



History or Tragedy?: Reassessing Marlowe's EDWARD II

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Abstract:

Heavy metal contamination of wastewater is a significant environmental issue due to the toxicity, persistence, and bioaccumulation potential of metals such as lead (Pb), cadmium (Cd), chromium (Cr), arsenic (As), mercury (Hg), copper (Cu), nickel (Ni), and zinc (Zn). Conventional treatment methods are often costly and generate secondary pollutants. Biochar derived from bamboo has emerged as a sustainable, low-cost, and environmentally friendly adsorbent for heavy metal remediation. Bamboo biochar possesses a highly porous structure, large specific surface area, abundant functional groups, and excellent adsorption capacity. This review summarizes the production, physicochemical properties, adsorption mechanisms, factors affecting adsorption, modification strategies, and recent applications of bamboo biochar for heavy metal removal from wastewater.

Key words:Bamboo biochar, Heavy metals, Wastewater treatment, Adsorption, Surface modification, Environmental remediation

1. Introduction

The History play became very popular during the reign of Queen Elizabeth. At this time, special impetus towards historical subjects was provided by the sense of nationality that had been steadily growing in England since the reign of Henry VII. This was accompanied by an eager desire to know the story of England's past and to celebrate her heroes, and there followed a spate of prose Chronicles soon after the Queen's accession. The older Chronicle of Fabian was republished. A summary of The Englyshe Chronicles by John Stowe appeared in 1565, and one of the most famous of all Elizabethan prose histories, The Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland by Ralph Holinshed, was published in 1577.

The earliest of these Chronicle play now extend to 'The Famous Victories of Henry The Fifth', which Shakespeare certainly knew before he wrote 'Henry IV (parts I & II)' and 'Henry V.' Of slightly later date are 'Life and Death of Jack Straw' and the double play of 'The Troublesome Reign of King John', 'Peele's Edward I', the second and third parts of 'Henry VI' and perhaps 'The True Tragedy of Richard III'. These Chronicle plays preceded Marlowe's Edward II, which appeared in 1590. All these plays are very loosely constructed, being merely a string of unconnected scenes with scarcely more connection than that they consecutively cover a period of time. There is almost no attempt to select the incidents and shape them into a plot, and relate them to the character.

It was Marlowe, in his Edward II, who first transformed the Chronicle narrative into a regular play. He adapted the play from Holinshed's Chronicles, Fabian's Chronicles and the narrative of Stowe. Instead of the older method of mere panoramic presentation, he deliberately chose scenes and even altered historical relations to make the story fit into a preconceived design. He concentrated on the character of Edward and shaped out of his career the first tragic History Play.

My main focus in this paper is on two important questions in the play –

(a)What are the factors that led to the downfall of Edward II?

(b)Can the play be considered a tragedy in the classical sense?

The early sections of the play present the nature of the weakness of the King and its effect on those around him. His one overwhelming weakness is his excessive affection for his childhood friend Gaveston, which leads him to neglect his wife and the welfare of the state, alienates him from his courtiers and ultimately brings about his own destruction.

The keynote to the fatal flaw in the character of the king is struck in the opening speech of the play, which illustrates Edward's amorous disposition. In this speech, Gaveston gleefully contemplates the invitation of the King. The homosexual relationship that exists between him and the King is suggested in his erotic lines:

"Sweet prince, I come, these, these thy amorous lines

Might have encouraged me to have swum from France

And, like Leander, gasped upon the sand,

So thou wouldst smile and take in thy arms." (Shakespeare I. I – 6 – 9)

The weaknesses of the King are further exposed as Gaveston prepares to pander to Edward's tastes. He hopes to delight the king with pages clad like "Sylvan nymphs" and lovely boys in "Dian's shape" bathing in a spring for "such things as these best please his majesty." (I. i.70)..

Edward, in turn, confers upon Gaveston the highest honours. He makes Gaveston, "Lord High Chamberlain, Chief

Secretary of State and the King, Earl of Cornwall" (and gives him his seal and the power to save or condemn anyone as he pleases.

Edward's love for Gaveston makes him careless of state affairs. While his own "soldiers mutiny for want of pay", he confers on Gaveston the power to draw as much money as he wants from the royal treasury. Again, when he is informed that the king of France has seized Normandy because of his slackness, his only reaction is:

"Tush, Sib, if this be all

Valois and I will soon be friends again." (III. ii. – 66 – 67)

Mortimer unveils the sorry state of affairs in the kingdom. Besides the French victory mentioned, after the Scots go unresisted, the Danes command the narrow seas. The King has exposed himself in a very sorry light on the battlefield. Mortimer remonstrates with Edward:

"When wert thou in the field with banner spread
But once, and then the soldiers marched like players,
With garish robes, not armour and thyself
Bedaubed with gold, rode laughing at the rest."

(II . ii. – 181 – 84)

"His neglect of the country has left the people unprotected,
the Northern borderers seeing the houses burnt
Their wives and children slaine, run up and downe
Cursing the name of [the King] and Gaveston."

(III. iii 178 – 170-180).

The King's utter irresponsibility is seen in his willingness to divide his entire kingdom among the nobles at Court so that he "may have some nook or corner / to frolic with [his] dearest Galveston" (I . IV . 72 - 73). He is totally careless of what happens to his realm as long as he can keep Gaveston his "minion". When the nobles threatened to exile Gaveston by force, Edward assured him:

"Sooner shall the sea o'erwhelm my land
Then bear the ship that shall transport thee hence."

(I. i. 151 - 152)

In his preoccupation with Gaveston, Edward seems to be unaware of the ideals that should inspire a King. He not only neglects the welfare of the state and causes misery to his subjects, but provokes the wrath of the nobles by his foolish behaviour. Mortimer points this out to his uncle, saying:

"The king and he
From out a window laugh at such as we
And clouds our trains, and jest at our attire."

(I. iv. 415 - 18)

All attempts to recall him to a sense of duty fail. Lancaster's counsel to banish Galveston is replied to with a stern threat by Edward. Even Edward's brother Kent (who is the only character not guided by any ulterior motives) is rebuffed. When he urges Edward to banish Galveston:

"My Lord, I see your love for Gaveston,
Will be the ruin of the realme and you...."

(II. ii. 207-208)

Edward replies by banishing him instead.

Edward thus alienates all his novels one by one, and the final straw comes when he pits himself against the authority of the church. He seeks to avenge himself on the Bishop of Coventry for being a party to Gaveston's exile. He insulted the Bishop by ordering his guard to:

"Throw off his golden metre rend his stole,
And in the channel christen him anew."

(I. i. 186 – 87)

Edward orders the Bishop to be confined to the tower, and Gaveston is further elevated to the Bishopric of Coventry. Consequently, the Archbishop of Canterbury gives the nobles his full support to rebel against the king, declaring "God himself is up in arms" (I. ii-40). With this supreme authority against him in an age when the word of the church was law, Edward could scarcely hope to survive in his position.

Another important factor in the downfall of Edward is the loss of the Queen's affection. In his extreme affection for Gaveston, Edward wears down the Queen's fidelity. Critics have suggested that the characterisation of Isabella is inconsistent, for she veers too suddenly from love to infidelity. However, a careful study of the play reveals that the change is not sudden but gradual. In the beginning, the Queen does love Edward, but he rejects her love:

Edward: Fawn not on me, French strumpet, get thee gone.

Queen: On whom but on my husband should I fawn?

Gaveston: On Mortimer, with whom ungente Queen – I

Say no more... Judge you the rest, my Lord.

(I.iv . 145-8)

When she brings news that the barons are prepared for war, she is answered, "Ay, and 'tis likewise thought you favour him" (II. Ii 225). Edward has no scruples in using her to get the exile orders against Gaveston repealed, vowing to love

her if she succeeds. In his parting from the queen, Edward offers her no words of farewell until she begs them; and then speaks viciously:

Queen: No farewell to poor Isabella, thy Queen?

Edward: Yes, Yes – for Mortimer your love's sake.

(I. iv – 13 – 14)

This is the turning point. Whatever Gaveston's accusations, Isabella, until now, had only been guilty of a warm response to Mortimer's tenderness. But now, in her passionate grief at the loss of her husband's affections, she outlines the king's escape plans to his enemies. She schemes with Mortimer and pretends concern for the king. She sends him her ring as a token of her affection and is duly applauded by Mortimer for her acting:

"Finely dissembled. Do so still, sweet Queen."

(V. ii. 157)

It is the queen who suggests the death of the king as long as he survives.

"What safety rests for us, or for my son?"

(v. ii. 42 – 43)

In France, she concludes that nothing can be hoped for from her marriage: "we are too far". She admits that she would welcome Edward's death. "I would be were [dead], so it were not by my means"

(v. ii. 155)

Edward thus alienates his wife, his countrymen and his nobles for the sake of Gaveston. (He himself is conscious only of his rights as a king, not of his duties. He reminds the nobles of the respect they owe him as a king and questions their defiance of his orders:

Beseems it thee to contradict thy king?

(I. i. – 91)

He even questions the authority of the Church;

Why should a king be subject to a priest?

(I. iv. 96)

When the news of Gaveston's death is brought to Edward he completely ignores his duties as a king. He is roused to a fury of revenge and cries out:

"I will have heads, and lives for him, as many

As I have manors, castles, towns and towers."

(III. ii. 132 – 133)

Private revenge plunges the country into a destructive civil war. Isabella sums up the situation in her lament: Misgoverned kings are the cause of all this wreck.

(IV. iv – 9)

But he does not think of his own responsibility towards his state and people. Hence Edward is defeated and captured by the nobles, and it is in his last days that he becomes a tragic figure.

The abdication scene presents him as a pathetic figure compelled to give up his crown. He eloquently expresses his grief as he comes to an awareness of his past power and his present impotence. The crown on his head becomes for him the last external symbol of stature and dignity, and he tries to hold on to it as long as he can. He begs the nobles for a little more time:

"But stay a while, let me be king till night,

That I may gaze upon this glittering Crown"

(V.i. 59-60)

Then, in words reminiscent of Faustus's last speech, he makes a plea to the universe to stay the inexorable passage of time:

"Continue ever thou celestiall sunne,

Let never silent night possess this clime,

Stand still, you watches of the element,

All times and seasons rest you at a stay,

That Edward may be still faire England's King."

(V.i. 64 – 68)

Edward goes through various emotions of sadness, indignation and anger before he finally gives up his crown. To the very end, he remains oblivious of his own responsibility for the misery he has inflicted on his subjects, his queen and himself. Rather, he blames the Queen and Mortimer for his fall. His own fault, if at, if any, is that he has been too lenient. His thoughts are of his "guiltless life" and "innocent hands". This blind conviction of innocence is the ultimate irony in Edward's tragedy.

His last few days evoke horror and pity as he endures intense suffering. The suffering is voiced by Edward himself:

"They give me bread and water, being a king;

So that, for want of sleep and sustenance,

My mind's distempered, and my body's numbed."

(V.v. 61-63)

He is subjected to the most inhuman torture. He is made to stand for ten days in mires and puddles, and the constant beat

of the drum keeps him in wide-eyed wakefulness.

At the end, he is reduced to a pathetic figure, hoping to buy his life with his last jewel. The final gruesome murder by Lightborn is indeed horrible, and, as Charles Lamb said, evokes pity and terror beyond any scene, ancient and modern. The gruesome murder is a fact recorded by Holinshed, who writes that the wail of the murdered man rang.

Through the castle and town of Berkly, so
That divers being awakened therewith (as they
Themselves confessed) prayed heartily to God
To receive his soul, when they understood
By his cry, what the matter meant⁴.

The end of Edward II evokes the emotions of awe, horror and pity that tragedy calls for; nevertheless, Edward II can not be called a tragedy in the classical sense. The medieval idea of tragedy is defined pithily by Chaucer's Monk:

Tragedie is to seyn a certeyn storie,
As olde bokes makes us memorie
Of him that stood in great prosperitee
And is y fallen out of heigh degree
Into miserie, and endeth wrecchedly⁵.

Superficially, Edward II tells such a story. But the prosperity and the high degree of the king are, in a sense, illusory, for chaotic conditions prevail in the country, his nobles defy him, and his high rank does not provide him security. His fall is merely a worsening of the situation in which he found himself at the beginning. Again, Edward II cannot be called a tragic hero with respect. He has been a weak king throughout, swayed by his passions and careless of his duties. He does not possess the qualities required for kingship and, therefore, human potential. In the end, we pity the suffering man and condemn the torture he is subjected to, but not his dethronement. To the last, he remains a pathetic figure. Marlowe's purpose was not to make a classical tragedy of the story. His purpose was to expose the weakness of the king and the evil consequences of what, and in this, he succeeded remarkably well. It is to his credit that from a prosaic historical account, he created a unified dramatic work, and thus saved the way for Shakespeare and other later dramatists.

Could be more tightly organised. At one or two points, the transitions are attempted (Q. P 6). The discussion of Q. II as a classical tragedy is too brief. "Classical" in what sense? The Aristotelian sense? Since it is also a history play, can one expect it to conform strictly to the pattern of a "Classical" tragedy? You could perhaps have exposed yourself to some of these questions.

NOTES

1. All references to the text are taken from the edition cited below:
2. Roma Gill, Christopher Marlowe: Edward II (London: Oxford University Press, 1967). Act, scene, and line numbers follow the quoted passage in the text.
3. Michel Poirier, Christopher Marlowe (London: Chatto and Windus, 1968), P. 184.
4. Roma Gill, Christopher Marlowe: Edward II, P. 31.
5. Ibid, P. 193.
6. J. P. Steane, Marlowe: A Critical Study (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965) P. 205.

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