this monarchy.” But vacillation is not irony, and seesawing only serves to make Edward’s predicament more acute. Others are constantly reminding him that his role, and the responsibilities that attend it, cannot be evaded. His offer to divide the kingdom is not taken seriously. When he pleads that “you that be noble-born should pity [Gaveston],” Warwick replies, “You that are princely born should shake him off” (1.4.80-1). Only the peers may clothe the naked king, and Edward cannot shed kingship as easily as he sheds its responsibilities, as Mortimer and Lancaster accuse him of doing. The relational pressures of kingship are simply too great; besides, Edward is unable to sacrifice the idea of kingship as an essentialist category—that is, the idea that he is king by divine right.

Edward clings stubbornly to monarchial privilege through most of the play, even as he often seems to want to have nothing else to do with kingship. On the run, however, and hiding in the monastery, Edward is finally willing even to sacrifice that, but he cannot escape the limitations that kingship puts on the imagination of others:

Father, thy face should harbour no deceit.
 O, hadst thou ever been a king, thy heart
 Pierced deeply with sense of my distress,
 Could not but take compassion of my state.
 Stately and proud, in riches and in train,
 Whilom I was, powerful and full of pomp;
 But what is he, whom rule and empery
 Have not in life or death made miserable? (4.6.8-15)

In Edward’s eyes, one must have “been a king” to fully sympathize with his plight. As being a king has shaped his view of the world, so Edward assumes that others who are not kings are blind to his real condition. Edward makes no connection between his unhappiness and his misgovernment: to his mind, “emperry” is ontologically a condition of misery. He

escapes, briefly, to a fantasy of the cloistered life: “Father, this life contemplative is heaven— / O that I might this life in quiet lead!” (4.6.20-1). But the “life contemplative” was never an option for Edward, and his longing for apartness quickly becomes a longing for death: “O might I never open these eyes again” (41).



Edward’s final monologues are his farewell to the dream that Gaveston inspired him to live: a life of pleasure in appearances, an ironic life of style, a rebellion against categories. This self-knowledge does not come easily, or without petulance. “The griefs of private men are soon allay’d, / But not of kings” (5.1.8-9), he complains, and goes on a rhetorical flight against the injustice of Mortimer and Isabel: “For such outrageous passions cloy my soul / As with the wings of rancour and disdain / Full often am I soaring up to heaven / To plain me to the gods against them both” (5.1.19-22). Then however, he begins to consider the issue of kingship more seriously than he did while hiding in the abbey:

But when I call to mind I am a king,
Methinks I should revenge me of the wrongs
That Mortimer and Isabel have done.
But what are kings, when regiment is gone,
But perfect shadows in a sunshine day?
My nobles rule, I bear the name of king;
I wear the crown; but am controll’d by them. . . . (5.1.23-29)

Edward then interrupts himself to rage against Mortimer and Isabella again, and to fear for the life of his son, “For he’s a lamb encompassed by wolves” (41). But he has already begun to wonder: if I am a king only by wearing a crown, which I am about to lose, what am I? Is a king still a king “when regiment is gone?”

A dandy has no essential self, no essential qualities; nor does he allow himself to become fixed in any one relational identity. Everything is performed and provisional. A king, too, performs; and even if he refuses to act like a king, he is marked as such by his

“regiment,” “pomp,” and “crown.” When the performance ends—when he can no longer command—and when the markers are gone—what’s left? As these thoughts encroach upon Edward, he begins to panic, and focuses all of his imaginative energy on the only external marker of his kingship that remains: the crown. Edward no longer wants to hide from kingship in pleasure or irony; he is not interested in building a new aristocracy. He wants to cling to the crown, to consume it, to unambiguously affirm his identity as king:

Here, take my crown, the life of Edward too:
Two kings in England cannot reign at once.
But stay awhile, let me be king till night,
That I may gaze upon this glittering crown;
So shall my eyes receive their last content,
My head the latest honour due to it,
And jointly both yield up their wished right. (5.1.57-63)

Like Faustus, Edward tries to stop time, not so much because he is desperate for his life, but because he is desperate for the identity that he once played recklessly with. His identity, life, and crown have become coterminous: “Why gape you for your sovereign’s overthrow— / My diadem, I mean, and guiltless life?” (72-3). Edward is experiencing a personality breakdown; his mind is filled “with strange despairing thoughts; / Which thoughts are martyred with endless torments” (79-80). He then steps out of speech altogether with the remarkable stage direction, “*The King rageth*” (85). For a moment, Edward ceases to exist. Then, after a last transitory resolution to keep the crown, he yields, praying that God will “Make me despise this transitory pomp / And sit for aye enthronized in heaven” (108-109).

Only once Edward has yielded the crown does it become clear that kingship is an essentialist category to both Edward and everyone else in the play. It is Matrevis and Gurney who suggest that Edward’s kingship is physical and embodied, following on the popular myth as to the resilience of royal blood. Alan Smith writes:

Clearly the deposed king's capacity to survive his torments astounds Matrevis and Gurney: Matrevis is forced to concede that Edward "hath a body able to endure / More than we can inflict . . ." (5.5.10-11). This expression of awe may be attributed to the characteristic mystique of royal blood as being inherently superior to the blood of ordinary human beings. (68)

"Edward's survival—presumably by virtue of his unusually hardy blood—is one of the few unqualified manifestations of his kingly nature" (Smith 69). Kingship is in Edward's body; it is an essential trait, much more so than a dandy's stoicism. It is kingship which renders him inflexible, and puts him outside the dandy's ironic circle.

The final affirmation of Edward's ontological identity as king comes with his gruesome death; also affirmed, or emblemized, is the fact that homosexual love that was never a game for him. Edward's murder also represents the total collapse of the aesthetic distancing that Gaveston the dandy and Edward the would-be dandy tried to bring to their lives. Whereas Gaveston is stylized to the end, and his death both offstage and quick (he gets beheaded after all), Edward's death is prolonged and excruciating, a fall from the imagination into flesh. And yet, while Edward's death is appallingly real to the audience, to his executioner it is a death supremely aestheticized. Lightborn is the third dandy in the play, a dark Gaveston who turns murder into an elaborate, Italianate game. The parody of sodomy that Lightborn performs, though designed to leave no mark, paradoxically marks the king's body as a sodomite's body in a quasi-judicial fashion. He inflicts the vicious punishment of a world that will not tolerate the ambiguously sexed dandy's evasions of normative social and sexual roles. A dandy's body, like his clothes, is only a vehicle for that superiority of mind that lesser beings find difficult to tolerate; it must go unmarked. The desire for freedom from constraints that the dandy embodies, like all Marlovian heroes, must be thwarted in the end.

V. Conclusion

Marlowe's heroes, "overreachers" all, lash out against the orthodoxies—social, religious, and sexual—that confine them. All of them come to bad ends. Stephen Greenblatt sees Marlowe's heroes fall into a pattern of strangely orthodox rebellion again and again:

[If] the heart of Renaissance orthodoxy is a vast system of repetitions in which disciplinary paradigms are established and men gradually learn what to desire and what to fear, the Marlovian rebels and skeptics remain embedded within this orthodoxy: they simply reverse the paradigms and embrace what the society brands as evil. In so doing, they imagine themselves set in diametrical opposition to their society where in fact they have unwittingly accepted its crucial structural elements. (209)

A shepherd becomes a conqueror, no better than those he conquers; a doctor of divinity sells his soul to the devil and pays the price; a merchant becomes the demonic scourge that his society had already branded him as. However, I believe Greenblatt's model is inadequate to deal with *Edward II*, Marlowe's last and most sophisticated play. Through what I've been calling Marlovian dandyism, the rebellious heroes of *Edward II*, Gaveston and Edward, look beyond this model, being neither in obvious diametrical opposition to their society nor completely unwitting about what they have accepted. The Marlovian dandy parodies the repetitions of Renaissance orthodoxy, which is a more effective and more subtle means of criticism than the frontal assaults of a Tamburlaine or Faustus. It has to be said that, as a dandy, Edward is a failure, with his "heavy" ontological status as king reified at the play's end. Gaveston is more successful; he carries the burden of being lightly. His performative and parodic displays of aristocracy and sexuality make him far more dangerous to the underpinnings of society than any outright criminal could be. He is an insider who remains

outside, a homosexual whose Ovidian references parody a heterosexual lover's discourse, and a rebel who attacks the rules of his society not with an army or Mephistopheles or poison, but with laughter.

It is tempting to imagine Christopher Marlowe as one of his own dandies. We behold him in his Cambridge portrait: a handsome young man in a rich black doublet trimmed with gold, the slightest expression of scorn pursing the lips, and the lettered motto, "What nourishes me destroys me." The sentiment is similar to Edward's: he will cling to one that all the world hates, though it means his destruction. A dandy like Gaveston or a would-be dandy like Edward does not fashion a self; he consumes it, hollows it out, and leaves a glittering shell whose every gesture suggests contempt for substantive rules while valorizing style. If Marlowe was not entirely successful in creating this figure, it may only be for lack of a proper context: Baudelaire and Carlyle's dandies exist at a pitch of urbanity that was simply unavailable in Marlowe's time. But the overreaching Marlovian hero, at his most subtle, prefigures those dark, sly creatures of sublime rebellion.

1. The dandy as Baudelaire describes him emerges with the figure of Beau Brummell (1778-1840), who took up residence in London in 1798, the year Wordsworth and Coleridge published *Lyrical Ballads*. The dandy is an invention of the Romantic period, who was then appropriated, theorized upon, refined, and eventually parodied by such Victorian-era writers as Carlyle, Baudelaire, and Wilde. With the dual rise of Romanticism and the dandy came a new appreciation for the Elizabethans, including Marlowe, who the Romantics claimed as one of their own (appreciations of Marlowe were written by such figures as Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt). Ellen Moers notes that "[t]he world of Brummell and the world of the Romantics were contemporaneous but mutually exclusive" but there was at least the dandiacal "Byron, the great exception that proved the rule" (51). The close association in time between a revival of the Elizabethans and the birth of dandysim helps to make a connection between the two, though tenuous, more plausible.

2. Compare this passage to Andrew Ross's description of the "camp intellectual": "But his aristocratic affectations are a sign of his *disqualification*, or remoteness from power, because they comfortably symbolize, to the bourgeois, the deceased power of the aristocrat, while they are equally removed from the threatening, embryonic power of the masses" (11, italics in original). Together, these passages illuminate how the dandy survives and thrives in a time of social instability. However, as we shall see, the Marlovian dandy emerges prematurely; Gaveston does not survive because the power of the aristocrat in *Edward II* is far from "deceased."

3. Both Carlyle and Baudelaire see the dandy as a category that, although especially relevant to their own time, is not unique to it. Carlyle's language implicitly describes dandyism as an ancient religious cult, and though he was probably being ironic, it was an idea that other writers such as Baudelaire "picked up. with considerable seriousness" (Moers 182). Baudelaire writes, "Dandyism is a mysterious institution, no less peculiar than the duel: it is of great antiquity, Caesar, Catiline and Alcibiades providing us with dazzling examples; and very widespread, Chateaubriand having found it in the forests and by the lakes of the New World" (26). Alcibiades, of course, is one of the homosexual "minions" that Mortimer Senior plucks out of history in his conciliatory speech to Mortimer Junior in Act 2, Scene 4, which "not kings only, but the wisest men" have had.

4. Sartre suggests that Baudelaire cultivated an image as "a pederast, an informer, an eater of children and heaven knew what besides" (151) as a mask through which he could be punished for his "real" sins without actually being punished for them—not unlike confessing to the sin of lying when it is your priest, at that moment, whom you are lying to.

5. Sontag goes on to distinguish the camp sensibility from dandyism by virtue of modern camp's appreciation of vulgarity, which the dandy supposedly deplored. I do not think she is giving the nineteenth-century dandy enough credit here. Botz-Bornstein's distinction between the dandy and the snob (see below) is a useful one; the true dandy is the exact opposite of the snob, who is merely a social climber who tries to imitate the dandy's air of detached irony. The dandy as I understand him, described in the writings of Baudelaire, Carlyle, Sartre, and Botz-Bornstein, is an absolute apostle of camp.

6. The "quotation marks" of camp recall what is probably Beau Brummel's most celebrated remark: "Do you call this thing a coat?" The highly audible quotation marks around "thing" elevate that seemingly ordinary object, a coat, into the unreachable sublime, while depriving the thing itself of aesthetic value—indeed, of all value, and therefore of all meaning. The attack is all the more devastating if its victim's own ontological status is at all bound up in his dress. There is much more than mere petulance behind Mortimer's complaint that king and Gaveston "From out a window laugh at such as we, / And flout our train, and jest at our attire" (1.4.416-17). The attack on the barons' attire is a fundamental attack on their claims to superior status.

7. To be fair to Sontag, she does suggest a finer distinction than this, though she does not go far to elucidate it. Sontag explains the "peculiar relation between Camp taste and homosexuality" through a comparison with the relationship she observes between Jews and liberalism: "Not all liberals are Jews, but Jews have shown a peculiar affinity for liberal and reformist causes. So, not all homosexuals have Camp taste. But homosexuals, by and large, constitute the vanguard—and the most articulate audience—of Camp" (290). Sontag published her essay in 1964, and it is safe to say that the possible normative roles for homosexuals have exploded since then, though it is also sobering to observe that the polarizing stereotype she is describing—the arch and witty queen—still carries with it considerable currency.

8. Judith Butler puts it more broadly, using the examples of "butch" and "femme" as historical identities of sexual style" to enact a criticism of gender identity that is less spectacular than the drag queen's, but which has the same effect: "The replication of heterosexual constructs in non-heterosexual frames brings into relief the utterly constructed status of the so-called heterosexual original. Thus, gay is to straight *not* as copy is to original, but rather, as copy is to copy. The parodic repetition of 'the original' . . . reveals the original to be nothing other than a parody of the *idea* of the natural and the original" (31). Similarly, in the socio-political realm, the dandy's parodic following of social rules and power hierarchies hints at the hollow, constructed nature of those rules.

9. The Latin motto translates to "In the manner of a corpse, as a corpse." If the phrase is appropriated from another writer I have been unable to locate the source. The dandy's "restrained energy" is corpse-like,

deathlike. Baudelaire's image suggests the idea of the dandy as undead zombie or vampire, a participant in the uncanny, which is applicable to Agamben's sense of the dandy as an appropriator of unreality.

10. In his article "Sex, Politics, and Self-Realization in *Edward II*," (reprinted in *A Poet and a filthy Playmaker: New Essays on Christopher Marlowe*, Kenneth Friedenreich, Roma Gill, and Constance B. Kuriyama, editors (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1988)) Claude J. Summers writes "Marlowe's interest in depicting a world of social fluidity and class conflict compels his deliberate departure from Holinshed and history in making Gaveston a commoner and Spencer a servant. The historical Gaveston was 'the son of a loyal and prominent Gascon knight and a natural born liegeman of the Crown,' while the Spencers were members of the secondary nobility who eventually came to lead the royalist party. By reducing their origins and presenting their rise in stark contrasts, Marlowe effectively captures a dizzying sense of freedom in the escape from a prescribed social status" (226).

11. Characters in *Edward II* attempt to invest names with the selfhood of their owners on more than one occasion; in Act 4, Scene 4, Edward demands "Who wounds me with the name of Mortimer, / That bloody man?" (38-9), and in Scene 5 he makes a pathetic display of tearing up a letter signed by Mortimer: "Well may I rent his name that rends my heart" (140). Furthermore, when the nobles subscribe to "the form of Gaveston's exile," they display a childish eagerness to attach their names to the document; Lancaster says, "Quick, quick, my lord; I long to write my name" (1.4.1-4). The stress that these characters lay on names suggests their attempt to fix the identities of themselves and others in a world where the family and national loyalties that names and titles indicate prove fluctuating and false.

12. The complex palette of sexuality in "Hero and Leander" is compressed into Gaveston's speech. The poem gives us an eroticized description of Hero's clothing, similar to that of the boy-Cupid's pearls ("Buskins of shells all silvered used she, / And branch'd with blushing coral to the knee"). But the description of a naked Leander is even more erotic ("Even as delicious meat is to the taste, / So was his neck in touching"). The homoeroticism of "Hero and Leander" ventures into comedy as the speaker describes a lovestruck Neptune's pursuit of Leander. (Leander makes an obtuse, campy reply to the god's advances: "You are deceiv'd, I am no woman, I.")

13. Smith's examination of "master and minion" relationships in *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare's England: A Cultural Poetics* (University of Chicago Press, 1991) is also briefly criticized in Ian McAdam's article "*Edward II* and the Illusion of Integrity," in *Studies in Philology*, Spring 1995, v. 92 n. 2. McAdam claims that "Marlowe's *Edward II* is a tragedy about the failure of self-fashioning," which I in part agree with. However, McAdam's citing of Summers' observation of the play's "resolute failure to condemn homosexuality" in order to claim that the "sexual issue" is at best peripheral to the play's conflict, seems to me naive.

14. Later, imprisoned at Killingworth Castle, Edward is told by Leicester to "[i]magine" that the castle "were your court / And that you lay for pleasure here a space, / Not of compulsion or necessity" (5.1.2-4), but the truth slips in with the word "imagine"—Edward has become such that Leicester, like Kent "dare[s] not call him king" (4.5.42). Without the real (and not just the symbolic) power of the monarchy behind, Edward no longer has the ability to alter the nature of space, even though he has yet to actually yield the crown. Henceforward Edward the prisoner's enforced wanderings are a cruel parody of his peripatetic movements as king, a movement that reflected his yearning for freedom from relational categories.

15. The epithet "Greekish strumpet" also serves to remind us how the threat Gaveston poses to the barons derives from a link between his foreignness and his sexuality. Elizabethan England liked to see itself as a second Rome, and so Helen is an especially apt figure for Gaveston as one whose mere presence in Troy triggers the events that lead to its destruction. Although Sodom and sodomy are never mentioned directly in the play, the reference to Helen involves Gaveston in the barons' trope of a city/kingdom afflicted by the

mere presence of a sexual criminal or criminals, the “canker” in Mortimer’s “lofty cedar tree” (2.2.16-18). For the barons, Gaveston is the universal symptom, location, or scape-goat, for all manner of sins: political, sexual, economic, geographic, and moral.

16. Note that Mortimer’s discounting of Edward’s “wanton humour” as a cause for his distemper entirely sidesteps the substance of that humor, which is homosexual sex. The entire speech serves as a condemnation of the homosexual “lifestyle” without ever mentioning the sodomy which would constitute the genuine offense in an Elizabethan court of law. The act itself in *Edward II* is unspeakable; even the vicious parody of sodomy of Edward’s murder is not directly written in the text.

17. Foucault locates the “invention” of homosexuality firmly in the nineteenth century, writing that “Westphal’s famous article of 1870 on ‘contrary sexual sensations’ can stand as [homosexuality’s] date of birth” (from *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1978, 1990), pg. 43). Referring to Alan Bray’s book *Homosexuality in Shakespeare’s England*, Gregory Bredbeck writes that “He documents how in the early eighteenth century a new homosexual subculture emerged, one centered primarily in ‘Molly houses’” (from Bredbeck’s *Sodomy and Interpretation: Marlowe to Milton* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), pg. 9). Given the terms of the present debate I may not be able to legitimately refer to “essential sexual identities,” for without the category of homosexuality we do not have heterosexuality. What we do have in *Edward II* are direct intimations of homoerotic desire between men, and a good deal of violence both verbal and actual directed toward the practitioners of that desire. The parallel that exists between Mortimer’s condemnations of Gaveston as profligately wealthy, apolitical, and superficial, and the similar condemnations laid at the feet of gay men today, seems too striking to be ignored. Gaveston, given his habitual dandy’s anti-essentialism, would in any case elude categorization as homosexual, heterosexual, or bisexual.

18. However, the risks he offers to run seem largely rhetorical. The nobles’ rejection of Edward’s offer to divide the kingdom is so offhand that we cannot be sure how seriously he means it. Edward’s rhetoric of abdication seems as empty and powerless as his rhetoric of command and vengeance proves later on.

19. As noted in 17, above, my labeling King Edward as a “homosexual” is problematic. We can finesse the question, however, by focusing not on what Edward is trying to be, but what he is trying not to be: confined by his identity as husband to the queen, which obligates him to act on heteroerotic desires that he does not have. Viewed this way, Edward’s dandyism does not fail because he clings to the essentialist identity of homosexual; it fails because he cannot perform his sexuality as lightly and variously as Gaveston can.

Works Cited

- Agamben, Giorgio. *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*. Translated by Ronald L. Martinez. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).
- Baudelaire, Charles. "The Painter of Modern Life," *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*. Translated by Jonathan Mayne. (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1964, 1995).
- Bergman, David. *Gaiety Transfigured: Gay Self-Representation in American Literature*. (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1991).
- Botz-Bornstein, Thorsten. "Rule-Following in Dandyism: 'Style' as an Overcoming of 'Rule' and 'Structure,'" *Modern Language Review* 90, no. 2 (April 1995): 285-95.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. (New York: Routledge, 1990).
- Cartelli, Thomas. *Marlowe, Shakespeare, and the Economy of Theatrical Experience*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991).
- Greenblatt, Stephen. *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*. (University of Chicago Press, 1980).
- Marlowe, Christopher. *Complete Plays and Poems*. Edited by E.D. Pendry. (London: J.M. Dent, 1976, 1983).
- McAdam, Ian. "Edward II and the Illusion of Integrity," *Studies in Philology* 92, no. 2 (Spring 1995): 203-229.
- Moers, Ellen. *The Dandy: Brummell to Beerbohm*. (New York: Viking, 1960).
- Ross, Andrew. "Uses of Camp," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 2, no. 2 (1988): 1-24.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Baudelaire*. Translated by Martin Turnell. (New York: New Directions Publishing Corp., 1950).
- Smith, Alan. "Marlowe's *Edward II* 5.3.23," *The Explicator* 52, no. 2 (Winter 1994): 66.
- Sontag, Susan. "Notes on 'Camp,'" *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*. (New York: Anchor Books, 1961, 1990).
- Thurn, David. "Sovereignty, Disorder, and Fetishism in Marlowe's *Edward II*," *Renaissance Drama* NS 21 (1990): 116