E2
by Bob Bartlett
directed by Joseph W. Ritsch
WORLD PREMIERE
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From the Dramaturg

Three Edward IIs

**Marlowe’s Edward II:** That we know anything still about the 14th-century British monarch Edward II, is due to the Elizabethan playwright Christopher Marlowe. Marlowe, both atheist and homosexual in an era that decried and prosecuted both, was no doubt drawn to his contemporary Raphael Holinshed’s account of a king who had several male favorites but who was ultimately murdered by being sodomized with a flaming poker, his “lamentable death,” a symbolic judgment on his lifestyle. Marlowe’s play exults in the love between Gaveston and Edward II in gorgeous muscular poetry with the mighty lines of iambic pentameter which he created.

**Historical Edward II:** Edward of Carnavorn (1284-1327) only became king because three sons had died before their father and thus he became the heir. His close relationship, possible love affair, with Gaveston and later Despenser was well known, although he also had five children with his powerful wife Isabella. The power and lands he bestowed on Gaveston caused anger among the lords and a weakened stance with Scotland. These disputes ultimately led to him being deposed and either neglected or murdered (though most probably not with a poker) making his son, the powerful Edward III, king as a teenager. Edward III was the parent of the warring lines of the Lancasters and Yorks and ultimately the Tudors.

**Bartlett’s Edward II:** Playwright Bob Bartlett moves the relationships and events of Marlowe’s play to the contemporary era, highlighting rising antagonism towards LGBTQ+ groups around the world. Bartlett examines the conflicting pulls of familial and romantic love, personal desire and social responsibility. He pares down the sprawling world of Marlowe’s huge court to five characters who meet at the intersection of these claims.

—Lisa A. Wilde, Dramaturg
About the Author

BIOGRAPHY

Bob Bartlett
Bob Bartlett’s plays include Union, a new play about Walt Whitman’s years living and loving in Washington, DC, during the Civil War; E2 (Rep Stage); The Orbit of Mercury (2017 O’Neill Finalist); Swimming with Whales (1st Stage); happiness (and other reasons to die) (The Welders); The Accident Bear (The Avenue Laundromat); Falwell (Active Cultures); Kuchu Uganda (DC Queer Theatre Festival); The Regular; and Kansas. His play Bareback Ink, a queer reimagining of the Ganymede myth, recently had runs at The Capital and Edinburgh Fringe Festivals and NYC’s Hard Sparks, directed by Obie-winner David Drake. Bartlett is the 2018 Playwright-in-Residence at New Voices for the Theater; a two-time recipient of the Individual Artists Award in Playwriting from the Maryland State Arts Council; an affiliated artist with the National New Play Network; Chair of KCACTF’s (Region 2) National Playwriting Program; a founding member of The Welders, a Washington, DC-based, producing playwrights collective; and a member of The Dramatists Guild of America and the theatre faculty at Bowie State University, where he teaches playwriting and screenwriting. A life-long Maryland resident, he lives in Central Maryland and earned his MFA in playwriting at Catholic University of America. (bob-bartlett.com)
RESIDENT DRAMATURG LISA WILDE INTERVIEW WITH BOB BARTLETT:

LW: What drew you to the story of EDWARD II?

BB: All of us—writers, audiences—hope to find ourselves in story. During my high school and college years, I searched for “me” in popular narrative, but I wasn’t there. So, as a young aspiring writer, whenever a play or film featuring gay characters played in DC, I would head out to the theater or cinema, often leaving the experience feeling better about myself and less alone.

I don’t recall my first exposure to EDWARD II, but I’d first read Marlowe’s DR. FAUSTUS in college. I vividly remember being blown away seeing Derek Jarman’s film of EDWARD II in a movie theatre—almost thirty years ago—when I was just beginning to think about writing plays. Perhaps around the same time, a new stage adaptation of EDWARD II, written by a local gay playwright, was being produced in DC (that I didn’t see). I saved a clipping of one of the reviews of the play for many years, which included a production photograph of Edward and Gaveston, partially dressed in white, in bed together, a bed covered in white sheets and pillows. That image has never really left me. I can see it even now. I’ve casually searched but haven’t found the playwright’s name. I’d love to read his play. For whatever reasons, I have never seen Marlowe’s EDWARD II on stage, although I’ve seen, several times, the filmed stage production featuring a young Ian McKellen as Edward.

LW: What does your E2 share with Marlowe’s play and how does it differ?

BB: I’d been thinking of writing an adaptation of Marlowe’s play for years, so I knew how I wanted to shape my play. I wasn’t interested in a large portion of Marlowe’s play. For me, Edward’s rise and fall is inseparable from his love of Gaveston, so when Gaveston dies in Marlowe’s play (sorry for the spoiler!), Marlowe loses some of me. My adaptation would concern the relationship between Edward and Gaveston—and end as that relationship is resolved. Of course, Marlowe’s play, post-Gaveston, condenses for the stage years of war as Edward fights for the Crown and England’s survival. Instead of once again bringing all of those battles to the stage, I was more interested in helping contemporary audiences access Edward’s short reign, as well as providing them a glimpse behind the royal curtain and the crushing price that royalty, fame, and the twenty-four hour news cycle exact on love. I’m a big fan of THE CROWN, which also shares the lives and politics of the royals that we rarely know. Marlowe’s play features forty-some characters, which just isn’t practical in the contemporary American theatre, so by dispensing with the second half of the source play, I’d be able to concern myself with just five characters—Edward, Gaveston, Isabella, Mortimer, and the young prince Edward.

Our plays, however, share quite a bit. Marlowe’s play is my primary source, and I even occasionally borrow some of his language. As I was researching E2, I spent hours reading about the real Edward and Isabella, whose lives are even more compelling than what Marlowe chose to bring to the Elizabethan stage. Some of what I learned about them is in E2.

LW: What inspired you to adapt Christopher Marlowe’s Edward II for a contemporary time?

BB: As a gay man living in America, I don’t feel as safe walking the streets as I did even five years ago, and businesses in some parts of the country can “legally” refuse to serve me, so I’m committed to bringing LGBTQ+ stories to the stage. Edward’s historical and fictional rise and fall are important reminders of the nature of power—and what types of people get to have it. Who could have imagined a decade ago that we would have an openly gay and married presidential candidate who appears as if he could have a future in national politics? England has had gay kings in the past, albeit closeted, but are we ready today for an openly gay king? For a gay president?

LW: Where do you get inspiration for your plays?

I’m a writer who doesn’t lack ideas for the next play. I have a list of plays I’d like to write, featuring subjects I’m curious about. This is a constant source of inspiration for me.
about exploring. I recently finished historical fictions for the stage about Walt Whitman’s years living and loving in DC during the Civil War and another about the Bonus Army squatting along the shore of the Anacostia River during the depression. Those had been on my list for a decade or longer. A life-long fan of Whitman and “Leaves of Grass,” I’m bothered that more of us don’t realize that America’s “greatest” poet lived in Washington for a decade, or that he operated a one-man U.S.O. during the Civil War and cruised Pennsylvania Avenue on Sunday evenings.

LW: What is your process like?

My process starts with a situation or a kernel of an idea—and research. I’m a note card writer, so I’ll carry around a stack of 4”x6” blank, white notecards wrapped in a rubber band for different plays I’m working through, even those I’m not writing at the moment. These cards may include characters and traits or structures and movements or moments from which I might build a play. In that way, I’m an outline writer, I suppose. When I’m ready to write the first lines of dialogue, I’ll hang large post-it notes on the walls around my house that might include character names and/or scene breakdowns. And then I decide the function of a scene, how it begins and ends, and what changes in the scene. My process almost always starts with place, which is important to me, and I often travel to the location where I’ve set a play.

LW: You are so prolific and are often working on multiple plays—how does that work for you?

Well, I was on sabbatical for the spring semester of 2019, so I set lofty goals for the year. I convinced myself that this may be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. I’d have almost eight months to be a full-time writer. During my sabbatical, I wrote drafts of three new full lengths, a one-act, several short plays, and reworked a good bit of E2. Like all writers, I need distance from a story now and again, so during my time as a full-time writer, I was able to put aside one play, like E2, for a month or six weeks, while I moved on to another; when I’d come back to E2, I could see it clearer. One of my mentors, D.W. Gregory, once told me that she’s generally researching one play while writing another and editing yet another. That seemed like a good way to approach the craft. Writing, it seems to me, is easier when one is always writing. I rarely need to force myself to write. There are times when I tell myself that I’m going to take a break for a few months, but invariably I come back to writing stories, or thinking about them. It’s what I do. It’s how I deal with life and the world. I’m not much of a talker or conversationalist. I do my talking on paper.

LW: What do you enjoy about playwriting?

I was first exposed to theatre in high school, where I played saxophone in the pit band for musicals. When I headed off to college, I tried my hand at acting and then directing for a number of years until I started writing, which is probably what I should have been doing from the beginning of my theatrical adventures. The truth is: I am addicted to the collaborative nature of the art. I adore actors, designers, directors. They’re my favorite people. There’s no greater rush for me than sitting in the darkened back rows of a theatre and watching talented artists build a world from what I’ve written. I often tell my students that I’d write plays even if they were never produced, and I certainly have a few that may never see a stage. I couldn’t write narrative fiction. It’s just not in me.

LW: How has being with the cast and director shaped the play’s process from its first draft?

Crazy exciting. I’ve often written roles for specific actors or with actors in mind. I pitched E2 to Joseph Ritsch, Artistic Director here at Rep Stage, over coffee in DC and soon after we started chatting about casting. As the development process moved forward and casting seemed more settled, we were fortunate to have two workshops with the cast and two public readings, one just recently at the Kennedy Center. I’ve had the chance to get to know the cast and to write with
them in mind. Actually, early in the process, I printed their headshots and had them at my desk as I was writing. That’s not too creepy, is it? The cast is brilliant. Throughout the play’s development, they’ve had the opportunity to respond to the writing and the shaping of their characters, as well as their character’s journeys, which has impacted the play in beautiful and surprising ways. Having a theatrical partner like Joseph has been so helpful. We share artistic tastes, and he sees Edward’s journey as I do, as romantic tragedy, and not too unlike Romeo and Juliet or Brokeback Mountain.

LW: What are you working on next?
A really smart horror screenplay, a stage adaptation of a short story by HG Wells, and an adaptation of an obscure 1960s gay book.

Sources and Themes

MARLOWE’S EDWARD II

What we know about Edward II is largely based on Christopher Marlowe’s 16th century play which in turn is based on Holinshed’s Chronicles. He had a number of male favorites who may have been his lovers and that according to first Holinshed and then Marlowe, writing hundreds of years after the events, that he was killed by a hot poker, which is likely fictional conjecture. The historical Edward II was an ineffectual ruler who only became king because his three older brothers died in their youth. He was both the son and father of extremely powerful kings, Edward I (Longshanks) and Edward III, the patriarch of the York and Lancaster lines, and ultimately the Tudors, including Henry VIII and Elizabeth I.

Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593) was a contemporary of William Shakespeare’s and considered one of the greatest English playwrights. He invented the “mighty line,” the ten-syllable heartbeat-like poetic line (iambic pentameter) that Shakespeare perfected. He was a scholarship student at Cambridge University, who was most likely recruited as a spy for Elizabeth I’s regime. He was fairly openly gay and an atheist at a time when both were prohibited. His characters, including Tamburlaine and Doctor Faustus, were larger than life individuals who tried to break the bounds of human existence and societal strictures. Undoubtedly, he was drawn to the story of Edward II because of its homosexual themes, though it would have been too dangerous to have him triumph. Like Edward II, Marlowe’s death at a young age was shrouded in mystery. He was stabbed in the eye, ostensibly during a bar brawl, but some believe it was a government assassination linked to his spying activities, and others believe he staged his death and escaped to the European continent.

Text of Marlowe’s Edward II:

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HOLINSHED

Raphael Holinshed (1525-1580) started as a translator for Reginald Wolfe, who was writing a universal history, and expanded the project after Wolfe’s death. His ambitious project of the Chronicles was the source material for Edward II as well as for many of Shakespeare’s history plays and King Lear and Macbeth. The Chronicles was compiled largely uncritically from many sources of varying degrees of trustworthiness. The texts of the first and second (1587) editions were expurgated by order of the Privy Council, and the excisions from the second edition were published separately in 1723. An edition of the complete, unexpurgated text of 1587, edited by Henry Ellis and titled Holinshed’s Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland, was published in six volumes (1807–08, reissued 1976). As he was a contemporary of Shakespeare, his versions of events from the 1300 and 1400s must be considered creative descriptions rather than accurately contemporary accounts. Unfortunately, these are the versions of English history that have been accepted as fact and passed down.

The following passages come from Raphael Holinshed’s Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland, volume 2 (New York: AMS Press, 1965); some spelling is modernized to enhance readability:

Page 539: “In the three and thirtieth yeare of his reigne, king Edward put his sonne prince Edward in prison, because that he had riotously broken the park of Walter Langton bishop of Chester; and because the prince had done this deed by the procurement of a lewd and wanton person, one Peers Gaveston an esquire of Gascoine, the king banished him [from] the realm, lest the prince, who delighted much in his company, might by his evil and wanton counsel fall to evil and naughty rule.”

Page 546-47: “Within three days after [the funeral of Edward I], when the lord treasurer Walter de Langton bishop of Coventry and Lichfield (through whose complaint Piers de Gaveston had been banished the land) was going towards Westminster, to make preparation for the same burial, he was upon commandment from the new king arrested, committed to prison, and after delivered to the hands of the said Piers, being then returned again into the realm, who sent him from castle to castle as a prisoner. His lands and tenements were seized to the king’s use, but his moveables were given to the foresaid Piers.”

Page 547: Regarding the “diverse wanton and light parts” that Gaveston promotes: “For having revoked again into England his old mate the said Piers de Gaveston, he received him into most high favor, creating him earl of Cornwall, and lord of Man, his principal secretary, and lord chamberlain of the realm, through whose company and society he was suddenly so corrupted, that he burst out into most heinous vices; for then using the said Piers as a procurer of his disordered doings, he began to have his nobles in no regard, to set nothing by their instructions, and to take small heed unto the good government of the commonwealth, so that within a while, he gave himself to wantonness, passing his time in voluptuous pleasure, and riotous excess: and to help them forward in that kind of life, the foresaid Piers, who (as it may be thought, he had sworn to make the king to forget himself, and the state, to which he was called) furnished his court with companies of jesters, ruffians, flattering parasites, musicians, and other vile and naughty ribalds,
that the king might spend both days and nights in jesting, playing, blanketing, and in such other filthy and dishonorable exercises: and moreover, desirous to advance those that were like to himself, he procured for them honorable offices, all which notable preferments and dignities, since they were ill bestowed, were rather to be accounted dishonorable than otherwise, both to the giver and the receiver...."

Page 587: “Whereupon when they saw that such practices would not serve their turn, they came suddenly one night into the chamber where he lay in bed fast asleep, and with heavy featherbeds or a table (as some write) being cast upon him, they kept him down and withal put into his fundament an horn, and through the same they thrust up into his body an hot spit, or (as others have) through the pipe of a trumpet, a plumber’s instrument of iron made very hot, the which passing up into his entrails, and being rolled to and fro, burnt the same, but so as no appearance of any would or hurt outwardly might be once perceived. His cry did move many within the castle and town of Berkeley to compassion, plainly hearing him utter a wailful noise, as the tormentors were about to murder him, 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 meant.”

BRITISH LGBTQ+ HISTORY

Christopher Marlowe’s Edward II was officially registered as a play post-mortem in 1593 and didn’t see its first publication until 1612. Many revivals and adaptations of the play followed after its first edition was uncovered in 1876, which perhaps provided some inspiration for the LGBTQ+ movement that would swell in the UK during the mid-20th century.

By 1970, British LGBTQ+ activists have formed many organizations, such as Campaign for Homosexual Equality and the Homosexual Law Reform Committee, to combat discrimination and decriminalization of gays and lesbians throughout the country. BBC Television aired Prospect Theatre Company’s production of Edward II, with Sir Ian McKellen starring as the titular character and broadcasting the country’s first gay kiss on television. A few years later, Britain would see its first Gay Pride Rally.
Below is a timeline of notable events in UK LGBTQ+ history.

Critics of the time accredited the relationship with his favorite and lover Piers Gaveston as the reason for Edward's downfall.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1533</td>
<td>King Henry VIII passes the Buggery Act of 1533, making homosexual acts between males punishable by death.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1592</td>
<td>Christopher Marlowe's Edward II is first performed by the Earl of Pembroke's Men. Many historians argue that it is the first gay English play.</td>
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<td>1593</td>
<td>Christopher Marlowe was stabbed and killed by Ingram Frizer. His legacy influenced the works of Shakespeare and other contemporaries.</td>
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<td>1724</td>
<td>Margaret Clap, also known as Mother Clap, runs a coffee house near London from 1724 to 1726, serving as a &quot;molly house&quot; or a meeting place for the gay community.</td>
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<td>1828</td>
<td>Offences against the Person Act 1828 repeals and replaces the Buggery Act of 1533, although sodomy was still punishable by death.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td>The death penalty for buggery was abolished. Since 1806, over 8,000 men were prosecuted for acts of sodomy.</td>
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<td>1895</td>
<td>Oscar Wilde, Irish playwright and poet, was imprisoned and sentenced to two years of hard labor for acts of “gross indecency” in a relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas.</td>
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<td>1897</td>
<td>George Cecil Ives establishes England's first gay rights group in England called the Order of Chaeronea.</td>
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<td>1924</td>
<td>Bertolt Brecht and Lion Feuchtwanger worked on an adaptation of Edward II, focusing on the homosexual life of Edward II and Gaveston.</td>
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<td>1958</td>
<td>The Homosexual Law Reform Society was established and aimed to make homosexuality decriminalized in the UK.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>Prospect Theatre Company’s production of Edward II starring Ian McKellen aired on BBC and broadcasted the country's first gay kiss on television.</td>
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<td>1972</td>
<td>The First British Gay Pride Rally was held in London with over 1,000 people in attendance.</td>
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<td>1991</td>
<td>Derek Jarman, director and Gay Activist adapts Edward II into a film, setting it in a contemporary time, pointing to the Stonewall uprising in 1969 and gay rights movements of the mid-20th century.</td>
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References
ROYAL FRENCH FAMILY

Philip III
1270-85

Philip IV
1285-1314

Louis X
1314-16

Philip V
1316-22

Charles IV
1322-28

Isabella +
Edward II
1307-27

Philippa + Edward III
of Hainault
1327-77

Edward
The Black Prince
1377-99

Lionel
Duke of Clarence

John of Gaunt
Duke of Lancaster

Edmund
Duke of York

Thomas
Duke of Gloucester

Charles V
1364-80

Charles VI
1380-1422

Henry IV
1399-1413

Henry V
1413-22

Henry VI
1422-61

Isabella +
Richard II

Charles VII
1422-61

Louis XI
1461-83

Audience Guide
ROYAL BRITISH FAMILY

PLANTAGENET FAMILY TREE

HENRY III
(1207-72)

Eleanor
of Provence
(1223-91)

(1) Eleanor
of Castile
(1241-90)

EDWARD I
(1239-1307)

Margaret
of France
(c. 1279-1318)

Beatrice
(1242-75)

Blanche
of Artois
(d. 1302)

Thomas of Brotherton
Earl of Norfolk
(1300-38)

Edward
Earl of Kent
(1307-30)

Margaret
Wake
(d. 1349)

Maud
Chaworth

(2) Margaret
(1240-75)

Isabella
of France
(1296-1358)

Philippe
of Hainault
(1311-69)

JOAN
of Acre
(1272-1307)

John
Earl of Cornwall
(1284-1327)

Eleanor
(1318-55)

Isabel
de Beaumont
(d. 1364)

Edward
The Black Prince
(1330-76)

Joan
(d. 1348)

Lionel
Duke of Clarence
(1338-68)

(1) Isabel
of Castile
(d. 1394)

(2) Joan
Duke of York
(1341-1402)

(3) Catherine
Swynford
(1350-1403)

JOHN
of Gaunt
Duke of Lancaster
(1340-99)

(1) Blanche
of Lancaster
(1341-69)

(2) Constanza
of Castile
(d. 1394)

Mary
de Bohun
(d. 1394)

Henry
Earl of Bolingbroke
(1366-1413)

(3) Katherine
Swynford
(1350-1403)

(1) Richard
II
(1367-1400)

(2) Isabel
of France
(1389-1409)

(1) Anne
of Bohemia
(1366-94)

[STUART]

[LANCASTER]

[YORK]
MAJOR CHARACTERS

Edward II, also Edward of Caernarvon (born April 25, 1284, Caernarvon, Caernarvonshire, Wales—died September 1327, Berkeley, Gloucestershire, England) king of England from 1307 to 1327. Although he was a man of limited capability, he waged a long, hopeless campaign to assert his authority over powerful barons. The fourth son of King Edward I, he ascended the throne upon his father's death (July 7, 1307) and immediately gave the highest offices to Edward I’s most prominent opponents. He earned the hatred of the barons by granting the earldom of Cornwall to his favorite (and possible lover), Piers Gaveston. In 1311 a 21-member baronial committee drafted a document—known as the Ordinances—demanding the banishment of Gaveston and the restriction of the King's powers over finances and appointments. Edward pretended to give in to these demands; he sent Gaveston out of the country but soon allowed him to return. In retaliation the barons seized Gaveston and executed him (June 1312).

Edward had to wait 11 years to annul the Ordinances and avenge Gaveston. Meanwhile, the Scottish king Robert the Bruce was threatening to throw off English overlordship. Edward led an army into Scotland in 1314 but was decisively defeated by Bruce at Bannockburn on June 24. With one stroke, Scotland’s independence was virtually secured. At this point Edward found two new favorites—Hugh le Despenser and his son and namesake. His reliance on the Despensers, however, soon aroused the resentment of his queen, Isabella. While on a diplomatic mission to Paris in 1325, she became the mistress of Roger Mortimer, an exiled baronial opponent of Edward. In September 1326 the couple invaded England, executed the Despensers, and deposed Edward in favor of his son, who was crowned (January 1327) King Edward III. Edward II was imprisoned and, according to the traditional account, died in September 1327, probably by violence. In the first decade of the 21st century, however, some historians suggested that Edward’s death was staged and that he may have survived until 1330.

Piers Gaveston, earl of Cornwall (c. 1284–1312) favorite of the English king Edward II. He was reputed to be handsome and a gifted swordsman. The king’s inordinate love for him made him arrogant and led to his murder by jealous barons. The son of a Gascon knight, he was brought up at the court of Edward I as foster brother and playmate for his son Edward, the future king. Strong, talented, and ambitious, Gaveston gained great influence over young Edward, and early in 1307 he was banished from England by the king; but he returned after the death of Edward I a few months later (July 1307) and at once became the chief adviser of Edward II. Made Earl of Cornwall, he received both lands and money from the king and added to his wealth and position by marrying Edward’s niece, Margaret, daughter of Gilbert de Clare, Earl of Gloucester (d. 1295). He took a very prominent part at Edward’s coronation in 1308. These proceedings aroused the anger and jealousy of the barons. They demanded his banishment; and the king sent Gaveston to Ireland as lieutenant, where he remained for about a year.

In 1311, the king was forced to agree to the election of the “Ordainers,” and the Ordinances that they drew up provided,
among other things, for Gaveston’s perpetual banishment. Gaveston then retired to Flanders but returned secretly to England at the end of 1311. Soon he was publicly restored by Edward, and the barons had taken up arms. Deserted by the king, Gaveston surrendered to Aymer de Valence, Earl of Pembroke, at Scarborough in May 1312 and was taken to Deddington in Oxfordshire, where he was seized by Guy de Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick. He was beheaded on Blacklow Hill near Warwick. His body was buried with great ceremony in 1315 at King’s Langley, in Hertfordshire, on

Isabella of France (1295–1358), sometimes described as the She-Wolf of France, was Queen of England as the wife of Edward II, and regent of England from 1327 until 1330. She was the youngest surviving child and only surviving daughter of Philip IV of France and Joan I of Navarre. Isabella was notable in her lifetime for her diplomatic skills, intelligence, and beauty. She became a “femme fatale” figure in plays and literature over the years, usually portrayed as a beautiful but cruel and manipulative figure.

Isabella arrived in England at the age of 12 during a period of growing conflict between the king and the barons. After the death of Gaveston at the hands of the barons in 1312, however, Edward later turned to a new favourite, Hugh Despenser the Younger, and attempted to take revenge on the barons, resulting in the Despenser War and a period of internal repression across England. Isabella could not tolerate Hugh Despenser and by 1325 her marriage to Edward was at a breaking point.

Travelling to France on a diplomatic mission, Isabella may have begun an affair with Roger Mortimer, and the two may possibly have agreed at this point to depose Edward and oust the Despenser family. The Queen returned to England with a small mercenary army in 1326, moving rapidly across England. The King’s forces deserted him. Isabella deposed Edward, becoming regent on behalf of her son, Edward III. Some believe that Isabella then arranged the murder of Edward II. Isabella and Mortimer’s regime began to crumble, partly because of her lavish spending, but also because the Queen successfully but unpopularly resolved long-running problems such as the wars with Scotland.

In 1330, Isabella’s son Edward III deposed Mortimer in turn, taking back his authority and executing Mortimer. The Queen was not punished, however, and lived for many years in considerable style until her death in 1358.

“No man ever excited her resentment who did not perish under its effect; the king himself forming no exception to

Philip of France and his family with daughter Isabella third from the left
Edward III (1312–1377). Edward was king of England for 50 years. His reign saw the beginning of the Hundred Years War against France. Edward became king in 1327 after his father was deposed by his mother and her lover, Roger Mortimer. A year later, Edward married Philippa of Hainault—they were to have 13 children. Isabella and Roger ruled in Edward’s name until 1330, when he executed Mortimer and banished his mother. Edward’s primary focus became war with France. Ongoing territorial disputes were intensified in 1340 when Edward assumed the title of king of France, starting a war that would last intermittently for over a century. In July 1346, Edward landed in Normandy, accompanied by his son Edward, the Black Prince. His decisive victory at Crécy in August scattered the French army. The Treaty of Bretigny in 1360 marked the end of the first phase of the Hundred Years War and the high point of English influence in France. Edward renounced his claim to the French crown in return for the whole of Aquitaine. In 1369, the French declared war again. Edward, by now an elderly man, left the fighting to his sons. They enjoyed little success and the English lost much of the territory they had gained in 1360. The Black Prince, the heir to the throne and considered one of the greatest knights in the war, died ahead of his father in 1376. Edward died on 21 June 1377, leaving his young grandson Richard as king. Richard was deposed by his cousin who became Henry IV and this upending of tradition sparked the Wars of the Roses.

Roger Mortimer, 1st earl of March, (1287–1330) lover of the English king Edward II’s queen, Isabella of France, with whom he contrived Edward’s deposition and murder (1327). For three years thereafter he was virtual king of England during the minority of Edward III. The descendant of Norman knights who had accompanied William the Conqueror, he inherited wealthy family estates and fortunes, principally in Wales and Ireland, and in 1304 became 8th Baron of Wigmore on the death of his father, the 7th baron. In 1317 he was associated with the Earl of Pembroke’s “middle party” in English politics; but distrust of the Despensers drove him, in common with other marcher lords, into opposition and violent conflict with the Despensers in South Wales in 1321. Imprisoned in the Tower of London, Roger escaped in 1323 and fled to France, where in 1325 he was joined by Queen Isabella, who became his mistress. The exiles invaded England in September 1326; the fall of the Despensers was followed by the deposition of Edward II and his subsequent murder (1327), in which Mortimer was deeply implicated. As the queen’s paramour, Mortimer virtually ruled England. His insatiable avarice, his arrogance, and his unpopular policy toward Scotland aroused against Mortimer a general revulsion among his fellow barons, and in October 1330 the young king Edward III, at the instigation of Henry of Lancaster, had him seized at Nottingham and conveyed to the Tower. Condemned for crimes declared to be notorious by his peers in Parliament, he was hanged at Tyburn as a traitor, and his estates were forfeited to the crown.

Earls According to Debrett’s, “Earl is the third rank of the Peerage, standing above the ranks of viscount and baron, but below duke and marquess.” The title has been in existence for a long time. In fact, it’s the oldest title. Under Norman kings,
The title became hereditary and was passed down through the males of the family. According to Merriam-Webster, it’s an ancient title that comes from the words “warrior” and “nobleman”.

Duke is the highest possible out of the five different peerage ranks. The word comes from the Latin dux, which means leader. It became a peerage title way back in 1337—and until 1448, it was almost exclusively given to members of the Royal Family. A marquess is the second in command, right underneath duke, but above earl, viscount and baron.

A constitutional monarchy is a form of government in which a non-elected monarch functions as the head of state within the limits of a constitution. Political power in a constitutional monarchy is shared between the monarch and an organized government such as the British Parliament. In the Kingdom of England, the Glorious Revolution of 1688 led to a constitutional monarchy restricted by laws such as the Bill of Rights 1689 and the Act of Settlement 1701, although limits on the power of the monarch (“a limited monarchy”) are much older than that. In 1688, Charles I was executed and Cromwell ruled during the interregnum until Charles II returned from exile to rule with diminished powers. Currently, the monarch approves the appointment of prime ministers and is consulted by the Prime Minister on major national issues.

MYTHOLOGICAL REFERENCES

Ganymede was a beautiful human youth, abducted or raped by Zeus, king of Greek gods and brought to Olympus where he was Zeus’ cup bearer.

Alexander and Hephaestion, Patroclus and Achilles, Hercules and Hylas—al examples of historical and mythological same sex loving friendships or even romantic connections.

Achilles was the great hero of the Greek army during the Trojan War. He shared a tent with Patroclus and was inconsolable when Patroclus was killed.
Fourth-century BCE leader Alexander the Great was known by contemporaries to prefer male lovers. Alexander and Hephaestion were possible lovers, and their tutor, Aristotle, described their relationship as “one soul abiding two bodies.” After Hephaestion’s death, Alexander mourned him greatly and did not eat for days. Alexander held an elaborate funeral for Hephaestion at Babylon, and sent a note to the shrine of Ammon, which had previously acknowledged Alexander as a god, asking them to grant Hephaestion divine honors. Alexander died soon after.

Hylas was Greek hero Heracles’ (Hercules) weapons carrier and lover. He was abducted by water nymphs and Heracles refused to return to the Argo with the Argonauts as he continued to search for him.

Circe in Greek legend was a sorceress, the daughter of Helios, the sun god, and of the ocean nymph Perse. She was able by means of drugs and incantations to change humans into wolves, lions, and swine. The Greek hero Odysseus visited her island, Aeaea, with his companions, whom she changed into swine.
From the Director

“…‘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?” 
— Edward II by Christopher Marlowe

When Bob Bartlett and I started to discuss the possibilities of his adaptation of Marlowe’s historic play, I was dismayed with how the themes resonated in these modern times. We find ourselves in a country, a world, that historically threatens the rights of LGBTQ+ people as well as a threat to progressive kindness and inclusion. How was it that a Renaissance play could feel so modern? How would we approach the material for a modern audience?

In 13 countries you can still be put to death for being gay. The “Gay Purge” in Chechnya continues. In this country trans people, especially trans women of color, are being murdered at an alarming rate. Several studies have shown an increase in hate crimes over the past two years. By the time you read this, the Supreme Court will have voted on whether gay and transgender people can be legally fired from their job for their identity. Marriage equality, although currently protected by federal law, is still threatened consistently.

In the theatre, we often throw around the term cautionary tale, but what happens when the “what if” of a cautionary tale is literally happening around us? How does this affect the way we live our lives, both publically and privately? Was Edward’s downfall his public display of affection for Gaveston, as well as raising him to the level of consort? Would things have turned out differently if Edward had kept Gaveston in the shadows and surrendered to societal pressures of England in the 1300s?

I am a gay man living in 2019. I am legally married to a loving, kind and generous husband. We own a home together in Baltimore City. We have two rambunctious cats we adore. We are surrounded by a community of friends and family that embrace us for who we are. We both have rewarding careers in the theatre industry. We have a lot to be grateful for. And yet, I still worry about him and I walking down the street hand in hand. The safety of my transgender friends and colleagues is consistently on my mind. I think about how many people want to challenge my marriage and the marriages of my friends who are in the LGBTQ+ community. As Gaveston says to Edward, I too find myself asking, “why do they hate us?”

As you see, there are many things that lay heavy on my mind. It can be overwhelming. But I always circle back to community and empathy and the power that theatre can have to create both. It helps me to be less overwhelmed, it helps me feel more safe and it allows me to be seen. And isn’t being seen one of our deepest human longings? What a gift the arts can be, especially when we are living in the midst of our own cautionary tale.

—Joseph W. Ritsch
The Production

Design

SET DESIGN, By Nathaniel Sinnott

- SCENIC DESIGNER: NATE SINNOTT
- Director: Joseph Ritsch
- T.D.: Tim Nielsen
- LIGHTING: Conor Mulligan
- SCALE: 3/8"=1'-0"
- COSTUMES: Benjamin Wiegel
- SOUND: Sarah O’Halloran

DRAWING: Ground Plan

REP STAGE: E2 of 7 9/20/2019

- Video wall is 16X10
- Discuss bed movement and transitions
- Catwalk (above)
- Actor crossover
- Discuss practical lighting
- Masking has been revised although house masking is not pictured, it should be completed as discussed

N.B.
- Channel rotation seating
- Lowered are back games
- Lighting and back games
- Lowered cloths to work
- Video wall is 16 X 10
- Fishtank box movement and formation
COSTUME DESIGN, By Benjamin Weigel

Edward II
Look One
Ea

Gaveston
Look One
Ea

Isabella
Look Two
Ea

Mortimer
Ea

Edward III
Look One
Ea
E2

The Production

Cast

Zachary L. Powell* (EDWARD II)
Alejandro Ruiz* (GAVESTON)

Dane Figueroa Edidi* (ISABELLA)
Robbie Gay* (MORTIMER)
Zach Rakotomaniraka* (EDWARD III)

* Member of Actors’ Equity Association, the professional union of Actors and Stage Managers in the USA.
* Appears courtesy of Actors’ Equity Association.
Creative Team

**Director:** Joseph W. Ritsch

**Assistant Director:** Jade Brooks-Bartlett

**Scenic Designer:** Nathaniel Sinnott

**Costume Designer:** Benjamin Weigel

**Lighting Designer:** Conor Mulligan

**Sound Designer:** Sarah O’Halloran

**Multimedia Designer:** Sarah Tundermann

**Resident Intimacy and Fight Director:** Jenny Male

**Stage Manager:** Jack Riley

**Assistant Stage Manager:** Aly Tu

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*Member of Actors’ Equity Association, the professional union of Actors and Stage Managers in the USA.

**Equity Membership Candidate.

† Member of United Scenic Artists, Local USA 829, I.A.T.S.E.

‡ The Director is a member of the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society, a national theatrical labor union.
Questions for Discussion

1. What progress has been made in gay rights in this century? Where? Do some research on laws about homosexuality in Chechnya and Uganda and discuss the problems that gay and transgender people face.

2. What are the themes of the play that deal with gender? Discuss what relevance they have for today's audiences.

3. Choose one of the political issues of the play and compare it to current events in 2019.

4. Discuss how the design elements spoke to both the time period of Marlowe's original play as well as the modern world.

Theater Etiquette

Attending the theater will be a positive experience for everyone if you observe a few simple courtesies:

- Turn off and put away all electronic devices prior to entering the theater.
- Taking photographs and video in the theater is prohibited.
- Do not place your feet on the seat in front of you.
- The actors onstage can see and hear the audience just as well as the audience can see and hear them. Please refrain from talking or moving around during the performance as it can be distracting to the actors, as well as to other audience members.
- Feel free to respond to the action of the play through appropriate laughter and applause. The actors enjoy this type of communication from the audience!
- Have fun! Attending theater should be an enjoyable experience.