

Marlowe's *Edward II* as "Actaeonesque History"

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In his historical tragedy *Edward II*, Christopher Marlowe pervasively engages an abundant variety of ancient myths. Most significantly, however, the drama uses as a motif the versatile Diana and Actaeon tale—of naked, angry goddess and metamorphosed mortal hunter—and reworks it to serve distinctly political ends. After all, as Ovid translator George Sandys suggested in 1632, the myth can be taken to show

how dangerous a curiosity it is to search into the secrets of Princes, or by chance to discover their nakednesse: who thereby incurring their hatred ever after live the life of a Hart, full of feare and suspicion.¹

An important key to Marlowe's *Edward II* is this Actaeon story, and the multiple and simultaneous identification between the characters of myth and those of history. Edward and his intruding minion Gaveston are not only reflections of each other, but are both types of Diana *and* Actaeon, often at the same time. Paradoxical as this may seem, it is a crucial component of the myth itself, which Leonard Barkan has deemed a "synthesis" of an "enormous range of possibilities" and "simultaneous" interpretations—including the idea that goddess and hunter are "transfigured forms" of each other.² Marlowe skillfully exploits such inherent doublings and multiplicities throughout the drama.

The multivalent symbolism of the Actaeon myth may be considered in several ways. Marlowe engages the interpretive openness of a specifically *Elizabethan* Diana, with its attendant notion of the monarch's "two bodies" reflecting crucial political issues of the Tudor period. The drama's seeing, spying, and showing find expression in two emotionally charged motifs

that dominate the play, both allied to the myth: the hunted hart and the damaged heart; and the punning, inescapable link between peering and piercing. Ultimately, the myth intimates a new approach to the long-standing dispute over *Edward II*'s success or failure in terms of its "history play" genre. Siding against those who believe that Marlowe presents an essentially personal tragedy, I argue that the playwright was intensely, even primarily interested in the political. Marlowe, I contend, wrote "Actaeonesque history," involving an amoral, dismembering competition for visual preeminence and transformative mastery.

Diana, Actaeon, and the *Queen's* Two Bodies

When the formerly banished favorite Pierce of Gaveston returns to England, his once "exiled eyes" are not only eager to "view my lord the King" (I.i.10, 45), but his excited imagination immediately envisions "pleasing shows" to entertain his lover Edward and enhance his own power:

Gav.: Sometime a lovely boy in Dian's shape,
 With hair that gilds the water as it glides,
 Crownets of pearl about his naked arms,
 And in his sportful hands an olive-tree,
 To hide those parts which men delight to see,
 Shall bathe him in a spring; and there, hard by,
 One like Actaeon peeping through the grove,
 Shall by the angry goddess be transformed,
 And running in the likeness of an hart
 By yelping hounds pulled down, and seem to die—
 Such things as these best please his majesty. (I.i.61-71)³

Resembling Marlowe's portrayal of Doctor Faustus declaring "I'll play Diana" to the hapless Benvolio's Actaeon (IV.ii.53),⁴ it is startling to see the same myth again offered up as court entertainment. And although the basic plot elements are covered in both—forbidden vision, bestial transformation, dismembering punishment—the differences draw attention. In *Doctor Faustus*, the skeptical Benvolio is the butt of a cruel joke; the horns are not only the stag's, but the cuckold's. And what is stressed is the terror

of the potential punishment. The initial transgressive vision is barely mentioned. In *Edward*, that moment of forbidden vision looms larger. Gaveston lingers over the near-nakedness of the goddess at the grotto of Gargaphie, and his and Edward's projected eyesight caresses the "lovely boy in Dian's shape" in much the same way as the child's hair melds into the water. The initial impulse of Gaveston's masque is voyeurism and exhibitionism, an eroticizing of privilege and power with a distinct homoerotic touch. Attendant upon this and spicing it are the goddess' anger, the chase, and the simulated death or "seeming to die"—echoing the sexually suggestive desire of Gaveston some fifty lines earlier to "die" upon the "bosom" of the King (I.i.17).

The impact of Gaveston's pageant has not been lost upon commentators. Harry Levin calls Gaveston's envisioned spectacle a "portent" in its themes of forbidden gazing and hunting down.⁵ Bent Sunesen goes even further, describing the myth as particularly "apt" and praising Marlowe's "lively sense . . . [of] symbolical power":

the essential significance of the play presses upon us with peculiar force through Gaveston's soliloquy These lines seem to grow in the tragedy and with the tragedy The soliloquy appears to make an extraordinarily expressive gesture toward the very center of the dramatic structure The tragedy is like a plant growing from its seed.⁶

Later critics qualify Sunesen's initial observations by noting his overreliance upon a one-to-one Actaeon/Edward correspondence. Sara Munson Deats subtly warns, "because of their elusive quality, many of Marlowe's mythological figures defy rigid categorization." She does not deny Sunesen's claims, but correctly insists upon expanding their possible range of meanings. For her, Actaeon's "multivalent image elicits contradictory responses," and the myth's "dual symbolism [and] complexity" must be appreciated in order to understand the ways in which "the Actaeon parallel incites sympathy as well as condemnation."⁷ John Cutts too notes a dual symbolism and identification in the early soliloquy, observing that "'One like Actaeon peeping through the grove' at first look would seem to be a possible alter ego for Gaveston," but also "represents Gaveston's projection of the King into that role."⁸ Similarly, Judith Weil approaches

with caution, declaring that "Marlowe's tragedy upsets all exact identifications between his characters and the characters of the myth."⁹ And Charles Masinton broadly interprets "this slightly salacious version of the myth," contending that it "provides the metaphor of psychological change, or metamorphosis, by which we can understand the transformation of the King's character" and other major figures as well.¹⁰

The versatility of the Actaeon tale and its capacity to sustain multiple meanings—integral to this myth, as Leonard Barkan argues¹¹—is evident in the astute observations of the above critics. I would add to this complexity by considering the somewhat neglected figure of Diana in the opening soliloquy, and what she represents. Virtually all of the critics focus on Edward and Gaveston as Actaeons, gazing upon the forbidden and courting dismemberative disaster. But as Barkan shows, the original myth (especially in its Ovidian form) equates the mortal and divine hunter as alternative, "mirrored" versions of each other.¹² In *Doctor Faustus*, the protagonist as stage manager of the Actaeonesque show declares himself a "play Diana" because he controls vision and metamorphosis; in the opening of *Edward II*, Gaveston fulfills this Cynthian role as dreamer and impresario. Similarly, King Edward is not solely an Actaeon. As the monarch who will be spied upon by Gaveston and whose inviolability is called into question, he also stands as a type of Diana—although *what* type is an issue that the play calls into question.

To assess accurately the image of Diana in the contexts of court and show, one must consider the historical and specifically Elizabethan Diana. The Cynthian presence in *Edward II* bears a debt to the Tudor Queen. Gaveston, drawing attention to London as an "Elizium" within the play's first dozen lines,¹³ goes on to appropriate a set of signifiers long associated with Marlowe's living monarch Elizabeth. "The myth," Leonard Barkan observes, "takes on considerable vitality within her reign."¹⁴ As Bruce Smith notes, George Gascoigne's *Princely Pleasures* at Kenilworth, written expressly for the Queen in 1575, contains the parts of "a boy dressed up as Diana" and retainers "decked out as nymphs and satyrs,"¹⁵ prefiguring Gaveston's

Like sylvan nymphs my pages shall be clad,
My men, like satyrs grazing on the lawns . . . (I.i.57-58)

The goddess appears in this era because symbolically and often dramatically, Elizabeth had *become* Diana, the Virgin Queen. Marie Axton traces this vein of court iconography in the 1570s, '80s, and '90s through Inns of Court plays and other pageants, demonstrating that both Elizabeth and her nobles relied upon "Diana or Cynthia as public image." Regarding Gascoigne's *Princely Pleasures*—in which advice to Elizabeth was offered through the veil of allegory—Axton stresses its multiple options for Diana/Elizabeth, and the myth's flexibility as an interpretive and instructional tool:

The complexity of her situation called for multiple images, so that she is figured as impervious goddess, jealous tyrant who does not wish anyone to marry or beget heirs, enchantress, and helpless nymph pursued by would-be ravishers.¹⁶

As Axton shows, the early court allusions to Diana questioned the wisdom of prolonged virginity, as nobles gently nudged the Queen towards proper consort, political alliance, and heir to the throne. But as Elizabeth cagily co-opted this mythical persona, she managed to associate Cynthia's chastity with national inviolability. Her words to the troops at Tilbury in 1588 provide a sense of the dynamics involved:

I know I have the body of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too, and think foul scorn that Parma or Spain or any prince of Europe should dare to invade the borders of my realm; to which, rather than any dishonor should grow by me, I myself will take up arms.¹⁷

The Queen attempted to include her subjects in the fierce guardianship of mingled sexual and geographical boundaries. This mode became so solidified that Ben Jonson's *Cynthia's Revels*, which Leonard Barkan deems "a great contemporary celebration of Elizabeth as Diana,"¹⁸ depicts a divinity—her "god-head put off" temporarily to "descend" among the mortals—who hammers home her triumph over the Earl of Essex and other potential rebels:

Cynthia: For so ACTAEON, by presuming farre,
Did (to our grief) incurre a fatal doome; . . .

But are we therefore judged too extreme?
 Seemes it no crime, to enter sacred bowers,
 And hallowed places, with impure aspect,
 Most lewdly to pollute? Seemes it no crime,
 To brave a *deitie*? Let mortals learne
 To make religion of offending heaven.¹⁹

Protecting the body *and the nation* from “lewd pollution” brings up a uniquely Renaissance notion that has on occasion been associated with *Edward II*, but never properly connected to the Diana and Actaeon myth in the play. The idea of “the King’s Two Bodies,” as Ernst Kantorowicz delineates it,²⁰ was first legally postulated in the 1560s:

The King has in him two Bodies, viz. a Body natural, and a Body politic. His Body natural (if it be considered in itself) is a Body mortal, subject to all Infirmities that come by Nature or Accident, . . . But his Body politic is a Body that cannot be seen or handled, consisting of Policy and Government, and constituted for the Direction of the People, and the Management of the publick-weal; and this Body is utterly void of Infancy, and Old Age, and other natural Defects and Imbecilities which the Body natural is subject to.²¹

In this formulation, touches of the divine and transcendent connect with the mortal, in ways that are quite amenable to the Cynthian power and privilege that Marlowe alludes to in *Edward II*. Gregory Bredbeck calls “the King’s Two Bodies” a “hybridization” of medieval and Renaissance thought, an “Elizabethan inheritance” that is “most central to an understanding of the representation of *Edward II*.”²² And although Axton cautions that the legal theory would “never attain the status of fact or orthodoxy,” it nonetheless was widely known, and carried with it a set of visual cues and meanings.²³ According to one early-seventeenth century description,

The resplendence and power of soveraigntie in the royall person of a Sovereign, showing itself both in so great maiestie as dazleth the eyes of all beholders, and in so admirable effects, as to transforme savagenesse into civilities, repugnance into concords, vices into virtues, . . . doth (by such the conversion of the body naturall, into a body political) beget thereunto a more admired glory.²⁴

Eye-dazzling, miraculous transformation, and admired glory: it is little wonder that the royal double body attracts Christopher Marlowe. It sounds here as if it has already acquired an Ovidian sheen and potency. It attracts for another reason too—its flexibility. Bredbeck describes the King's Two Bodies as "a metaphor that conveniently mutates according to the exigencies of the moment."²⁵ And with great insight, Axton asserts that in particular, "dramatists were equipped to express its subtle complexity."²⁶

In *Edward II*, there is a powerful overlap between the goddess Diana and, as Axton phrases it, the "*Queen's Two Bodies*": the two subjects are indeed ripe for dramatic expression of their subtle complexities. Marlowe was understandably affected by the mythological iconography and the legal theory of his day. With the dramatist's prerogative, he exploits both in his play, making them interact and jar with each other, interrogating them singly and together. Edward, although an Actaeon, is simultaneously a Diana. He repeatedly expresses himself in a Cynthian parlance of exclusive, privileged sight; symbolic displays of power; metamorphic reprisal; and dismembering punishment. These rarefied Cynthian privileges become linked to the supposedly pristine bodies natural and politic of the ruler. However, Edward's actions undercut the aspirations of his Diana-like language. Ironically, his behavior heightens the gulf between divine rhetoric and worldly reality. Furthermore, his actions betray and "pollute" the double body. Bent Sunesen is correct when he senses in Gaveston's soliloquy a reversal of the inviolate Diana, barely hiding the parts men delight to see: "this is the 'divine huntress chaste and fair' engaged in something very much like strip-tease."²⁷ This image of a Diana playing against type, of Edward as a sporadic, ineffectual, ultimately failed Diana, connects to the ways in which he foolishly exposes his bodies natural and politic.

Edward's opening himself to sight and touch—anathema to Ovid's goddess—is tantamount to opening up the realm itself, and is equally dangerous. His invitation to Gaveston and his proximity to the lowly-born outsider undermine royal and divine privilege, according to the mythic paradigm:

Ed.: Embrace me, Gaveston, as I do thee.
 Why shouldst thou kneel? Knowst thou not who I am?
 Thy friend, thy self, another Gaveston! (I.i.141-43)

This scene is dominated symbolically by the imagined Actaeon pageant coming to life, as Gaveston “stands aside” and spies on the court (I.i.73-139). Marlowe immediately suggests the identification—the interchangeable quality—between the high and the low character, the Diana and the Actaeon type. However, the physical embrace of the intruder in the inner sanctum of court completely contrasts with Diana’s rightful ire upon being discovered at Gargaphie. Edward’s is an encouraged embrace—an invited invasion and giving away—of the body politic:

Ed.: I here create thee Lord High Chamberlain,
 Chief Secretary to the state and me,
 Earl of Cornwall, King and Lord of Man
 I’ll give thee more; for but to honor thee
 Is Edward pleased with kingly regiment.
 Fearst thou thy person? Thou shalt have a guard.
 Wantst thou gold? Go to my treasury.
 Wouldst thou be loved and feared? Receive my seal. (I.i.154-68)

Edward, as a failed Diana, displays and gives away the bodies natural and politic—his own physical privacy and the kingdom’s wealth and power.

This permitted Actaeonesque vision is a form of spying that invades not just Edward, but the realm, the more abstract half of the double body. And while the King invites it, the nobles abhor and resist it. One of the play’s strongest images involves their response to Gaveston’s spying. Privately counseling patience, the elder Mortimer attempts to excuse the King’s irresponsible behavior by citing historical precedent for the sort of male love they are witnessing. “The mightiest kings have had their minions,” he says, as well as the “wisest men,” offering up a list of homosexual worthies from Alexander, Hercules, and Achilles to Cicero and Socrates (I.iv.390-400). However, his irate nephew Mortimer Junior, Edward’s nemesis and the most vocal of the nobles, responds that male love is not the issue.²⁸ Rather, three things obsess him at this moment of candor. First, “that one so basely born / Should . . . riot it with the treasure of the realm”

(I.iv.402-04), which hits directly upon the social and economic implications of Gaveston's Actaeonesque intruding and Edward's un-Cynthian embrace. Related to this but closer to the emotional core of the issue is the younger Mortimer's intense antipathy to the way Gaveston and his followers "make such show" and "jet it in the court" (I.iv.406-414). Making "show" or display is a court privilege conferred by birth; it should be neither garish nor totally exposing, and it comes with rules and responsibilities—a decorum which Edward and Gaveston have not observed. Finally, Mortimer's deepest animosity is engendered by the intruder's visual supremacy. Gaveston has achieved the power to spy and look down upon them and the entire realm that Edward has placed at his disposal:

Mort.: Whiles others 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. (I.iv.416-19)

The intrusive spying combined with the disrespect—the failure to revere authority (or divinity)—cry out for punishment.

Mortimer, as a defender and avenger of the body politic, hates and fears being secretly looked at and down upon. In a moment of great anger he tells the King, "we will not thus be faced and *overpeered*" (I.iv.19, *italics mine*). This not only gives the sense of competition through sight, and the primacy of the visual in the power struggle that is taking place; it also connects to the Actaeon myth these contentions regarding view. In Golding's Ovid the unusual verb "overpeerd" makes one of its first appearances in English: it is what the statuesque, blushing Diana does despite her nymphs' attempts to hide her from Actaeon's gaze.²⁹ Golding's original context is rich because both his setting and his use of the term are ambiguous and double-edged. Diana "overpeers" as her privilege and a source of her power; however, her height and her overpeering ability are also the reasons she is peered *at*. Her power to see is directly connected to her being seen, and the ensuing vulnerability that this causes. Marlowe capitalizes upon such ambiguity as he experiments with role-reversals of the myth. What does it mean to have the attendant "nymphs"—the

nobles trying to guard their monarch's inviolability—declaring themselves unwilling to be weakened in the face of intrusive spying? Why does their master the King refuse to accept their protection, for himself and the realm? The Diana myth and the monarch's roles are opened up, profoundly unsettled and destabilized by Marlowe.

The nobles' outrage at Edward stems from his exposure of the court, a dangerous accessibility that is expressed in various ways. Many of these are deeply symbolic of Gaveston's (and later the next minion Spencer's) proximity to the natural and political bodies of the monarch. When Edward defiantly seats his minion next to him upon the throne, declaring "It is our pleasure; we will have it so" (I.iv.8-14), the disgusted nobles ironically quote Ovid on the incompatibility of love and majesty, and draw their swords.³⁰ Charles Forker stresses how the King's gesture here is both "emblematic and shocking," in that it "signifies that Edward has made his lover politically equal with himself."³¹ But more than this, it represents a yoking of physical and political contact, a threatening nearness that is despicable and dangerous. The nobles attempt to fight back not only with swords, but with symbols of their own. Sarcastically welcoming Gaveston back from exile, they design "devices" that depict the intruder's effect upon the realm: among others, a canker creeping up to the top of a tree where "kingly eagles perch" (II.ii.11-46). Such symbolism, which Edward reads correctly as "private libeling" (II.ii.34), resembles the barely veiled advice of the Elizabethan pageants of Gascoigne, Jonson, and others described by Marie Axton.³²

When they do not have the desired effect and their advice regarding protection of the body politic goes unheeded, the nobles resort to more direct means of persuasion. "Look for rebellion, look to be deposed," threatens Lancaster, to which arch-rival Mortimer adds, encapsulating the crisis of this failed Diana figure, "Thy court is naked" (II.ii.158, 171). The court is indeed naked—the consequence of a ruler whose desire for voyeuristic pleasure with and through his minions is as great as his own need to exhibit himself. In this, he is like so many other Marlowe characters whose glee in watching turns into a histrionic zest for showing. Edward's theatrical "carnivalizing" of himself stands as one instance out of many:

Mort.: When wert thou in the field with banner spread?
 But once, and then thy soldiers marched like players,
 With garish robes, not armor, and thyself
 Bedaubed with gold, rode laughing at the rest,
 Nodding and shaking of thy spangled crest,
 Where women's favors hung like labels down. (II.ii.179-84)

Such inappropriate role-playing—indifference to or ineptitude with fitting displays of power, as Edward turns war into festive theater—have led to national shame, "England's high disgrace" before the "fleering Scots" (II.ii.185-86). In sum, says Mortimer, "The idle triumphs, masks, lascivious shows . . . / Have drawn thy treasure dry, have made thee weak" (II.ii.154-56).

Incompetent as he is with public displays that should accompany the prestige of England's King—a symbolic Diana protecting the pristine body politic—Edward nonetheless verbalizes his wrath in ways that promise Cynthian mutilation and dismemberment. The sword shall "hew these knees that now are grown so stiff," he tells the contentious Mortimer in the first scene. He will decapitate his enemies, making examples of them as they "preach upon poles" (I.i.94, 118). He revenges himself like a true Diana upon the Bishop of Coventry, "christening him anew" in gutter water—a foul version of the Ovidian *ultricies undis* or "avenging drops" that come back to haunt him later—and "rending" his garments (I.i.187-88). Edward's resolve, "I'll tread upon their heads, / That think with *high looks* thus to tread me down" (II.ii.96-97, italics mine), has Ovidian overtones. And when he triumphs temporarily in Act III, his desire "To be avenged on you all for your braves" means decapitation. "Thy head shall overlook the rest," he tells Warwick, the beheader of Gaveston—with a macabre echo of the notion of "overpeering" (III.iii.40-57).

However, more often than not these threats appear empty and unacted-upon, a marked contrast to Ben Jonson's Cynthia / Elizabeth who taught mortals "religion" by displaying the dire consequences of "braving a deitie" and "offending heaven."³³ When Edward no longer has his power, he feebly and metaphorically attempts the former Cynthian tearing as he grabs hold of the decree of deposition:

[*The KING takes the paper.*]

Ed.: By Mortimer, whose name is written here.

Well may I rent his name that rends my heart!

[*Tears it.*]

This poor revenge hath something eased my mind.

So may his limbs be torn, as is this paper.

Hear me, immortal Jove, and grant it too. (Vi.139-44)

The privilege of Diana is gone, so another pagan god is invoked to wreak dismembering vengeance. Karen Cunningham observes that although "Edward adopts the language" and the promise to "'bridle tongues' [and] chop off heads, . . . his acts of mutilation . . . are displaced from flesh to paper."³⁴ He is a lame, impotent Diana whose punishments are instead inflicted upon himself and the realm.

The nobles, as if to fill the Cynthian vacuum caused by Edward's inadequacies, take up the language and the deeds of dismemberment with much greater effectiveness. Furthermore, they do so in ways that link the transgression of Edward's body natural to the damage sustained by the body politic, the realm. As unity breaks apart, Mortimer describes England in its dissolution as "maim'd" (III.iii.68). He decries "the open wrongs and injuries Edward hath done to us, his queen, and land" (IV.iv.21-22). This "openness" not only has the sense of "apparent" or "obvious," but also hints at Edward's real transgression, the wrong kind of accessibility, and the ways in which it exposes the body politic, the "land." The result of such access is a Cynthian dismemberment of the body politic, which Edward's very language self-destructively has invited:

Ed.: Make several kingdoms of this monarchy,

And share it equally amongst you all,

So I may have some nook or corner left,

To frolic with my dearest Gaveston. (I.iv.70-73)

Ed.: . . . rather than thus be braved,

Make England's civil towns huge heaps of stones. (III.iii.30-31)

The rending apart is physical as well as political, personal as well as national. This is the essence of the Elizabethan double body, and in Marlowe's depiction the Cynthian overtones resound.

In the same way that Edward's speech has held from the beginning the promise of dismemberment, the words of the nobles from early on have responded in kind. In the first scene, the irate Lancaster connects the King's physical self and the symbol of monarchy to decapitation:

Lanc.: Look to see the throne, where you should sit,
To float in blood, and at thy wanton head
The glozing head of thy base minion thrown. (I.i.131-33)

This threat, unlike so many of Edward's rending vaunts, is later followed to the letter:

Warwick: . . . by my sword,
His head shall off. Gaveston, . . .
. . . it is our country's cause
That here severely we will execute
Upon thy person.
. . .
Mort.: Thus we'll gratify the King:
We'll send his head. . . Let him bestow
His tears on that, for that is all he gets
Of Gaveston, or else his senseless trunk. (II.v.21-25,55-58)

There is a triumphant lingering over these scattered body parts.

Towards the end of the play, similar sadistic pleasure comes from ripping apart, and is related with tragic irony to Edward's role as a failed Diana. The two final scenes of the deposed King grotesquely invert Gaveston's initial fantasy of a theatrical "Diana" displaying himself in the shimmering waters of a gorgeous Gargaphie. The waters of these last two scenes become progressively more foul; the recollection of the opening titillation, with the boy's hair "gilding the water as it glides" (I.i.62), is a cruel memory. Edward's jailers Matrevis and Gurney are gleefully sadistic versions of Diana's nymphs. Instead of delicately assisting with the refinements of the monarch's sacred bath, they profanely and brutally "bathe" him and shave off his beard in dirty "puddle water" (V.iv.27-38).³⁵ In Marlowe's treatment, the shaving symbolically prefigures the more literal ripping apart that comes next.

The water in Edward's death scene is completely excremental, "the sink / Wherein the filth of all the castle falls" (V.v.2). His "attendants" have become even further removed from Ovid's nymphs. They are torturers who feed the fallen monarch scraps, and keep him awake for days to "assail his mind" (V.v.1, 8). Referred to as a "lake" (28) and visited by the assassin Lightborn—identified by Harry Levin as a type of Lucifer³⁶—this filthy "sink" has been called by Douglas Cole a "Cocytus," the frozen lake of Hell.³⁷ And so it is; but Marlowe also mingles the waters of Cocytus and Gargaphie. In an uncanny echo of "overpeering," Lightborn tells the sleepless Edward, "You're *overwatched*, my lord" (V.v.91, italics mine). In this lake, a failed Diana becomes a suffering Actaeon:

Ed.: My mind's distempered and my body's numbed,
And whether I have limbs or no I know not.
O would my blood dropp'd out from every vein,
As doth the water from my tatter'd robes. (V.v.66-69)

Edward exhibits Actaeon's confusion, his uncertainty over his own limbs, and the presentiment that his own blood will shortly fall. Also, in this scene—in ways that will be considered more fully in the next section—the language of the "heart" and the "hart" resounds. In thus intimating Actaeon's punishment, Marlowe engages audience sympathy as well as taps into a profound ambiguity. Edward's murder—an anal penetration by a fiery hot spit, designed to leave no mark—has long been discussed as a parodic gay rape, emblematic of his transgression. It is indeed, as Gregory Bredbeck suggests, an act of "writing" his crime onto him, literally "branding" him with it.³⁸ However, it is also the mythologically appropriate Cynthian tearing of one who has failed to understand the necessary inviolability of the Elizabethan double body.

The Hunted Hart and the Wounded Heart

Related to the intersection of Diana and the "Queen's Two Bodies" in *Edward II* is a matrix of meanings and effects that have been touched upon

by a few critics, but not fully elucidated. Two distinct strands are interwoven, throughout the play. The first regards the Actaeonesque image of the hunted hart; while the second involves the many dimensions of "peering" and "piercing." In both cases, Marlowe develops complex layers of ambiguity through multiply-mirrored images, reverberant puns, and double- and sometimes triple-entendres.

While I have just finished arguing that Edward has been underappreciated as a Diana, it is in keeping with the nature of the myth's multiple identifications to say within the next breath that he is simultaneously very much of an Actaeon as well. The duality that I am stressing gives Marlowe's mythologizing a great deal of its charge within this drama. It also supports and refines Charles Forker's observation that "mysterious dualities of conduct and attitude pervade nearly all the central figures of *Edward II*."³⁹ The Actaeon association is unmistakable; in fact, its specific manifestation in the motif of the hart has been well documented. Bent Sunesen begins the assessment of the ways in which "the pattern of the hunt is reproduced" in the play, and "tragic fate of the 'hart' is inevitable":

... the royal "hart" has been finally tracked down and is now moving aimlessly from side to side, exhausted, beset with the furious pack.⁴⁰

He concentrates on the "images of pursuit by merciless punishers," as well as the flight of Edward, who considers the sufferings of the "forest deer" without actually calling himself one (Vi.8-10). Sunesen also cites lines and scenes where the nobles "appear as hounds in various contexts": "they barked apace a month ago" (IV.iii.11-12); "how oft have I been baited by these peers?" (II.ii.198); "Edward's head . . . [is] encompassed by wolves, / Which in a moment will abridge his life" (Vi.41-42).⁴¹

Other critics have extended these observations regarding the King as an Actaeon-like hunted hart. Sara Munson Deats displays an awareness of the myth's allegorical history when she suggests that symbolically the noble "hounds" represent Actaeon/Edward's "own devouring desires."⁴² Regarding the revolt of the nobles, Judith Weil sees the myth as essential:

We may surmise that the watchdogs of the realm are deliberately failing to recognize their old master If Edward is Actaeon, then his noble hounds have

glimpsed the man beneath the deerskin, and have chased him all the faster for it. They will only kill him when the skin drops away altogether. The hunting of Edward by Mortimer would be quite obvious during a performance.⁴³

Weil is right; there are abundant examples of this hunt in such lines as "Shall I be haunted thus?" (II.ii.154); "Was I born to fly and run away?" (IV.v.4); "we, alas, are chased" (IV.vi.22); the Prince's "I think King Edward will outrun us all" (IV.ii.69); and the Queen's "we'll ride a-hunting in the park" (V.iv.112).

Still other critics have attributed the poignancy of Edward's death to the slaughter and mangling of the hart. Charles Masinton stresses that "the tragic fate . . . is influenced by the ancient myth of metamorphosis"; and John Cutts deems the pathos of *Doctor Faustus* almost

Inconsequential compared with Edward's pleas for warmth, understanding, and love, and his being physically torn apart and dismembered.⁴⁴

Both Weil and Deats partially accept Martha Golden's thesis that the deposed Edward is a Christ-like, suffering hart whose agonies inspired a degree of pity and sympathy, and who is symbolically "resurrected" in the person of the new King, Edward III.⁴⁵ Tellingly, for my argument about the myth's powers of multiple identification, Weil prefers to see the new King less as a revived Actaeon/Christ, and more as a "finally . . . just Diana to Mortimer's proud, conceited Actaeon."⁴⁶ Finally, Deats notes the subtleties of the hunted hart image and the ways in which Marlowe skillfully uses it:

the dual symbolism of the myth adds a complexity to the Actaeon exemplum: . . . Actaeon, like Edward, is victim as well as agent.⁴⁷

To the insightful work already done on this particular image, I would add that Marlowe internalizes the hart icon for Edward, and makes it work on yet another, more personal level. He manages this by equating the animal "hart"—self-consciously and with punning linguistic playfulness—to Edward's individual, human "heart." In fact, in the 1594 quarto of the play and in C. F. Tucker Brooke's old-spelling edition, the human organ

was spelled identically to the pursued animal. The sheer preponderance of both kinds of "hart" calls attention to itself: there are dozens of references.⁴⁸ And what happens to the human "heart" oddly mirrors what happens to the animal "hart": it is lacerated, punished, possessed, and finally broken. Edward himself unwittingly engages in this tragic punning even early on, as he reproaches Gaveston, "Rend not my heart with thy too-piercing words" (I.iv.117)—a foreshadowing of the literal piercing to come. Even the lesser characters speak this "language of the heart" in ways that seem applicable to Edward. During a temporary amity, Canterbury intones, "Now is my heart at ease"; Isabella laments her sighing, breaking heart; Pembroke describes the King's unkindness, "Hard is the heart that injures such a saint"; and Mortimer declares, with double-edged defiance, "What we have done, our heart-blood shall maintain" (I.iv.91, 115, 165, 190).

The human heart is not only a way of expressing passion, anger, and grief; emblematically and linguistically, it also becomes the "human *hart*" Edward who is chased back and forth in a deadly political pursuit. At key moments the symbolic "heart to hart talk" grows extreme. In the pun-crammed Act I, scene iv, of Gaveston's banishment and repeal, the distraught Edward pictures himself as a battered heart:

Ed.: He's gone, and for his absence thus I mourn.
Did never sorrow go so near my heart
As doth the want of my sweet Gaveston.

...

My heart is as an anvil unto sorrow,
Which beats upon it like the Cyclops' hammers. (I.iv.304-12)

The repeal, he declares, "overjoys my heart . . . ne'er was my heart so light" (I.iv.343, 367).

Such references continue throughout the drama. In Edward's worst moments they are most prevalent and potent: his hunting down, deposition, imprisonment, and slaughter. These are not merely the sufferings of a human heart, but the mirrored images of a pursued and ultimately mangled Actaeonesque hart. "Chased from England's bounds"

(IV.v.71) and “pursued with deadly hate” (IV.vi.5), Edward takes refuge in a monastery and seeks comfort from the abbot:

*Ed.: Oh, hadst thou ever been a king, thy heart,
Pierced deeply sense of my distress,
Could not but take compassion of my state.*

...

*Oh, might I never ope these eyes again,
Never again lift up this drooping head,
Oh, never more lift up this dying heart! (IV.vi.8-43, italics mine)*

When an agent of Mortimer’s captures the King and his new favorites, Edward’s surrender comes with similar imagery:

*Ed.: Here, man, rip up this panting breast of mine,
And take my heart in rescue of my friends! (IV.vi.66-67)*

Edward’s “heart with sad laments / That bleeds within me for this strange exchange” (Vi.34-35)—the handing over of the crown—can just as readily cry out for vengeance, from the perspective of the “forest dear” or wounded stag: “Well may I rent his name that rends my heart!” (Vi.9, 140).

In his imprisonment and assassination, the “King’s Two Harts” move even closer together. Images of destruction and dismemberment permeate the characters’ speech. Edward wonders when the hound-like Mortimer will be “satisfied with blood”:

*Ed.: If mine will serve, unbowel straight this breast,
And give my heart to Isabel and him.*

...

*My daily diet is heart-breaking sobs,
That almost rents the closet of my heart. (Viii.10-11, 21-22)*

The human heart sounds increasingly like the torn animal, as the images of ripping intensify. When Lightborn appears, hunter and prey refer to the “heart” five times in forty lines. These include figurative language of possession (“here’s a place indeed, with all my heart”); dissolution (“thy heart . . . will melt”); dismemberment (“this breaks my heart”); and slaughter (“murder in thy heart,” V.v.40, 52-54, 70, 86). The details of the

sadistic murder are taken straight from Holinshed,⁴⁹ but Marlowe's complex mythological and linguistic overlays suggest other reverberations as well. Edward, it seems, has been transformed into a hart ripped apart from the inside—closer to the core that was his human heart to begin with. English chronicle matches and illuminates the essential horror of Ovidian metamorphosis.

Peering and Piercing: Politics, Transgression, and Punishment

Like the heart/hart configuration, Marlowe unleashes another family of loaded puns that is also integrally involved with Diana, Actaeon, and English history. Strangely, scholars have failed to say much about the playwright's skillful and highly self-conscious interconnection of the following: Pierce of Gaveston; the noble peers; "peers," as in looking; and "pierce," as in penetrating. Marlowe resoundingly engages these terms and all that they represent. They hold keys to the play's most central concerns, from court politics and espionage to theatrical display and visual/sexual transgression. To put the relationship into a tongue-twisting, chiastic nutshell: *Piers peers; the peers pierce*. Sara Munson Deats has found a "fearful symmetry" in the structure of *Edward II*; perhaps this mirror-like, chiastic piercing helps to account for it.⁵⁰ Pierce Gaveston peers like "one through a grove"; he spies and gazes greedily upon secret sights. As a consequence, the resentful, visually violated noble peers avenge themselves by "piercing" and lacerating the offender and those party to the offense.

Marlowe is not normally associated with what could be called the Shakespearean compulsion to pun. The latter engages in complex wordplay that ranges from petty quibbles—the type denigrated by Samuel Johnson⁵¹—to the kind of punning in Shakespeare that is not humorous at all. But the opportunity for such loaded word-play—thorough, symbolic, and musically developed—practically forces itself upon Marlowe, from the first name of the minion to the manner of the protagonist's murder, both historical facts waiting to be capitalized upon. Marlowe revels in the reverberations, and has grotesque fun with them; they provide part of the

play's unique power. He cannot resist them for yet another reason: they come so close to the tragedy's Actaeonesque "heart."

A brief catalogue of these multiple peerings and piercings will give some idea of their nature and range. To Edward, Gaveston is "my lovely Pierce" (III.i.8), "Good Pierce, my sweet favorite" (III.ii.43), and finally, "Poor Pierce, headed against law of arms" (III.ii.53)—that is, beheaded in spite of the nobles' promise of safe-passage. It is this Pierce who within the play's opening scene sets the parameters of the alternate peerings and piercings within the drama. First, after reading the King's letter inviting him home, he declares, "Farewell base stooping to the lordly peers" (I.i.18); this designation is reinforced by the irate Lancaster ("My lord, why do you thus incense your peers?" I.i.98). Then, in Gaveston's description of a play-Actaeon peering and "peeping through the grove" (I.i.67), he dramatizes his desires to provide pleasurable "sight" for his "exiled eyes," to "view my lord the King," and to "stand aside" and spy on the proceedings at court (I.i.10, 45, 73ff.). Finally, he also includes the sense of piercing as laceration: dismissing the ill-wishing soldier he has just insulted, he declares,

Gav.: . . . these words of his move me as much
As if a goose should play the porpentine,
And dart her plumes, thinking to pierce my breast. (I.i.41-43)

With what we have seen above of the dual "hart" motif, the pierced "breast" here may even be a sly prefiguration of the lacerated "hart / By yelping hounds pulled down," which follows so closely after it (I.i.69-70). In any event, in under a hundred lines Marlowe manages to crystallize the play's essential dynamic of peering vision and its piercing punishments. He sets forth the puns and double-entendres through which they will contend. To return to the musical analogy of the previous paragraph, Gaveston's "exposure" is the musical "exposition," the opening statement of the peering/piercing theme.

The development of this motif throughout the play is lively and varied. Gaveston, hunted and Actaeon-like, yokes the notions of chase, vision, and piercing:

Enter Gaveston, pursued.

Gav.: Yet, lusty lords, I have escaped your hands,
Your threats, your 'larums, and your hot pursuits;
And though divorced from King Edward's eyes,
Yet liveth Pierce of Gaveston unsurprised. (II.iv.1-4)

However, this triumph is temporary: Pierce himself is pierced, as the ambushing Warwick "in a trench / Str[ikes] off his head" (III.i.119-20). The play consistently depicts the consequences of what Roland Barthes calls the "haptic" gaze, an intrusive vision that penetrates and possesses its object.⁵² In Marlowe's version of the haptic gaze, peering and piercing become one. The noble peers are aware of this dimension of sight, jealously protective of its power, and angry and fearful when its privilege has been unwisely granted to an undeserving outsider. The use of the noun "peers"—the nobles—reinforces the sense of their visual function. Noble peers are a necessary presence in a successful tableaux of court power. In a moment of accord, the Queen approvingly draws attention to the visual picture the monarch and the surrounding nobles present:

Queen: Now is the King of England rich and strong,
Having the love of his renowned peers. (I.iv.355-56)

When the amity breaks down, Mortimer uses similar imagery of the peerage to show what Edward lacks, with overtones of the goddess Diana at the bath:

Mort.: Thy court is naked, being bereft of those
That make a king seem glorious to the world;
I mean the peers, whom thou shouldst dearly love. (II.ii.171-73)

Marlowe engages more than just abundant references to "these peers" (I.iv.212) and the "proudest peer in Brittany" (II.ii.42). He shows how the nobles understand that their power and privilege consists of being *peered at* in limited and proper ways—as opposed to being spied on, visually pierced by Pierce of Gaveston. Mortimer's absolute refusal to be "overpeered" (I.iv.119)—out-ranked, looked down and spied upon—makes

him for Edward the transgressive leader of the “proud overdaring peers” (Liv.47); but it is the King who has failed to observe social and visual decorum.

As Edward’s own speech has foreshadowed—“Rend not my heart with thy too-piercing words,” he tells Gaveston early on (Liv.117)—metaphorical piercing through vision leads inescapably to bodily piercing with weapons. It is not such a far distance from the hunted Edward’s “heart, / Pierced deeply with a sense of . . . distress” (IV.vi.9-10), which is figurative, to the literal piercing embodied by the assassin Lightborn. The latter has learned

Light.: To pierce the windpipe with a needle’s point;
Or whilst one is asleep, to take a quill
And blow a little powder in his ears;
Or open his mouth and pour quicksilver down.
But yet I have a braver way than these. (V.iv.33-37)

All of these “brave ways” are piercings or penetrations of sorts, entries into the body. The “braver way,” in which Lightborn takes professional pride, is alluded to by the tools it requires: “a spit, and let it be red-hot, . . . a table and a feather-bed” (V.v.30-32). Actually performed onstage here, its details are well known from Holinshed:

With heavie feather beddes, (or a table as some write) being cast upon him, they kept him downe, and withall put into his fundament an horne, and through the same they thrust up into his bodie a hote spitte . . . the which passing up into his intrayles, and being rolled to and fro, burnt the same, but so as no appearance of any wound or hurt outwardly might bee once perceived.⁵³

This is the ultimate penetration, distinguished by its supreme internality as well as its invisibility. “Be secret,” commands Mortimer, and have it “be not spied” (V.iv.28, 40). Lightborn follows this to the letter, instructing Matrevis and Gurney to “lay the table down, and stamp on it, / But not too hard, lest that you bruise his body” (V.v.111-12).

Like the intrusive court peering that began the play, this clandestine penetration is internal and physical—a peering and piercing into and within. Although Marlowe certainly makes it a deathly emblem of the

drama's male love, it is more than that. It is the perfect symbol and end point—to use the phrase self-consciously—of a set of conflicts and intersections that transcend Edward's mere sexuality. National politics and social struggle; spying and display; Actaeonesque peering and piercing: all these coalesce in Edward's violated body. It is not just horror and pathos that account for Charles Lamb's powerful reaction to this scene;⁵⁴ it is awe. In Marlowe's virtuosic handling of the peering and piercing that dominate this drama, the distinctions between the punned words break down in the same way that human boundaries are crossed and destroyed.

Political and Personal Tragedy: Marlowe's "Actaeonesque History"

A crucial issue to address regarding *Edward II* is one of genre. Interpreters of the work have split into two major camps. The first considers the drama an essentially "personal tragedy" by a playwright who has little concern with politics, and no coherent or cohesive vision of them. The second disagrees, labels the work a true historical tragedy, and finds within it a primary though unorthodox interest in politics. I would like to ally myself with the latter viewpoint, and offer up in support a related notion: that in *Edward II* Marlowe creates "Actaeonesque history."

Those who see *Edward* as mainly personal are emphatic, and they go back to E. M. W. Tillyard in the 1930s: "What animates the play," Tillyard believes, is "Edward's personal obsession, his peculiar psychology, the humor and finally the great pathos of the play." The work, he asserts, is "concerned nominally but not essentially with historical matter."⁵⁵ Clifford Leech concurs: Marlowe "cared only for what happened to the individual" and "was interested in Edward not as embodying a suffering England, but as a man who had and lost power." To him the play has "no theory, . . . no warning or program for reform, no overt affirmation of a faith in man."⁵⁶ J. C. Maxwell agrees that "the historical process . . . has little interest for Marlowe"; and M. C. Bradbrook that politically there is no "central feeling or theme."⁵⁷ Harshly critical, Wilbur Sanders derides the

singular absence of any guiding and shaping intelligence behind the presentation of the historical material, . . . [and the] consistent subjugation of the political and the public to a very narrowly conceived pattern of personal conflict.⁵⁸

In a similar vein, the early J. B. Steane observes that in this play "the self is all there is"; that England is "mentioned, but . . . not emotionally or dramatically involved."⁵⁹

However, many critics have disagreed adamantly, and stressed Marlowe's deep involvement with history. Tellingly, Steane—one of Marlowe's most insightful interpreters—later reverses himself on the issue of the play's "thinness" and praises *Edward II* as a problem play "akin in genre to *Measure for Measure* or *Troilus and Cressida*."⁶⁰ But advocacy of the work as a deeply involved, iconoclastic history actually began much earlier. In the 1940s Paul Kocher took his cues from Holinshed's observations that the "mischeefes" of Edward's reign "happened not onlie to [Edward], but also to the whole state of the realme"; Kocher emphasized the play's "elementary awareness that the nobles and the commons are political forces of prime importance."⁶¹ Harry Levin takes *Edward II* to be a successful mingling of the historical and the personal, arguing that the play's "unique contribution . . . was to bring the chronicle within the perspective of tragedy, to adapt the most public of forms to the most private of emotions." Irving Ribner eloquently articulates the historical view:

Suffering humanity in this play is a suffering English king, with the ends of tragedy and those of history entirely fused, for Edward's sins are sins of government, the crisis he faces is a political one, and his disaster is not merely death but the loss of his crown and the ruin of his kingdom by civil war.⁶²

More recently still, James Voss has seen in the play "a working out of fundamentally hostile but interlocking sociopolitical forces," which Marlowe masterfully brings together "into a meaningful version of history."⁶³

Of these divergent critical camps, only the latter is attuned to the nuances of court politics and the destructive sweep of history engaged by Marlowe. The scholars who argue that Marlowe lacks a coherent view of history are baffled because the picture that he consistently presents is not what they

would like it to be: orthodox, optimistic, providential, moral, or didactic. In the cases of Tillyard and Sanders, their impressions of what a *Shakespeare* history play is or should be (including the above list of characteristics) so color their notions of the genre that they refuse to accept deviation.⁶⁴ Even so sensitive a critic as Clifford Leech reveals this flaw of oversimplification, when he complains that the work has "no warning or program for reform, no overt affirmation of a faith in man"⁶⁵—presumably, the strong moral center of a "real" history play.

In *Edward II*, Marlowe has written a less affirming and comforting, but certainly a focused and cohesive political drama. The play is an "Actaeonesque history" in that it views events of the court and the nation in ways suggested darkly by the Actaeon paradigm. The central characteristics of this variation upon the history play genre mirror the myth. First, power struggles are waged through vision, sight, and spying. Next, and spectacularly, vengeful victors have the power to transform and mutilate the vanquished. Finally, the entire process is unstable, amoral, and ambiguous; it inspires ambivalence, disagreement, and interpretive uncertainty. "Actaeonesque history" is neither Shakespearean nor providential, nor was it meant to be. Rather, the privilege of Diana—with her imperious wrath and ultimate murderousness—is Marlowe's metaphor for court power and the progress of history.

As in the Actaeon myth, power in *Edward II* is equated with sight. In Ovid and other versions of the tale, only a select few can view naked majesty; those who visually intrude, uninvited, are spies and transgressors. They must be taught to fear the angry looks of divinity. One of the most "Actaeonesque" aspects of this history is that characters constantly express power in terms of an omnipotent Cynthian gaze, of having eyes that overpeer all and at the same time inspire awe and fear. The combatants who contend for power consider it, more than anything, visual in nature. Gaveston values his abilities to see and show, but even more to wield the "eyes" of power; as a threatened, jealous noble puts it, "Happy is the man whom he vouchsafes . . . one good look" (I.ii.18-19). It is Gaveston's visual power—his ability to spy from above and laugh—that most infuriates Mortimer. Edward himself is acutely aware that the struggle that takes

place is for primacy of view and potency of gaze: he declares of the menacing nobles, "I'll tread upon their heads / That think *with high looks thus to tread me down*" (II.ii.96-97, ital. mine). And Mortimer in his glory, at the height of his power, perceives potency in terms of eyes that master all. He mingles Machiavelli and a gaze as severe as Diana's:

Mort.: Feared am I more than loved;—let me be feared,
And when I frown, make all the court look pale.
I view the prince with Aristarchus' eyes,
Whose looks were as a breeching to a boy. (V.iv.52-55)

In their ascendancy, Isabella and Mortimer's "eyes . . . sparkle fire"; Edward gives up his crown "rather than . . . look on them" (Vi.104-06).

Conversely and somewhat ironically, these characters, so determined to attain a power that makes them visually fearsome, resent and fear any exposure to view that is involuntary or unexpected on their part. As in Diana's case, being seen in this manner incites their rage. Since it is a source of power and an opportunity for one-upmanship, the acquisition of this sort of forbidden view, through espionage and secrecy, permeates the play. Gaveston is not the only one who practices the spy's arts, peering on the nobles for scraps of intelligence. The academics Spencer and Baldock, social climbers planning to insinuate themselves into court life, utilize intelligence techniques that suggest Christopher Marlowe's own background as spy and university man:

Spenc.: A friend of mine told me in secrecy
That [Gaveston] is repealed, and sent for back again;
And even now a post came from the court
With letters to our lady from the King;
And as she read she smiled, which makes me think
It is about her lover Gaveston. (II.i.17-22)

Spencer aims to rise by attaching himself to the up-and-coming Gaveston. To do so effectively, observation and surveillance must be practiced. Accordingly, the nobles are "resolute and full of secrecy" (II.ii.124). They too have their sources of intelligence: "Now, my lords, know this, / That Gaveston is secretly arrived" (II.iii.15-16). Mortimer is a master of

intelligence techniques: he sends an ambiguous, coded letter ordering Edward's death, along with a "secret token" that will result in Lightborn's own murder, in order to silence him; and he gives instructions for the "brave and secret" assassination, "so it be not spied" (V.iv.5-20, 28, 40). It is fitting indeed that the master-myth of Actaeon adapted for this play has been taken to show "how dangerous a curiosity it is to search into the secrets of princes."⁶⁶

Further following the Actaeon myth, Marlowe in *Edward II* portrays political power as the ability to transform both allies and rivals, and to mutilate in the pursuit of revenge. The early examples of political metamorphic prowess are benign, at least to those who are "transformed":

Ed.: I here create thee Lord High Chamberlain,
Chief Secretary to the State and me,
Earl of Cornwall, King and Lord of Man. (I.i.154-56)

... in this place of honor and of trust,
Spencer, sweet Spencer, I do adopt thee here;
And merely of our love we do create thee
Earl of Gloucester, and Lord Chamberlain. (III.ii.143-46)

For the King and those who would usurp his authority, power is a matter of metamorphic might: the ability to alter the state, shape, or form of others. This can be beneficial—"he that I list to favor shall be great" (II.iii.260)—or destructive. The almost endless threats, catalogued by Karen Cunningham, to hew knees, decapitate, dismember, and to draw and hang, amount to attempts to transform the shapes of one's enemies.⁶⁷ The debt to Diana in this is seen quite explicitly when the temporarily victorious King is read the names of his mutilated rivals: he turns them into dogs who "barked apace a month ago," but will "neither bark nor bite" now (IV.iii.12-13). Later, Edward's shaving in puddle water is a miniature symbolic transformation by his vanquishers. Gaveston's altered form, his "senseless trunk" (II.v.54), concludes the first half of the play, as a symbol of Mortimer's rising Cynthian, metamorphic power. Similarly, Mortimer's cut-off head "crowns" the second half, embodying (perhaps *disembodying* is the better word) the triumph of young Edward III in his ascendance to

manhood and mastery. Judith Weil sees the prince in his acquisition of power as "finally play[ing] the just Diana to Mortimer's proud, conceited Actaeon";⁶⁸ perhaps her interpretation is triggered by his ability at last to wield dismembering punishment. Marlowe emphasizes the degree to which the decapitation in all its gore achieves and affirms the young King's triumph:

Ed. III: . . . on [Edward's] mournful hearse
Thy hateful and accursed head shall lie. (V.vi.29-30)

I Lord: My lord, here is the head of Mortimer.
Ed. III: . . . Accursed head,
Could I have ruled thee then, as I do now,
Thou hadst not hatched this monstrous treachery
Sweet father, here unto thy murdered ghost
I offer up this wicked traitor's head. (V.vi.93-100)

From the viewpoint of Marlowe's "Actaeonesque history," cyclical retributive dismemberment accompanies power, as both a forceful tool and a means of display.

The idea of display leads to the final component of Marlowe's unique, mythological variation upon the history play genre: the deep interpretive ambiguity of the mythic paradigm in its depiction of intense suffering. Diana inflicts punishment upon Actaeon as a form of display, and she holds him up for a public judgement that cannot clearly decide about the virtue of what she has done. In Golding's *Ovid*, there is analysis and discussion over its merit:

Much muttring was upon this fact. Some thought there was extended
A great deal more extremetie than neded. Some commended
Diana's doing; saying that it was but worthely
For safegarde of hir womanhod. Eche partie did applie
Good reasons to defende their case.⁶⁹

Has Diana acted "worthely," or with too much "extremetie"? A salient characteristic of the Actaeon myth lies in this ambiguity; meanings are dichotomous and wavering. The myth is amoral, at least in its Ovidian

rendering, in the sense that Ovid does not provide—to use Clifford Leech's criticism of *Edward*—a "program" or an "overt affirmation." The tale is characterized by its indeterminacy and inconclusiveness—as well as by the fact that these opposing ideas about the justice of Actaeon's fate are so much discussed. Marlowe finds in this murkiness and contentious debate an ideal metaphor and forum for English history. He capitalizes upon Ovid's "*Rumor in ambiguo est*"—"Common talk wavered this way and that."⁷⁰ *Edward*'s "murmuring commons" (II.ii.157)—with perhaps an echo of Golding's "muttring" of opinion—also hold mixed ideas about their monarch. Some are openly critical, others supportive, and yet others "waver." At *Edward*'s lowest, "the commons now begin to pity him," says Mortimer (V.iv.2).

Pity is a crucial, complex concept in both the Actaeon myth and *Edward II*. Actaeon's suffering is intense, and engenders pity:

No part of him was free from wound. He could none other do
But sigh and in the shape of Hart with voyce as Hartes are wont,
(For voyce of man was none now left to help him at the brunt)
By breying shew his secret grief amount the Mountaynes hie,
And kneeling sadly on his knees with dreerie teares in eye,
As one by humbling of himselfe that mercy seemde to crave,
With piteous look instead of hands his head about to wave.⁷¹

The hart-like *Edward* in his fall also inspires pity, as many commentators have observed.⁷² He is entirely different from the exhibitionistic hedonist of the play's opening; he has lost all. "What, are you moved? Pity you me?" he asks as he relinquishes his crown (Vi.102); and Marlowe does shift the sympathies. In *Edward*'s mental and physical agony, and final pathetic demeanor, he is humanized. As in Ovid, with the "piteous" sighing of the hart near death, Marlowe's suffering *Edward* in his death throes inspires pity. Even the murderous Matrevis senses some pathos: "I fear me this cry will raise the town" and rally public support, he frets (V.v.113). In Holinshed, *Edward*'s "crie did move many in the castell and the town to compassion."⁷³

And yet in both Ovid and Marlowe, interpretive inconclusiveness in the face of intense suffering renders the pity almost meaningless. The

agonies of Actaeon and Edward have an immediate cause in their transgressions, but they do not have a clearly justifiable moral reason, nor do they have a cure. As shown above, the pain and pathos are shrouded in ambiguity. There are no virtuous characters in this drama, only corrupt ones whose flaws and bloodthirstiness grow the closer they get to authority. In the end, the justice is debatable—but the slaughter is inescapable. It is also ongoing, the cyclical by-product of a ruthless struggle to achieve a Diana-like omnipotence of view and vengeance. This is Marlowe's brutal, pessimistic portrayal of power, constructed out of Cynthian mythology, the royal double body, and the intersections of "peering" and "piercing," "hart" and "heart." It is a portrayal of power unacceptable to those who would deny the playwright a cohesive political vision. Yet it is the essence of "Actaeonesque history," distilled from the violence and vagaries of English chronicle.

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NOTES

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¹ George Sandys, *Ovid's Metamorphosis: Englished, Mythologized, and Represented in Pictures*, 1632, ed. Karl Hulley and Stanley Vandersall (Lincoln, Nebraska: U of Nebraska P, 1970) 151.

² Leonard Barkan notes Actaeon's representation as not only spy, but "voyeur, purveyor of multiple identities, victim of love, visionary, gelding, buffoon, holy fool"; "Diana and Actaeon: The Myth as Synthesis," *ELR* 10.3 (1980): 317-59, esp. 322-26, 359.

³ Quotations from *Edward II* are in *Drama of the English Renaissance*, ed. Russell Fraser and Norman Rabkin, vol. 1 (New York: Macmillan, 1976).

⁴ *Doctor Faustus* is also quoted from vol. 1 of Fraser and Rabkin. They base their edition upon the 1616 "B-text."

⁵ Harry Levin, *The Overreacher: A Study of Christopher Marlowe* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1952) 114.

⁶ Bent Sunesen, "Marlowe and the Dumb Show," *English Studies* 35 (1954): 241-53, here 241, 245-46.

⁷ Sara Munson Deats, "Myth and Metamorphosis in Marlowe's *Edward II*," *Texas Studies in Language and Literature* 22.3 (1980) 311-13.

⁸ John Cutts, *The Left Hand of God: A Critical Interpretation of the Plays of Christopher Marlowe* (Haddonfield, New Jersey: Haddonfield House, 1973) 207.

⁹Judith Weil, *Christopher Marlowe: Merlin's Prophet* (Cambridge: CUP, 1977) 162.

¹⁰Charles Masinton, *Christopher Marlowe's Tragic Vision* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio UP, 1972) 88-91.

¹¹Barkan 323-26.

¹²Barkan 322.

¹³"Elizium" is the actual spelling in the 1594 quarto; see *The Works of Christopher Marlowe*, ed. C. F. Tucker Brooke (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910).

¹⁴Barkan 322, here cites E. C. Wilson's *England's Eliza* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1939) 167-229.

¹⁵Bruce Smith, *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare's England* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1991) 99.

¹⁶Marie Axton, *The Queen's Two Bodies: Drama and the Elizabethan Succession* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1977) 60-66.

¹⁷*The Public Speaking of Queen Elizabeth: Selections from the Official Addresses*, ed. George P. Rice (New York: 1951) 96.

¹⁸Barkan 333.

¹⁹I.i.93; V.ii.14-23; in *The Works of Ben Jonson*, ed. C. H. Herford, P. and E. Simpson, vol. 4 (Oxford: OUP, 1932).

²⁰Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957).

²¹Edmund Plowden, *The Commentaries and Reports of Edmund Plowden, originally written in French, and now faithfully translated into English* (London, 1797) 213.

²²Gregory Bredbeck, *Sodomy and Interpretation: Marlowe to Milton* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991) 131.

²³Axton x.

²⁴Edward Forset, *A Comparative Discourse of the Bodies Natural and Politique* (London, 1606), cited in Axton 143.

²⁵Bredbeck 132.

²⁶Axton 60.

²⁷Sunesen 244.

²⁸Critical opinion is divided over the relative importance of Edward's sexual predilections in engendering the nobles' ire. Those emphasizing his homosexuality include Purvis Boyette, "Wanton Humors and Wanton Poets: Homosexuality in Marlowe's *Edward II*," *Tulane Studies in English* 22 (1977):33-50; and Claude Summers, "Sex, Politics, and Self-Realization in *Edward II*," *A Poet and a Filthy Play-maker: New Essays on Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Kenneth Friedenreich et al. (New York: AMS Press, 1988): 221-40. Proponents that social class, not sexual preference, is more of a factor include J. B. Steane, *Marlowe: A Critical Study* (Cambridge: CUP, 1964); and Weil 163. For an overview, see *Edward II*, ed. Charles Forker (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1994) 85-90.

²⁹The OED cites Golding's 1567 "overpeerd them all" as the first recorded usage. *The XV Bookes Entytuled Metamorphosis of Publius Ovidius Naso*, trans. Arthur Golding (London, 1567) 33.

³⁰"*Quam male conveniunt!*" declares Mortimer Senior: how badly Edward and Gaveston suit each other. He alludes to Ovid: "Non bene conveniunt, nec in una seda

morantur, / Maiestas et amor [Majesty and love do not go well together, nor tarry long in the same dwelling place]." *Metamorphoses*, trans. F. J. Miller (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1939), II. 846-47.

³¹Forker 160.

³²Axton 60-66.

³³Jonson, *Cynthia's Revels* V.ii.14-23.

³⁴Karen Cunningham, "Renaissance Execution and Marlovian Elocution: The Drama of Death," *PMLA* 105 (1990): 209-222, here 218.

³⁵Marlowe goes outside of his main source, Holinshed, for these important details. See John Stowe, *The Chronicles of England from Brute unto this Present Year (1580)* 355-56; quoted in Forker 360.

³⁶Levin 101.

³⁷Douglas Cole, *Suffering and Evil in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1962) 184-85.

³⁸Bredbeck 149.

³⁹Forker 81.

⁴⁰Sunesen 246-47.

⁴¹Sunesen 246.

⁴²Deats 311; the hounds are tied to Actaeon's excessive appetites in Geoffrey Whitney's *A Choice of Emblemes and Other Devises*, 1586 (Amsterdam: Da Capo Press, 1969) 15. For an extended discussion of the myth, see Anthony Brian Taylor, "Arthur Golding and the Elizabethan Progress of Actaeon's Dogs," *Connotations* 1.3 (1991): 207-23, as well as responses to this article by F. J. Sypher, Charles Martindale and Sarah Annes Brown in *Connotations* 2.1 (1992): 52-68, and 2.2 (1992): 163-65, 205-22.

⁴³Weil 164.

⁴⁴Charles Masinton, *Christopher Marlowe's Tragic Vision* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio UP, 1972) 109; Cutts 237.

⁴⁵Martha Hester Golden, "The Iconography of the English History Play," Ph. D. dissertation (Columbia, 1967) 215; cited in Weil 205, and Deats 311.

⁴⁶Weil 164.

⁴⁷Deats 311.

⁴⁸*The Works of Christopher Marlowe*, ed. C. F. Tucker Brooke (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910; 1966); see also *A Concordance to the Plays, Poems, and Translations of Christopher Marlowe*, ed. R. J. Fehrenbach, L. A. Boone, and M. A. di Cesare (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1982).

⁴⁹Raphael Holinshed, *The Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, 2nd ed. (London, 1587); cited in Forker 355-56.

⁵⁰Sara Munson Deats, "Marlowe's Fearful Symmetry in *Edward II*," in Kenneth Friedenreich et al., 241-62. Deats charts seven scenarios that begin the play, reach the center, and then in mirror image or reverse order, conclude it; esp. 242.

⁵¹"A quibble is to Shakespeare what luminous vapors are to the traveller: he follows it at all adventures; it is sure to lead him out of his way, and sure to engulf him in the mire." Samuel Johnson, *The Preface to Shakespeare*, Abrams et al., *The Norton Anthology*

of *English Literature*, 6th ed., vol. 1 (New York: Norton, 1993) 2398.

⁵²On the "haptic gaze" and its "power to seize, to take" see Roland Barthes, *Responsibility of Forms* 238.

⁵³Holinshed 341-42; cited in Forker 355-56.

⁵⁴Charles Lamb wrote that Edward's murder instilled more pity and terror than any scene, either ancient or modern, with which he was acquainted; see *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets in The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. E. V. Lucas (London, 1903) 4: 24.

⁵⁵E. M. W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays* (London, 1944) 106-09.

⁵⁶Clifford Leech, "Marlowe's *Edward II*: Power and Suffering," *Critical Quarterly* 1 (1959): 181-96, 187.

⁵⁷J. C. Maxwell, "The Plays of Christopher Marlowe," in *The Age of Shakespeare*, ed. Boris Ford (Harmondsworth, 1960) 175; M. C. Bradbrook, *Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy* (Cambridge: CUP, 1935) 161.

⁵⁸Wilbur Sanders, *The Dramatist and the Received Idea: Studies in the Plays of Marlowe and Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Harvard UP) 126.

⁵⁹J. B. Steane, *Marlowe: A Critical Study* (Cambridge: CUP, 1964) 122-23.

⁶⁰See the introduction to the 1974 reprint of Steane's *Marlowe: A Critical Study*.

⁶¹Holinshed 342; Paul Kocher, *Christopher Marlowe: A Study of his Thought, Learning, and Character* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1946) 207.

⁶²Irving Ribner, *The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare* (London: Methuen, 1965) 124.

⁶³James Voss, "Edward II: Marlowe's Historical Tragedy," *English Studies* 63 (1982): 517-30, here 530.

⁶⁴In Sanders' case the refusal to accept deviation may stem from undisguised homophobia, which accounts for his discomfort with Marlowe's "overemphasis" on the personal. For an analysis of homophobia and resistance to *Edward*, see Claude J. Summers, "Sex, Politics, and Self-Realization in *Edward II*," in Friedenreich et al. 221-40, esp. 221-23, 237.

⁶⁵Leech 187.

⁶⁶Sandys 151.

⁶⁷Cunningham 205-15.

⁶⁸Weil 169.

⁶⁹Golding 34.

⁷⁰Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. F. J. Miller (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1939) III. 253.

⁷¹Golding 34.

⁷²In addition to Charles Lamb, the shift towards pity for Edward has been discussed by, among others, Deats in "Myth and Metamorphosis"; Cutts 236-37; and David Bevington and James Schapiro, "'What are kings, when regiment is gone?': The Decay of Ceremony in *Edward II*," in Friedenreich et al. 263-78, here 275-76.

⁷³Holinshed 341-42.