PLAYWRIGHT AND MAN OF GOD:
RELIGION AND CONVENTION IN THE COMIC PLAYS OF
JOHN MARSTON

by

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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Department of English
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ABSTRACT

John Marston’s literary legacy has inevitably existed in the larger-than-life shadows of his great contemporaries William Shakespeare and Ben Jonson. In the last two centuries, his works were hardly taken on their own terms but were perceived instead in overt or implicit comparison to Shakespeare’s or Jonson’s. As a result, Marston’s plays acquired the lasting but unfair image of haphazard concoctions whose cheap sensationalism and personal satire often got them in trouble with the authorities. This was the case until recently, especially with Marston’s comic drama.

Following revisionist trends, this study sets out to restore some perspective: it offers a fresh reading of Marston’s comic plays and collaborations—*Antonio and Mellida, What You Will, Jack Drum’s Entertainment, The Dutch Courtesan, The Malcontent, Parasitaster, Eastward Ho*, and *Histrio-Mastix*—by pursuing a more nuanced contextualization with regard to religious context and archival evidence. The first central contention here is that instead of undermining political and religious authority, Marston’s comic drama can demonstrate consistent conformist and conservative affinities, which imply a seriously considered agenda. This study’s second main point is that the perceived failures of Marston’s comic plays—such as tragic
elements, basic characterization, and sudden final reversals—can be plausibly read as deliberate effects, designed with this agenda in mind.

The significance of this analysis lies in its interpretation of Marston’s comedies from the angle of religious and political conformism, which argues for an alternative identity for this playwright. The discussion opens with a presentation of Marston’s early satirical books as texts informed by a moderate Church of England Protestantism, yet coinciding at times with some of Calvin’s writings, and by a distrust of the individualistic tendencies of the English Presbyterian movement as well as the perceived literal ritualism of the old Catholic faith. On this basis, it then proceeds to reveal an identical philosophy behind Marston’s comic plays and collaborations. Antonio and Mellida and What You Will are interpreted to dramatize the human soul’s dependence on God’s favourable grace; Jack Drum’s Entertainment and The Dutch Courtesan to insist on the acknowledgement of God in romantic desire; The Malcontent and Parasitaster to present the dangers of the political immorality; and Eastward Ho and Histrio-Mastix to argue for the necessity of edifying occupations for the wayward human will. In its conclusion, this study further highlights Marston’s bias for political and religious individual obedience to established hierarchies and his suspicion of the early modern forces of change. The conformist identity that emerges from the present discussion is consistently supported by the archival evidence surviving from the playwright’s life. Thus, Marston’s comic drama can be interpreted as the result of carefully considered and skilfully implemented political and religious ideas that have been neglected so far.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Like its subject, my study of Marston’s comic drama has benefited from a variety of influences and contributions, for all of which I am sincerely grateful. Most importantly, however, this project would not have materialized were it not for the generous funding and employment opportunities I received through the PhD program at the Department of English, University of Toronto. With respect to the project’s completion, I am deeply indebted to my doctoral supervisors, Alexander Leggatt and Jill Levenson, for their infectious enthusiasm and knowledgeable guidance, and to my committee advisors, David Galbraith and Leslie Thomson, for their liberal help with the intricacies of early modern religion and the practicalities of early modern theatre. For invaluable reviews of the finished draft, I thank my external examiner, Helen Ostovich, and my departmental appraiser, Anne Lancashire. Of course, any errors that may remain here are entirely my own.

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NOTE

In this study, I use the following editions of John Marston’s independent comedies and comic collaborations: George K. Hunter’s *Antonio and Mellida* and *The Malcontent*; H. Harvey Wood’s *Jack Drum’s Entertainment, What You Will*, and *Histrio-Mastix*; David A. Blostein’s *Parasitaster*; M. L. Wine’s *The Dutch Courtesan*; and R. W. Van Fossen’s *Eastward Ho*. My reference text for Marston’s non-dramatic works is Arnold Davenport’s *The Poems of John Marston*.


Finally, I have made two provisions with regard to line numbers and spelling. To avoid confusion where no line numbers are available for verse reference, I use page numbers instead and specify them as such by abbreviation. I also modernize all English old-spelling titles completely, but I modify English old-spelling quotations only with regard to the long “s,” “i” used as “j” and vice versa, and “u” used as “v” and vice versa.
INTRODUCTION

Premise and Scope

In 1616, Ben Jonson (1572/3-1637) took a belated stab at his fellow playwright John Marston (1576-1634), saying “Marston wrott his Father in Lawes preachings & his Father in Law his Commedies” (Drummond 138). Although Jonson’s apparent intention was to dismiss Marston’s comedies as derivative, his remark had another, less obvious, implication. Marston’s father-in-law was Dr. William Wilkes, one of King James I’s favourite preachers:

William Wilkes, a most excellent preacher in the Court of K. James I. was born within the diocess of Lichfeild [sic] and Coventry, elected Probationer-fellow of Merton coll. in 1572. entred into the sacred function when Master of Arts, and in 1580. became Vicar of the Church of S. Peter in the East, within the City of Oxon, by the presentation thereunto of the Warden and Society of the said coll. where for his excellent Sermons he was much frequented by Scholars and Citizens. Afterwards taking the degrees in Divinity he resigned the said Church, being well beneficed in Wiltshire, and dignified. After K. James came to the English Crown, he was made one of his Chaplains in ordinary, preached often before him to his great content, and wrote

  Of obedience or Ecclesiastical union. Lond. 1605. oct.

  A second memento for Magistrates, directing how to reduce all offenders; and being reduced, how to preserve them in the Unity of Love both in Church and Commonwealth. Lond. 1608. As for the first memento I have not yet seen, unless it be meant of the book Of Obedience, &c. He died at Barford S. Martins in Wiltshire, of which he was Rector, leaving behind him one only daughter named Mary, who was married to John Marston of the City of Coventry, Gentleman. Which John dying 25 June 1634. was buried in the Church belonging to the Temples in London, near to the body of John Marston his Father, sometimes a Councellour of the Middle Temple. (Anthony Wood 289-99)1

Dr. Wilkes’s reputation and publications make it plausible that there may be more to Jonson’s seemingly facetious dismissal of Marston. Like Dr. Wilkes, Marston had an

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1 The Second Memento Anthony Wood mentions is indeed a later reprint of Obedience or Ecclesiastical Union. (Wood’s version of the title, Of Obedience or Ecclesiastical Union, adds an “of” that does not appear in the title of either the 1605 edition or the 1608 reprint.)
abiding interest in religion. It began most likely during his time at Oxford University, where he would have certainly encountered in his curriculum texts on moral philosophy such as Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* and *On the Soul* (Gibson xcv-vi). In a later application to use the Bodleian Library, Marston mentioned his further pursuit of philosophy after his graduation from Oxford in 1594:

\[
\text{Supplicat etc. Johannes Marston bacchalaureus facultatis artium ex aula Sanctæ Mariæ, vt quatenus tres annos et vltra a suscepto bacchalaureatus gradus in studio philosophiæ posuerit liceat ei bona vestra cum venia publicæ bibliothecæ beneficio frui: conceditur simpliciter.}^2
\]

(R. E. Brettle, “John Marston, Dramatist at Oxford” 404-5)

John Marston, B.A., beseeches etc. the faculty of St. Mary Hall, seeing that for three years and more since acquiring the level of B.A. he has devoted himself to the study of philosophy, that it be permitted to him through your kind indulgence to enjoy the benefit of the public library: it is permitted.

Marston’s studies prepared him for an ecclesiastical career, as that was one of the main careers available to English university graduates, together with the law and political office. Marston’s father, a prominent lawyer at Middle Temple, brought him to London in the hope that he would study law, but Marston had other plans. He must have known that his marriage to Dr. Wilkes’s daughter Mary in 1605 would open career opportunities for him, and he was eventually ordained in the Church of England in 1609.\(^3\)

In the years after his marriage and most likely in the months leading to it, Marston must have enjoyed a close relationship with his father-in-law. He lived under Dr. Wilkes’s roof from 1605 until 1616, and his first ecclesiastical appointment was at

\(^2\) Italic font in this quotation signifies expansion of abbreviations.

\(^3\) Marston’s father referred to him as “my willfull disobedient sonne” in a cancelled part of his will and prayed that “god blesse hym and give hym trewe knowledge of himself and to forgoe his delighte in playes vayne studdyes and fooleries” (O’Neill 444). However, he later changed this passage to: “man purposeth and god disposeth his will be donne and send [my sonne] his grace to feare and serve him” (Marston, Sr.). Marston, Sr., may have thus anticipated “the grace” of his son’s vocation, knowingly or not.
Barford St. Martin, Wiltshire, where Dr. Wilkes was rector. Predictably, the two men held similar religious views. Both conformed to the religious status quo of the time. Dr. Wilkes was part of the ecclesiastical establishment, as evident from his pamphlet *Obedience or Ecclesiastical Union*, and Marston supported this position as well. He subscribed to the official religious policies of the church, first under Queen Elizabeth I upon his admission at Oxford:

> [A student] had to declare on the usual oath on the Gospels his assent to the Thirty-Nine Articles, the Book of Common Prayer, and the Royal Supremacy, and to sign his name on one of the manuscript pages bound with a printed copy of the Thirty-Nine Articles.  
> (Brettle, “John Marston, Dramatist at Oxford” 398)

Marston then went through a second ceremony of subscription upon his ordination, “the one required of all clergy in the Church of England,” by virtue of which he signed his acceptance to the religious policies of James I, his father-in-law’s direct employer (Cressy and Ferrell 69). In addition, several of Marston’s comedies—*What You Will*, *The Dutch Courtesan*, *The Malcontent*, and *Eastward Ho* in which he had a hand—resemble Dr. Wilkes’s *Obedience* in their negative attitude to religious sects, a specific parallel that is yet to be explored in Marston scholarship. Marston’s marriage thus clearly solidified his allegiance to the English ecclesiastical establishment. In this context, Ben Jonson’s ridicule of his comedies confirms the fact that Marston explored elements associated with religion and theology in a consistent fashion, noticeable to his first readers and spectators. Marston did so even before his acquaintance with Dr. Wilkes, a sequence which means that he most likely developed his religious views independently.

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4 In his will, Dr. Wilkes states: “I give and bequeath to my sone in law M’. John Marston my gold=ring which hath the Garceyes Armes engraven in it. Also I absolutely forgive my said sonne=in Law al that is or may bee due unto mee for lodging and diet, for himselfe, his wife, his man, and mayde which he had of me for eleven yeares” (Last Will).
My study therefore rests on the premise that Marston’s comic drama can be read as a consistent manifestation of his lifelong interest in religion and theology, of his interest in both the ecclesiastical institution and its philosophies. My plan is to discuss the religious elements in Marston’s comic plays as a result of a recurrent combination of comic conventions and his Protestant world-view. I define Marston’s Church of England Protestantism with the help of his poetic works, the comedies of his contemporaries, and the religious situation in England in his time. The goal of my approach is to illustrate the formative influence religion and theology had on Marston’s engagement with comic conventions, and to demonstrate his knowledge of a variety of philosophical texts and awareness of their implications. This contextualization allows for a nuanced understanding of religious elements in Marston’s comic drama, and it leads to my central claim that they are not necessarily incidental or parodic but could be the result of a consistently conservative understanding of the world, characterized by conformist support for the Church of England as an institution and for the tacit Calvinist tenets behind some of its doctrines. This religious sensibility in Marston’s comedy, “the sense of a good world violated,” is reflected on all levels, from slapstick scenes to serious

5 Marston’s tragedies—Antonio’s Revenge (1599-1601), Sophonisba (1605-1606), and the collaborative Insatiate Countess (1610-1613)—fall outside the scope of this study, but their similar relationship to politics and religion will be discussed in a later companion project.

6 Marston himself acknowledged that, even when he made concerted efforts to exercise authorial control, unintended factors affected the printing of his comedies: “Reader, know I have perused this copy to make some satisfaction for the first faulty impression; yet so urgent hath been my business that some errors have still passed, which thy discretion may amend” (Parasitaster, To His Equal Reader 62-65). Of course, the production of playtexts involved a host of other contributing agents besides author and publisher: “censor, theatre manager, and actor alike may have cut, changed, or expanded the text available to a play’s first print readers. So may a collaborating or a revising playwright, even if unacknowledged on any title page. These possibilities certainly do not exhaust the conditioning factors to impinge upon the writing process” (Cathcart, “Borrowings” 159). My study contends, however, that even if the physical production of Marston’s comic plays was highly collaborative, they can still be interpreted as a reflection of a recognizable set of values, consistent with the events of his life.
soliloquies and from minor characters to overall plot convention (Leggatt, *English Drama* 116-19).

In England, the impact of Calvinist ideas was not restricted only to radical Protestant thought; “slight Calvinist influence may be discerned in the Thirty-Nine Articles” as well (F. L. Cross 270). This influence was more pronounced in the area of “doctrine” than in the aspects of ritual or worship (McNeill 314). Among the doctrines the Church of England adapted were the bondage of human free will through sin, justification by grace through faith, predestination, and divine omnipotence, reflected in Articles 9, 10, 11, 12, and 17 respectively (Bicknell 171-72, 199, 207, 218). Yet this adaptation deliberately modified the Calvinist originals for a variety of reasons. As E. J. Bicknell points out: “if the Articles would never have existed in their present form without the influence of Calvin, that does not mean that they are Calvinistic in the sense that they accept all his teachings” (16). John Calvin’s chief work, *Institutio christianae religionis* (1569), may have seen approximately twenty complete and abridged editions in the original Latin or in English translation during Marston’s lifetime, but the attitude to him among English theologians was complex. As John Whitgift, the Archbishop of Canterbury, stated:

> To traduce Calvin and other learned men in pulpits I can by no means like, neither do I allow the same towards Augustine, Jerome and other learned fathers who nevertheless have often and many times been abused in that university [Cambridge] without controlment. And yet if a man should have occasion to control Calvin for his bad and unchristian censure of King Henry VIII or him and others in their peremptory and false reproofs of this Church of England in diverse points and likewise in some other singularities, I know no Article of Religion against it much less do I know any cause why men should be so violently dealt withal for it or termed ungodly popish impudent for the doctrine of the Church of England doth in no respect depend on them.

(qtd. in Peter Lake, *Moderate Puritans* 211).
The attitude of the leading conformist theologian Richard Hooker (1554-1600) to Calvin is similarly mixed. Hooker begins by calling Calvin “incomparably the wisest man that ever the French Church did enjoy, since the houre it enjoyed him” (Preface.2.5), but he later qualifies his admiration with the warning that:

\[
\text{we are not able to define, whether the wisedome of God (who setteth before us in holy Scripture so many admirable paternes of vertue, and no one of them without some what noted wherin they are culpable, to the end that to him alone it might always be acknowledged, Thou only art holy thou onely art just) might not permit those worthy vessels of his glory to be in some things blemished with the staine of humaine frailtie, even for this cause, least we should esteeme of any man above that which behoveth.} \\
\text{(Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity Preface.4.24)}
\]

The English Church therefore recognized Calvin’s influence, but it also criticized it in order to protect its independent identity, prevent the spread of Geneva-style Presbyterianism in England, and keep its more traditional constituents. A similar attitude is visible in Marston’s comic plays where religious ideas often coincide with those of Calvin’s teachings that fit the policies of the English ecclesiastical establishment.

Although such religious elements in Marston’s comedies are numerous and omnipresent, I have organized my discussion around four of the most prominent ones. In chapter one, I examine Marston’s engagement with the human soul as a religious concept in *Antonio and Mellida* and *What You Will*. In chapter two, I explore his dramatizations of romantic relationships and their theological implications in *Jack Drum’s Entertainment* and *The Dutch Courtesan*. In chapter three, I analyse Marston’s presentation of political rulers and the religious consequences of their decisions in *The Malcontent* and *Parasitaster*. Finally, in my last chapter, I discuss the religious repercussions of the neglect of moral education in the two comic plays in which Marston
was a collaborator, *Eastward Ho* and *Histrio-Mastix*. In each of these four chapters, I also demonstrate how Marston’s conservative religious beliefs shape or influence the comic conventions in each play. His approach to the genre reflects his understanding of the world as created by unquestionable divine design and inhabited by a fallible and helpless humanity. For this reason, his comedies and even his comic collaborations are populated by somewhat underdeveloped, puppet-like characters that happen to lead complex scholarly discussions on religious matters. The serious problems they face are always wrapped up too quickly in the final acts, but while many critics have taken this quality as a central failure of Marston’s comedy, I intend to read it as resulting from a belief system which saw control of existence divorced from humanity and available only to a mysterious Calvinist God.

**Critical Review**

Scholars of Marston’s works have mentioned his interest in religion in general. H. Harvey Wood points out that “Marston’s moral preoccupation is always active” (xxxiv). John Scott Colley notes that Marston’s “staunch Christian consciousness provoked within him the paradoxical sense of moral absolutism that left little doubt about the nature of man’s earthly struggles and the ultimate divine judgement” (*John Marston’s* 5). George Geckle also agrees that “Marston was essentially a conservative, one who wished to conserve the old values inherent in Christian ethic” (*John Marston’s* 47). Yet none of these critics has approached Marston’s comic drama as a whole, informed by deliberately consistent elements originating in Marston’s serious engagement with religious ideas. None of them has addressed the origins or implications of these ideas or their similarity
with those of his father-in-law, Dr. William Wilkes, either. Wood, for example, calls Marston’s “relentless pursuit of a moral issue” a vital defect (xxxiv). Colley interprets Marston’s *Antonio and Mellida*, *Jack Drum’s Entertainment*, and *What You Will* as “devoted to literary satire” with their religious statements relegated to the status of “postures” (*John Marston’s* 17). Geckle does not discuss the religious aspect of the serious relationships in *Jack Drum’s Entertainment* at all, and he finds *Antonio and Mellida* a generic failure that does not relate to its moral message (*John Marston’s* 78).

Other studies offer similar examples. R. W. Ingram is of the opinion that religion is an aspect of both *The Malcontent* and *The Dutch Courtesan* (109-13, 121), but he dubs *Jack Drum’s Entertainment* “a wholehearted parody” without discussing the role of divine providence in this play (63). David Farley-Hills calls Marston’s collaboration *Histrio-Mastix* “essentially religious” (47), but he claims that *The Malcontent* fails as “a vision of mankind’s place in the universe” and *The Dutch Courtesan* ends in “confusion of thought” instead of a clear religious message (68). Ejner Jensen speaks of the didacticism of *Jack Drum’s Entertainment*, *What You Will*, and *Parasitaster*, but he does not elaborate on the nature of Marston’s didactic ideas (41). Philip J. Finkelpearl, on the other hand, interprets Antonio’s manner of speech in *Antonio and Mellida* as “constructed to reveal his absurdities,” that is, undermining Antonio’s religious discussion of the soul (*John Marston* 143). Rick Bowers also thinks that Marston’s thrust in *Antonio and Mellida* is “sensational, not moral; a matter of contemporary theatrical and popular culture, not ethical consistency excavated from the classics” (14). Michael Scott and R. A. Foakes discover a problem with the religious aspect of *The Malcontent*, too. Scott observes that the protagonist’s “pious platitudes are merely an example of the
‘outward shows’ which he is condemning” (30), and Foakes states that “he does not provide an effective moral vision, so much as indulge himself in a kind of a variety show” (25). Unlike Scott and Foakes, Anthony Caputi identifies a “synthesis of Stoic and Christian ideas” in Marston’s output as a whole, but he interprets Jack Drum’s Entertainment as “deprived of a moral centre,” and Eastward Ho as “triumphantly comic” and not religious in its finale (129, 224). Likewise, Alvin Kernan claims that the characters’ attempts to “investigate matters of religious faith” in Histrio-Mastix lead only to “endless speculation and tortured language” (“John Marston’s” 138).

The conclusions of these critics are sometimes affected by the recent understanding that Marston was an inconsistent playwright who failed at character development, used genre awkwardly, parodied other playwrights parasitically, controlled diction poorly, and included metatheatrical remarks to undermine serious statement.7 Even when critics mention religion or theology in their studies, they do not explore the sources of such ideas completely. What my project brings to Marston scholarship, then, is an attempt to see these so-called failures as deliberate reflections of specific religious ideas and not of their undermining. In my opinion, besides subversion of the play’s message, limited character development can also be construed as human powerlessness. Tragic scenes in comedy need not always be a sign of generic failure, either. They have been part of New Comedy since its inception, and in Marston’s drama they allow for the

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7 Oscar B. Campbell claims that Marston, “being unpractised and inexpert in the new field, built his first dramas upon the crude sorts of plots that were currently popular” (182). Madeleine Doran calls Marston “restlessly experimental if not ever conspicuously successful” (213). See also John Scott Colley on the disharmony of Marston’s drama (John Marston’s 178); Ejner Jensen on Marston’s conflict between didacticism and dramatic form in Jack Drum’s Entertainment, What You Will, and Parasitaster (41); Joel Kaplan on the unsuitability of the disguised Altofronto for the satirical purpose of The Malcontent; R. W. Ingram on the deficiencies of romantic characters (70) and George Geckle on the unsatisfactory play structure in Antonio and Mellida (John Marston’s 71); and Anthony Caputi on the poor transfer of verse satire to the stage in Histrio-Mastix (82).
range necessary to explore the corruption of a post-lapsarian world while creating an
effect of suspense and still preserving the slender hope for salvation in the happy ending.
Borrowings from other authors such as Seneca, Guarini, Du Bartas, and Shakespeare can
be read as part of a conservative approach as well, a resort to tried and trusted dramatic
situations. \(^8\) Occasional satirical attacks can be seen not only as the source of humour but
also as part of the larger religious design, contrary to the impression left by the War of
the Theatres. \(^9\) Finally, theatrical self-awareness need not be undermining; often it can
“make a point that is in its own way quite serious, if a bit hackneyed” (Leggatt *English
Drama* 114).

Following these leads, my study offers a reading of Marston’s comedy that
deliberately looks for signs of conformism rather than rebellion and radicalism, as
consistent conformism is the important feature that has been overlooked in his comic
plays. I explore in as much detail as possible Marston’s work with various philosophical
sources and their adaptation in the fictional worlds of his comic plays. My study thus
engages with G. K. Hunter’s statement that:

> [I]he Elizabethan stage was a *secular* stage, in the sense that it did not
meddle with specifically religious subjects; but, on the other hand, both
authors and audiences were deeply involved in religious assumptions
throughout their ordinary lives, and it would be very odd if these did not
seep through into their handling of ostensibly secular, but serious and
deeply felt, situations.  
(Introduction to *Antonio’s Revenge* xvii)

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\(^8\) Charles Cathcart observes: “the frequent and apparently indiscriminate echoes to be found in Marston’s
early plays need not indicate unseriousness of purpose, casualness of approach, or even a lapse in decorum,
either calculated or inadvertent” (“Borrowings” 173).

\(^9\) For more far-reaching discussions of the War of the Theatres, see Charles Cathcart, *Marston, Rivalry,
Rapprochement, and Jonson*; James P. Bednarz, *Shakespeare and the Poets’ War*; Alfred Harbage,
*Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions* (90-119); and Josiah H. Penniman, *The War of the Theatres*. Roscoe
Addison Small’s *The Stage-Quarrel between Ben Jonson and the So-Called Poetasters* and David
Bevington’s *Tudor Drama* (279-88) offer relatively conservative accounts, whereas David Bergeron’s
*Practicing Renaissance Scholarship* (123-48) and Roslyn L. Knutson’s *Playing Companies and Commerce
(75-102)* dismiss the idea of the War completely. My study attempts to steer a middle course by
acknowledging personal attacks but interpreting them not as a central force but as part of a larger design.
Yet my analysis intends to show that while no actual sermons, Marston’s comic plays and collaborations do engage with specifically religious subjects. In this regard, my discussion is indebted to Brownell Salomon’s insight that “theological ideas are integrally related to […] total form and meaning” in Marston’s *The Malcontent* (284). I build on Salomon’s discussion, using seminal texts from the late Elizabethan and early Jacobean religious environments and historical studies of their politics, and I extend my findings to all of Marston’s independent comedies and comic collaborations. I demonstrate in detail the origins and meaning of the religious elements in these plays and their impact on subject-matter and generic conventions. My approach thus makes it possible to look at Marston’s comic canon as consistent and serious in its dramatization of the faculty of the human soul, human relationships, politics, and education.

**Religion in Marston’s Poetry**

Marston’s early poetic works anticipate the conservative world-view behind his comedies. His mock-erotic poem *The Metamorphosis of Pygmalion’s Image* and its companion piece *Certain Satires* (1598), his second satirical book *The Scourge of Villainy* (1598, 1599) and his contributions to the *Love’s Martyr* collection (1601)—all of these works address religious issues that will later appear in his drama. For example, Marston compares Pygmalion’s furtive glances at his statue to those of a church-goer involved in questionable behaviour during service:

> Who ever saw the subtile Citty-dame  
> In sacred church, when her pure thoughts shold pray,  
> Peire through her fingers, so to hide her shame,  
> When that her eye, her mind would faine bewray.  
> So would he view, and winke, and view againe,
The poet cannot be said to condone the exploitation of a pornographic narrative for sexual gratification in *The Metamorphosis*. He may seem to invite it at the outset of his poem, but only to laugh at those readers who take its bait, “the gaping eares that swallow up my lines” (p. 61). He therefore satirizes religious hypocrisy and illegitimate forms of desire, targets which are prominent in his dramatization of romantic relationships in *Jack Drum’s Entertainment* and *The Dutch Courtesan*.10

Marston’s two books of satire engage with religion even more overtly. Arnold Davenport observes that “the marked philosophical preoccupation in the Satires is evidence that [Marston] was interested in the classical philosophers and in current moral theology” (5). T. F. Wharton agrees, pointing out that “Marston’s satiric theory […] has one further component: philosophical seriousness” (*Critical Rise* 8). Specifically, Marston’s satires defend the use of secular writing conventions for religious subject-matter; attack religious positions opposed to the established church; criticize ancient and medieval moral philosophy; and deliver statements on theological concepts such as the human soul, its faculties of reason, will, and consciousness, and finally on the concept of divine grace. Thus, they establish the parameters that shape the larger religious elements in his comedies. For instance, Marston’s defence of the combination of secular form and religious subject-matter anticipates the practice of this combination in his comedies. His criticism of unsanctioned religious groups is central to his conception of his fictional

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10 William Keach observes that Marston was only partly in control of his poem, but that its “three most conspicuous references to non-literary social experience”—one of which refers to “the subtile Citty-dame” and the other two describe religious experiences as well—are all presented in similes which stand in “deliberately shocking contrast to stanzas of explicit erotic description” (142). John Scott Colley also notes that in *The Metamorphosis* Marston is concerned with “the dangers of delusion and moral blindness” (“‘Opinion’” 223). R. C. Horne believes that Marston’s aim is “to involve his readers in the process of ethical dialogue” as well (21).
political states and his disapproval of nonconformism, as evident in *The Malcontent* and *Parasitaster*. Further, his views on the various human faculties and their dependence on divine grace are of paramount importance not only for his discussion of the soul in *Antonio and Mellida* and *What You Will* and the soul’s cultivation through education in *Eastward Ho* and *Histrio-Mastix*, but also for the very dynamic of his plots and his conception of his character types.

Marston jumped to the defence of secular literary conventions in religious literature shortly after 1597, when the young Cambridge satirist Joseph Hall (1574-1656) had ridiculed several poets who employed secular forms to write religious poems. Hall’s targets were Robert Southwell, the Jesuit martyr (1561-1595), for his “Saint Peter’s Complaint” and *Mary Magdalen’s Funeral Tears*; Gervase Markham, an Earl of Essex admirer (1568?-1637), for the *Poem of Poems, or Sion’s Muse*; and Thomas Lodge, another Catholic author (1558-1625), for *The Tears of Marie the Mother of God*. Hall condemned their works not so much for the authors’ religious or political sympathies, but for what he saw as their secular undermining of the sacred quality of holy subjects:

Hence ye profane: mell not with holy things
That *Sion* muse from *Palestina* brings.
*Parnassus* is transform’d to *Sion* hill,
And *Ju’ry-palmes* her steep ascents done fill [sic].
Now good Saint *Peter* weeps pure *Helicon*,
And both the *Maries* make a Musick mone:
Yea and the Prophet of heavenly Lyre,
Great *Salomon*, sings in English Quire,
And is become a newfound Sonetist,
Singing his love, the holy spouse of Christ: …

(*Virgidemiarum Sex Libri* I.viii.1-10)

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11 On the poetry of Southwell and Lodge, see Arthur F. Marotti’s *Religious Ideology and Cultural Fantasy* (24-31, 102, 205). Marotti observes that “Southwell’s literary remains were visibly Catholic ones, though they were subjected to a degree of Protestantizing” (28). The “Protestantizing” constituted the removal of whole poems or parts of poems that dealt with Mary Queen of Scots, King John, and the Eucharist.
Marston defended the poets against Hall’s purist notion of decorum. He even alleged that, in attacking them, Hall could be said to criticize much more prominent religious writers who were involved in the translation of sacred texts: the Calvinist religious poet Guillaume de Salluste Du Bartas (1544-1590), who was an ambassador to James VI of Scotland and future King of England; John Hopkins (1520/21-1570) and Thomas Sternhold (d. 1549), who teamed up to compile the collection of rhymed psalms used in Elizabethan churches; and King James himself, who translated Du Bartas’s work into English:

[Hall] doth sweetly sing
Against Peters teares, and Maries moving moane,
And like a fierce enraged Boare doth foame
At sacred Sonnets. O daring hardiment!
At Bartas sweet Semaines, raile impudent
At Hopkins, Sternhold, and the Scottish King,
At all Translators that doe strive to bring
That stranger language to our vulgar tongue,
Spett in thy poison theyr faire acts among. (Certain Satires iv.36-44)

The reasoning behind Marston’s defence of religious poetry in secular form is that, if God is the Creator of the human soul and if secular literature is the invention of that soul, then secular literature could be only a worthy means to praise God the Creator:

Why may not then our soules without thy blame,
(which is the best thing that our God did frame)
Devote the best part to his sacred Name?
And with due reverence and devotion
Honor his Name with our invention? (Certain Satires iv.54-57)

This passage is central for my understanding of Marston’s works, as it clearly states the strong relationship Marston envisioned between secular literary forms and religious subject-matter. The combination is important not only for his poetic works but also for his comic drama. His positive comic characters resemble his satirist in that they “strive
with wits best quintessence / To adore that sacred ever-living Essence” (*Certain Satires* iv.48-50).

Marston’s public argument with Hall helps define the religious ideas informing his satires more precisely. Hall was a student at the “Puritan stronghold of Emmanuel College,” Cambridge (McCabe, *Joseph Hall* 7). Marston’s opposition to his fellow satirist identifies him as a more moderate layman in the Church of England, a stance confirmed by his resistance to the more radical branches of Protestantism and by the later similarity between his views and those of his father-in-law. Marston even ridicules Hall by comparing him to a Puritan fanatic who believes that church buildings and their bells are not holy because of their use in Catholic times:

So have I heard an Heritick maintaine  
The Church unholy, where Jehovas Name  
Is now ador’d: because he surely knowes  
Some-times it was defil’d with Popish showes.  
The Bells profane, and not to be endur’d,  
Because to Popish rites they were inur’d.  
Pure madness peace, cease to be insolent,  
And be not outward sober, inlye impudent. (*Certain Satires* iv.63-70)

Marston’s critique of radical reformism in the Church of England is not confined to his attacks on Hall only. He presents sweeping change as a compromise of the relationship between the Church and God its Creator. His *Certain Satires* describe the reformers as ready to “set endles contentious strife / Betwixt Jehova, and his sacred wife” (ii.85-86). Marston also accuses them of hypocrisy, like the “devout meale-mouth’d Precisean” who always carries a “sacred booke” and says grace for “halfe an houre,” but who is also a much less pious usurer (ii.56, 59, 62). His second book of satires, *The Scourge of Villainy*, features attacks on Protestant radicals as well. It unleashes anger on the “lewd Precisians. / Who scorning Church rites, take the simbole up / As slovenly, as careless
Courtiers slup / Their mutton gruel” (I.ii.93-96). What the satirist requires here is respect towards the utensils of the Eucharist ritual, even if they are not objects of worship in themselves. His statements therefore position him as a firm moderate, supporting the Church of England compromise between a fairly ritualistic service inherited from the old faith on the one hand and the new Protestant demand for a much simplified liturgy on the other. He is thus an opponent to religious groups that were perceived as breaking away from this compromise, and his critique of them will resurface in his comedies as well, particularly in the ridicule of English and European Protestant sects in *What You Will*, *The Malcontent*, *The Dutch Courtesan*, and of a variety of nonconformist religious positions in *Eastward Ho*.

Marston’s satire is also hostile towards the other extremity in the English religious spectrum at the time, the English Catholic community both in England and in exile. For instance, the poet targets what he regards as the sacrilegious presumption inherent in the belief of transubstantiation:

Deride their frenzie, that for policie
Adore Wheate dough, as reall deitie.
Almighty men, that can their Maker make,
And force his sacred body to forsake
The Cherubines, to be gnawne actually,
Deviding *individuum*, really. (*The Scourge of Villainy* I.ii.84-87)

Another attack concerns the selling of communion bread: “vengeance pricks me on, / When mart is made of faire Religion, / Reform’d bald Trebus swore in Romish quiere / He sold Gods essence, for a poore denier” (I.ii.72-75). Marston’s reactions follow directly from Article 28 of the Articles of Faith, designed to steer the understanding of the Eucharist in the Church of England service away from literal transubstantiation:

“Transubstantiation (or change of the substance of Bread and Wine) in the Supper of the
Lord, cannot be proved by Holy Writ, but is repugnant to the plain words of Scripture, overthroweth the nature of sacrament, and hath given occasion to many supersitions” (Bicknell 382). The adherence to official doctrine in Marston’s satires is thus further evidence of his conformist position. In the same book, he also singles out the English graduates of European Catholic seminaries with hostile comments: “returne not with pretence of salving spots, / When here yee soyle us with impuritie, / And monstrous filth, of Doway seminary. / What though Iberia yeeld you libertie, / To snort in source of Sodom vilanie?” (I.iii.56-60).12 As I will demonstrate later in the introduction, Marston’s criticism of Puritans and Catholics in his satires is identical to that of various establishment writers in his time.

Further details about Marston’s religious position emerge from his statements on the theological concepts of the soul, its faculties of reason, will, and conscience or synderesis, and their role in salvation.13 These concepts are especially prominent in The Scourge of Villainy. All the sins Marston describes in this book stem from degradation of the soul and the subsequent loss of its connection with its Creator. God, of course, is the ultimate authority in the universe, and humanity’s troubles are attributed to alienation from God by neglect of the human soul, “the sacred seate of God” (The Scourge I.ii.39). John Calvin (1509-1564) had offered a similar concept of the soul as humanity’s connection with God: “although the glorie of God do appeare in the outward shape of man, yet is it no doubt that the proper seate of the image of God is in the soule” (1.15.3).

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12 This hostility may have been a cause for his heated exchange with the Spanish-born stepdaughter of a London alderman at a Christmas dance in 1601 (Jenkins 243-44).
13 Synderesis—“a Greeke word, that signifieth as much as if wee should say, Preservation, whereby that remnant of the light and law of nature that remaineth in us, is still preserved and kept in our soule after sinne. And so this worde Synteresis signifieth that knowledge of the Lawe which is borne with us: and it is so called, because it always keepeth in man, yea in the most wicked that can bee, an advertisement or instruction, which telleth him what is right and just, and that there is a judgement of God” (Pierre de La Primaudye, Second Part of the French Academy 576).
Repeatedly, Marston focuses on the main reason for the sorry state of the soul, or the “intellectual” as he calls it:

Lust hath confounded all,
The bright glosse of our intellectual
Is fouly soyl’d. The wanton wallowing
In fond delights, and amorous dallying,
Hath dusk’d the fairest splendour of our soule:
Nothing now left, but carkas, lothsome, foule. (III.viii.165-70)

The soul, whose substance is “celestiall, / Invisible, immortal, and divine,” deteriorates in the sensual corruption of the body, her “[l]and-lordes muddy slime” (III.viii.190-92).

Calvin puts forth a similar theory of human lust originating in humanity’s fall from divine grace: “whatsoever is in man, even from the understanding to the will, from the soul to the flesh, is corrupted and stuffed full with this concupiscence” (2.1.8). Calvin’s attitude coincides with the mostly negative presentation of the body and sexual desire in Marston’s dramatization of romantic relationships. Desire in Marston’s comic plays is sanctioned only within courtship that clearly implies spiritual appreciation of the desired person, as this act is the only suitable acknowledgement of God’s moral design in that person. One example from Marston’s verse is the description of a creature born of such a relationship in the poem “A Narration and Description of a Most Exact Wondrous Creature” from the *Love’s Martyr* collection: “Lo now; th’xtracture of devinest Essence, /
The Soule of heavens labour’d Quintessence, / (Peans to Phœbus) from deare Lover’s death, / Takes sweete creation and all blessing breath” (13-16). Here the fatal union of the allegorical lovers, the phoenix and the dove, constitutes the birth of pure heavenly essence. The poet thus endows legitimate desire with an almost transcendent quality and this motif is present in his comedies, positing hope for human salvation with the help of
divine intervention. Other forms of romance, however, like those based solely on physical attraction, are condemned as immoral.

For this reason, Marston discusses the corruption of the soul more often than its spiritual elevation. In *The Scourge of Villainy*, the poet slams the idea that the human soul is part of God’s essence, as God would not tolerate the human sin rampant in the world:

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Sure I nere thinke those axioms to be true,
That soules of men, from that great soule ensue,
And of his essence doe participate
As’t were by pypes, when so degenerate,
So adverse is our natures motion,
To his immaculate condition:
That such foule filth, from such faire puritie,
Such sensuall acts from such a Deitie,
Can nere proceed. (II.vii.189-96)
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Humanity’s soul is of its own essence, and the human corruptible nature has removed the soul far from God. What is more, the soul cannot fight its degradation on its own.

According to Calvin and Church of England doctrine, only God has the power to remit sins and inspire virtuous intent through His generous favour or grace. Article 10 of the Thirty-Nine states, “we have no power to do good works pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us, when we have that good will” (Bicknell 172).

Calvin developed this doctrine in his discussions of the works of Augustine of Hippo (354-430), and it became one of the central tenets of the Reformation. In its interpretation, Adam’s refusal to obey God’s command not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge resulted in Adam’s moral corruption and in the moral corruption of all humanity as his descendants:

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he did not alone suffer this punishment, that in place of wisedome, strength, holinesse, trueth, and justice (with which ornaments he had
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been clothed) there came in the most horrible pestilences, blidnesse [sic],
weaknesse, filthinesse, falshood, and injustice, but also hee entangled and
drowned his whole offpring [sic] in the same miseries. (2.1.5)

This concept of hereditary moral corruption, which stems from Adam’s first act of
disobedience, has been known since the times of the Church Fathers as original sin. It led
Calvin to deny humanity the capability of moral rectitude independent of God. Calvin
thus claims that post-lapsarian humanity can be righteous not of its own volition but only
as a result of God’s merciful intervention in His grace. Post-lapsarian human will,
working independently of divine grace, is an unreliable faculty because of its corruption.
It can desire good only when God intends it to do so, as is evident in Calvin’s paraphrase
of Augustine’s assertion that:

mans will obtaineth not grace by libertie, but libertie by grace: and that by
the same grace, by affection of delite printed in him, is it framed to
continuance, that it is strengthened with invincible force: that while grace
governeth, it never falleth away: when grace forsaketh, it by and by
tumbleth downe. That by the free mercie of God it both is converted to
good, and being converted abideth in it, that the direction of mans will to
good, and stedfastnesse after direction, hangeth upon the only will of God,
and not upon any merite of his owne. And so to man is left such free will,
if we list so to call it, as [Augustine] writeth of in another place, that can
neither be turned to God, not abide in God but by grace, and by grace is
able all that it is able. (2.3.14)

This doctrine is of paramount significance for Marston’s comedies. As E. J. Bicknell
notes, “[i]n the time of Elizabeth Calvinism was almost the dominant creed of the clergy
of the English Church” with regard to human will and divine grace (193). Marston’s
characters, plots, and discussions of various moral subjects are based on this assumption
of humanity’s complete dependence on God in the control of their lives and after-life.

Marston’s Calvinist understanding of corrupt human faculties can also be
extrapolated from his arguments with ancient and medieval moral philosophers, who
usually give humanity more control than Calvin or Augustine sanctioned. In *The Scourge of Villainy*, Marston attacks Aristotle (384-322 BCE), John Duns Scotus (c. 1266-1308), and Seneca (4-65) specifically. He finds laughable Aristotle’s statement that human virtues and vices can be developed without God’s intervention but through cumulative moral or immoral actions: “I smile at thee, and at the Stagerite, / Who holds the liking of the appetite, / Beeing fedde with actions often put in ure / Hatcheth the soule, in qualitie impure, / Or pure” (I.iv.99-103). Aristotle formulated his concept of moral virtues in *The Nicomachean Ethics*, where he claims that human habit (i.e., repetitive action developed through education) is responsible for moral virtue:

> moral virtue comes about as a result of habit, whence also its name (ήθική) is one that is formed by a slight variation from the word εθος (habit). From this it is plain that none of the moral virtues arises in us by nature; for nothing that exists by nature can form a habit contrary to its nature. (II.1)

Marston ignores the nature-versus-nurture debate and counters Aristotle’s statement with a declaration that divine grace prompts humanity to virtuous existence and not habit achieved via education: “Sure Grace is infus’d / By divine favour, not by actions us’d. / Which is as permanent as heavens blisse / To them that have it, then no habite is” (I.iv.117-20). Those chosen for salvation have grace from on high; they do not develop it through their habits, which Marston obviously regards as transient and unreliable.

Marston’s criticism of Aristotle is identical with his remark on John Duns Scotus, as Scotus was one of Aristotle’s seminal medieval commentators, and Aristotle’s influence is evident in his work. Marston criticizes Scotus first on the issue of habit as well (*The Scourge* I.iv.131-36). A further disagreement concerns Scotus’s belief that a human being is capable of loving God through the faculties of natural reason and will:
natural reason dictates that the infinite good be loved above all. Consequently the will can do this by its purely natural endowments, for the intellect could not rightly dictate something to the will that the natural will could not tend towards or carry out naturally. If it could do so, then the will would be naturally bad, or at least it would not be free to tend towards everything according to that aspect of good revealed to it by the intellect. (Duns Scotus 435)

Scotus uses the term “natural” here in the sense that the will and reason are not assisted by divine intervention, and he concludes that they must be able to tend towards good naturally or otherwise the value of the will’s choice is compromised and so is its moral capability. Marston, however, rejects the notion that the unassisted human will and reason are capable of moral actions, as they were compromised in humanity’s fall from grace: “Reason by prudence in her function / Had wont to tutor all our action. / Ayding with precepts of philosophy / Our feeble natur es imb eilitie. / But now affection, will, concupiscence, / Have got o’re Reason chiefe preheminence” (The Scourge III.viii.173-78). The only hope for humanity, then, is that God’s grace is working in the human soul and strengthening its compromised reason and will. Marston’s views on these faculties are thus in line with Calvin’s opinion that “although […] the Image of God was not altogether defaced & blotted out in [man], yet was it so corrupted, that al that remaineth, is but ugly deformite” (1.15.4).

Marston is in line even with Richard Hooker, the most important conformist theologian of the Church of England in the late sixteenth century, who put new emphasis on the faculty of human reason in order to defend the ecclesiastical institution from Presbyterian demands for reforms. Yet despite his emphasis on reason, Hooker still stressed the important part of mysterious divine grace in its operation. While privileging rational interpretation of Scripture over the allegedly inspired readings of the
Presbyterians, Hooker made it clear that the Spirit of God directed human reason

nevertheless, even if the soul was not aware of the Spirit’s operation:

The operations of the spirit, especially these ordinary which be commō unto all true Christian men, are as we know, things secret & undiscernable even to the very soule where they are, because their nature is of another & an higher kind then that they cā be by us perceived in this life. Wherefore albeit the spirit lead us unto all truth & direct us in all goodnes, yet because these workings of the spirit in us are so privy & secret, we therfore stand on a plainer ground, when we gather by reason frō the qualitie of things believed or done, that the spirit of God hath directed us in both; then if we settle our selves to believe or to do any certaine particular thing, as being moved thereto by the spirit. (Of the Laws III.8.147)

Hooker anticipates this point with the more aphoristic: “nature hath need of grace, whereunto I hope, we are not opposite, by holding that grace hath use of nature” (III.8.142). Therefore, Hooker holds that human reason is a faculty of paramount importance, but only when it works with divine grace to implement an approximation of the eternal law of God in life on earth. When left on its own, however, it is susceptible to the will’s corruption. Marston appears to make a similar distinction between reason as the moral guide of flawed human nature and reason under the thrall of the morally wayward will.

Finally, Marston’s attack on Seneca also resembles his criticism of Aristotle. It condemns Seneca’s assertion that humanity owes more to philosophy than it owes to the gods when it comes to living well. Seneca expressed this view in his Epistle xc:

Who can doubt, my dear Lucilius, that life is the gift of the immortal gods, but that living well is the gift of philosophy? Hence the idea that our debt to philosophy is greater than our debt to the gods, in proportion as a good life is more of a benefit than mere life, would be regarded as correct, were not philosophy itself a boon which the gods have bestowed upon us. (xc.1)

Seneca’s final qualification that philosophy ultimately comes from the gods as well does not make a difference for Marston. He takes only the first part of the statement, possibly
under the influence of another of Seneca’s claims: “the wise man is sufficient unto himself for a happy existence, but not for mere existence” (ix.13). In Marston’s eyes, therefore, Seneca’s statements are tantamount to blasphemy, as one cannot be happy relying solely on natural philosophy without God’s gracious intervention: “Peace Seneca, thou belchest blasphemy. / To live from God, but to live happily / (I hear thee boast,) from thy Phylosophie, / And from thy selfe, ô raving lunacie!” (The Scourge I.iv.141-44). The same attitude is behind the criticism of natural philosophy in Marston’s comedies, especially in Antonio and Mellida and What You Will, and their discussions of the concept of the soul.

Marston follows his critique of the human capability of virtue and happiness in Aristotle, Scotus, and Seneca with more criticism of the human will. The faculty of human desire, compromised in Adam’s fall, inevitably leads one to superficial satisfaction, which is a distraction from one’s moral purpose. Marston conveys this idea through the image of a human body raging senselessly:

Now doth the body ledde with sencelesse will,
(The which in reasons absence ruleth still)
Rave, talk idlie, as’t were some deitie
Adoring female painted puppetry
Playing at put-pin, doting on some glasse
(Which breath’d but on his falsed glosse doth passe)
Toying with babies, and with fond pastime
Some childrens sport, deflowring of chast time,
Impoying all his wits in vaine expence,
Abusing all his organons of sense. (The Scourge III.viii.201-10)

The faculty of reason here is absent because it is subject to the reign of the corrupt human will and therefore not effective. As a result, the will abuses the human body by preoccupying it with superficialities at the expense of moral existence.
The very standard of right and wrong—human conscience or synderesis—has abandoned humanity as well. Marston exclaims: “Returne, returne, sacred Synderesis, / Inspire our truncks, let not such mud as this / Pollute us still. Awake our lethargie, / Raise us out from our brain-sicke foolerie” (The Scourge III.viii.211-14). Humanity seems to have lost the last remaining trace of God’s law, the basic function of its conscience. This very critical view of the human faculties paints a pessimistic picture of humanity in Marston’s satires. Arnold Davenport also notes their focus on “the miserable condition of humanity” (20); and Philip J. Finkelpearl sees their “fools and villains so hopelessly unreformable that the cynic satirist is entitled to flay them remorselessly despite the futility of his task” (John Marston 113). John Scott Colley agrees with the above critics: “To Marston’s satiric persona, at any rate, most people are corrupt to the core and can never achieve virtue through their own efforts” (“Marston, Calvinism” 86). This pessimism, however, is qualified in Marston’s comic plays, as they feature not only morally conscious characters but also sinners who eventually renounce their immoral ways. As Geoffrey Aggeler remarks, “Marston cannot be accused of turning away from beauty, specifically the moral and spiritual beauty that shines forth in a corrupt fallen world” (74). This attitude is evident particularly in his positive female characters. His two collaborations, Eastward Ho and Histrio-Mastix, also make a similar point, as their respective sinners are allowed to achieve humility and faith in God after a life of profligacy.

Because of humanity’s susceptibility to sin, the value of human obedience to God is a recurrent point in Marston’s comedies. If his characters emerge from the oblivion of their depravity, they do so not because of their independent capabilities but only thanks to
God’s mysterious influence. Marston’s poem from the Love’s Martyr collection, “Perfectioni Hymnus,” defines God in a note to line 16, reading “Differntia Deorum & hominum (apud Senecam) sic habet nostri melior pars animus in illis nulla pars extra animum.” This is an approximate quotation from Seneca’s definition of God from Naturales quaestiones: “Quid ergo interest inter naturam dei et nostrum? Nostri melior pars animus est, in illo nulla pars extra animum est,” or “What, then, is the difference between our nature and the nature of god? In ourselves the better part is the mind, in god there is no part other than the mind” (14.11). God is thus impervious to humanity’s imperfection because He is free from the distractions of a wayward body. He is all-powerful, without a weakness, in that He is unadulterated intellect. In humanity, on the other hand, the soul is superior to the body, but both are compromised by Adam’s initial disobedience. Obedience is therefore an important concept not only in Marston’s comedies but also generally in the English religious politics of his time. The preference for obedience in the texts of Church of England leaders in public debates stems from the utter distrust of the corrupt post-lapsarian individual and from the identification of political and religious rebellion with the disobedient individual will.

Marston’s Religious Context

Despite their conformism, Marston’s works The Metamorphosis of Pygmalion’s Image and Certain Satires and The Scourge of Villainy ended up surprisingly on a list of publications which the official press censors and highest ranking clerics in England at the time, the Bishop of London Richard Bancroft and the Archbishop of Canterbury John Whitgift, ordered to be burnt “presently” (Arber vol.3, 316v). The bishops’ main concern
was that “noe Satyres or Epigrams be printed hereafter” (Arber vol.3, 316r). The final version of their list—featuring Everard Guilpin’s *Skialetheia or The Shadow of Truth* (1598), Thomas Middleton’s *Microcynicon: Six Snarling Satires* (1599), and Sir John Davies’s *Epigrams* (1599) printed in one volume with Marlowe’s translations of Ovid’s *Amores*—corroborates their intention. The only exceptions are two marriage tracts, Hercule Tasso’s *Of Marriage and Wiving* (1599) and the anonymous *The Fifteen Joys of Marriage* (1400?). No further mention of these proceedings survives in any of the bishops’ personal letters in the records of the Historical Manuscript Commission (Bancroft, Whitgift).

Bancroft and Whitgift probably had different reasons for burning the different texts. The epigrams and marriage tracts may have offended specific individuals, including the Queen herself.14 The satirical works, on the other hand, likely raised the clerics’ eyebrows because of their depictions of a world wallowing in vice and sin and because of their statements on specific religious issues, which ran the risk of provoking a public controversy. For example, Guilpin speaks of “this sinne leapered age” and of a world “so bad that virtue’s over-awde” (*Skialetheia* i.5, 31). Middleton in turn laments the corruption of those who have heretofore been regarded as moral pillars of society, its older generation. Once “of a divine and holy presage,” they now tell “lies / Of heaven, of hell, of earth and of the skies” (Bv). Joseph Hall’s *Virgidemiarum* (1597-98) was on the bishops’ list initially but was eventually reprieved even though it also touches on a

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14 As Richard Bancroft states in a censorship letter on another occasion, comments on matrimony with regard to the Queen were things “which were better omitted” (406). The most likely reasons for the burning of these tracts are thus their allusions to Elizabeth’s marital status and their overt misogyny. Hercule Tasso’s *Of Marriage and Wiving* praises Elizabeth I, but it also makes an inappropriate reference to the Queen’s potential marriage (G3v). As for *The Fifteen Joys of Marriage*, it blatantly claims that “the world’s wisest woman has about as much sense as I have gold in my eye or a gorilla has tail,” an affront in the eyes of Archbishop John Whitgift, Elizabeth’s personal friend, and anyone else connected with her (104).
number of religious subjects: the use of secular conventions in religious literature (I.viii),
an advertisement in St. Paul’s Cathedral seeking the purchase of a vicarage (II.v), the
questionable practices of Catholic Rome (IV.vii), and destruction of churches on private
estates (V.i). As Richard McCabe has pointed out, these authors’ “pointed and articulate
criticism in so popular a form must have given the authorities cause for concern”
(“Elizabethan Satire” 191). Their concern appears to be primarily about the possibility
that such satirical writings, even if conformist, may play into the hands of religious
radicals. The descriptions of moral corruption would inadvertently support nonconformist
opinion that iniquity is endemic in the state and that its source lay in the unreformed
institution of the Church of England.

The Church’s Injunctions, republished periodically during Elizabeth’s reign, aimed
to prevent exactly this risk by strongly discouraging aggressive discussions of religious
issues in public:

the Queenes Majestie being most desirous of all other earthly things, that
her people should live in charitie both towards GOD and man, and therein
abound in good workes, willeth and straighly commaundeth all maner her
subjects, to forbeare all vaine and contentious disputations, in matters of
religion, and not to use in despite or rebuke of any person, these
convitious words [sic], Papist or papistical heritike, schismatike, or
sacrimentary, or any such like wordes of reproach. But if any manner of
person shall deserve the accusation of any such, ye first he be charitably
admonished thereof, and if that shall not amend him, then to denounce the
offender to the Ordinarie, or to some higher power, having authority to
correct the same. (Church of England, injunction 50)

The authorities’ anxiety about religious expression became especially intense in the
1580s and the 1590s, when a boom of religious dissidence in England forced them to
stifle even conformist publications, and the burning of Marston’s satires is a clear
example of the nature of their campaign.
There is nothing in Marston’s satirical books that would warrant their burning from a conformist point of view. His attacks on Puritans and Catholics conformed to the official church position in the great religious debates of the last decades of Elizabeth’s reign. His descriptions of the human soul and its faculties, while pessimistic, were never dissenting. Yet Marston’s decision to discuss them all in print crossed the line and the bishops clamped down. What is more, in the wake of the ban, Marston’s fellow satirist and recent admirer John Weever suddenly accused him of nonconformity. Weever claimed, perhaps opportunistically, that England was in no danger of moral iniquity:

“There is no sinne in Albion permanent / Vice lies deepe smothered in his darksome toome, / And Vertue takes possession of his roome” (Faunus I2v). On these grounds, he proceeded to charge Marston with “quarrellous sedition” in that Marston had presumed “to taxe all the world, like Augustus Cesar, making every man subject to [his] censure” (Whipping A2r). He also claimed Marston’s “vild injurious speach / Will Princes lawes, lawes Justice over-reach” (The Whipping Ev).15

Marston, however, was hardly the ambitious rebel that Weever painted him to be. In an illuminating defence on Marston’s behalf, Everard Guilpin suggested that Marston’s satire was aggressive but not incendiary. It actually complemented the work of the Church in the eradication of immoral behaviour, persistent in fallen human nature:

“sacred Pastors take exceeding paine / To winne the wicked to a blessed life, / Commanding man from wickednesse refraine, / But still dissention sets us all at strife: / They may command as God commandeth them / But we will do our willes: Why? we are men” (The Whipper A7v). Guilpin argued that the time for “kinde perswasions,” “[s]ung

15 At the time of these exchanges, John Weever contemplated a career in the church himself (Kathman). He initially praised Marston’s satires in his Epigrams (F8v), but he later criticized them at length in his Faunus and Melliflora (F3r, I2v-R4v) and The Whipping (B7v-E2v), most likely to earn ecclesiastical favour.
from the tongue of dulcet pietie,” was over, and to control dissent the current situation
necessitated “irefull Fury whip” instead (B3v). For this reason, he encouraged Marston to
continue in his endeavour, as it could only help human salvation:

Meane time, good Satyre to thy wonted traine,
As yet there are no lettes to hinder thee:
Thy touching quill with a sweete mooning straine,
Sings to the soule a blessed llyllabie:
   Thy lines beget a tymerous feare in all,
   And that same feare deepe thoughts angellicall.

So that the whylome leawd lascivious man,
Is now remote from his abhorred life,
And cloathes [sic] the dalliance of a Curtezan,
And every breathing wicked soule at strife:
   Contending which shall first begin to mend,
   That they may glory in a blessed end. (B5r-v)\(^1\)

Guilpin’s assertion that Marston’s satirical project faced no obstacles may be surprising
following the burning of his satires, but the absence of further reprisals from the
authorities could possibly suggest that they eventually relented, ignoring Weever’s
accusations. In retrospect, John Marston’s eventual employment in the Church of
England could be a further affirmation of the bishops’ discretionary leniency.

Marston was thus clearly a “conformist,” a term Peter Lake uses to refer
not to all those who can in some sense be said to have conformed to the
rites and ceremonies of the English church, but only to those men who
chose to make polemical fuss about the issues of church government and
ceremonial conformity and who sought to stigmatize as puritans, those
less enthusiastic about such issues than themselves.

\((Anglicans and Puritans 7)\)

Marston’s critique of extreme religious views reflects the opinions of conformist leaders
about the risks inherent in the two mutually exclusive traditions at the core of the Church

\(^1\) Besides satirical convictions, Everard Guilpin and John Marston also shared family ties. Guilpin’s
mother, Thomasin Guilpin, married Marston’s maternal uncle, William Guarsi, in 1592 (Brettle, “Everard
Guilpin” 396; Hobsbaum). Marston addressed his “Satyra nova” in The Scourge of Villainy to Guilpin
(III.x).
of England. As Kenneth Fincham observes, Elizabeth attempted to reconcile conflicting elements and convictions that would ultimately come to a head despite her efforts to unite them:

The Church retained its Catholic structure of bishops, cathedrals and Church courts; the Book of Common Prayer contained some traditional offices and ceremonies; and Elizabeth I, herself a moderate protestant, was determined to preside over a genuinely national Church which could incorporate Church papists and nominal conformists alongside advanced protestants. Further institutional reform therefore was blocked.

(Introduction 2)

The brewing tensions escalated in the 1580s after the Queen’s preferment of John Whitgift as Archbishop of Canterbury. His appointment saw the end of Puritan protection in England, as it came after the bowing out of Elizabeth’s “old evangelical protestant councilors like Leicester and Walsingham” (Peter Lake, Anglicans and Puritans 91-92). Within months of his elevation, “Whitgift launched a subscription campaign against the puritan ministers” (Guy 131). The subscription document was “a schedule of three articles that included an affirmation that the Prayer Book contained nothing contrary to God’s Word” (Collinson, Elizabethan Essays 242). The establishment thus threatened “mass suspensions and deprivations of even moderate puritan ministers” (Peter Lake, Anglicans and Puritans 72). The Archbishop’s aim was conformity, as it “was assumed to be dangerous and unnatural for more than one religion to be tolerated within one commonwealth” (Collinson, Elizabethan Essays 228). His campaign was an attempt to forestall the growing Presbyterianism, a Puritan movement to democratize the Church by dismantling its Catholic hierarchical structure. Following the leadership of Theodore Beza on the continent and Thomas Cartwright and Walter Travers in England, various English groups of radical reformers believed that Presbyterianism was “the only
legitimate form of government for the church of Christ” because it most accurately reflected the practice of the apostles (Peter Lake, Anglicans and Puritans 3). The proposed Presbyterian reforms, however, meant loss of power for the establishment and more power in the hands of grass-roots laity, a concession the bishops and the Queen were not prepared to make.17

Predictably, Whitgift’s campaign provoked a backlash. Peter Lake explains:

When conformists sought to make continuance in the ministry conditional on acceptance of what puritans took to be the corrupt elements in the structure of the English church, puritan ministers were forced to confront a choice between their puritan principles, the public, polemical commitments that their vision of their religion had led them to make, and their practical capacity to pursue those same edificational, evangelical aims as ministers of the word. (Moderate Puritans 3)

Resistance to Whitgift’s campaign spilled into the public press in 1588-89, and the Archbishop had difficulties containing the inevitable controversy. Publishing from a secret press, the politician and pamphleteer Job Throckmorton and his collaborator John Penry launched satirical attacks on Whitgift himself and other prominent establishment clerics under the pseudonym Martin Marprelate.18 In response, Whitgift and Bancroft

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17 “Presbyterianism was a form of church government which vested ecclesiastical power first in the individual congregation and then in a hierarchy of synods. Each congregation was ruled by a pastor, who was to preach the word, a doctor, who was to teach right doctrine, and a panel of lay elders. A group of deacons was to collect and distribute relief for the poor. All these officers were to be elected by the congregation. Spiritual discipline, up to and including excommunication, was to be exercised over the congregation by the minister and the elders. The basic unit of ecclesiastical government was thus the individual congregation. No minister or congregation enjoyed authority or jurisdiction over any other; the principle of ministerial parity and congregational autonomy was central to the discipline. In so far as the church was held together by any overarching or co-ordinating power, that power was vested in a hierarchy of synods to which individual churches sent representatives and which linked local and provincial networks of ministers to the central authority of the national synod. Predicated on a sharp distinction between civil and ecclesiastical power, the discipline effectively excluded the prince from the day-to-day running of the church” (Peter Lake, Anglicans and Puritans 3). See also Bancroft’s views on the “Precisians” (Cressy and Ferrell 125-26).

18 In the first tract of the series, The Epistle (1588), Martin claimed that Whitgift and his bishops maintained their position solely by slandering the members of the Presbyterian movement before the Queen and refusing to accept the religious government clearly prescribed in Scripture: “How could their government stand, unless they should slander their brethren, and make her Majesty believe that the church government prescribed in the word would overthrow her regiment, if it were received in our church, and
first hired the playwrights John Lyly and Thomas Nashe to counter-attack the rogue publications in their satirical style, but when this strategy proved unsuccessful, both bishops went on the offensive themselves. Bancroft issued *Dangerous Positions and Proceedings* in 1593, and Whitgift published *A Most Godly and Learned Sermon* in 1598.

Like Marston, both clerics singled out the Puritans along with the Catholics as the two most dangerous threats to the Church of England. Whitgift claimed that the Puritans were guilty of sedition because of their teaching that it is “not lawfull for Christians eyther to bee Magistrates, or to obey Magistrates,” that is persons of secular authority (C6r). The Catholics were enemies because of their denial that magistrates could have authority “over Ecclesiasticall persons, especiallie over the Bishoppe of Rome,” i.e., the Pope (Cr). Bancroft came up with a similar statement:

> The experience which wee have hereof at this day in the Church of England, is more then pregnant: partly through the divelish and traitorous practices of Seminary Priests and Jesuites: and partly by reason of the lewd and the obstinate course, held by our pretended reformers, the Consistorian Puritanes: both of them labouring with all their might, by rayling, libeling, and lying, to steale away the peoples harts from their governours, to ringe them to a dislike of the present state of our Church, and to drawe them into parts-taking: the one sort, for the embracing of such directiõs, as should come unto them from Rome: the other for the establishing of that counterfeit and false Hierarchie, which they would obtrude upon us by the countenance and name of the Church at Geneva.

(Bancroft, *Dangerous Positions* 2-3)

Predictably, the bishops’ propaganda slogan became “obedience.” Whitgift asserted that “obedience is necessarie and required of all” and claimed that his point was supported that the seekers of reformation are a sort of malcontents, an enemies to the state” (Marprelate 8). Martin then proceeded to call the whole English episcopate “petty popes and petty antichrists” (9) and “monstrous and ungodly wretches” (33). Finally, he set forth his conditions of peace: preaching of the word of God in every parish instead of reading it, no non-resident ministers, end to the persecution of nonconformist ministers and their secret excommunications, and freedom of the Presbyterian press (34).

19 Bancroft published his treatise anonymously, an act which reveals his anxiety about signing his religious views, especially in the volatile and unpredictable climate of a controversy. As Brian Cummings observes, it was not uncommon for religious authors to resort to self-censorship: “Theologians and divines often went to considerable lengths to avoid public clarity, sometimes to avoid clarity in the first place” (282).
“by the expresse worde and commaundement of God; by the ordinaunce of God; by the commoditie that redounneth to the Subjects; through Princes and Magistrates; and by the plagues and punishment, whereby those from time to time have bene plaged that were disobedient” (A7r-v). Eventually, the ecclesiastical establishment came off victorious, as is evident from Elizabeth’s subsequent suppression of the Lambeth articles.20 The final victory, however, was marked by Richard Hooker’s work *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (1593-97).

Hooker’s plans for his new work quickly earned him the support of establishment patrons:

> These must have included Whitgift, who had apparently placed his library at Lambeth at Hooker’s disposal, would naturally have been kept informed from the beginning, at least in general terms, of what he was writing, and had personally licensed the work’s publication; and very likely Richard Bancroft, who was at the time particularly active in pursuing nonconformists and separatists.

(McGrade)

Hooker did not disappoint his elevated benefactors. By promoting the human faculty of reason to the role of “a necessary instrument, without which we could not reape by the scriptures perfection, that fruite & benefit which it yeeldeth,” Hooker thwarted Presbyterian plans for introducing the model of apostolic discipline in the Church of England (*Of the Laws III.8.144*). He justified the existing ecclesiastical institution with its hierarchy, as the product of humanity’s divinely-guided rational faculty, a product

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20 The Lambeth Articles controversy was a power struggle at Cambridge University involving Calvinist and anti-Calvinist faculty in a heated polemical debate about the nature of predestination. Whitgift avoided taking sides, but when he ultimately decided to publish the controversal articles, he faced the Queen’s anger: “On 5 December 1595 Robert Cecil wrote to the Archbishop telling him that the Queen ‘mislikes much that any allowance hath been given by your Grace and the rest of any point to be disputed of predestination being a matter tender and dangerous to weak ignorant minds and thereupon requireth your grace to suspend them’” (Peter Lake, *Moderate Puritans* 228). Elizabeth thus quashed another Calvinist attempt to instigate further reform. See also Peter White’s *Predestination, policy, and polemic* for a recent revision of earlier accounts (101-23).
reflecting “the obedience of creatures unto the law of nature” (I.3.53) and “the perfection of obedience” of the angels “unto that lawe, which the Highest, whom they adore, love and imitate, hath imposed on them” (I.4.55). Armed with the laws of hierarchy and obedience, Hooker then painted Presbyterian reform in the menacing shades of sedition. “[R]ebellion against the lawes” was the mark of the devil (I.4.56). Without God’s help, humanity could not be trusted to obey, which meant that political laws, and by association religious ones, had to be designed to pre-empt disobedience:

Lawes politique, ordained for external order and regiment amongst men, are never framed as they should be, unlesse presuming the will of man to be inwardly obstinate, rebellious, and averse from all obediëce unto the sacred lawes of his nature; in a word, unlesse presuming man to be in regard of his deprave minde little better then a wild beast, they do accordingly provide notwithstanding so to frame his outward actions, that they be no hindrance unto the common good for which societies are instituted: unlesse they do this, they are not perfect. (I.10.70)

Hooker’s new theology thus advocated for obedience to the established Church of England, as an ecclesiastical institution which was designed by divinely-aided human reason according to God’s laws evident both in heaven and in nature. In this fashion, he undermined the arguments of radical Protestant groups who claimed that divine inspiration guided their readings of the New Testament to expose Church practices in urgent need of reform. By doing so, he managed to “assimilate attitudes central to Calvinist orthodoxy to the sectarian fringe” and cement the establishment’s position of compromise under the next monarch (Peter Lake, Anglicans and Puritans 159).

The first years of the reign of Elizabeth’s successor, James I, were further testament to conformist victory and defeat for the Presbyterian movement. King James’s coronation, expected with hope by the English Puritans, was another disappointment. Their hopes for eventual religious reform were all but crushed:
[James] demanded that all clergymen acknowledge his temporal and spiritual supremacy, as well as the scriptural warrant for the Prayer Book, the degrees of bishop, priest and deacon, and the Articles of Religion. In other words, subscription was required to Archbishop Whitgift’s Three Articles of 1583, which were shortly afterwards adopted as canon 36 of 1604. Those moderate puritans who subscribed ceased, in James’s eyes, to be puritans, since they had renounced subversive disobedience to the royal command. (Fincham, Introduction 26)\(^21\)

Like Bancroft and Whitgift before him, James I viewed both Puritans and Catholics with suspicion despite his dreams to effect “a generall Christian union in Religion” that would involve the main European Christian denominations (Political Writings 140). His ecumenical ambitions notwithstanding, the King advised his son in Basilikon Doron to beware of the two extremities in religion: “the one, to believe with the Papists, the Churches authority, better then your owne knowledge; the other, to leane with the Anabaptists, to your owne conceits and dreamed revelations” (Political Writings 18-19).

Obedience was thus the religious keyword for James, too, and Marston’s father-in-law, Dr. Wilkes, was one of the writers to contribute to the King’s campaign for conformity:

To intimidate their presbyterian opponents, apologists for the ecclesiastical status quo erected a blank and uninviting wall bearing the single word Obedience: or rather the two terms which the royal chaplain William Wilkes made the title of a book written after Hampton Court Conference: Obedience or Ecclesiastical Union (1605).

(Collinson Religion of Protestants 12)

Marston himself subscribed to King James’s policies upon his ordination in the Church of England in 1609, but he obviously harboured establishment views long before that. He was also a dependent of Dr. Wilkes, when Wilkes accused radical reformists of causing instability in the political state for their own personal benefit:

would God I might but feare, least that these which doe so earnestly sollicite for Innovation, and perswade the change of a knowne olde good, under the pretence of a new better, doe levell at nothing more then, that all

\(^{21}\) See also White’s Predestination, policy, and polemic (140-52).
things in this settled State, being disorderly hudled, themselves may glide through, whilst others doe fishe in the troubled waters. (Wilkes 19)

Marston’s position on this issue in the comedies is identical with the ideas of Dr. Wilkes and King James I. Both of them opposed religious enfranchisement because both opposed the individual freedom implied in democracy. Wilkes regarded democratic government as a sign that “his Majestie should quickly have lost the obedience, and found the vexation of seditious Subjects” (60). The King discarded it likewise, as the fantasy of “some fierie spirited men in the ministrie” (Political Writings 26). Marston’s political discussions in The Malcontent and Parasitaster share the convictions of his father-in-law and sovereign, as the two comedies oppose both religious reform and democracy. Instead, these plays reflect King James’s assertion that the subjects’ attitude to their king must be “as to Gods Lieutenant in earth, obeying his commands of Gods Minister, acknowledging him a Judge set by GOD over them, having power to judge them, but to be judged onely by GOD, whom to onley hee must give count of his judgement” (Political Writings 72).

The New Comedy and Morality Modes: Tragedy, Irony, and Religion

To convey his religious conservatism in his drama, Marston came up with two specific comic formulas, distinct from Ben Jonson’s contemporaneous experiments with the satirical tradition of Old Comedy. Jonson stated his new direction in his play Every Man Out of His Humour (1599) by discarding the suggestion of his choric character Mitis that Every Man should follow in the popular romantic mode of New Comedy: “the argument of [this] comedy might have been of some other nature, as of a duke to be in love with a countess, and that countess to be in love with the duke’s son, and the son to love the lady’s waiting-maid: some such cross-wooing, with a clown to their servingman”
Mitis’s idea was unsuitable to Jonson’s purpose, as the romantic intrigues of New Comedy would distract the audience from the play’s satirical targets. For this reason, the playwright opted in favour of the realism of “comical satyre,” and he composed *Every Man Out* “near and familiarly allied to the time” (3.1.521-22). The play is thus an adaptation of the satirical tradition of Old Comedy under the influence of Roman verse satire; it targeted topical personalities and issues, and did not include a romantic plot. The love interest of New Comedy is practically non-existent in Jonson’s earlier satirical comedies and is notably ridiculed in some of the later ones.

Unlike Jonson, Marston chose to stick to the New Comedy tradition, with the sole exception of *Histrio-Mastix*, which is composed in the allegorical mode of the English morality plays. Marston’s decision (when the decision was his and not his collaborators’) was most likely dictated by three features of these two dramatic types. The first feature is tragic threat. It was part of the inception of New Comedy, as evident in the works of its pioneer, Menander:

As well as being heir to a long-standing comic tradition, Menander was much influenced by Athenian tragedy, particularly the plays of Euripides. Indeed, stories of rape, abandonment of babies, and subsequent recognition had tragic prototypes, as is drawn to our attention by Syros in Act 2 of *Epitrepontes*, and Euripides was famous for having developed such plots. (Peter Brown xiv)

Like Menander, Marston incorporates tragic elements in his New Comedy plots. In the allegory of *Histrio-Mastix*, he uses tragic threat in the form of the looming damnation, as the danger of eternal death is at the heart of the conventional morality pattern of “alienation from God and return to God, presented as the temptation, fall and restitution
of the protagonist” (King 235). This dependence on tragic elements, present in all of Marston’s comic plays, offers him the full range of both the doom of post-lapsarian corruption and the hopeful possibility of a happy ending. As Sylvia Feldman argues in her discussion of *The Dutch Courtesan* and *Histrio-Mastix*, Marston was under the influence of the earlier morality tradition to a larger extent than previously supposed (95-98, 111-15). Feldman explains that “the basic morality structure is in essence a comic structure, for it moves from turbulence to tranquility and it always ends happily” (15). Instead of a defect, however, the sudden final transition from a pessimistic plot to a positive finale in Marston’s comic plays and collaborations—what Madeleine Doran has called “a violent reversal”—can also be a deliberate dramatic device imparting suspense and highlighting God’s miraculous grace (213).

With respect to morality conventions, Marston and his collaborator may have drawn their inspiration loosely from R. Wever’s *Lusty Juventus* (1547-1553), the title character of which appears in *Histrio-Mastix*, and the anonymous *Impatient Poverty* (1547-1558), which features the allegorical characters of Peace, Envy, Misrule, and Prosperity. With respect to New Comedy, on the other hand, Marston may have followed the trend of Giovanni Battista Guarini’s *Il pastor fido* (1590), which was published in London in the original Italian in 1591 and in English translation by John Dymock in

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22 *Histrio-Mastix* assigns this pattern to its secondary characters, the representatives of nobility, citizenry, and common folk, and makes its protagonist, Chrysoganus, an unambiguous force of good. For further discussion on the specific structure of *Histrio-Mastix*, see David Bevington (280).

23 With regard to performance, my study follows critical interpretations that see the boys’ companies for which Marston wrote his comic plays as capable of imparting genuine tragic feelings. For example, Michael Shapiro states that *Antonio and Mellida* combines equally genuine elements of “slapstick, romantic comedy, and revenge tragedy” (132). Lucy Munro has concluded that in terms of acting “the differences between the adult and children’s companies have been exaggerated” (2). Most recently, Edel Lamb has observed that “[t]he language and staging properties […] create a fictional body in this theatre and the physical body of the player is not necessarily significant” (23-24). These critics thus revisit earlier assertions such as Harold Hillebrand’s statement that “[t]here was still one road which was irretrievably barred to children, the road to emotional depth and tragic intensity” (272).
1602. While these two publications were available to Marston, he probably had no access to Guarini’s definition of his new tragicomic genre in *Il Verato* (1588), *Il Verato secondo* (1590), and its final summary in his *Il compendio della poesia tragicomica* (1601):

He who composes tragicomedy takes from tragedy its great persons but not its great action, its verisimilar plot but not its true one, its movement of the feelings but not its disturbance of them, its pleasure but not its sadness, its danger but not its death; from comedy it takes laughter that is not excessive, modest amusement, feigned difficulty, happy reversal, and above all the comic order of which we shall speak in its place.

(*Compendium* 511)

Unlike Guarini, Marston notably uses the term “comedy” instead of “tragicomedy” in all of his discussions of the genre. He also employs realism inconsistently and allows emotions in his comedies to run high, a preference which combines well with his reformed understanding of human existence and the serious, often tragic, atmosphere it required. Yet Marston could have had access to *Il pastor fido* in the Italian original from 1591 onwards, and he certainly borrowed from Dymock’s 1602 translation in his *The Malcontent*. In addition, his use in all his comedies and collaborations of the “happy reversal” Guarini mentions could be further evidence for the Italian’s influence. Walter Staton and William Simeone describe this device as a practice of “bringing some characters near death, followed by a surprise happy ending that is very little reminiscent of the ancients” (xv).  

The second feature of Marston’s preferred dramatic modes, relevant to his subject-matter, is their use of dramatic irony either in the form of a character’s unaided

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24 For more on Guarini’s possible influence on Marston, see Jason Lawrence’s “Re-Make/Re-Model: Marston’s *The Malcontent* and Guarinian Tragicomedy,” and Lee Bliss’s “Pastiche, Burlesque, Tragicomedy” (238).
confusion or of his or her manipulation by other characters.\textsuperscript{25} Although widespread at the
time, in Marston this device can also emphasize the helplessness of fallen humanity and
the importance of faith in an unfathomable God. Guarini captures this idea masterfully in
the ironic words of his blind character Tirenio: “O monstrous blindnesse of these earthly
mindes / In what a darke profound and mystie night / Of errors be they drowned? when
thou ô heavenly sonne / Dost not enlighten them” (5.6.P4r). As characters undergo a
variety of predicaments, of their own making or not, Marston also allows his audience
knowledge of the bigger picture, which can be a subtle allusion to the superiority of the
all-seeing God over his human creation. One such example is Piero’s unwitting pardon of
the disguised Andrugio in \textit{Antonio and Mellida}. Another is the merchant Albano’s family
who mistake him for a disguised impostor in \textit{What You Will}. Brabant Jr.’s unsuspecting
avoidance of murder thanks to the page in \textit{Jack Drum’s Entertainment} and Malheureux’s
similar escape from sin at the hands of his disguised friend Freevill in \textit{The Dutch
Courtesan} illustrate the same idea. So do Quicksilver’s unaware repentance before his
master Touchstone in \textit{Eastward Ho} and Chrisoganus’s unwavering perseverance in the
face of hardship in \textit{Histrio-Mastix}. The best examples, however, are Marston’s two
disguise-plot comedies, \textit{The Malcontent} and \textit{Parasitaster}. Here the protagonists,
Altofronto and Hercules, work in their alter egos, Malevole and Faunus, to effect the
moral reformation of the corrupt Genoa and Urbin. With the other characters at their

\textsuperscript{25} Examples of dramatic irony are plentiful in both morality plays and the comedies in the New Comedy
tradition. In \textit{Lusty Juventus}, the protagonist does not suspect that the character of Frendshyp is in fact
Hypocrisie, sent by the Devyl to distract him from his godly path of biblical study (Wever 482-84). The
same device is at work in earlier \textit{Everyman} (1495-1500), where the title character attempts to convince the
worldly Fellowship, Kindred, Cousin, Goods, Beauty, Strength, and Five Wits to accompany him on his
other-worldly pilgrimage to the final “rekenynge” (98-100). As for New Comedy, Jonson’s scoff at the
conventional confusions of “cross-wooing” leaves no doubt that dramatic irony is one of this genre’s most
distinctive features (\textit{Every Man Out} 3.1.516-21).
mercy, the two dukes achieve their goals but not without swearing by God’s higher power.

The last feature of the dramatic types that Marston used for his project is their engagement with religion. Morality plays, such as *Lusty Juventus* and *Impatient Poverty*, reflect closely the religious culture of their respective times.\(^\text{26}\) English New Comedy, on the other hand, may have acquired its religious content not only through the influence of earlier religious drama but also through the moralization that came with the genre’s use in Latin language education and subsequent reflection of topical religious issues. As David Galbraith points out, “Comedy, and particularly the plays of Terence, played an important role in the school curriculum” (10). However, Terence’s texts exposed English schoolboys to a Roman culture not always in tune with English Christian morality, and for this reason, conservative critics reacted with cautionary advice. For example, in his *The Schoolmaster* (1570), Roger Ascham questions the moral value of the stock scenarios in Plautus and Terence, unless they are used as negative examples by preachers:

> The matter in both is altogether within the compass of the meanest men’s manners, and doth not stretch to anything of any great weight at all, but standeth chiefly in uttering the thoughts and conditions of hard fathers, foolish mothers, unthrifty young men, crafty servants, subtle bawds, and wily harlots, and so is much spent in finding out fine fetches and packing up pelting matters, such as in London commonly come to the hearing of the Masters of Bridewell. Here is base stuff for that scholar that should become hereafter either a good minister in religion or a civil gentleman in service of his prince and country, except the preacher do know such matters to confute them, when ignorance surely in all such things were better for a civil gentleman than knowledge. (143)

Ascham’s concerns were shared on the continent by Guarini, who designed his new genre of tragicomedy to counter the deeds of “mercenary and sordid persons who have

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\(^{26}\) *Lusty Juventus* makes salvation dependent on the reformist elements of knowledge of Scripture and faith (Wever 194-214). It also features numerous quotations from the Bible in order to support its new theology. *Impatient Poverty*, on the other hand, still features Catholic elements such as the practice of penance (982).
contaminated [comedy] and reduced her to a vile state” (Compendium 523). His Il pastor fido is thus both a celebration of the power of love and a reminder about the mysterious ways of God: “Eternall heavenly powers, / How diverse are your high untroden waies, / By which your favours do on us descend?” (5.6.Q1r). A similar tendency is evident also in Marston’s more immediate predecessors. John Lyly’s Campaspe (1580-1584) is one such example. G. K. Hunter observes that the philosophers’ debate in Lyly’s play concerns “the philosophical conception of a First Mover and the religious conception of a personal God” (Introduction 15). Yet Campaspe is also a moral love-story, preaching control of desire via the character of Alexander the Great, who is intended as a subtle compliment of Elizabeth I. Lyly’s comedy thus resembles Marston’s preoccupation with moral philosophy and romance. Marston’s later change to increasing realism parallels contemporary comedies that combine religious and romantic elements in various degrees, like Lording Barry’s Family of Love (1605). Barry’s praise of the “[s]aint-like, immortal, spotless and divine” Maria and his very topical ridicule of Mistress Purge, a member of the Family of Love sect, are similar to Marston’s treatment of his heroine Mellida and his topical caricature of Mistress Mulligrub (3.1.796).

Marston’s comic output was therefore the product of a theatre that was extremely sensitive to moral and religious problems. Ascham’s invective touches on the potential relationship between comedy and preaching, and Jonson’s scoff reveals the same connection between Marston’s comedies and his father-in-law’s sermons. Marston thus

27 David Bevington points out that “Alexander’s triumph over carnal affection is appropriate to a virgin queen” (173).
28 My bibliography lists The Family of Love under Thomas Middleton, as I use Simon Shepherd’s edition of this play. However, Gary Taylor and MacDonald P. Jackson have concluded convincingly that the author of The Family of Love is Lording Barry and not Thomas Middleton (444-45). Charles Cathcart, on the other hand, has argued for Marston’s involvement, but not as persuasively (Marston, Rivalry 79-140).
enjoyed the perfect vehicles for his stage preaching in the dramatic modes of New
Comedy and the English morality play, as their conventions matched his “knowledge and
experience” (Colie 29). Regarded in a more nuanced religious context, his work with
them can be interpreted as the expression of conservative and conformist values and not
necessarily of their undermining. Marston calls The Malcontent an “aspera thalia” (a
“bitter comedy”) inspired by “the ancient freedom of poesy,” two descriptions that sum
up aptly all his comic plays (Dedication, Ind.59-65). His insistence on bitterness and
freedom is a nod to satire, as is his more straightforward identification of the scope of
Parasitaster with the targets of Juvenal’s works: “Quicquid agunt hominess, votum,
timor, ira, voluptas, / Gaudia, discursus, nostri farrago libelli est” (To My Equal Reader
27-28) or “all human activity—prayers, fears, anger, pleasure / joys, hustle and bustle—
this is the mishmash of my little book” (Juvenal Satires 85-86). Marston’s type of
comedy, however, is distinct from Jonson’s Old Comedy experiments with satirical
characters. Marston may exploit the humour of stock types and the odd personal jibe, but
he retained the tragic potential, the dramatic irony, and the edifying aspect of the New
Comedy and English morality modes in order to develop a more abstract type of stage
satire: one that imparted moral criticism not so much through the obvious failings of
recognizable caricatures, but mainly through recurrent discussions of theological
concepts which gave the action a distinctly religious awareness. Marston’s consistent
combination of these three features with his establishment theology and political
conformism is what distinguishes his comedy from that of his contemporaries.
Admittedly his fellow-playwrights did compose individual comedies that resembled his,
but none of them shares his total commitment to the ideals of “holy policy, reverend comely superiority, and established unity” (The Malcontent, To the Reader 21-22).

**Marston’s Comic Plays**

The conservatism of Marston’s religious world-view—evident in his poetical writings and in his later connections with the Church of England establishment—informs the four main elements that I discuss in my study of his comedies. At the core of each of them is the concept of obedience. It is behind the element of the soul in *Antonio and Mellida* and *What You Will*, the two plays I discuss in my first chapter. Their central characters attack ancient and medieval theories of natural philosophy as inaccurate from a reformed standpoint. For instance, in an attempt to explain the rebellion of his subjects, the ousted Duke of Genoa, Andrugio, claims that without God’s help, “Nature forms things unperfect, useless, vain” (*Antonio and Mellida* 3.1.32). His subjects’ disobedience is therefore proof of the corruption of this world, inherent in its creation from earth. Their disloyalty also contradicts the claims of natural philosophy that the earthly creation is self-sufficient:

Did Nature make the earth, or the earth Nature?
For earthly dirt makes all things, makes the man,
Molds me up honor; and like a cunning Dutchman
Paints me a puppet even with seeming breath
And gives the sot appearance of a soul.
Go to, go to; thou liest, Philosophy! (3.1.26-31)

Andrugio’s view of humanity as fools endowed only with the appearance of a soul is consistent with the extreme moral pessimism of Marston’s satires. The Duke’s explanation of political rebellion as the behaviour to be expected of a corrupt species in
which the intellect is compromised beyond recognition is identical with the political views of both Marston’s father-in-law, Dr. Wilkes, and his King, James I of England.

*What You Will* offers a similar take on the human intellect. In this play, the student of philosophy Lampatho recounts his frustration in studying the conflicting views of ancient and medieval philosophers on the nature of the human soul:

*Delight*

Delight my spaniel slept, whilst I bausd [sic] leaves,
Tossed ore the dunces, por’d on the old print
Of titled wordes, and stil my spaniel slept.
Whilst I wasted lamoile, bated my flesh,
Shrunk up my veins, and still my spaniel slept.
And still I had converse with Zabarell,
Aquinas, Scotus, and the musty sawe
Of antick Donate, still my spaniell slept:
Still went on went I [sic], first an sit anima,
Then it were mortall, O hold! hold!
At that they are at braine buffets fell by the eares,
A maine pell mell together—still my spaniel slept.
Then whether twere Corproreall, Local, fixt,
Extraduce, but whether’t had free will
Or no, ho! Philosophers
Stood banding factions all so strongly propt,
I staggerd, knew not which was firmer part.
But thought, quoted, reade, observ’d and pried,
Stufft noting bookes, and still my spaniel slept.
At length he wakt and yawned, and by yon sky,
For aught I know he knew as much as I. ([*What You Will*](#) 2.p.257-58)

The suggestions that the soul is mortal or that it is made of flesh or that it has free will raise dangerous doubts in Lampatho. His initial interest in pre-Reformation philosophy, some of which implies the soul’s independence of God, has taken him away from established doctrine and thrust him into disconcerting confusion—an act of disobedience. Andrugio’s and Lampatho’s speeches are evidently not parodic but central for the plots of their respective plays and reflective of Marston’s conformist bias. I therefore interpret both *Antonio and Mellida* and *What You Will* as conservative dramas in which the action
and its final outcome can be read through the concept of the human soul as a damaged and unreliable faculty, doomed to constant rebellion if left alone and capable of godliness only if aided by divine grace. In my analysis, I also identify the sources of the pre-Reformation ideas that Marston’s two plays criticize, and I explore their significance.

The treatment of romantic relationships in Marston’s comedy can also be read through the lens of his conservatism, as I demonstrate in my chapter on *Jack Drum’s Entertainment* and *The Dutch Courtesan*. The premise of both comedies is a distinction between legitimate and illegitimate forms of desire, where legitimacy is determined by a Protestant understanding of human will as the faculty which has brought about humanity’s fall from God’s grace. Illegitimate desire contradicts overtly the principles of God, as in the case of Malheureux, who pleads blasphemously: “Let me be vicious, so I may be lov’d. / Passion, I am thy slave! Sweet, it shall be my grace / That I account thy love my only virtue” (*The Dutch Courtesan* 2.2.110-12). Legitimate desire, on the other hand, is the appreciation of God’s presence in the desired person. One of the examples here is the character Pasquil who, in a prayer to God, denies the presence of lustful urges in his love for Katherine:

If I do love that glorie of thy hand,
That rich *Idea* of perfection,
With any lustfull or prophane intent,
Crost be my love, murdred be all my hopes:
But if with chaste and virtuous arme I clip
The rarest model of thy workmanship,
Be then propitious: o eternall light
And blesse my fortunes, maugre hellish spight.

(*Jack Drum’s Entertainment* 3.p.214)

The second example is Freevill’s distinction between his carnal love for the prostitute Franceschina and his subsequent spiritual love for his fiancée Beatrice: “I lov’d
[Franceschina] with my heart until my soul showed me the imperfection of my body, and placed my affection on a lawful love, my modest Beatrice” (The Dutch Courtesan 1.2.89-93). Freevill’s explanation also identifies the freedom of will that his name signifies. It is a freedom achieved thanks to God’s grace, as in Calvin’s writings, and characters of Freevill’s type are Marston’s exploration of God’s influence on fallen humanity. For instance, Freevill’s and Pasquil’s reasoning on romantic relationships reveals a consistently optimistic attitude. Their reformed desires are inevitably attracted to the spiritual side of their respective partners, as the human body is the epitome of sinful disobedience. Both Jack Drum’s Entertainment and The Dutch Courtesan are thus comedies informed by a conservative understanding of sexual desire, intended to privilege relationships based on religious faith at the expense of those motivated by other factors, such as arrogance, lust, material gain, or religious nonconformity. The Dutch Courtesan also reflects the influence of John Florio’s translation of Michel de Montaigne’s Essays, particularly of Montaigne’s distinction between the feelings of love and friendship vis-à-vis marriage.

Marston’s treatment of the morality of political rule is also conformist, as I demonstrate in my analysis of The Malcontent and Parasitaster, or the Fawn in my third chapter. Both dramas assert the necessity of moral government. The Malcontent interprets public opinion as superficial, exploited by corrupt politicians but ultimately unreliable. For this reason, in the play’s final speech, its central character, the Duke of Genoa Giovanni Alforontto, advises political usurpers to submit to God’s rule:

O, they that are as great as be their sins,
Let them remember that th’ inconstant people
Love many princes merely for their faces
And outward shows; and they do covet more
To have a sight of these than of their virtues.  
Yet thus much let the great ones still conceit  
When they observe not Heaven’s imposed conditions,  
They are no kings, but forfeit their commissions. (5.6.137-49)

The word “kings” was replaced with “princes” and “men” in subsequent editions, but this decision is hardly an attempt to stifle a hint of the Presbyterian belief in disobedience to magistrates. The speech is delivered by the magistrate himself, the righteous and wrongfully deposed Duke Altofronto, at his restoration, and as such it hardly constitutes instigation to sedition. On the contrary, its central message reveals its conservative bias in the defeat of disobedience and the deserved restoration of the rightful ruler. In addition, political instability is blamed on religious nonconformity throughout the play, as Altofronto points out that sects turn Christians into infidels and thus into disobedient subjects (1.3.12-13). Marston again provides a serious vehicle for his religious politics by infusing another New Comedy structure with tragic atmosphere and dramatic irony.

The situation is similar in Parasitaster, or the Fawn. Initially this play may be perceived as a critique of the old duke, Hercules of Ferrara, who decides to marry the much younger Dulcimel, princess of Urbin. The Duke sees his marriage as his last chance to unleash his sexual desire from the restraint of reason, “the repressed heat” that has so far been unbecoming of his position (1.1.56). It is almost as if Parasitaster goes against the concept of the human body in Marston’s satires, which forbids lustful urges on the grounds that they are the prime reason for humanity’s fall from God’s grace. However, the Duke quickly comes to his senses and blames his aberrant lustful behaviour on his yes-men counsellors: “Thou grateful poison, sleek mischief, flattery, / Thou dreamful slumber (that doth fall on kings / As soft and soon as their first holy oil), / Be thou
forever damned” (1.2.326-29). Hercules repents and swears to convert his lust to a moral purpose, the curing of the neighbouring court of Urbin from vice:

I vow to waste this most prodigious heat,  
That falls into my age like scorching flames  
In depth of numbed December, in flattering all  
In all of their extremest viciousness,  
Till in their own loved race they fall most lame,  
And meet full but the close of vice’s shame. (1.2.345-50)

As in The Malcontent, Marston makes his ruler the prime agent of religious morality, relegating the majority of subjects to the necessity of moral reformation. The location of the moral consciousness of the state in its absolute ruler is another indication of Marston’s conservative approach to comedy and his allegiance to establishment politics, as exemplified in the works of his father-in-law, Dr. William Wilkes, the bishops Whitgift and Bancroft, Queen Elizabeth I, and King James I. Ultimately the majority of the sinful inhabitants of Urbin are shipped away. Also threatened with banishment are weak clerics, easily abandoning their duties at the risk of danger: “priests that forsook their functions to avoid a thwart stroke with a wet finger” (4.198-99). As in The Malcontent, Marston relies again on a New Comedy structure, characterised by a surprising final reversal from serious plot to happy ending.

Finally, the focus of my fourth chapter is moral education and its neglect in Marston’s two collaborations, Eastward Ho and Histrio-Mastix, again from the perspective of the conservative religious bias outlined above. In these two plays, education—as long as it avoids Lampatho’s engagement with dubious theologies in What You Will—is an avenue towards morally adequate existence because of its development of the intellect and its resistance to carnal temptation. Thus, Eastward Ho reveals the consequences of an apprentice’s decision to indulge in his pastimes at the expense of his
edifying trade. As a result, Quicksilver—the emblem of disobedience—finds himself destitute, rueing his earlier reluctance to listen to his master’s warnings:

As if the stars and Providence spake to me,
And said, “The drift of all unlawful courses,
Whatever end they dare propose themselves,
In frame of their licentious policies,
In the firm order of just Destiny,
They are the ready highways to our ruins.”
I know not what to do; my wicked hopes
Are, with this tempest, torn up by the roots.
O which way shall I bend my desperate steps,
In which unsufferable shame and misery
Will not attend them? (4.1.135-47)

The same fate catches up with the rebellious nobles in *Histrio-Mastix*. Their decision to abandon their scholarly pursuits leaves their tutor Chrisoganus in dismay: “What better recreations can you find, / Then sacred knowledge in divinest thinges” (2.p.257). Both the nobles and Quicksilver repent eventually. Thrown in prison, Quicksilver commits himself to “him that can succour me; let God work his will,” thus subjecting his wayward will to God’s rule (5.3.96-97). He shares his captivity with other disobedient elements, namely all the religious nonconformists in England: “Papist, Protestant, Puritan, Brownist, Anabaptist, Millenary, Family o’ Love, Jew, turk, Infidel, Atheist, Good Fellow, etc.” (5.2.32-38).²⁹ The nobles of *Histrio-Mastix* also agree to the practice of humility that Chrisoganus advises at the end of the play: “entertaine submission in your soules” (6.p.296). Like Marston’s independent comedies, *Eastward Ho* relies on New Comedy mixed with elements of tragedy and dramatic irony, while *Histrio-Mastix* uses tragic atmosphere and the irony of ignorance in its morality structure.

²⁹ The labels “Protestant” and “Calvinist” were often used as appellation for nonconformists at the time. See William Fulke’s *A Defence*: “we speake indifferently against Protestants, Calvinists, Bezites, and Puritans without any curious distinction of them, being all among themselves brethren and pewfellowes, & sometimes the one sort of them, sometimes the other, more or lesse corrupting the holy Scriptures” (63).
CHAPTER 1: The Faculty of the Soul

Antonio and Mellida (1599-1600)

In both Antonio and Mellida and What You Will, the action reflects Marston’s reformed conception of the human soul: a corrupt and unreliable faculty in characters of weak or no faith, but the imperfect seat of God in the godly and humble. The soul’s weakness precludes human self-sufficiency and makes human obedience to God inevitable. The arrogant few who dare rise against God’s omnipotence, despite their fallen status, are destined either to defeat or to redemption through moral reformation. Marston’s presentation of the human soul in these two plays is thus first consistent with his discussion of it in his poetic works: both comedies attack pre-Reformation theologies that grant more power to humanity than Protestant understanding sanctioned. Second, Marston’s conception of the soul is also consistent with his conformist political position and therefore an important factor for the other religious elements in his comic drama: romantic relationships, politics, and moral education. Finally, Marston delivers his discussion of this faculty in his customary New Comedy form with its distinctive features of tragic threat and dramatic irony.

The quarto edition of Antonio and Mellida opens appropriately with a sarcastic statement on virtue, religion, and piety. In a scathing dedication, Marston pays tribute to his patron, the illustrious Nobody, “virtue’s advancer, religion’s shelter, and piety’s fosterer” (12-13). This mock-compliment reveals the orphaned state of religion among the laity and its implications for their morality.30 Although Marston’s concern is so far consistent with the pessimism of his satirical verse, several scenes have raised questions

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30 For a discussion of the omission of this induction in the first collected edition of Marston’s plays and its significance for the early perception of Antonio and Mellida, see my note, “Two Manuscript Comments by Early Readers in The Works of Mr. John Marston (1633)” (151).
whether the moral ideas expressed in this play are not also the target of ridicule. For example, in the induction the characters appear on stage with black cloaks over their costumes and discuss their parts. The tyrant Piero states, “fear not, I’ll suit it right. / Who cannot be proud, stroke up the hair and strut?” (Ind.13-14). John Scott Colley claims that this part of the play makes *Antonio and Mellida* “a burlesque, farce, satire, or whatever” (*John Marston’s* 55). However, another plausible reading may be that Marston was simply introducing the characters of his comedy. For example, Reavley Gair has argued that the effect of the induction is “at once apologetic (with an implied request for tolerance of inexperience) and invitational (soliciting response from the audience in guiding the future development of this theatrical enterprise [i.e. the theatre at St. Paul’s])” (*The Children of Paul’s* 119). Gair’s interpretation fits well with the usual function of the black cloaks, worn by actors presenting prologues (Dessen and Thomson 50). Finally, the speech headings give the names of the characters and not the actors.

Still, further comments on the action proper seem to undermine any serious statement whatsoever. A bemused page jokes about Antonio and Mellida’s spontaneous romantic exchange in Italian: “But howsoever, if I should sit in judgement, ’tis an error easier to be pardoned by the auditors’ than excused by the author’s; and yet some private respect may rebate the edge of the keener censure” (4.1.224-27). R. A. Foakes maintains that this passage is “mocking the extremities of romantic ardour as expressed in some of the fashionable modes of poetry and drama of the time, such as the sonnet” (15). Yet it is also possible to read this comment as a customary statement of humility on the part of the playwright that does not compromise the obvious religious import of the lovers’ Italian exchange. After all, Italian is only appropriate to the play’s setting.
Yet another element that has raised the issue of parody is Antonio’s proclivity for emotional outbursts. In moments of passion, he throws himself on the ground (2.1.200, 4.1.28, and 4.1.164), an act which makes it difficult to distinguish between him and the other affected lovers ridiculed in the play. However T. F. Wharton has noted that in the Antonio plays “certain features of speech are accepted or even applauded in a character denoted as good, but ridiculed in a character classified as bad” (“Old Marston” 358). This observation is also true of Jack Drum’s Entertainment, where the word “perfection” is just another absurd pomposity when Puff is speaking, but it is also an expression of godly affection when Pasquil takes his turn (3.p.210, 214). In this light, Antonio’s actions are not necessarily part of a caricature of an affected lover, but those of a serious character whose genuinely tragic suffering may be stylised but is not ridiculed.

The seriousness of the plot in Antonio and Mellida has suffered also because this play depends on its sequel, Antonio’s Revenge, for crucial hints of character motivation. Only in the sequel does Marston make it clear that the reason the tyrant Piero has conquered Genoa is his eventual plan to unite three of the Italian city-states in order to destroy Rome, the seat of religion: “Thus Venice, Florence, Genoa, strongly leagu’d— / Excellent, excellent!—I’ll conquer Rome, / Pop out the light of bright religion” (Antonio’s Revenge 4.1.265-67). It may be objected that the sacking of Catholic Rome would hardly be perceived as the end of religion in Protestant London of 1600, but the distinction of Protestant versus Catholic is never made in the play. What Antonio and Mellida presents instead is the conflict between an ungodly overreacher in the character of Piero and his pious opposition in Antonio, Andrugio, and Feliche. Marston delivers

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31 Perhaps this detail is one of the actual “more exact accomplishments” that Antonio and Mellida’s induction promises in its “second part,” Antonio’s Revenge (135-36).
their clash from a conformist political and religious perspective, reflecting the late Elizabethan establishment ethos I have outlined in the introduction. His moral concern in this comedy is therefore identical with his concern in the dedication that religion, virtue, and piety matter to nobody (12-13). It is also consistent with his conceptualization of the human soul.

Appropriately, Piero’s first appearance is greeted with advice of caution. The courtier Feliche warns his ruler that his pride will ultimately tempt him to reach for the seat of God, a temptation which would bring the certain destruction of his soul:

This same smoke, call’d pride,  
Take heed, she’ll lift thee to improvidence  
And break thy neck from steep security;  
She’ll make thee grudge to let Jehova share  
In thy successful battles; O, she’s ominous,  
Enticeth princes to devour heaven,  
Swallow omnipotence, outstare dread fate,  
Subdue eternity in giant thought,  
Heaves up their heart with swelling puff’d conceit  
Till their souls burst with venom’d arrogance. (1.1.47-56)

Feliche’s admonition is a reminder for Piero that the power he has enjoyed is the result of God’s sanction. Yet Piero’s attempt to topple the traditional hierarchy of the universe in which humanity is inferior to its Creator makes him disobedient to God and puts him at risk of committing his soul to eternal death. Piero’s refusal to give God credit for his victory over Genoa is undoubtedly a transgression, and humility is more becoming to him than dreams of unlimited power. Piero’s success, however, has obliterated his awareness of the fallen status of his soul and has put him on track to a clash with the play’s conservative values.

Feliche’s speech establishes a clear opposition between Piero and himself. The courtier’s standard of judgement is conformist according to the late Elizabethan religious
and political establishment. Piero, on the other hand, attempts to define himself by his aberrant will, a faculty of the human soul clearly compromised after the fall. Having no respect for God’s power, Piero brushes aside Feliche’s warnings with the words “Dimitto superos, summa votorum attigi” [I dismiss the gods; I have achieved the fulfilment of prayers] and “O me coelitum excelsissimum” [I am the highest of the gods] (1.1. 59, 77). Yet this is not the “seductive heterodoxy” David Bevington notices in Christopher Marlowe’s Tamburlaine plays (1587-88) (234). Both of Piero’s retorts are conveyed in the arrogant tone of Seneca’s character Atreus from the Thyestes. They are nothing short of blasphemy and portend the end which Piero suffers in Antonio’s Revenge. They also help Marston infuse his comedy with the tragic seriousness essential for its moral message. Unlike Piero, Feliche is presented as a pious character. His name means “happy” in Italian, and it implies happiness achieved through faith in the mysterious ways of divine providence and contentment with the rewards of that providence. It is thus difficult to accept Jonathan Dollimore’s assertion that Antonio and Mellida rejects “the providential scheme which divine vengeance conventionally presupposed” (29).

Antonio is another character who represents the conformist world-view in this play. He is the son of Andrugio, the rightful if defeated Duke of Genoa, and a representative of a legitimate old order currently lost. Antonio is in love with the daughter of his father’s enemy Piero, and he manages to sneak into Piero’s court disguised as the Amazon traveller Florizel, following his defeat at Pietro’s hands. Initially, his indulgence in overwhelming grief for his lost father betrays predictable human weakness:

Have I felt anguish pour’d into my heart,  
Burning like balsamum in tender wounds,
And yet dost live? Could not the fretting sea
Have roll’d me up in wrinkles of his brow?
Is death grown coy, or grim confusion nice,
That it will not accompany a wretch,
But I must needs be cast on Venice shore
And try new fortunes with this strange disguise
To purchase my adored Mellida? (1.1.25-29)

Yet Antonio picks himself up with “here rests the hope of all: / Lower than hell there is no depth to fall” (1.1.33-34). He may compare his life to hell, but as such it is no different from the concept of life as presented in Marston’s satires, where existence before the after-life is deemed a morally corrupt reality. What keeps Antonio going in his time of crisis is his special relationship with Mellida. Antonio calls her “Creation’s purity” or the embodiment of the morally immaculate creation of God (1.1.156). His is not a worldly infatuation, as that of the affected lovers ridiculed in this play; it is rather an affection constantly aware of the world’s divine design and hopeful of transcendence into the after-life. Marston’s dramatization of romantic love in this play is thus premised on Antonio’s recognition of God’s moral purpose in his Mellida.

The next moments in the comedy build up to Antonio’s identification of his romantic feelings with faith. To highlight his lovers’ loyalty, Marston depends on dramatic irony. When Mellida meets her disguised Antonio, he tells her a fictional story of his own dying moments in the sea-fight between Venice and Genoa. At first Antonio’s visceral imagery seems parodic: the sea’s “bowels [rumble] with wind passion”; rocks groan at the “intestine uproar of the main”; and a ship falls in the “slifter’d paunch” of a wave, only to be “belk’d again” (1.1.207-20). Yet the diction is intended as no laughing matter; it presents a sea battle in its appropriate images of drowning and stabbing.

Antonio follows this description with a message for Mellida from his dead self: “My faith
in my love doth live” (1.1.241). He thus unites the themes of love and faith, and highlights the religious principles at work in the romantic plot. Mellida is of course a paragon of godliness, and her loyalty, even in the face of his alleged death, provides him with a reason to live in his desperate circumstances. The scene is also an allusion to the importance of human faith in the unpredictable power of God, especially when God seems to have forsaken His fallen offspring.

The religious implications of Antonio’s affection are even more convincing when compared to the inanity of the pretentious suitors chasing Piero’s niece Rossaline. For example, Castilio greets Rossaline’s request that he clean her spittle with his shoe as “an unmeasured honour” (2.1.83-84). His ridiculous attempt to impress her makes Feliche fume at the “good dog’s office, which these amorists / Triumph of” (2.1.93-94). Marston employs Feliche’s detached commentary to ensure a sharp contrast between the morally elevated love of Antonio and the absurd amorous expressions of characters like Castilio, Balurdo, Forobosco, and Alberto. Unlike Castilio’s affectations, Antonio’s affection for Mellida is a love of the soul. When Antonio reveals himself to the Venetian princess, he is deprived of everything that defines his identity. He has lost his father, the Duke of Genoa, and his country. The only thing that is left to him is his relationship, and Antonio’s next speech proves its significance:

But come, sweet creature, thou shalt be my home,
My father, country, riches and my friend,
My all, my soul; and thou and I will live—
Let’s think like what—and thou and I will live
Like unmatch’d mirrors of calamity. (2.1.293-97)

Antonio calls Mellida his soul, which again implies a superior connection. The lovers’ spiritual communion on earth is privileged, as it resembles the communion of souls in
descriptions of the after-life: “namely, that the soules of the godlie having ended the
labour of their warfare go into a blessed rest, where with happie joyfulnessse they looke
for the enjoying of the promised glorie” (Calvin 3.25.6) or the “everlasting felicity”
mentioned in Article 17 (Bicknell 219). Antonio’s mention of the soul in this context
introduces it as the guiding principle of exemplary romantic relationships, and this
function remains consistent in Marston’s other comic plays.

This faculty remains the main concern throughout act 3 as well, but attention here
shifts from romance to politics and personal communion with God. While Antonio
conceives of his relationship with Mellida as a relationship of the soul, his father, the
ousted Duke of Genoa, Andrugio, denies his former subjects the faculty of soul
altogether. Speaking after the loss of his sea-fight with Piero, Andrugio complains:

Philosophy maintains that Nature’s wise
And forms no useless or unperfect thing.
Did Nature make the earth, or the earth Nature?
For earthly dirt makes all things, makes the man,
Molds me up honor; and like a cunning Dutchman
Paints me a puppet even with seeming breath
And gives the sot appearance of a soul.
Go to, go to; thou liest, Philosophy!
Nature forms things unperfect, useless, vain. (3.1.24-32)

Andrugio claims that humanity only *seems* to rise above the clay of which God created it.
He criticises Aristotelian natural philosophy for its assertion that “nature in all cases
desires what is better” (*De generatione et corruptione* 336b27-28). Aristotle’s statement
implies a continuous natural improvement which, according to Andrugio, is clearly
absent in humanity. Andrugio prefers instead the lens of Marston’s satires according to
which post-lapsarian humanity exists in an imperfect state deprived of its moral
capabilities. God has made nature, or the sum of all earthly things, of earth, and nature is
thus far from aspiring to perfection if it renounces God.\textsuperscript{32} The science of studying nature, natural philosophy, is inevitably inferior to moral philosophy. Andrugio embraces this point of view to criticize his disloyal subjects who have forsaken him to support the usurper Piero. Their betrayal is the sign of their earthly imperfection: their bodies are made of earth and their souls are so deformed that they are practically non-existent. They are therefore liable to disobedience, and Andrugio’s description of them reveals the typical conservative distrust of common folk in Marston’s plays. Their rebellion is presented as a sign of their corruption, and they are thus denied the right to express their opinions. Examples of similar treatment of the people as subjects in a political state appear also in \textit{The Malcontent}, \textit{Parasitaster}, and \textit{Histrio-Mastix}.

While Andrugio may deny his subjects the faculty of the soul, he never doubts his own. His intellectual faculty is his only hope for recovery of his former status. “There is nothing left / Unto Andrugio, but Andrugio; / And that nor mischief, force, distress, nor hell can take. / Fortune my fortunes, not my mind shall shake” (3.1.59-62). Despite the loss of Genoa, Andrugio is still a duke in his mind, and although this attitude may make him seem insane in the eyes of his counsellor Lucio, his belief mysteriously turns the course of events in his favour by the end of the play. Like Antonio’s, Andrugio’s faith is of paramount importance, as he encourages himself, “Come soul, resume the valor of thy birth; / Myself myself, will dare all opposites” (3.1.72-73). His goal to restore himself as the Duke of Genoa is justified because he is the lawful ruler of his city, as much as God is the lawful ruler of the play’s universe. He attempts to bring back the obedience granted to him from on high and envisions celestial support for his endeavour: “O, fair cause stands

\textsuperscript{32} See here also Dr. Wilkes’s will: “As for my spirit I commend to the hands of God that gave it, see my body I commit to the earth from whence it is” (Last Will).
firm and will abide; / Legions of angels fight upon her side” (3.1.90-91). His hope and acknowledgement of heaven’s role make him different from Piero and a favourite to win the final confrontation of the play. He is thus an example of the positive capability of the soul under the influence of faith and also of the ruler treated unfairly by his subjects according to the writings of King James I.

Andrugio’s discussion of the soul is followed by Feliche’s ongoing moral commentary. Feliche envies nothing material at court except candlelight, the silent untainted witness of secret moral transgressions:

O, if that candlelight were made a poet,
He would prove a rare firkin satirist
And draw the core forth of imposthum’d sin.
Well, I thank heaven yet that my content
Can envy nothing but poor candlelight.
As for the other glistening copper spangs
That glisten in the tyer of court,
Praise God I either hate or pity them. (3.2.12-19)

Like Andrugio, Feliche gives heaven due credit; he is grateful for his content which allows him to transcend this world and its transient trappings. His attitude is also reflective of the morally conformist world-view of the play, and it constitutes a rejection of Piero’s overreaching attempts to amass worldly power at the expense of religion. Unlike Piero’s, Feliche’s soul is ruled by firm faith in God and obedience to Him, which are evident in the character’s consistent submission to divine superiority.

Feliche’s religious conformism emerges loud and clear also in his second encounter with the inane courtier Castilio. Aware of the corruption of the earthly world, Feliche discards Castilio’s praise of the supposed perfection of Piero’s courtiers. He knows he can detect a flaw behind every ostensibly enviable quality: the witty are arrogant, the great are ambitious, and the feared are afraid. Quadratus in *What You Will*
delivers a similar speech (1.p.239). Feliche thus puts an emphasis on humanity’s insufficiency again. No human being deserves the label “enviable.” Feliche himself is content that he is not exceptional, and gives credit to God for his happiness:

> When I discourse all these, and see myself
> Nor fair nor rich nor witty, great, nor fear’d,
> Yet amply suited with all full content,
> Lord, how I clap my hands and smooth my brow,
> Rubbing my quiet bosom, tossing up
> A grateful spirit to omnipotence. (3.2.55-60)

The gratitude that Feliche’s soul offers to God demonstrates Marston’s emphasis on the fallen nature of humanity and the value of its acknowledgement. Despite his fallen status, Feliche is destined for a positive end, because of his awareness of his inferiority to divine providence, as are Antonio and Andrugio.

Castilio’s further attempts to provoke Feliche are therefore doomed. His claim that Feliche is envious of the numerous ladies who are throwing themselves at him backfires. Feliche has enjoyed some popularity in his time, as Flavia attests: “I hear you make commonplaces of your mistresses, to perform the office of memory by” (2.1.236-37). Yet his sole purpose in attracting ladies’ attention has been to test their virtue, and he has discovered the ladies of Venice to be of far stronger moral integrity than Castilio implies:

> I have put on good clothes and smugg’d my face,
> Struck a fair wench with a smart-speaking eye,
> Courted in all sorts, blunt and passionate,
> Had opportunity, put them to the “ah”;
> And by this light, I find them wondrous chaste,
> Impregnable—perchance a kiss or so;
> But for the rest, O most inexorable. (3.2.83-89)

Feliche therefore cannot accept the fact that Castilio is sullying their reputation. Yet, when the culprit apologizes, Feliche quickly assures him that he harbours no personal
hatred: “I hate not man, but man’s lewd qualities” (3.2.276). This last phrase is itself a variation on an allusion to impiety from the satires, “I hate no man, but mens impietie” (The Scourge I.ii.6). Feliche’s moral sense thus puts him firmly into the camp of the godly souls in Antonio and Mellida and makes him possible to read as far less “contradictory” than previously assumed (Kernan, The Cankered Muse 207).

Marston then returns to the faculty of the soul in the tribulations of his title characters. Antonio is distraught and wants to surrender to Piero, as he suddenly finds his plan to elope with Mellida thwarted. Feliche manages to bring his friend out of his overwhelming grief, and he lends Antonio his sailing clothes, so he can avoid the search-party. Ironically, Piero enlists the disguised Antonio in the search for his own self. Marston uses this situation as the premise for Antonio’s next speech, in which the character plays on his dual identity: he is both Antonio and a sailor in search for Antonio. Antonio’s soul is with his missing Mellida, while his disguised body stands in front of the spectators:

Alas, this that you see is not Antonio;  
His spirit hovers in Piero’s court,  
Hurling about his agile faculties  
To apprehend the sight of Mellida.  
But poor, poor soul, wanting apt instruments  
To speak or see, stands dumb and blind, sad spirit,  
Roll’d up in gloomy clouds as black as air  
Through which the rusty coach of night is drawn.  
’Tis so; I’ll give you instance that ’tis so;  
Conceit you me: as, having clasp’d a rose  
Within my palm, the rose being ta’en away,  
My hand retains a little breath of sweet;  
So man’s trunk; his spirit slipp’d away,  
Holds still a faint perfume of his sweet guest.  
’Tis so; for when discursive powers fly out  
And roam in progress through the bounds of heaven,  
The soul itself gallops along with them  
As chieftain of this winged troop of thought;
Whilst the dull lodge of spirit standeth waste
Until the soul return from—What was’t I said?
O, this is naught but speckling melancholy. (4.1.8-23)

Antonio’s imagery helps Marston underscore once more the dichotomy between body and soul. Antonio’s soul has left his body to seek its kindred spirit, Mellida, and the audience can thus see his disguised body without its animating power. His soul, on the other hand, is missing the bodily senses on which it depends in order to perceive the fallen world. Marston employs here images possibly based on medieval theories of the soul’s relation to the body. Thomas Aquinas (1225-74), for example, argued that the disembodied soul has no way of acquiring new knowledge on earth since it has no senses and thus no access to the material world (Richard Cross 278). Antonio’s soul is struggling to find Mellida, as it lacks the faculties to do so. John Duns Scotus, on the other hand, held that the human soul had two aspects: one that kept together the human form of a corpse after death and another that left the body at the moment of death (Richard Cross 272). Antonio implies that his body, dressed in a sailor’s disguise, still retains a semblance of its animated spirit but is not truly alive. Although these theories precede the Reformation, Marston uses them to convey the genuine tragic pain Antonio suffers because of his separation from Mellida, with whom his soul is irrevocably connected.

The delivery of Antonio’s speech by the original boy actor may have also contributed to the character’s expression of helplessness and not undermined its religious message. Antonio’s further exchange with his distraught father, Andrugio, must have had a similar effect. Their reunion seems to rekindle Andrugio’s faith, and he exclaims, “Now Heaven’s will be done, for I have liv’d / To see my joy, my son Antonio” (4.1.113-14).
However, Antonio perceives himself as cursed by heaven because of his continued misfortunes:

Bless not the body with your twining arms
Which is accurst of heaven. O, what black sin
Hath been committed by our ancient house,
Whose scalding vengeance lights upon our heads,
That thus the world and fortune casts us out
As loathed objects, Ruin’s branded slaves. (4.1.118-23)

With this speech, however, Antonio commits the moral error of challenging God for an explanation of the hardships that have happened to him. Marston is quick to check his protagonist by having his father advise him to refrain from questioning heaven: “Do not expostulate the heavens’ will” (4.1.124). Disobedience is quashed in the bud. To prove the validity of Andrugio’s point, Marston has Mellida enter at that very moment, and Antonio’s happiness is momentarily restored. God works in mysterious ways in the world of the play, and set-backs should not be the reason for despair. Andrugio’s words resemble Calvin’s advice: “But we must keepe modestie, that we drawe not God to yelde cause of his doings, but let us so reverence his secret judgements, that his will be unto us, a most just cause of all things” (1.17.1).

Antonio’s subsequent unwitting interaction with Mellida in this scene is identical to his conversation with her in act 2, in which he describes her as his soul. Wearing the disguise of a page, she tries to question Antonio’s high opinion of her, Antonio accuses her of “blasphemy,” and his unsuspecting confessions underscore the sincere piety of his feelings (4.1.189). Their exchange is a good example of Marston’s use of dramatic irony in the play. Through carefully selected religious allusions, he insists again on the spiritual quality of his title characters’ relationship. As Mellida reveals herself, Antonio calls her “Celeste salvatrice” [Heavenly saviour] (4.1.193) and Mellida replies with “Diletta e
soave anima mia Antonio” [Antonio, my chosen and delightful soul] (4.1.195). Even when this heavenly exchange takes on a more sensual tone—“Muoiono i sensi nel desiatodesio” [Let the senses die in fulfilled desire] (4.1.200)—its sensuality is undoubtedly sanctioned by the lovers’ strong spiritual connection. Their conversation is thus consistent with the moral values of the play, as their switch to Italian is consistent with the play’s Italian setting.

To test Antonio’s faith further, Marston has him leave Mellida exactly when Piero’s search-party enters the stage. When Antonio returns with his father, confident that he has found in Mellida’s reappearance the inspiration to rise above his worldly misfortunes—“an antidote / ’Gainst all the poison that the world can breathe; / My Mellida, my Mellida”—her absence makes him lapse into despair once more (4.2.5-7). Andrugio, however, encourages his son to fight for their restoration, “blood-true-honour’d graves / Are far more blessed than base life of slaves” (4.2.36-37). Through his faith, Andrugio overcomes his ordeal and confronts Piero in the final act. He returns to the stage when the celebrations for Mellida’s marriage to the Florentine prince, Galeatzo, are under way, and Piero is one step from fulfilling the first stage of his plan to destroy religion. Antonio is missing, however, and for a moment the play appears to signal the tragic end of its title character.

Yet the abject flatterer Forobosco surprisingly undermines what seems to be Piero’s certain triumph. In an aside, he hints at the usurper’s diabolical nature: “He sits like Lucifer himself” (5.2.4). His comment refers to Piero sitting arrogantly, in his “chair of state” (5.2.132) or throne (Dessen and Thomson 228). The Old Testament in the Bishops’ Bible depicts Lucifer as bragging “I will clime up into heaven, and exalt my
throne above beside the starres of God, I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation toward the North” (Parker Esa. 14.13). Forobosco’s aside thus gives the moral advantage to the godly Andrugio, Antonio, and Feliche. Andrugio makes his entrance, disguised in armour and “[r]oyally casqued in a helm of steel” (5.2.147). His headpiece imparts mystery and asserts his fighting intentions (Dessen and Thomson 114). Feliche introduces him as a knight who has brought Andrugio’s head to claim the promised prize of “twenty thousand double pistolets and the endearing of [Piero’s] choicest love” (5.2.138-39). The Duke of Genoa removes his helmet and, in an unbelievable coup de théâtre, triumphs over his conqueror. This unrealistic trick on Marston’s part spins what is a plot of tragic potential into comedy. Instead of arresting Andrugio, Piero resigns himself to the fact that he has to reward the very person he has tried to capture! What this unbelievable finale underlines, however, is the enormous trust that Andrugio has had in divine providence. He has ventured into this gamble because he knows God is on his side, and God does not let him down.

Andrugio’s triumph is a just reward for a ruler whose philosophy is based on justice: “he’s a king, / A true right king, that dares do aught save wrong, / Fears nothing mortal but to be unjust” (4.1.53-55). Andrugio’s speech on kingship comes from Seneca’s Thyestes, like Piero’s opening blasphemies, but unlike them, it is compatible with the religious framework laid out in Marston’s satires and adopted in Marston’s other political plots in The Malcontent and Parasitaster (342). Whereas Piero is a godless ruler, compared to Lucifer, Andrugio “sits upon Jove’s footstool” and thinks about “the silver crown of clear content,” a form of government perfectly suited to every man “worth his

33 The anonymous 1599 edition of the Geneva Bible gives the same verse with minimal variation: “I will ascend unto heaven, and exalt my throne above beside the starres of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the Congregation in the sides of the North” (Isa. 14.13).
soul” (4.1.61-66). Although Andrugio wavers at times under the weight of his passions, as most of Marston’s characters do, his moments of weakness are a useful dramatic ploy to keep the audience in suspense. Their other function is to reveal the human vulnerability of the characters in the play. Some of them may be godly but they are all imperfect in their post-lapsarian state.

Following his father’s example, Antonio too overcomes his moments of despair. With the help of Andrugio and Feliche, he is just as miraculously reunited with Mellida. Initially, Andrugio brings his son on stage apparently dead in a coffin for what appears to be a mourning scene (Dessen and Thomson 53). Piero exclaims, “[b]ut stay; what tragic spectacle appears,” and the play is again on the verge of turning into a tragedy (5.2.173). For a moment the audience is tricked into believing that Antonio has killed himself, as Marston does not show Andrugio and Antonio planning this ruse. In her grief, Mellida asks for a spiritual reunion with her lover in heaven—“O that my spirit in a sigh could mount / Into the sphere where thy sweet soul doth rest”—but Antonio’s seeming death is a trick (5.2.197-98). When Piero offers his life to “redeem one minute of [Antonio’s] breath,” Antonio “miraculously” rises from his coffin. The play’s finale thus reinforces its overall morality. Even if Antonio’s death seems another unconvincing trick to have Piero reconciled with the house of Genoa, Antonio talks about it in the terms of a religious resurrection, even if a temporary one:

I rise from death that never liv’d till now.  
Piero, keep thy vow, and I enjoy  
More expressed height of happiness  
Than power of thought can reach; if not, lo,  
There stands my tomb and here a pleasing stage,  
Most wish’d spectators of my tragedy;  
To this end have I feign’d, that her fair eye  
For whom I liv’d, might bless me ere I die. (5.2.210-17)
Antonio’s rising from the coffin can mark the start of his new life, as his reunion with his heavenly Mellida will bring him happiness human thought cannot possibly grasp. Yet it may also mark his end, to which the protagonist will not object as long as Mellida can bless him in his death.\footnote{A similar allusion to rebirth takes place in the final scene of John Fletcher’s The Tamer Tamed (1604-1617).}

This last scene is thus an example of Marston’s manipulation of dramatic conventions that allows him to create the necessary range out of his New Comedy material. His direct nods to tragedy are superseded by a surprising happy ending, a technique which highlights the importance of religious faith in his godly characters and stresses God’s power over helpless humanity. His frequent use of irony also highlights humanity’s inability to grasp God’s world in its entirety. Yet chief importance in Antonio and Mellida is reserved for the faculty of the human soul. It emerges most clearly here in its political and romantic aspects, as political disobedience is inevitably identified with spiritual corruption and privileged relationships are equated with the purity of spiritual connection. In this sense, the human soul is a fundamental element in Marston’s other comedies: it is a factor in the romance in Jack Drum’s Entertainment and The Dutch Courtesan, the politics in The Malcontent and Parasitaster, and moral education in Eastward Ho and Histrio-Mastix. The emphasis on education in Marston’s two collaborations is even more particularly connected with his discussion of the faculty in his comedy What You Will, especially with that play’s insistence on education that privileges simple Protestant understanding over ancient and medieval theories.
**What You Will (1601)**

Like *Antonio and Mellida*, *What You Will* is preoccupied with the faculty of the human soul. This aspect of the play is most clearly present in its discussion of the dangers inherent in pre-Reformation theories of the soul’s nature and in the dramatization of the soul’s weaknesses in the context of matrimony. *What You Will* is therefore another example of Marston’s conservative insistence on human obedience in a universe controlled by an almighty deity. This comedy also ends on an unlikely positive note, with its unexpected final message of forgiveness and hope again an allusion to the mysterious ways in which divine power can grace humanity. In this case, however, the conservative moral message is explicitly highlighted at the end through a classical statement of gratitude to Jupiter, adapted here no doubt for the Christian God: “Deo op[tim]o: max[imo]: gratias” or “Thanks be to God, the best and the greatest” (5.p.295).

Marston’s approach to comedy in *What You Will* has been mapped out in detail, as he worked with an identifiable source, Sforza d’Oddi’s *I morti vivi* (1576). As Anthony Caputi points out, the changes to the Italian original introduce “the Marstonian seriousness utterly absent” in it (163). For example, Marston created from scratch the characters Quadratus and Lampatho and their philosophical discussions on the nature of the soul. This change confirms the importance that the element of the soul had for the playwright. Caputi also notes that for the most part Marston “reduced the fairly complex characters borrowed from D’Oddi [sic] to the extremely flat, though highly animated, burlesque figures met in his earlier plays” (166). This deliberate transformation can also be construed in line with the playwright’s conservative religious ideas: humanity is
helpless and it is best presented on stage through characters of almost marionette quality. As the play’s opening lines attest, the mortal earth has very little to offer its inhabitants.

*What You Will* begins with the disappearance of the Venetian merchant Albano Belletzo at sea and the decision of his wife, Celia, to remarry after only three months of waiting for his return. Celia has set her sights on the flashy French knight Monsieur Laverdure and his marginally higher social status. In her infatuation, however, she does not realize that the Frenchman owns nothing besides his modest title and is most likely after the fortune of her missing husband. Her actions thus constitute a central moral problem and naturally cause considerable distress to Albano’s brothers Randolfo and Andrea, and to their friend, the more worthy suitor Jacomo. When Jacomo appears under Celia’s window in an attempt to earn her favour, he laments her decision and pleads for mercy: “O where doth Piety and Pitty rest?” (1.p.238). His mournful cry provokes the portly plain-spoken Quadratus to launch the first of his many sarcastic rants:

Fetch cordes he’s irrecoverable, mad, ranke madde,
He calls for strange Chymeras, fictions
That have no being since the curse of death
Was throwne on man: Pitty and Piety,
Whole daine converse with them? alas vaine head,
*Pitty* and *Piety* are long since dead. (1.p.238)

Quadratus takes Jacomo’s plea and transforms it into a statement on the fictional and perhaps even the real worlds around him. Pity and piety have been dead since Adam’s original sin brought the curse of corruption and death on humanity. They are absent from both the Venice of the play and the London of the audience. Otherwise, Celia would not remarry so soon after her husband’s death. To look for pity and piety therefore is tantamount to madness, and Quadratus’s opening words are reminiscent of Marston’s
sarcastic dedication of *Antonio and Mellida*, where the fate of virtue, religion, and piety are entrusted to the care of the patron Nobody (13).

Besides pity and piety, Quadratus exposes a number of other notions he believes to be compromised. His speech also resembles Feliche’s exposure of enviable qualities in *Antonio and Mellida* (3.2.50-60). Like Feliche, Quadratus questions love, the earthly world, knowledge, honour, virtue, beauty, and wealth, which are all tainted by corruption:

> Love? hang love  
> It is the abject out-cast of the world,  
> Hate all things, hate the world, thy selfe, all men,  
> Hate knowledge, strive not to be over-wise,  
> “It drew distruction into Paradise.”  
> Hate Honor, Vertue, they are baites  
> That tice mens hopes to sadder fates;  
> Hate beautie, every ballad-monger  
> Can cry his idle foppish humour.  
> Hate riches, wealthes a flattering Jacke,  
> Adors to face, mewes hind thy backe.  
> He that is poore is firmly sped,  
> He never shall be flattered,  
> All thinges are error, durt and nothing,  
> Or pant with want or gorg’d to lothing, […] (1.p.239)

Instead of pursuing secular distinction, Quadratus advises Jacomo and the audience to resign themselves to death: “affect no higher / Then praise of heaven, wine, a fire. / Suck up thy daies in silent breath, / When their snuffs out come Sinior death” (1.p.239). Death, of course, is the only path to the world that matters, the world of spiritual communion with God in the after-life. The simple pleasures of prayer, wine, and the heat of a fire are enough to get by in this life, and Quadratus abides by this philosophy. In contrast, the ambitious thirst for knowledge of God’s mysteries is dangerous, as it can lead to what Calvin calls “the monstrous wickednesse” that made Adam desire to be “equall with God” and brought about the destruction of Paradise (2.1.4).
What You Will thus posits a bleak view of human life from its very beginning. Its opening scene preaches a complete denial of self, of prying into God’s ways, and of welfare in the life on earth; what matters instead is spiritual existence and the after-life. Humanity should be satisfied with earthly austerity—“He that is poore is firmly sped”—and avoid preoccupation with secular ambitions and physical urges. In other words, it should humble itself to obedient simplicity and hope for its election to the kingdom of heaven. Quadratus’s reasoning also reflects the play’s resistance to social mobility caused by material wealth. A merchant’s widow like Celia can climb up the social ladder thanks to the wealth she has inherited after her husband’s disappearance. A bankrupt knight like Laverdure needs to bolster up his devalued title urgently with a widow’s cash. The play’s resistance to their match is informed by conservative nostalgia for old identities and hierarchies. Celia’s desire to climb the social ladder, to be “Muff’d Mask’d and Ladied, with my more then most sweete Madam,” is presented as unnatural (1. p.242). By equating her social mobility with Adam’s attempt to achieve equality with God, What You Will critiques changes in social status as cases of overreaching, as does Antonio and Mellida in the case of Piero.

The principle of obedience is also behind the philosophical discussion of the soul between the characters Quadratus and Lampatho. Quadratus represents the conservative side in the argument, while Lampatho is the character who has ventured outside the accepted church doctrines. Quadratus is called an Epicure in the play because of his emphasis on modest existence in enjoyment of simple pleasures. Epicurus’s original philosophy maintained that “we do not mean the pleasures of the prodigal or the pleasures of sensuality, as we are understood to do by some through ignorance, prejudice,
or wilful misinterpretation. By pleasure we mean the absence of pain in the body and of trouble in the soul” (Diogenes Laertius X.132). Marston is of course selective about the Epicurean ideas Quadratus espouses. He ignores deliberately this philosophy’s other main tenet, amoral atomism which leads to the inevitable conclusion that the human soul is mortal: “Death, therefore, the most awful of evils, is nothing to us, seeing that, when we are, death is not come, and, when death is come, we are not” (125). Marston’s manipulation of Epicureanism allows him to make Quadratus a spokesperson for the Christian idea of a humble life in resigned expectation of resurrection. From this standpoint, the character’s enthusiasm for wine and fish also contributes to his unassuming image despite Epicurus’s specific warnings against their consumption (132).

Unlike Quadratus, his opposite Lampatho is characterized by doubt of after-life and subsequent despair. Lampatho is introduced as a “skrubbing railer whose course harden’d fortune / Grating his hide, gauling his starved ribs / Sittes hauling at Deserts more battle [sic] fate,” one “[w]ho out of dungeon of his black Dispairs / Skoules at the fortune of the fairer Merit” (2.p.249). He is a scholar whose hardship has taken its toll and compromised his moral judgement. He has become addicted to satirical railing, and his bitterness has led him to launch unfair attacks. Quadratus points out that he does not mind fair satire, for instance if a fair critic should “menace me, / Or curbe my humors with well-govern’d check, / I should with most industrious regard, / Observe abstaine, and curbe my skipping lightnesse.” Lampatho is unfair, however, as he is “out of sence / Of his owne wants” (2.p.249-50). He is a harsh critic who calls every pleasure “phantasticall,” that is, irrational or fanciful. Quadratus in turn defends “Phantasticknesse” as one of the most precious human faculties, the imagination.
Announcing the beginning of their discussion of the soul, Quadratus’s description of fantasticness is reminiscent of Marston’s description of the human soul in Certain Satires and therefore perhaps not an “ironic praise of folly” (Campbell 178). In his satires, Marston calls the soul “the best thing that our God did frame,” a faculty whose inventions are worthy praise for its Creator (iv.55). In What You Will, Quadratus declares that fantasticness is exactly the function of the soul that allows it to create:

Phantasticknesse
That which the naturall Sophisters tearme
Phantusia incomplexa [sic], is a function
Even of the bright immortal part of man.
It is the common passe, the sacred dore,
Unto the prive chamber of the soule:
That bar’d: nought passeth past the baser Court
Of outward scence: by it th’inamorate
Most lively thinkes he sees the absent beauties
Of his lov’d mistres.
By it we shape a new creation,
Of things as yet unborne, by it wee feede
Our ravenous memory, our intention feast:
Slid he that’s not Phantastickall’s a beast. (2.p.250)

According to Quadratus, the imagination is a sacred entrance to the soul which makes it capable of perception beyond the inferior bodily senses. Unlike them, it can conjure the presence of absent lover, the creation of original work, and the memories of things past. It is the function that distinguishes humanity from animals. What is more, Quadratus claims, fantasticness is necessary for religious salvation: “he can skarce be sav’d / That’s not phantastickall, I stand ferme to it” (2.p.250). While the imagination cannot be a guarantee in itself, it makes it possible for humanity to imagine what salvation is and it encourages faith.

Quadratus’s exposition of fantasticness establishes him as a privileged voice in the play’s discussion of the soul. Because of his faith and his emphasis on simple
spiritualism, Quadratus has the confidence that is lacking in his opponent Lampatho. The
candid Epicure thus resembles Andrugio and Antonio in *Antonio and Mellida*, the godly
characters whose faith allows them to achieve moral awareness and hope for ultimate
salvation. The key to Quadratus’s belief is his realization that nothing in the life on
earth is worth pursuing, and that one may as well enjoy the simple pleasures in
expectation of Judgement Day. He concedes that it is impossible for human sense to
grasp God’s mysteries, and he discourages over-curious theological study, as it is bound
to lead one into error:

> On us the end of time is come,
> Fond feare of that we cannot shun,
> Whilst quickest sence doth freshly last,
> Clip time aboute, hug pleasure fast.
> The Sisters ravell out our twine,
> He that knows littl’s most devine.
> Error deludes; whole beate this hence,
> Naughtes knowne but by exterior sence. (2.p.252)

Quadratus’s criticism of the human senses and his sceptical view of human understanding
of God’s ways allow him to lead a contented existence despite God’s looming final
judgement. He is thus a prime example of obedience. He is happy in the same way as
Feliche is happy in *Antonio and Mellida*. Unlike Feliche and Quadratus, Lampatho is
driven to despair not only because of his hard luck and poverty, but also because of his
seven-year-long attempt to understand one of God’s mysterious creations, the human
soul. His reading of ancient, medieval, and contemporary philosophers betrays his
curiosity to know what is next, which is exactly what Quadratus preaches against.
Marston’s presentation of Lampatho resembles another of Calvin’s opinions on Adam’s

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35 See also Matthew Steggle’s article “‘Acute Canaidus’ in *What You Will*, 567.”
disobedient desire for knowledge. In Adam, Calvin sees humanity’s inability to pass “the trial of obedience” and prove a willing subject of God (2.1.4).

Lampatho’s philosophical readings remind the reader of Marston’s own. Marston’s application to use the Bodleian Library at Oxford states that “for three years and more since acquiring the level of B.A. he has devoted himself to the study of philosophy” (Brettle, “John Marston, Dramatist at Oxford” 398). Lampatho has pursued a similar albeit longer course of study: “I was a scholler: seaven use-full springs / Did I defloure in quotations / Of crossd opinions bout the soule of man” (2.p.257). Like Marston’s satires, Lampatho’s speeches will become an attack on classical and medieval philosophy in What You Will. However, unlike Marston’s satirist, who is confident in the superiority of his understanding of God and humanity, Lampatho has been left confused by his philosophical studies and as knowledgeable as his dog, Delight. He has found himself at an impasse because he has tried to obtain knowledge about the soul in thinkers who obviously have little in common with Protestant religious doctrine:

Delight my spaniel slept, whilst I bausd [sic] leaves,
Tossd ore the dunces, por’d on the old print
Of titled wordes, and stil my spaniel slept.
Whilst I wasted lampoile, bated my flesh,
Shrunk up my veines, and still my spaniel slept.
And still I had converse with Zabarell,
Aquinas, Scotus, and the musty sawe
Of antick Donate, still my spaniell slept:
Still went on went I [sic], first an sit anima,
Then it were mortall, O hold! hold!
At that they are at braine buffets fell by the eares,
A maine pell mell togerther—still my spaniel slept.
Then whether twere Corproreall, Local, fixt,
Extraduce, but whether’rt had free will
Or no, ho! Philosophers
Stood banding factions all so strongly propt,
I staggerd, knew not which was firmer part.
But thought, quoted, reade, observ’d and pried,
Stufft noting bookes, and still my spaniel slept.
At length he wakt and yawned, and by yon sky,
For aught I know he knew as much as I. (2.p.257-58)

The first scholars Lampatho mentions are the early Church schismatic Donatus (c.311),
the theologians Thomas Aquinas (c.1225–74) and John Duns Scotus (c.1266–1308), and
the Aristotelian commentator Jacopo Zabarella (1533-89). The questions Lampatho
encounters are what the soul is: whether it is mortal; whether it is corporeal; whether it is
extraduce (that is, created at conception by the parents, as opposed to created by God and
pre-existing); and whether it possesses free will.

It is unclear what Donatus’s position on the soul was, but during the Reformation
he had become synonymous with nonconformism because of his schism’s rigorist
tendencies and conflict with Augustine of Hippo. Aquinas and Scotus, on the other hand,
represent two camps in late medieval theological thought. Aquinas states that because
souls come to know objects via receiving universals (the general idea of an object or its
so-called form) and not particulars (a particular physical object as essence or matter in a
particular form), they are “not themselves composed of matter and form” (*Summa
theologiae* I.75.5). Instead, the human soul is form only, as it gives form to the matter or
essence of the human body, thus animating it into existence. Aquinas attempts to
demonstrate that this immateriality or incorporeality of the soul is cogent proof for its
immortality:

The human soul, then, as source of our intelligence, cannot decompose. Because it is self-subsistent, it doesn’t perish with the body as the souls of animals do; but neither can it decompose itself. For forms are precisely what make things actual and give them existence. Material things come to be precisely by being formed, and perish when they lose their form. But subsistent forms cannot lose themselves. (I.75.6)
Scotus agreed with the soul’s potential for immortality, but rejected Aquinas’s proof for it particularly because of its dependence on the notion of separation:

not all destruction is the result of separating one thing from another. Take the being of an angel, and let it be assumed as some do that existence is distinct from its essence. Such a being is not separable from itself and nevertheless it can be destroyed if its existence is succeeded by the opposite of existence. (Philosophical Writings 154)

Hence Scotus posits that “natural reason cannot prove that the resurrection is necessary, neither by way of a priori reasons such as those based on the notion of the intrinsic principle in man, nor by a posteriori arguments, for instance by reason of some operation or perfection fitting to man” (157-58). Instead, he claims that the resurrection of the soul is certain “on the basis of faith alone” (158). Ironically, faith is exactly what Lampatho is lacking as a result of his attempt to decide between Aquinas and Scotus. Jacopo Zabarella complicates Lampatho’s task even further, as he “left the question of immortality to the theologians, since Aristotle, as a natural philosopher, had not been explicit about it” (Kessler 530).

Lampatho’s search for a reliable theory of the soul becomes more and more difficult the further back he goes in history. In the second part of his speech, he lists the ancient Greek thinkers that he has encountered in his readings:

One talks of motes, the soule was made of motes,  
An other fire, tother light, a third a spark of Star-like nature,  
Hippo water, Anaximenes ayre,  
Aristoxenus Musicke; Critias I know not what.  
A company of old phrenetici  
Did eate my youth, and when I crept abroad,  
Finding my numnesse in this nimble age,  
I fell a railing, but now soft and slow,  
I know, I know naught, but I naught do know.  
What shall I doe, what plot, what course persew? (2.p.258)
Marston most likely modelled this part of Lampatho’s speech on discussions of the soul similar to those in Aristotle’s *On the Soul* and Cicero’s *Tusculan Disputations*, which he encountered either at Oxford or as part of his independent readings. Aristotle examines various previous theories on the origin and nature of the soul and criticises those he deems unacceptable (*On the Soul* 403b20-405b10), and Cicero provides a similar critique in his discussion of death (1.19-24). Both authors refer to most of the conflicting theories on the soul that Lampatho cites.

The first ancient philosopher Lampatho refers to is Democritus. As Aristotle points out, Democritus’s concept of the soul depended on his understanding that the fundamental principle of all things is tiny particles, moving on their own:

> For forms and atoms being countless, he calls the spherical ones fire and soul, and likens them to the (so-called) motes in the air, which can be seen in the sunbeams passing through our windows; the aggregate of these particles he calls the elements of which all nature is composed. (*On the Soul* 404a33)

Lampatho seems to think that Democritus’s concept is preposterous now, but it has already contributed to his uncertainty, because Democritus offers a theory on the human soul which is in conflict with other theories Lampatho discovers, like those of Zeno, Hippo, Anaximenes, Aristoxenus, and Critias. Most importantly the theories of all these philosophers are in direct contradiction with the idea of the soul’s creation in Protestant theology.

Cicero identifies Zeno as the philosopher who “thought that the soul is fire” and Aristoxenus as the “musician and philosopher” who believed the soul to be “what is called ‘harmonia’ in singing and stringed instruments” (*Tusculan Disputations* I.19). Aristotle, on the other hand, puts Hippo in the category of “the less exact thinkers” who
“have declared the soul to be water” (*On the Soul* 405b3). He also says that Critias was one of those who “have imagined the soul to be blood, because they have supposed that sensation is the peculiar characteristic of the soul, and that this is due to the nature of blood” (405b6). Neither Cicero nor Aristotle mention Anaximenes, but he was known for the view that “our souls […] being air, hold us together, and breath and air encompass the whole world” (Barnes 26). All these conflicting theories leave Lampatho’s faith shaken.

The play’s negative representation of ancient Greek philosophy in this scene may appear inconsistent with Quadratus’s enthusiastic Epicureanism in the beginning. Yet the crucial difference between Quadratus’s and Lampatho’s theologies is that Marston adapts Quadratus’s Epicureanism to a Christian context through the emphasis on modest existence. In Lampatho, on the other hand, the play seems to resist the humanist drive to rediscover the philosophical ideas of antiquity. The motivation behind their rejection can again ultimately be identified with the Reformation: “It were but folly to borrow of the Philosophers a definition of the soule of whom almost none, except *Plato*, hath perfectly affirmed it to be an immortal substance” (Calvin 1.15.6).

Calvin believed firmly that the human soul was created in its own immortal essence: “by the name of soule I meane an immortall essence, and yet created, which is the nobler parte of him” (1.15.2). His first proof of its immortality is the soul’s knowledge of God: “the verie knowledge of God doeth proove that the soules which ascend up above the world are immortall: for vanishing livelinesse were not able to attaine to the fountaine of life” (1.15.2). Another proof for Calvin is Christ’s resurrection of Lazarus, whose soul must have been alive if Christ could bring it back. Yet by far the most important evidence in favour of human immortality is Christ’s sacrifice: “he by
dying brought to passe that that wee should not die, or (which is all one) by his death he
did redeeme life for us” (2.16.7). Lampatho’s readings on the faculty of the soul,
however, have led him astray from such acceptable evidence. He has become one of
those who “because they are estranged from the Father of lightes they are blinded with
darknesse, so that they doe not thinke upon this, that they shall remaine alive after death”
(Calvin 1.15.2). The worst consequence for Lampatho, therefore, is not his indiscriminate
railing but his loss of faith in God. He is out of line with the “sure and certain hope of
resurrection to eternal life” posited in the order for the burial of the dead in the Church of
England (Cressy and Ferrell 66). Quadratus sums Lampatho’s situation up when he says
that Lampatho has become trapped in a “dungeon of his black *Diaspurs*” (2.p.249).36
Because he doubts the immortality of the soul, Lampatho has also come to doubt the
divine design of the world: “The more I learnt the more I learnt to doubt, / Knowledge
and wit, faiths foes, turne faith about” (2.p.257). With the hindsight of his failure, he
discards the medieval theologians for “dunces” and the ancient philosophers for “a
company of old phrenetici,” but their conflicting opinions have already damaged his
belief.37

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36 The Elizabethan Church made a special provision against despair in its injunction 17: “Also, that the vice
of damnable despaire may bee clearly taken away, and that firme beliefe and stedfast hope may bee surely
conceived of all their parishioners, being in any daunger, they shall learn as to have alwaies in a readiness,
such comfortable places and sentences of scripture, as do set forth the mercie, and benefits, and goodnesse
of almightie God, towards all penitent and believing persons, that they may at al times when necessitie shall
require, promptly comfort their flooke with the lively word of God, which is the only stay of mans
conscience.”

37 Several critics have interpreted Lampatho as a caricature of Ben Jonson in the War of the Theatres:
Bednarz (165-67), Caputi (173), and Kernan (*The Cankered Muse* 155). In Jonson’s Apologetical Dialogue
to his *Poetaster*, the character of the Author no doubt refers to Marston when he mentions one of his
adversaries who “three years / […] did provoke me with their petulant styles / On every stage” (83-85).
Jonson also retaliated for Marston’s satirical portrayal of him in *Jack Drum’s Entertainment* by parodying
Marston’s language in his *Poetaster* (5.3.206-511). Yet Marston’s Lampatho does not bring to mind
Jonson’s character as Drummond described it (151). If intended for personal satire at all, Lampatho is
Marston’s self-caricature, as both Finkelpearl (*John Marston* 164) and Campbell (174) have pointed out.
Through Lampatho’s frustration, Marston again consolidates his conservative view on the theological role of the human faculty. Suggestions that the human soul is corporal, fixed, extraduce, or endowed with a free will deny God’s exclusive creation and control of it. Therefore, the play seems to suggest that seeking knowledge of divine mysteries is dangerous, and humanity better limit itself in that respect to waiting for death, after which the mysteries will be revealed at the final Day of Judgement. The play’s insistence that the soul is the creation of God alone and that only He has control over it also has implications for the element of personal education which I will discuss in chapter 4. While presumption to know God’s ways is prohibited, the two plays in which Marston was a collaborator, *Eastward Ho* and *Histrio-Mastix*, encourage practical learning as an activity beneficial for the soul through edification. Their take on knowledge is therefore also conservative: knowledge is discouraged if it in any way implies the elevation of humanity beyond its fallen status in the Christian universe.

Marston follows Quadratus’s and Lampatho’s conservative discussion of the nature of the soul with religious satire from a conformist point of view. Disoriented, Lampatho asks the Epicure for help, but Quadratus points out that a scholar’s only means to prosperity in this world is immoral or criminal activity:

Serve God and Mammon, to the Divill goe,
Affect some sect, I, ’tis the sect is it,
So thou canst seeme ’tis held the pretious wit:
And O if thou canst get some higher seate,
Where thou maist sell your holy portion,
(Which charitable providence ordained
In sacred bountie for a blessed use)
Alien the gleabe, intaile it to thy loines,
Intombe it in thy grave
Past resurrection to his native use. (2.p.258-59)

Lampatho can thus be interpreted as Marston’s reconciliation gesture to his rival playwright, to whom he also dedicated *The Malcontent*. 

84
Quadratus’s sarcastic advice criticizes what he sees as the abuse of the established church. Some of its members are more interested in making a profit than in serving God. The country is rife with sects, a complaint that will resurface in *The Malcontent* (1.3.10-15), *The Dutch Courtesan* (the Mulligrubs of the sub-plot), and *Eastward Ho* (5.2.32-38). Even worse is the selling of church land or the permanent transfer of its property rights to its ostensibly temporary tenants, the clergy.\(^{38}\) Quadratus exclaims that “if there be a hell, and such swine sav’d, / Heaven take all, that’s all my hopes have craved” (2.p.259).

Corruption has sadly entered the institution thanks to those supposed to fight it.

Although Act 3 returns to the intrigue of Celia’s premature marriage, it still keeps the focus on human corruption. Jacomo, Randolfo, and Andrea decide to take things into their own hands after the dissolute Duke of Venice lights his pipe with their petition to stop the wedding. They dress a look-alike of Albano in Albano’s clothes in the hope that rumours of his return will at least postpone the marriage celebrations. This ploy allows Marston to tie Lampatho’s uncertainty over the soul and subsequent loss of faith with the issue of destabilized social identities. Observing the disguising of Albano’s look-alike, Jacomo comments on the undeserved adoration of appearance:

\[
\text{Appareil’s growne a God and does more neate,} \\
\text{Makes men of ragges, which straight he beares aloft,} \\
\text{Like patcht up scar-Crowes to affright the rout} \\
\text{Of the Idolatrous vulgar, that worship Images,} \\
\text{Stand aw’d and bare-skulp’t at the glosse of silkes, […]}.\quad (3.p.260)
\]

\(^{38}\) The Church addressed this issue in its 26\(^{th}\) injunction: “Also to avoid the detestable sinne of Simonie, because buing and selling of Benefices, is execrable before God, therfore al such persons as buy any Benefices, or come to them by fraud or deceyt, shall be deprived of such Benefices and be made unable to any time after, to receive any other spiritual promotion: and such as do sell them, or by any colour doe bestowe them for their owne gaine and profit, shall loose their right and title of patronage and presentment for that time, and the gift thereof for that vacation, shall appertain to the Queens Majestie.”
The multitude’s idolatrous veneration of expensive clothing is what allows the French knight Laverdure to captivate Celia despite his lack of means. It is also the cause of forthcoming grief for Albano Belletzo, who returns to discover that a poor knight dressed in clothes bought on credit has seduced his wife and a disguised perfumer has assumed his identity. Parallel to the church, increasingly corrupted by its materialistic members, identities in society also suffer because of rampant materialism. Some of the inhabitants of Venice thus seem to have forgotten that God is watching their actions; what matters to them instead is who is wearing what. As Ejner Jensen observes, “appearance and reality are so confused that they become nearly interchangeable” (32). The same instability claims another victim at the end of the play when Simplicius Faber, Laverdure’s constant flatterer, is tricked out of his rapier and clothes by a page disguised as a lady.

With Jacomo’s speech on appearance, Marston sets up an apt atmosphere for Albano’s return. This successful merchant and exemplary citizen discovers that in the three short months he has been missing his whole world has all but collapsed. His wife, who has assured him of her loyalty before his departure, not only has not followed through on her promise, but also is about to transfer all his wealth to a stranger. Albano cannot understand her decision, as until now he has assumed marital love to be eternal because of its divine creation:

If love be holy, if that mistery,
Of co-united hearts be sacrament,
If the unbounded goodnesse have infus’d.
A sacred ardour, if [sic] a mutuall love
Into our Speties, of those amorous joyes,
Those sweetes of life, those confortes even in death
If that cleere flame deduce its heate from heaven,
Tis like his cause eternall always one
As is th’instiller of devinest love
Unchangd by time, immortall mauger death. (3.p.262-63)
For Albano’s beliefs Marston employs a Catholic view of marriage because of the play’s Venetian setting. Albano gives marriage the status of a sacrament which had been stripped in England with the onset of the Reformation. The Thirty-Nine Articles stipulate that there are “two sacraments ordained of Christ Our Lord in the gospel, that is to say, baptism, and the supper of the Lord. Those five commonly called sacraments, that is to say, confirmation, penance, orders, matrimony, and extreme unction, are not to be counted for sacraments of the gospel” (Bicknell 351). The Church of England’s understanding of matrimony is ultimately a reflection of Calvin’s interpretation that marriage is “a holy ordinance of God” but not a sacrament (4.19.34).

Despite its holy status, Albano soon discovers that marital love can also be affected by the corruption of the soul. Human love has become a joke, the stuff of comedies, a materialistic concern rather than a genuine feeling:

But O tis growne a figment: love a jest [sic]:
A commick Poesie: the soule of man is rotten
Even to the core; no sound affection.
Our love is hollow-vaulted, stands on proppes
Of circumstance, profit or ambitious hopes. (3.p.263)

Albano’s moral principles are thrown into disarray. He has realized that because of its fallen status humanity is incapable of maintaining God’s gift of love. Materialism has affected the spiritual dimension of human affection and degraded it. Albano’s listing of the material paraphernalia he imagines at his wife’s new wedding is a further comment on this issue. His contrast between material and spiritual is yet another manifestation of Marston’s recurring concern with the power inherent in material possession and the impact of this power on the soul. The playwright is anxious about the potential of moral disobedience that is inherent in the liberty of secular wealth.
Besides the news of his wife’s remarriage, yet another shocking discovery awaits Albano. Lampatho’s attack on Laverdure’s assumption of free will sets the scene for it. Laverdure’s page has reported to his master Jacomo’s scheme with Albano’s look-alike. Unaware of the real Albano’s return, the Frenchman grows in confidence that Celia will marry him regardless of her brothers’ plan. Lampatho reacts furiously to Laverdure’s assertions, as he sees in them the sign of an overreacher who believes he can control his fate in spite of divine providence:

LAMPATHO. Why, what a babell arrogance is this? Men will put by the very stock of fate, Theyle thwart the destiny of marriage, Strive to disturbe the sway of providence, Theile do it!
QUADRATUS. Come, youle be snarling now.
LAMPATHO. As if we had free-will in supernaturall Effects, and that our love or hate Depended not on causes bove the reach Of humaine stature. (3.p.265)

Quadratus tries to control Lampatho’s relapse into ranting, but Lampatho has a point. Laverdure assumes that he can rule the course of fate and destroy Albano’s marriage. The Frenchman has reached for a power that is exclusive to God and becomes an appropriate target for Lampatho, who wants to “launce our times impieties” (3.p.265).

Albano’s shock is even greater when Laverdure leads everyone to think that Albano is not himself but a disguised look-alike, the perfumer Francisco Soranza. As a result, the distraught merchant is reduced to convincing his own brothers that he is himself! They do not believe him, of course, and he remarks bitterly that he has drowned indeed and “now my soule has skipt into a perfumer” (3.p.269). Albano’s quip is a sad play on the Pythagorean theory of metempsychosis, which argued for the migration of souls into new bodies after death. Marston thus draws a strong parallel between Albano
and Lampatho: they both quote ancient theories of the human soul. Also, they both fall victims to disconcerting situations and seem to lose their faith in the process. Lampatho states that his studies in moral philosophy have turned his faith about (2.p.257). Albano’s homecoming experience has made it impossible for him to believe either: “O deere unbeleefe, / How wealthy dost thou make thy owners wit” (3.p.269).

Act 4 presents another discussion of human will, indirectly related to Lampatho’s attack on Laverdure. The much-talked-about Celia finally takes the stage and asks her ladies for their opinions on the eligible bachelors of the play. Her sister Melletza declares Laverdure neither handsome nor rich, Jacomo both witty and ugly, and Quadratus a beggar. In this scarcity of acceptable matches, Melletza claims she has happily married the only suitable husband left:

MELLETZA. Why I am wed wench.
CELIA. Pree thee to whome?
MELLETZA. To the true husband, right head of a woman, my wil, which vowes never to marry till I meane to be a foole, a slave […]. (4.p.275)

Melletza is an unusually liberated female character for making such a statement of independence. She is her own master, a bold decision in a play that resists characters’ control of their own fates and encourages resignation to divine providence. She also goes momentarily against comic convention, which usually sees female characters married off to their male suitors. Eventually, Melletza even tames Lampatho, the very opponent of the doctrine of free will, but her victory itself, even if progressive, implies matrimony: “if hee bee poore I assure my soule he is chaste and honest, good faith I fancy, I fancie him”
Melletza’s handling of her partner ensures more power for her in the relationship, but her final scene in the play is far from unconventional.39

Lampatho’s eventual composure is no doubt a direct result of the renewed strength of his faith. Thanks to Quadratus he is introduced to healthier evidence for the soul’s immortality. According to the portly Epicurean, the features of a beautiful woman, God’s creation, are the best evidence of the soul’s eternity:

There’s more Philosophy, more theorems,  
More demonstrations, all invincible  
More cleare divinity drawe on her cheeke,  
Then in all volumes tedious paraphrase  
Of musty eld. O who would staggering doubt  
The soules eternity, seeing it hath  
Of heavenly beauty, but to case it up,  
Who would distrust a supreame existence,  
Able to confound when it can create,  
Such heaven on earth able to intrance  
Amaze: O I ’tis providence, not chance. (4.p.479)

Quadratus’s speech addresses all of Lampatho’s earlier problems. The scholar has been studying old theories of the soul in vain; all he needs instead is a look at a beautiful woman’s face. As Quadratus points out, human beauty must be the work of a superior being, which excludes the possibility of chance and makes divine providence inevitable. There must be God if such a creation exists, and if He can create that, He can also create an immortal soul. Quadratus’s speech leaves no doubt that Lampatho has come dangerously close to atheism in his uncertainty over the immortality of the soul, but the scholar is cured nonetheless. He is brought firmly back within the fold of orthodoxy after he forsakes his study of pre-Reformation theological theories. God is thus asserted once

39 Melletza in this play and Crispinella in *The Dutch Courtesan* anticipate more strikingly progressive female characters such as Maria in John Fletcher’s *The Tamer Tamed*, who leads an organized rebellion against the treatment of women.
more as the only power in the universe, and humanity is again relegated to a simple marionette in His hands.

Besides Lampatho, Quadratus attempts to save the dissolute Duke of Venice. On the night before Celia’s wedding to Laverdure, the Duke is to hold revels at his court, and he demands something special, something beyond “what the lip of common berth can tast” (5.p.290). Quadratus proposes “tragike solid passion,” “that’s for greatnesse apt, for Princes fit” (5.p.291). His intention, however, is to provide his ruler not only with entertainment appropriate for his exalted rank but also with a subtle reminder of the after-life. His subtle approach is in line with the political theories of obedience at the time. In a humorous aside, however, Quadratus points out his concern that the Duke has “the best means to be damn’d of any Lord in Venice” (5.p.290). The tragedy Quadratus will present is therefore “The honor’d end of Cato Utican” and its main concern will be Cato’s philosophical discussion of “the soules eternity” (5.p.291). Assuming its immortality, Cato will argue that “A true magnanimous spirit should give up durt / To durt, and with his owne flesh dead his flesh, / Fore chance should force it crouch unto his foe” (5.p.291). Quadratus thus plans to present Cato’s famous last night in the hope that the Duke will think of his soul’s salvation and renounce earthly preoccupations. The same political concerns emerge in Marston’s Parasitaster, except that the duke there is in charge of his own moral reformation as well.

40 The Elizabethan “Homily on Obedience” stated: “wee may not in any wise withstande violently, or rebel against rulers, or make any insurrection, sedicion, or tumults, either by force of armes, (or other waies) against anointed of the lord, or any of his appointed officers. But we must in such case, pacientlye suffer all wronges and injuries, referring the judgement of our cause onelye to god” (67).
For this scene Marston resorted to Plutarch’s *Lives*. In the original, Cato indulges in a philosophical discussion with the Stoic philosopher Apollonides and the Peripatetic Demetrius, but the subject is not the soul’s eternity:

> After he had bathed him selfe, he went to supper, & sate at his meate, as he had always used after the battell at Pharsalia, and never lay, but when he went to bed. So he had all his friends, & chiefe Magistrats of Utica to supper with him. After supper, they fell into grave talke and matters of Philosophie: till at length they came unto the straunge opinion of the Stoick Philosophers, which was this: that only the good man is free, and all the evill be slaves. The Peripatetick Philosophers that was present there, was straight against it. But Cato was very earnest against the Peripatetick, and argued the matter a long time, with a vehement speech and contencion: insomuch as they that heard him, found then that he was determined to ende his life, & to rid him selfe out of all those troubles. (845)

Instead of the soul’s immortality, Cato discusses a related idea. He defends Zeno of Cilium’s notion that the good or wise man “alone is free and bad men are slaves, freedom being power of independent action, whereas slavery is privation of the same” (Diogenes Laertius VII.121). Cato is appreciative of the Stoic’s idea that integrity is the ability to stay true to one’s principles and thus protect one’s liberty. Under pressure to surrender to Caesar, Cato’s only option of staying true to his beliefs is ending his life.

Marston adapted his source in order to put a stronger emphasis on the subject that interested him, the soul’s immortality, and to avoid the implications of disobedience in Cato’s actions. He has Quadratus state that “Cato holdes a distinct notion / Of individuall actions after death” (5.p.291). Marston undoubtedly got the idea for this interpretation from Cato’s reading of *Phaedo* on the night of his suicide, Plato’s dialogue on the immortality of the soul:

> When he was come into his chamber and layed in his bedde, he tooke *Platoes* dialogues in his hand, treating of the soule, and red the most parte of it. Then looking by his beds side, and missing his sword (which his
sonne had taken from him when he was at supper) he called one of the

...e of his chamber to him, and asked him who had taken his sword

...his man made him no aunswere, & and he fell againe to read his

booke. (846)

Plato’s dialogue is in opposition to the Stoic and Aristotelian beliefs that the soul is mortal.41 Plato’s speaker Socrates admits that, while it is forbidden to do violence to oneself, “there is something in store for those who’ve died—in fact, as we’ve long been
told, something far better for the good than for the wicked” (63c6-7). Death is also to be preferred to life, according to Plato’s master, as the human soul cannot attain truth while it is housed in the body, because “the body affords us countless distractions, owing to the nurture it must have; and again if any illnesses befall it, they hamper our pursuit of that which is” (66b7-c1). Socrates then comes to the conclusion that “either knowledge is nowhere to be gained, or else it is for the dead” (66e6-67a1). His dualistic understanding of soul and body is similar to Calvin’s, and Plato is the only ancient philosopher Calvin actually praises in his discussion of previous theories of the human soul (1.15.6).

Quadratus’s plan to enact Cato’s final night is therefore a ploy not only to reassure Lampatho one last time of the certainty of after-life, but also to remind the Duke of Venice of its implications. The portly Epicurean is hopeful that the Duke will change his profligate ways and avoid damnation because of Cato’s story. He confidently claims: “O these are pointes would intice away ones soule, / To breaks [sic] indenture of base prentisage, / And run away from’s boddy in swift thoughts / To melt in contemplation”

41 Diogenes Laertius states that the early Stoics held the soul to be mortal: “Yet it is perishable, though the soul of the universe, of which individual souls of animals are part, is indestructible. Zeno of Citium and Antipater, in their treatises De anima, and Posidonius define the soul as a warm breath; for by this we become animate and this enables us to move. Cleanthes indeed holds that all souls continue to exist until the general conflagration; but Chrysippus says that only the souls of the wise do so” (VII.157). Aristotle, the founder of the Peripatetic school of thought, takes a similar stance with his idea of the passive mind: “mind in the passive sense is perishable” (De anima III.v). For further discussion of Aristotle’s view of the soul’s mortality, see D. J. Allen (59) and David Ross (152).
Quadratus never mentions Plato explicitly, but his reference to “the soules eternity” is a sufficient hint. His performance of the famous Roman’s end will certainly wean the Duke from his excessive revelry and make him mindful of how he wants his soul to spend eternity. It is yet another of Marston’s reminders that life on earth—which is first and foremost identified as humanity’s period of banishment for its disobedience—is inferior to the after-life. The human soul, however, has the potential to accept God’s justifying grace and therefore restore itself to communion with God, the utmost human happiness.

Marston chooses to spare the audience the serious performance of Cato’s tragedy. As What You Will approaches its end, Quadratus is cut short by the joint entrance of Albano and his disguised look-alike Francisco the perfumer. The merchant is at the end of his wits and begs the Duke to recognize him and save his marriage. Yet Jacomo believes that he is a fiddler Laverdure has disguised in order to expose the plot put together by Jacomo, Rondolfo, and Andrea. Laverdure has done no such thing, however, and he is appropriately the first to recognize Albano. Jacomo then explains that the misunderstanding with Francisco has been “the sacred end of love” intended to save Albano’s marriage. Immediately, Marston brings about a change of mood, and the happy ending is inevitable, as Albano begins to mete out forgiveness: “Love, give me thy love, brothers give me your breasts, French knight reach me thy hand, perfumer thy fist. Duke I invite thee, love I forgive thee: Frenchman I hug thee, Ile know all, ile pardon all, and ile laugh at all” (5.p.293). The other strands of the plot come together as well. Lampatho secures Melletza’s cautious affections, and Laverdure is set to marry Celia’s maid, Lucea. Lyzabetta spurns Quadratus, but the Duke assures him that his performance of Cato’s last
night will be heard at “apter and more calme affected houres” (5.p.294). This response prompts Quadratus to deliver an optimistic final message, a promise for “springing hopes, still in fresh new joyes” (5.p295).

The play’s suddenly positive finale is curiously at odds with its earlier gravity. Lampatho’s earlier loss of faith in the soul’s immortality and Albano’s loss of faith in marital love are followed by a return to faith, happiness, and marriage too quickly to imply satisfactory resolution. This contradiction is especially true in Albano’s case, where Celia is accepted back even though she has been contemplating marrying Laverdure up until her husband’s recognition. Yet What You Will is not different in this respect from Antonio and Mellida or Jack Drum’s Entertainment. Its end is another example of Marston’s intention to highlight the characters’ lack of control over their fates. Quadratus sums up this fatalist attitude aptly with the opinion that humanity can “prview but not prevent / No mortal can the miseries of life” (5.p.294). Humanity cannot prevent its happy moments either. Problems appear and disappear regardless of human effort to solve or resist them. The best that the characters can do is have faith that death will reunite their souls with their Creator. The play’s final motto, “Deo op[timo]: max[imo]: gratias” or “Thanks be to God, the best and the greatest,” also argues this point (5.p.295).

Thus, in both What You Will and Antonio and Mellida, Marston presents worlds informed by his conservative understanding of religion. In their respective plots, the faculty of the human soul emerges as an element of utmost importance. It is the centre of both human corruption and potential for redemption. It is also significant for all aspects of human experience: romance, politics, and education. Spiritual love, or the recognition
of God’s creation in the desired person, leads to privileged lasting relationships. The combination of moral rectitude and faith is a recipe for successful political life. Finally, moral perseverance and appropriate study is the way to reliable moral education. As I will continue to demonstrate, all these aspects of Marston’s comic drama exemplify his strong allegiance to political conservatism and religious conformism.
CHAPTER 2: Romantic Relationships

Jack Drum’s Entertainment (1600)

Like Antonio and Mellida and What You Will, Jack Drum’s Entertainment and The Dutch Courtesan employ a combination of religious discussion and a New Comedy structure. With the help of tragic elements, Marston manages to build up the seriousness of their respective plots convincingly before he leads them to a surprisingly happy resolution. His central concern in this pair of comedies is the distinction between moral and immoral romantic relationships, a distinction which emerges as “the difference betwixt the love of a courtesan and a wife” in The Dutch Courtesan (Fabulae Argumentum). Whereas in The Dutch Courtesan Marston contrasts the immoral prostitute Franceschina with the saintly wife Beatrice, in Jack Drum’s Entertainment he compares the unprincipled Camelia and the virtuous Katherine, two sisters eligible for marriage.

James P. Bednarz observes that “Marston’s purpose in contrasting Katherine with Camelia is to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate forms of desire” (148). Ejner Jensen agrees: “The moral focus of the play is on the question of the nature of love and marriage” (29). As in Antonio and Mellida and What You Will, Marston characterizes legitimate desire in Jack Drum and The Dutch Courtesan as the acknowledgement of God’s creative power in the desired person. Romantic love is thus sanctioned only if it is love for God’s presence in the beloved.

Marston’s position on romantic relationships leads him to his second main concern in Jack Drum’s Entertainment: the paramount importance of human faith in divine providence. The character who embodies this faith and its weakness most clearly is Camelia and Katherine’s father, the godly knight Sir Edward Fortune. Sir Edward’s
trust in God, even if imperfect, is ultimately rewarded, as is Katherine’s morally appropriate relationship, making *Jack Drum’s Entertainment* an example of Marston’s conservative bias to obedience. Marston employs the same pattern in *The Dutch Courtesan*, where Beatrice’s godly love is celebrated together with Freevill’s unshakable faith.

*Jack Drum’s Entertainment* opens with Sir Edward Fortune defending traditional country hospitality. Sir Edward’s speech has a religious ring to it, and it comes in answer to a question posed by Mammon, the stereotypical usurer. Mammon criticises Sir Edward’s generosity as waste, but the old knight replies that thrift in a time of plenty is nothing if not doubt of God’s grace:

SIR EDWARD. [...] tush, tush, your life hath lost his taste,
    Oh madness still to sweate in hotte pursueit
    Of cold abhorred sluttish nigardise,
    To exile ones fortunes from their native use,
    To entertaine a present povertie,
    A willing want, for Infidell mistrust
    Of gratious providence: … (1.p.184)

Sir Edward accuses Mammon of heretical miserliness. Like Andrugio in *Antonio and Mellida*, the old knight believes that questioning divine providence is a blasphemy. Providence, in Calvin’s definition, stands for “that, not wherewith God idlely beholdeth from heaven what is done in the world, but wherewith as guiding the sterne he setteth and ordreth all things that come to pass” (1.16.4). In His government, God reveals that “he hath care of al mãkind,” and Mammon’s attempt to ensure his future through material wealth is a certain sign of doubt of divine power (1.17.1).42 Sir Edward’s accusation is all

42 Lloyd Edward Kermode notes that the character of Mammon is an embodiment of conservative anxieties over usury and the economic power associated with it: “The Elizabethan Englishman (or the dramatist) who was determined to lay the blame for England’s economic problems at the door of some hated Other could trace his way back to Jews, who had allegedly instigated usury, the avaricious, unchristian vice of money-
the more appropriate because the play is set during Whitsuntide, the old holiday in the month of May marked by feasting, sports, and merry-making. It is the time to celebrate God’s bounty, not to hoard it. Later, the old knight calls Mammon a “carefull, thriving Citizen,” but the usurer will emerge predictably as the play’s diabolical villain (1.p.187). In religious terms, Mammon is Marston’s negative representation of the human desire to control fate in opposition to divine providence. In contrast, Sir Edward resigns himself to God’s care. His trust that God will see to his well-being also makes him an unconventional comic father: instead of imposing his will on his daughters, he allows them freedom in marriage, “be free my daughters in election” (1.p.186).

Following this initial distinction on the matter of providence, Marston introduces another pair of morally contrasting characters: Winifride, the greedy nurse of Sir Edward’s elder daughter, Camelia, and Ned Planet, a student of philosophy and friend of Camelia’s suitor Brabant Jr. Winifride manipulates Camelia to favour the rich fool John Ellis before the poor but honest Brabant Jr. and is proud of her achievement: “For as it pleas’d my bribed lippes to blow, / So turnes her feathery fancie too and fro” (1.p.189). Planet, on the other hand, looks after Brabant Jr. and tries to spare him from Camelia’s abuse. Brabant Jr. criticises Planet for being “buried in Philosophie, / […] intombd in supernaturalls, / […] dead to native pleasures life,” but Planet does not pay attention to his friend’s disapproval and remains faithful to “Philosophy, Thrift, and my self” (1.p.190). This detached attitude endows Planet with a moral superiority over the rest of the characters. Unlike Mammon’s stinginess which betrays a desire for power, Planet’s breeding” (5). Although Kermode insists on Mammon’s non-Jewishness, the character possesses several features that betray strong anti-Semitism: his mask (Dramatis personae), his similarity to Shakespeare’s Shylock (2.p.196-98), and his eventual confinement to Bedlam, the mental hospital of St. Mary of Bethlehem, or “a Citie of Jurye,” as the character Jack Drum calls it (5.p.237).
thrift is a sign of retreat from the secular and preoccupation with the spiritual. Marston thus invests Planet with the role of moral consciousness of this play and employs him to delineate the distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate romantic desire.

Planet’s introduction is aptly followed by the first courting scene in which three suitors are vying to win the affections of Katherine, Sir Edward’s younger daughter. Mammon, Puff, and Pasquil have all come to Sir Edward’s house to serenade her. She spurns Puff and Mammon with polite humour, but while Puff’s reaction to rejection is innocuous, Mammon’s is presented in a sinister light. His servant Flawne, who resembles Shylock’s Lancelot Gobbo from *The Merchant of Venice*, says “me thinks I hold a candle to the divel” (2.p.196) and later “the Divell and double Duckats, still associate him, but I am gone” (2.p.198). Thus, Mammon’s diabolical nature begins to emerge, and he will become the chief obstacle to morally acceptable romantic love in this comedy.43

Unlike Mammon and Puff, Pasquil, on the other hand, is presented as the perfect spiritual match for Katherine. In the following speech, he appears not as a caricature but as a serious lover:

PASQUIL. The glooming morne with shining Armes  
The silver Ensign of the grim cheekt night, hath chaste  
And for’c’d the sacred troupes of sparkling stares  
Into their private Tents, yet calme husht sleepe  
Strikes dumbe the snoring world: yet frolick youth  
Thats lately matcht unto a well shapte Lasse,  
Clippes his sweet Mistresse, with a pleasing arme,  
Whilst the great power of Imperious Love  
Sommons my dutie to salute the shine  
Of my Loves beauties. Unequald Katherine  
I bring no Musick to prepare thy thoughts

43 For Mammon’s similarities with Shylock, see Kermode (18). No evidence survives to point to an actual creative relationship between Marston and Shakespeare, but Marston’s modelling of dramatic situations on scenes from Shakespeare in this play, in *The Malcontent* (1.5.45-48), in *Parasiaster* (the character of Gonzago, Duke of Urbin), and in the *Histrio-Mastix* (5.p.291-292) suggests emulation. See also James Knowles, “Marston, Skipwith” (167).
To entertain an amorous discourse:
More Musick’s in thy name, and sweet dispose,
Then in Apollos Lyre, or Orpheus close. (2.p.198)

Pasquil’s words put him in a much more positive light than Puffe and Mammon. His references to the happily sleeping newly-married couple suggest that he will be the one to claim the hand of Sir Edward’s virtuous daughter. He also begins to speak in religious imagery. As soon as Katherine replies to him, he first exclaims that her words “imparadise [his] thoughts” (2.p.198). Later, when his images become physical, Pasquil still insists on the spiritual dimension of his love: “This is no kisse, but an Ambrosian bowle, / The Nectar deaw of thy delicious sowle: / Let me sucke one kisse more, and with a nimble lip, / Nibble upon those Rosie bankes, more soft and cleare / Then is the Jeweld tip of Venus eare” (2.p.199). His protestations may appear contradictory, but his playfulness does not undermine the overall morality of the play. His rendezvous with Katherine marks the beginning of a spiritual union, a relationship of a superior order. He demonstrates this superiority by describing what he would consider ultimate happiness: “but let me live / Clipt in the cincture of a faithfull arme, / Luld in contented joy, being made divine, / With the most precious love of Katherine” (2.p.199). Pasquil’s image here is almost identical with the peacefully sleeping newlyweds he describes above. His further lines profess his desire for a transcendental reunion with his lover in the after-life: “Heavens graunt, being dead my soule may live nie thee” (2.p.199). This character is therefore the very embodiment of Marston’s concept of legitimate desire, a lover who acknowledges God the Creator in the object of his desire and aims at eventual transcendence into His world.
Another two important aspects of this exchange, not explicit above, suggest Pasquil’s suitability for Katherine. First, his protestations continue Sir Edward’s criticism of the accumulation of material wealth, as Pasquil too refuses to pin his hopes on earthly riches, or “the increase of durt” (2.p.199). This similarity between the young man and the old knight underscores the comedy’s privilege of spiritual over material security. The second important aspect of Pasquil and Katherine’s conversation is also related to the dichotomy between physical and spiritual. Their love is presented in the terms that Marston has already used to present privileged romantic love in *Antonio and Mellida* and *What You Will*. The potential of transcendence from the human to the divine world, inherent in morally appropriate love, is also central to Freevill, for example. His assertion to Beatrice that “Only you / Shall make me wish to live, and not fear death, / So on your cheeks I might yield latest breath” expresses faith in God’s care (2.1.44-48). Pasquil’s heavenly feelings for Katherine demonstrate the same faith and are therefore privileged when compared to those of the other lovers in *Jack Drum’s Entertainment*.

Further religious allusions emerge, as Marston introduces the threat of tragedy in his festive atmosphere. Mammon attempts to have Pasquil killed by hiring the Frenchman Monsieur John fo de King, but even though the Frenchman accepts the usurer’s money, he lets Pasquil know about the threat to his life. His reason is ultimately moral albeit with an ulterior motif: “but me know there is a God that hate bloud, derfore, me no kil, me know dere is a vench, that love Crowne, derefore me keepe de money” (2.p.201). The Frenchman will not commit murder, but he does intend to use the usurer’s money to indulge his promiscuity, an immoral choice which the play will punish later. When Pasquil finds out about Mammon’s intentions, he calls him a “leaud miscreant,” an
appellation consistent with the “Infidell” which Sir Edward uses to describe Mammon’s miserliness. The usurer’s godlessness is thus beyond doubt, and his attempt to get rid of Pasquil is presented as a moral contradiction, a desire to enjoy the heavenly Katherine through diabolical means: “[Mammon] through the throat of hel / Wouldst mount to heaven, and enjoy love, / Invaluably pretious” (2.p.201).

To exact revenge on Mammon, Pasquil pretends that Mammon’s French henchman has murdered him. The usurer bites the bait and gloats over Pasquil’s supposedly dead body. The Frenchman, who is in on Pasquil’s plan, tells Mammon that he should “leave praying for dead, tis no good Calvanisme, puritanisme” (2.p.201), sarcastically mistaking Mammon’s gloating as prayer.44 The problem of praying for the dead was a complex one in Marston’s time. Calvin had stated that: “al the godly do immediately after death enjoy blessed rest as wel as the Prophets, Apostles, and Martyrs. If their estate be such, what I beseech you shall our prayers availe them?” (3.5.10). His view that prayers for the dead could make no difference to their souls rendered the concept of purgatory redundant. The Church of England followed suit with regard to purgatory, but its official doctrine omitted the matter of praying for the dead. Article 22 simply stated that “[t]he Romish doctrine concerning purgatory, pardons, worshipping and adoration as well of images as of relics, and also invocation of saints, is a fond thing, vainly invented, and grounded upon no warranty in scripture, but rather repugnant of the word of God” (Bicknell 276). It thus left a certain leeway of discretion on the subject of prayer, perhaps as long as the persons praying did so only in terms of commemoration

44 As I mention in the introduction, the labels “Protestant” and “Calvinist” were often used as appellation for nonconformists at the time. See William Fulke’s A Defence: “we speake indifferently against Protestants, Calvinists, Bezites, and Puritans without any curious distinction of them, being all among themselves brethren and pewfellowes, & sometimes the one sort of them, sometimes the other, more or lesse corrupting the holy Scriptures” (63).
and not in assumption that their supplication could influence the dead person’s salvation. Marston took advantage of this discretionary freedom in order to take a stab at elements he viewed as nonconformist. His attack is consistent with the attitude to sects in What You Will, The Dutch Courtesan, The Malcontent, and Eastward Ho.

The ridicule of radical reformist groups in Jack Drum’s Entertainment works not only because Mammon is far from praying for Pasquil but also because Pasquil is far from dead. On the contrary, the young man jumps up at Mammon and attempts to scare him into repentance, as Mammon takes him for a ghost: “Old wretch, amend thy thoughts, purge, purge, repent, / Ile hide thy ulcer but be penitent” (2.p.202). Pasquil also promises to hide Mammon’s transgression as a reward for the usurer’s remorse. For a moment, tragedy is avoided, but the next turn of the action brings the serious atmosphere back. While Pasquil has been feigning death, Brabant Sr. and Planet see his body lying on the ground and run with the news to Sir Edward Fortune and Katherine. In true tragic fashion, Katherine tears her hair and disappears without a trace. Sir Edward mourns for Pasquil, “a virtuous modest youth,” but resigns himself to “the will of God” after his daughter’s disappearance (2.p.205). His belief in God is thus a gesture of humility on his part, one that surrenders agency to the Almighty and limits humanity to the obedience of patient faith.

Sir Edward’s perseverance in this difficult moment will be rewarded ultimately even if he falters momentarily. He decides to dull its pain with the help of wine: “Broach me a fresh Butt of Canary Sacke, / Lets sing, drink, sleep, for thats the best reliefe: / To drowne all care, and overwhelme all griefe” (2.p.206). His decision is not necessarily a sign of Marston’s ridicule, however (Campbell 157). It is Marston’s way of hinting at

45 See Bicknell’s discussion of the issue (279 and particularly footnote 5).
human vulnerability in an otherwise good Christian. Sir Edward is not perfect even if he ostensibly abides by Calvin’s teaching on enduring difficult times:

So must wee thinke that while the troublesome state of things in the world raketh from us abilitie to judge, God by the pure light of his righteousnesse and wisedome, doeth in well framed order governe & dispose even those verie troublesom motions themselves to a right end.

(1.17.1)

The old knight gives in to his grief, as he is a post-lapsarian human and not impervious to pain. At the end of the play, he will ask forgiveness for his lapse, even though he never questions God’s will.

Pasquil’s reaction to Katherine’s disappearance also betrays awareness of his human imperfection. The young man sees the incident as potential punishment for lust and is eager to convince God of his morally pure love:

O thou omnipotent, infinitie,
Crack not the sinewes of my patience
With racking torment: Insist not thus to scourge
My tender youth with sharpe affliction,
If I do love that glorie of thy hand,
That rich Idea of perfection,
With any lustfull or prophane intent,
Crost be my love, murdred be all my hopes:
But if with chaste and virtuous arme I clip
The rarest model of thy workmanship,
Be then propitious: o eternall light
And blesse my fortunes, maugre hellish spight. (3.p.214)

Here Marston emphasises again the spiritual dimension of Pasquil’s feelings for Katherine. Much like Beatrice in The Dutch Courtesan, Katherine is described as the embodiment of God’s perfect creation, and Pasquil hopes that the godly affection he feels for her will bring her back. The scene is melodramatic but not parodic. It is part of Marston’s plot design of parallel courtships and their distinction according to moral
implication. The child actor who played Pasquil in the original stagings must have earned the audiences’ sympathies by capitalizing on the poignancy of his young age.

Pasquil’s suffering for Katherine is immediately juxtaposed with Brabant Jr.’s humiliation at the hands of Camelia. When Camelia spurns Brabant Jr. because he is a second brother and thus unlikely to receive inheritance, Brabant snaps out of his infatuation and states that genuine affection should not be subject to materialistic considerations. Brabant’s view on the preoccupation with things material thus echoes both Pasquil’s and Sir Edward Fortune’s:

I do confess my yonger brothership;  
Yet therin laie no such disparagement  
As your high scorne imputes unto my worth.  
Coach Jades and Dogges, are coupled still together,  
Only for outward likeness, growth and strength,  
But the bright models of eternitie,  
Are join'd together for affection,  
Which in the soule is form’d. Oh let this move,  
Love should make marriage, not marriage Love. (3.p.212)

Brabant Jr. argues for a marriage built on genuine affection, not on materialistic consideration or carnal appetite. Sincere affection brings together “the bright models of eternity” or the lovers’ souls, and it is a connection which transcends mortality. Brabant Jr.’s language resembles the conversations of Pasquil and Katherine, and those of other exemplary romantic couples in Marston’s comedies. It is consistent with Marston’s idea about merging romantic feelings with religious faith and presenting love as an acknowledgement of God’s part in the creation of the human world. The same awareness is encouraged in *The Book of Common Prayer*, where matrimony is said

not to be enterprised nor taken in hand unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly, to satisfy men’s carnal lusts and appetites, like brute beasts that have no understanding, but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in fear of God, duly considering the causes for which matrimony was ordained.
Marston’s theory of romantic love explains Katherine’s desire to be reunited with Pasquil in death when she learns of his alleged murder. She prays to his ghost to “prepare thy arme / To clip the spirit of thy constant Love” (3.p.214). Yet, as Jack Drum’s comic framework precludes death and its religious one suicide, Marston brings Pasquil back on stage to prevent a tragic development. Pasquil runs in, shouting “Hold, hold, thou miracle of constancie,” and Katherine cannot tell whether she is still in this world or she has already been reunited with Pasquil’s spirit in heaven. This dramatic confusion is aptly executed to highlight the fact that for Katherine Pasquil’s presence is transporting because of the divine love which the two lovers share:

KATHERINE. What do I dreame? Or have I drawne the sluice Of life up? And through streames of bloud Unfelt, have set my prisoned soule at large? Am I in heaven? Or in Pasquills Armes? I am in heaven, for my Neds embrace Is Katherine long wish’d celestiall place. (3.p.215)

Once again Marston gives the love expressions between Katherine and Pasquil a distinctly religious ring which makes them superior to those of other lovers in the play. His rendition of their love is reminiscent of Calvin’s description of the elects’ “blessed rest” in heaven (Calvin 3.25.6), and he re-creates this reunion scene later in The Dutch Courtesan (5.2.46-49).

Nevertheless, just as it seems that the lovers are finally safe, Marston introduces yet another tragic twist to his plot, perhaps to underscore the challenges to human faith in the fallen world on earth. Katherine asks Pasquil to fetch her gown, so she can return to her house properly dressed, as she has been wearing only a petticoat in accordance with dramatic representations of distraught grief (Dessen and Thomson 137). With Pasquil

Katherine’s refusal to fall for the usurer’s materialistic promises of exotic dress and jewels provokes him to disfigure her with a sinister oil of toads. When Pasquil returns, Katherine manages to tell him that “the devle in the shape of Mammon” has disfigured her, before she runs away in shame. Her references to Mammon as a devil are consistent with those made by Mammon’s servant Flawne earlier in the play (2.p.196, p.198). Thus, on a more abstract level, the comedy continues with its negative representation of the usurer’s wealth. It privileges the virtuous Pasquil instead, because of his opposition to material riches and because of his trust in divine providence.

With the disfigurement of Katherine, Marston’s comedy rises to new tragic heights. Having lost his love for the second time, Pasquil delivers a tragic cry:

PASQUIL FURENS. O dira fata, saeva, miseranda, horida
Quis hic Locus? quae Regio? Quae Mundi plaga?

In his exclamation, Pasquil echoes Seneca’s Trojan Women and Hercules:

NUNTIUS. O dura fata, saeva miseranda horrida!
MESSENGER. O cruel deaths, harsh and pitiable and horrible!
(Trojan Women 1056)46
HERCULES. Quis hic locus, quae regio? quae mundi plaga?
ubi sum?
HERCULES. What place is this, what region, what tract of the earth?
Where am I? (Hercules 1138-39)

Marston thus conveys Pasquil’s utter sense of disorientation, following the loss of Katherine, a grief of genuine tragic proportions. In his madness, the young man destroys Mammon’s obligations, which document all the money owed to the usurer. Mammon

46 Translator John G. Fitch opts for a less literal rendition. A more verbatim variant would be “O harsh fate, cruel, pitiable, horrible.” Marston changes Seneca’s line slightly, substituting “dura” with “dira,” “harsh” with “frightful.”
loses his reason and is sent to Bedlam, or St. Mary of Bethlehem, the notorious London institution for the mentally ill in Marston’s day. Pasquil continues speaking in a rambling fashion, yet making sense by mixing references to tragic events from classical literature with subtle allusions to the current plight of religion and piety:

PASQUIL. *Ubi Hellena, ubi Troia*, sit not true my *Ganimede*,
When shall old *Saturne* mount his Throane againe:
See, see, alas how bleake *Religion* stands.
*Katherina, Katherina*, you damned *Titanoies*,
Why prick you heavens ribbes with blasphemie?
*Python* yet breathes, old gray hayr’d pietie. (4.p.225)

Pasquil’s words are once again consistent with Marston’s view on the sorry state of religion expressed in his other comedies. Religion stands “bleak,” a statement that reminds the reader of the dedication to *Antonio and Mellida* (12-13) and of Quadratus’s sarcastic statement on pity and piety in *What You Will* (1.p.238). The reference to “heavens ribbes” evokes a similar image from *Histrio-Mastix*, where the lawyer Vourcher proudly claims that “Wee’le swell in greatnesse and our palace Towers / Shall pricke the ribs of Heaven with proud height” (4.p.281).

At this point, Marston leaves the distraught Pasquil and the disfigured Katherine in order to return to another lover in the play, Brabant Jr. The young man has just snapped out of his infatuation with Camelia, but he is not at all prepared for the following turn of events. In an attempt to punish Camelia for her treatment of Brabant Jr., Planet bribes her nurse Winifride to make her mistress fall in love with him, and Camelia falls so hard for Planet that she even serenades him.47 He punishes her, however, by spurning her as she has spurned his friend:

47 Camelia calls: “Bring forth the Violls, each one play his part, / Musick’s the quiver of young *Coupids* dart” (4.p.228). Michael Shapiro has pointed out that “[w]hether the female singer is a courtesan or bawd, for whom singing could be considered a professional requirement, or a lascivious amateur like Camelia in
Thus my deare Brabant, am I thy revenge,
And whip her for the peevish scorne she bare
To thy weake younger birth: ô that the soules of men
Were temperate like mine, then Natures painte
Should not triumph o’er our infirmities.
I do adore with infinit respect,
Weomen whose merit issues from their worth
Of inward graces, but these rotten poasts
That are but guilt with outward garnishment,
O how my soule abhorres them. (4.p.229)

Planet describes Camelia as a person who thrives on the power of her appearance and
does not merit attention because of the inward powers of her soul. She therefore deserves
some of her own treatment, and in a phrase reminiscent of the title of Marston’s second
Planet’s speech also privileges the inner graces of the soul over the body covering it, or
“Natures painte” again.

Brabant Jr., however, completely misunderstands Planet’s intentions when he sees
Winifride giving Planet a scarf as a token of Camelia’s love. In his jealousy, Brabant
orders his page to kill Planet, but regrets his decision after hearing the shot:

Oh that these womens beauties,
This Natures witchraft, should inchaunt our soules
So infinitely unrecoverable,
That Hell, death, shame, eternall infamy,
Cannot reclaime our desperate resolves.
But we will on [sic] spight of damnation. (5.p.231)

Brabant’s speech again posits an opposition between inferior natural desire and the
superior soul, between natural appearance and spiritual worth. He is thus very much like
Malheureux from Marston’s later comedy The Dutch Courtesan. Malheureux too is
caught in a situation where he has to choose between the murder of his friend or his

Jack Drum’s Entertainment, a serenade by a woman suggests unnatural sexual aggressiveness and
intimates danger or even death for the men who listen” (247).
infatuation with a courtesan. Unlike Brabant Jr., however, Malheureux can see “How easy ’tis to err / When passion will not give us leave to think” (2.2.206-24). Brabant, on the other hand, orders his page to shoot Planet and contemplates what seems to be suicide in the aftermath: “Hush’d silence, and dumb solitude, are fit / To be observers of my Tragedie” (5.p.232). Yet what drives him to take his life is not despair but the necessity of self-punishment: “I have infring’d the lawes of God and Man, / In sheading of my Planet’s guiltes blood” (5.p.232). Brabant Jr.’s plan for a self-execution is not allowed to proceed, as Marston steers the action towards a happy ending through dramatic irony. The young man’s page has actually discharged the pistol in the air, refusing to obey his master’s unreasonable orders. Planet is alive and the play begins to reward its godly characters, as providence once again triumphs in an unexpected fashion. Brabant Jr. and his counterpart in The Dutch Courtesan are thus examples of God’s mysterious plan, as both their criminal plans are thwarted by other well-meaning characters.

Sir Edward Fortune also bows to God’s “dread omnipotence,” as Katherine and Pasquil return. Katherine has been more than miraculously cured with herbs given to her by “[a] skilfull Beldame,” and Pasquil does not take long to be cured either (5.p.235). The philosopher Planet prescribes music, as the soul of man, in his opinion, is a type of divine symphony: “Why the soule of man is nought but simphonies, / A sound of disagreeing parts, yet faire unite / By heavens hand, divine by reasons light” (5.p.235). God’s gift of illuminating reason brings the soul of man into harmony—a role for reason similar to the one Hooker assigns it in his theology. Planet’s cure helps his friend but not without the sight of God’s “rich Idea of perfection,” Katherine (3.p.214). Reunited with
his love, the young man feels that the sight of the paragon of God’s creation generates a new and healthy soul in him:

PASQUIL. Amazement, wonder, stiffe astonishment,  
Stare and stand gazing on this miracle,  
Perfection, of what e’re a human thought  
Can reach with his discoursive faculties,  
Those whose sweet presence purifies my sence,  
And does create a second soule in me,  
Deare Katherine, the life of Pasquils hopes. (5.p.236)

Pasquil’s statement reiterates the idea that the love which acknowledges God’s power in the fallen human world is capable of working miracles in those who feel it. His relationship with Katherine is understandably higher in the hierarchy of the play than those based on blind physical infatuation.

The main plot is thus brought happily back to a reaffirmation of the religious ideas expressed in its beginning. Marston changes the imagery from murder and damnation swiftly to forgiveness and salvation. Sir Edward Fortune has remained true to his principles even though he has had doubts through his moments of grief. Nevertheless, he still asks for forgiveness: “O pardon me thou dread omnipotence, / I thought thou couldst not thus have blessed me” (5.p.236). Katherine also asks her father to excuse the pain she has brought upon him, even though Sir Edward reassures her that “there is nothing but salvation, / Could come unto my heart more gratious / Then is the sight of my dear Katherine” (5.p.236). The old knight then declares Pasquil his son-in-law, and the play reaches its conventional comic end. Salvation is on the old knight’s mind, and Katherine and Pasquil’s union seems destined for a happy ending in the after-life.

This acknowledgement of God’s power, however, is notably absent in the sub-plot of Jack Drum’s Entertainment, where Marston creates the image of an arrogant poet-
critic Brabant Sr., Brabant Jr.’s brother. In his unwarranted confidence, this character is somewhat similar to Malheureux from *The Dutch Courtesan*, as his presumption of superior judgement sets him on course for humiliation. In contrast to Pasquil’s and Brabant Jr.’s humility, Brabant Sr. has assumed pre-eminence over his fellow poets and his dim-witted followers. He ridicules the latter by incurring significant personal costs, and he is thus proclaimed:

[…] the Prince of Foose, unequald Ideot,
He that makes costly suppers to trie wits:
And will not stick to spend some 20. poind
To grope a gull: that same perpetuall grin
That leades his Corkie Jests to make them sinke
Into the eares of his Deryders with his own applause. (1.p.190)

Brabant believes himself to be superior to them, assuming a power similar to divine omnipotence. He claims that his pranks are “the recreation of my Intellect” and his victims, “my zanyes, I fill their paunches, they feed my pleasures, I use them as my fooles faith, ha, ha” (1.p.193-94). As David Bevington points out, he is a self-appointed literary despot (283).

The prank that effects Brabant’s downfall is his decision to send the amorous Frenchman John fo de King to his wife who, Brabant hopes, will give the Frenchman a sound beating for his advances:

BRABANT SR. I wil strait frame the strongest eternall Jest
    That e’re was builded [sic] by Invention:
    My wife lies verie private in the Towne,
    I’le bring the French man to her presently,
    As to a loose lascivious Curtezan:
    Nor he, nor you, nor she, shall know the rest,
    But it shall be immortal for a Jest. (4.p.222)

Brabant Sr.’s “immortal” jest backfires, as instead of beating up the Frenchman, Mistress Mall Brabant asks John fo de King in: “if it please you to see my Chamber, tis at your
service,” and her husband becomes an inadvertent victim of his own device (4.p.227).

Unlike Pasquil, Brabant Sr. abuses his relationship with his partner, and Planet aims a sobering religious rant at the presumptuous prankster:

Why should’st thou take felicitie to gull
Good honest soules, and in thy arrogance
And glorious ostentation of thy wit,
Think God infused all perfection
Into thy soule alone, and made the rest
For thee to laugh at? Now you Censurer
Be the ridiculous subject of our mirth.
Why Foole, the power of Creation
Is still Omnipotent, and there’s no man that breathes
So valiant, learned, Wittie, or so wise,
But it can equall him out of the same mould
Wherein the first was form’d. (5.p.240)

Planet’s tirade reflects clearly the understanding of humanity evident earlier in Marston’s satire. No matter how gifted, Brabant Sr. may not assume the talent to rise above God’s power. Brabant’s ridicule of his followers is therefore immoral from a religious point of view, as he takes on a moral superiority that is compromised by his reluctance to acknowledge his post-lapsarian deficiency. The humiliation that he suffers at his wife’s hands emphasizes his vulnerability and undermines the superior status he has appointed for himself.48

48 Ben Jonson was likely referring to Brabant Sr. when he complained to William Drummond that “Marston represented him in the stage” (Drummond 140). Drummond’s opinions of Jonson corroborate that the foibles Marston ridiculed in Brabant were foibles of which Jonson was also guilty: “He is a great lover and praiser of himself, a contemner and Scorner of others, given to losse a friend, than a Jest, jealous of every word and action of those about him (especialie after drink) which is one of the Elements in which he liveth) [sic] a dissembler of ill parts which raigne in him, a bragger of some good that he wanteth, thinketh nothing well but what he himself, or some of his friends and Countrymen hath said or done” (151). With Brabant, Marston may have retaliated for Jonson’s ridicule of his *The Scourge of Villainy* and possibly *Histrio-Mastix* in *Every Man Out of His Humour* (3.1.183-91). Jonson’s recognizable parody of the distinctive language of these two works was perhaps the beginning of the brief satirical exchange between them. Jonson responded to Marston’s satire in *Jack Drum’s Entertainment* with his *Poetaster* (5.3.206-511), but Marston seems to have attempted reconciliation with his *What You Will* and *The Malcontent.*

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Through these final religious allusions, the comedy of *Jack Drum’s Entertainment* asserts again Marston’s conservative understanding of intimate human relationships and the relationship between humanity and God. The play presents its main romance in Senecan seriousness, an appropriate atmosphere for the challenges it erects before morally acceptable romantic love. Yet, despite near-death experiences, the play’s godly lovers triumph eventually, while those who have strayed from God’s established path are punished in the summary fashion that marks the endings of most of Marston’s comedies. Mammon is confined to a mental institution, Camelia is rejected by all the bachelors, and Brabant Sr. is crowned with the horns of a cuckold. Order is restored and the festive occasion is marked by a drinking song. Even if disruptive passions or unjustified doubts have played themselves out, they are contained in a structure which ends with the inevitable wedding and the re-establishment of a conservative order, a pattern which is evident also in *The Dutch Courtesan*. 
The Dutch Courtesan (1603-1604)

The Dutch Courtesan was explicitly composed to contrast morally legitimate and illegitimate romantic relationships: its central argument is “the difference betwixt the love of a courtesan and a wife” (Fabulae Argumentum). As a testimony to its success, the play was eventually selected “as part of the festivities celebrating the marriage of Princess Elizabeth to Frederick, the Elector Palatine” on February 25 and December 12 1613 (Wine xiv). Its analysis of physical desire and spiritual connection made it an excellent entertainment even for a high-level political marriage such as that of James I’s daughter.

Marston’s selection of his sources also demonstrates his purpose in this text. His borrowings from Nicolas de Monreulx’s Les Bergeries de Juliette and Michel de Montaigne’s Essays—particularly from “Upon Some Verses in Virgil”—provided him with ample material for the element of moral romance. His changes to Monreulx’s plot demonstrate in detail his intention to distinguish between the moral consequences of purchased lust and marital love. His reading of Montaigne’s Essays also betrays a conservative perception of human intimacy that relies on the conservative aspect M. A. Screech sees in the French thinker today:

Montaigne reconciled throughout his Essays a questing, often skeptical, intelligence with a profound political conservatism, an unshakable respect for constitutional legality, a humane morality and an easy submission—in its proper sphere—to the teaching authority of the Roman Catholic Church. (xx)

Another Montaigne scholar, Biancamaria Fontana, also points out that: “A conservative at heart, [Montaigne] disapproved of all initiatives directed towards subversion, or even the radical reform, of existing institutions, either because he thought they would prove ineffective or because he believed they would generate disastrous side effects” (3). Thus,
although Marston opposed Catholic practices vocally, he found appealing Montaigne’s counter-reformation scepticism of complete human self-sufficiency. Montaigne balanced his emphasis on the human self (the result of his insistence on individual experience and of his confessional style of writing) with his doubts of the self’s ability to realize its potential. While he “did not fully share Augustine’s vision of man as fatally marked by sin and evil,” Montaigne was nonetheless “sensitive to the reality of human imperfection” (Fontana 47).

Marston based his dramatic distinction of moral and immoral romantic relationships on Montaigne’s distinction between the concepts of the stronger but short-lived physical “love” and the tamer but long-lasting “friendship” or “amity.” Montaigne claimed that: “A good marriage (if any there be) refuseth the company & conditions of love; it endevoureth to represent those of amity. It is a sweete society of life, full of constancie, of trust, and an infinite number of profitable and solid offices, and mutuall obligations” (III.5.511). He did not deny physical love a part in the affections leading up to friendship, but he insisted that it dissolved in friendship’s superior emotions. Further, because of its physicality, Montaigne held love to be inferior to the spirituality he ascribed to friendship:

As soone as [love] creepeth into the termes of friendship, that is to say, in the agreement of wills, it languisheth and vanisheth away: enjoying doth loose it, as having a corporall end, and subject to saciety. On the other side, friendshippe is enjoyed according as it is desired, it is neither bredde, nor nourished, nor encreaseth but in jouissance, as being spirituall, and the mind being refined by use and custome. (“Of Friendship” I.27.91)

Montaigne did consider physical desire as a prerequisite for virtue—“that the body be given its proper place in the scheme of things”—but his descriptions of love betray his moral anxiety (MacFarlane 85). His contrast between the carnal quality of love and the
spirituality of friendship impacts both pre-marital and marital relationships in Marston’s *The Dutch Courtesan*. Instead of “love” and “friendship,” however, Marston differentiates mostly between love that is purely physical and love that is primarily spiritual. The surrender to lust in the former leads to serious moral crimes both in Marston and in Montaigne. The subjection of lust to acute moral awareness in the latter liberates the lover to acknowledge God’s presence in his or her desired companion and thus to glorify God’s ultimate control over all aspects of human existence.\(^{49}\)

Therefore, Marston’s *The Dutch Courtesan* can be interpreted as opposing the liberal notion of pure sexual indulgence instead of encouraging it. The play precludes the enactment of such freedom either by placing sexual indulgence in the past or by preventing it altogether in the present. In the past, sexual liberty is approached with strong moral criticism; in the present, it is thwarted at any cost. This rendition of pure physical desire is yet another manifestation of Marston’s conservative denial of the validity of the independent human body, that is, the body considered outside of the moral laws of God’s universe. However, the body’s pure physicality is only a secondary target in *The Dutch Courtesan*; the primary object of the play’s criticism is the erroneous human assumption of impeccable moral judgement. Although couched in pious rhetoric, this assumption constitutes arrogance in the face of God, and it itself leads to unbridled lust. This type of overreaching involves characters from both the main plot and the sub-plot. Both demonstrate Marston’s allegiance to the conservative beliefs which saw him conform to the policies of the Church of England and denounce nonconformist religious positions.

\(^{49}\) Philip J. Finkelpearl’s distinction that “Montaigne felt that love was neither possible nor desirable in marriage,” while “Marston, on the other hand, saw married love as the fulfillment of what was only imperfectly embodied in illicit sexual relationships” is pertinent here (*John Marston* 201).
Previous readings of *The Dutch Courtesan* have insisted that Marston did encourage the satisfaction of his main characters’ carnal passions before they embark on married life. For instance, M. L. Wine states that Marston is in favour of “the recognition and control, but not the annihilation, of man’s natural desires” (xvi). Peter Davison also regards the play’s protagonist, Freevill, as “a man whose experience and maturity are such that he can indulge himself sexually without becoming a slave to passion,” although Davison qualifies his statement with the proviso that the character is “unconvincing” for that same reason (8). Ejner Jensen goes even further, noting that the character of Freevill “takes the position of the natural man who accepts things in terms of their apparent good […]. He is morally lax” (94). This may also be the reason Marston’s contemporary Anthony Nixon claimed that *The Dutch Courtesan* was “sacrificed in Paules Churchyard” because it corrupted “English conditions” (B2r). Yet Freevill’s speeches on the subject can be also read as encouraging the acknowledgement of human imperfection instead. The character insists on testing one’s virtue by withstanding the opportunity of indulging one’s lust before assuming moral invincibility. Through Freevill, therefore, Marston can be said to put the emphasis of his play not on the necessity of the satisfaction of one’s physical desire but rather on humility in the face of inevitable human moral fallibility. Thus, Marston suppresses Montaigne’s hint that satisfaction may be useful (Montaigne himself reserves this concept for the special cases of old age and lawful pleasures only).

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50 In his 1606 retrospective mock-prognostication, Nixon notes that in 1605 booksellers had not made much profit because of the types of writers they sold. Among them were those who “have good wittes, but so criticall, that they arraigne other mens works at the Tribunall seate of every censurious Aristarehs understanding, when their owne are sacrificed in Paules Churchyard to corrupt English conditions, and sent away Westward for carping both at Court, Cittie and countrie” (B2r). Marston did criticize the works of his contemporaries, and his examination of lust in *The Dutch Courtesan* may have been construed as corrupting. However, the sending away “Westward” is less likely a reference to his *Eastward Ho* and more probably a hint at Thomas Dekker and John Webster’s collaboration *Westward Ho* (1604), which openly declares “Court, Citty, and Countrie” as its targets (1.1.227). I have previously overlooked this possibility myself (“Two Manuscript Comments” 156).
and adopts instead his usual distrust of intimate relationships based solely on sexual desire.\textsuperscript{51} For Marston, the rebellion inherent in the irrational liberation of the body clashed with the obedient conduct more appropriate to fallen humanity, living with the damaging consequences of original sin. So did the assumption of impeccable moral virtue and the consequent ability of moral judgement, when that moral virtue and judgement have not been adequately tested. On a more abstract scale, his attitude to the presumption of infallible moral judgement constitutes also a clear attack on English nonconformist Protestant sects.

The deluding naivety of assuming moral purity is evident from the very opening of the play. Marston’s depiction of London in \textit{The Dutch Courtesan} is reminiscent of his Venice in \textit{What You Will} or of his Genoa in \textit{The Malcontent}. Like its foreign counterparts, the setting of this comedy is rife with vice. Yet the character Malheureux has taken upon himself the part of moral conscience and refuses to let Freevill go home unaccompanied from a night of drinking, because he is afraid his friend will stray to “some common house of lascivious entertainment” (1.1.57-58). At first, Malheureux seems to be a privileged character, as his words echo the voice of Marston’s moral characters in the other comedies and the satirical speaker of his verse. He knows that lust poses a serious risk to the eternal after-life of the human soul: “the strongest argument that speaks / Against the soul’s eternity” (1.1.81-82). Lust is therefore “a most deadly

\textsuperscript{51} Montaigne states: “I esteeme [carnal pleasure] wholesome and fit to rouze a dull spirit and a heavie body: and, as a phisition experienced, I would prescribe the same unto a man of my complexion and forme, as soone as any other receipt, to keepe him awake and in strength, when he is well in yeares; and delaye him from the gripings of olde age” (“Upon Some Verses” III.5.534); and also: “Philosophie contends not against naturall delights, so that due measure be joined therewith; & alloweth the moderation not the shunning of them. The efforts of her resistance are employed against strange & bastard or lawlesse ones” (III.5.534-35).
sin,” “one of the head sins” (1.1.68, 70). Malheureux’s opinion also corresponds closely to Montaigne’s assertion in the *Essays* that:

> In all other things you may observe decorum, and maintaine some decencie: all other operations admit some rules of honesty: this [i.e., copulation] cannot onely be imagined, but vicious or ridiculous. See whether for example sake, you can but find a wise or discreet proceeding in it. *Alexander* said, that he knew himselfe mortall chiefly by this action, & by sleeping: sleepe doth stifle, & supresseth the faculties of our soule; and that, both devoureth and dissipates them. Surely it is an argument not onely of our originall corruption, but a badge of our vanity & deformity. (“Upon Some Verses” III.5.527(ii))

Malheureux therefore appears to be Marston’s spokesman in the play. He tries to educate the liberal Freevill by reminding him of the dire consequences that the satisfaction of carnal lust poses to his chances for salvation. Still, the meaning of Malheureux’s name, “unhappy” in French, hints that this character does not share the same status as the “happy” Feliche in *Antonio and Mellida*. Unlike Feliche’s, Malheureux’s virtue is untested, and his godly rhetoric stems from an empty presumption that he can judge those around him, much like Brabant Sr. in *Jack Drum’s Entertainment*. Montaigne points out, however, that “there is no continencie nor vertue, where no resistance is to the contrary” (III.5.520). Consequently, Malheureux can be interpreted as a subtle critique of over-zealous religious reformism, which ascribed to itself the prerogative of moral judgement while lacking the power to support that assumption in the context of original sin.\(^{52}\)

At first, however, Freevill’s reply to Malheureux’s warning justifies the impression Malheureux makes, that of the solicitous godly friend. Freevill’s name, referring to free will, also seems to suggest that, unlike his friend, he is a rebel who follows his own will rather than that of God, thus rejecting the notions of humanity’s fallen status and the unreliability of its faculties. Freevill even defends prostitution as a

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\(^{52}\) Sylvia Feldman dubs Malheureux “a typical mankind figure” (97).
social necessity, all but confirming the above-mentioned interpretations that he encourages the satisfaction of pure sexual desire. Marston borrows Freevill’s comments on prostitution from Montaigne’s *Essays* as well, but in the original, they are part of Montaigne’s tirade against pagan philosophers, working without the true knowledge of God: “Whereupon some say, that to forbid and remoove the common brothel-houses, is not only to spread whoredome every where, which only was alotted to those places, but also to incite idle & vagabond men to that vice, by reason of the difficulty” (“An Apology of Raymond Sebond” II.12.339). Yet rather than agreeing with these natural and therefore immoral philosophers, Freevill appears to oppose them, and his defence of prostitution is more convincingly a mock-encomium rather than an actual heart-felt apology. Freevill’s religious language is packed with scathing sarcasm: “Why is charity grown a sin? or relieving the poor and impotent an offense?” (1.1.104-5). His praises expose the trade’s dark side, as he makes it clear that prostitution is a humiliating last resort for the victims of poverty: “A poor, decayed mechanical man’s wife, her husband is laid up; may not she lawfully be laid down when her husband’s only rising is by his wife’s falling?” (1.1.95). The only lasting reward the trade brings is disease: “employ your money upon women, and, a thousand to nothing, some one of them will bestow that on you which shall stick by you as long as you live” (1.1.112-14). Finally, Freevill claims that prostitution is part of a deeply unethical process, the growing and demeaning commodification of everything in society that should be held sacred: “honor, justice, faith, nay, even God Himself” (1.1.120).53

53 Like usury in *Jack Drum’s Entertainment*, prostitution in *The Dutch Courtesan* appears to be treated with anxiety stemming from economic concerns. It is approached with “a fear about the insinuation of commerce into all avenues of human endeavour” (Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr. 26).
Freevill proceeds to call a brothel “a house of salvation” perhaps sarcastically, but he is also aware that he can assert his moral restraint adequately only because he has already faced a real opportunity to sin (1.1.137). He therefore attacks not “his friend’s abstinence” but his friend’s arrogance (Tricomi, *Reading* 111). He insists that a visit to the brothel will make Malheureux repent his assumption of invincible moral rectitude, but Malheureux is so confident that he promises to set Freevill’s favourite prostitute straight and make her “loathe the shame she’s in” (1.1.139, 152). As Malheureux discovers, however, his inexperienced righteousness is not as invincible as he believes, and he loses the right to berate the moral faults of others, as his own moral weakness emerges with sinister consequences. Brian Gibbons observes that this character is “unhealthily, unstably immature, like Angelo in *Measure for Measure*” (92).

Freevill, on the other hand, is fully aware of the dangers of lust. When the courtesan Franceschina enters and serenades them, he makes a distinction between his past relationship with her and his new affection for his fiancée, Beatrice.\(^{54}\) The difference between the two follows Montaigne’s distinction between physical love and spiritual friendship: “I lov’d [Franceschina] with my heart until my soul showed me the imperfection of my body, and placed my affection on a lawful love, my modest Beatrice” (1.2.89-93). Freevill’s previous relationship with Franceschina has been the unlawful consequence of the corruption of his body, but his new affection for Beatrice is the result of his soul’s rediscovery of God’s law. Unlike his physical love for Franceschina, Freevill’s affection for Beatrice is spiritual, as is Montaigne’s concept of friendship, the much more reliable foundation for marriage: “friendshippe is enjoyed according as it is

\(^{54}\) Shapiro’s comment that “a serenade by a woman suggests unnatural sexual aggressiveness and intimates danger or even death for the men who listen” is valid here again (247).
desired, it is neither bredde, nor nourished, nor encreaseth but in jouissance, as being
spirituall, and the mind being refined by use and custome” (“Of Friendship” 1.27.91).
Logically, Freevill refuses to stay with Malheureux at the brothel, and his decisive exit is
no doubt intended to demonstrate the ability of his will-power to resist temptation. His
freedom of will, therefore, is perfectly described in Calvin’s statement as the will that
“obtaineth not grace by libertie, but libertie by grace: and that by the same grace, by
affection of delite printed in him, is it framed to continuance, that it is strengthened with
invincible force: that while grace governeth, it never falleth away” (2.3.14). Freevill is
free because he is not subject to wayward physical desires but is liberated by the
mysterious grace of God which allows him to make morally sound decisions. His
interactions with Malheureux can thus be read as more than “singularly secular”
(Gibbons 94). His acknowledgement of his body’s corrupted state reveals his humility
and makes him a morally privileged character in the world of *The Dutch Courtesan*.

Malhereux, on the other hand, begins to break down at the sight of Franceschina’s
ravishing beauty, despite his earlier moral confidence. He cannot believe that such an
attractive appearance can be doomed to damnation: “Is she unchaste? Can such a one be
damn’d? / O love and beauty, ye two eldest seeds / Of the vast chaos, what strong right
you have / Even in things divine, our very souls!” (1.2.124-27). In his lament,
Malheureux betrays his moral weakness, and the scene marks the beginning of his
attempt to deny the negative moral implications of physical desire. By giving physical
beauty and attraction power over his soul, Malheureux removes himself from God, a
lapse in moral judgement which speaks of Malheureux’s moral instability. He is
susceptible to the weakness Montaigne describes in “Upon Some Verses of Virgil”: “A
man cannot boast of contemning or combating sensualitie, if he see hir not, or know not hir grace, hir force and most attractive beauties” (III.2.491-92). Clearly, Marston presents Malheureux as morally unprepared for his encounter with Franceschina, despite the character’s earlier confidence. Unlike Quadratus’s assertion in *What You Will* that female beauty is proof for the immortality of the soul and God’s existence and power, Malheureux’s statements notably omit God’s purpose for His creation and effectively dismantle God’s world in order to justify his desire.

And justify it Malheureux must, as his arguments are in direct contradiction with his earlier views on lust:

> Beauty’s for use!  
> I never saw a sweet face vicious:  
> It might be proud, inconstant, wanton, nice,  
> But never tainted with unnatural vice.  
> […]  
> That which is ever loved of most is best.  
> Let colder eld the strong’st objections move;  
> No love’s without some lust, no life without some love.  
> (1.2.131-34, 141-43)

Malheureux’s infatuation with Franceschina’s beauty leads him to abandon his earlier criticism of lust as the death of the soul and come up with a line of reasoning that paradoxically rests on lust’s acceptability. His point is simple: beauty cannot be immoral as it invites attraction, attraction entails multiple partners, and Franceschina’s multiple partners grant her a special status that must be morally acceptable even if it is based on carnal desire. His reasoning is evidently flawed from the play’s point of view, as Franceschina’s popularity not only does not acknowledge God’s moral purpose in her creation but also goes blatantly against it by virtue of moral abuse. Malheureux thus ignores his earlier moral principles and contradicts the tenets of obedience and moral
awareness informing Marston’s comedies. He is Freevill’s exact opposite; as George Geckle observes: “From a Christian point of view Malheureux’s reasoning is not only illogical but morally damnable” (John Marston’s 159).

The sub-plot of The Dutch Courtesan also features a preoccupation with unstable morality. Some of it is located in the supposedly romantic setting of the marriage of Master and Mistress Mulligrub, but most of it involves the morality of the Mulligrubs’ tavern business. Their immorality consists primarily of religious hypocrisy of which they are cured by the witty jester Cocledemoy (8). The Mulligrubs are thus similar to Malheureux, as their ostentatious scruples are exposed to be as shaky as his. The couple are members of the religious sect the Family of Love, but their godliness is a façade to cover Mistress Mulligrub’s adulterous relationships with her husband’s fellow merchants and Master Mulligrub’s profits achieved by “sins of the cellar” (1.1.40-41). Through their ridicule, Marston takes another stab at England’s Protestant nonconformists. He has Cocledemoy cheat the Mulligrubs out of their prized possessions and defend his stealing as the moral punishment his victims deserve:

Were I to bite an honest gentleman, a poor gogaran poet, or a penurious parson that had but ten pigs’ tails in a twelvemonth, and for want of learning had but one good stool in a fortnight, I were damn’d beyond the works of supererogation! But to wring the withers of my gouty, barm’d, spigot-frigging jumbler of elements, Mulligrub, I hold it as lawful as sheep-shearing, taking eggs from hens, cauldres from asses, or butter’d shrimps from horses—they make no use of them, were not provided for them. And therefore, worshipful Cocledemoy, hang toasts! On, in grace and virtue to proceed! (3.2.33-42)

The jester’s final religious allusion makes it clear that his motivation to vex Master Mulligrub is not the profit from selling the vintner’s belongings but making the vintner aware of his moral degradation. Apart from exposing Master Mulligrub, Cocledemoy’s
speech also exposes the sorry state of poverty-stricken parsons. His reference to them is no doubt intended to contrast the pitiful state of the established church with the luxury of emerging sects.

Cocledemoy’s other religious jokes also hint to the necessary redress of this imbalance. The character Mary Faugh, who procures clients for the prostitute Franceschina, suggests that the jester intends to return the stolen goblets eventually, but he replies that he has no such desire, as “restitution is Catholic” (1.2.8). His joke implies that his appropriation of Mulligrub’s belongings is equivalent to Henry VIII’s appropriation of the property of corrupt monasteries. Its restitution would be the sign of the restoration of wealth to support corrupt church practices or sectarianism in Mulligrub’s case. Mary Faugh follows with a stab at both Catholics and the Family of Love: “though I am one of the Family of Love and, as they say, a bawd that covers the multitude of sins, yet I trust I am none of the wicked that eat fish o’ Fridays” (1.2.17-19). She concedes that she may be a lady of loose morals—suggesting that procuring and prostitution are the main practices of the Familists—but she is no Catholic, the worst of the worst. Cocledemoy’s and Mary Faugh’s conversation, therefore, presents yet another attack on nonconformist religious groups in Marston’s comedy. Like Freevill, Cocledemoy is also critical of his side-kick’s unacceptable occupation, even though he uses her to achieve his reformation of the Mulligrubs. He swiftly exposes Mary’s trade as a wholesale assault on the virtue of chastity: “she sells divine virtues as virginity,

55 The Familists, or the members of the Family of Love sect, were often charged with promiscuity because of their teachings’ insistence on common property (Hamilton 37, 117, 133). Calvin also targets their practices in his critique of the Anabaptists: “Certaine Anabaptistes in this age, devise I wote not what phrantike intemperance in steede of spirituall regeneration: saying that the children of God restored into the state of innocency, now ought no more to be carefull for bridling of the lust of the flesh: that the Spirite is to be followed for their guide, under whose guiding they never goe out of the waie” (3.3.14).
modesty, and such rare gems, and those not like a petty chapman, by retail, but more like a great merchant, wholesale” (1.2.36-39). The jester’s trade metaphor is a critique not only of prostitution but also of the corrupting influence of commerce, and by association, the commerce in which the Mulligrubs are involved.

As Cocledemoy attempts to sober up the vintner and his wife from their immoral stupor, Freevill tries to do the same for Malheureux. John Scott Colley observes that Mulligrub and Malheureux are similar characters: “Both profess a standard of conduct that runs directly counter to their actions, and as a result, both of them become mired in potentially serious situations” (John Marston’s 164). Freevill reminds his unfortunate friend of his earlier moral confidence by repeating Malheureux’s very words: “The sight of vice augments the hate of sin!” (1.1.144, 149). Yet his attempt to help Malheureux hear himself is unsuccessful, as Malheureux goes even further in his ungodly disobedience by making up stronger justifications for his desire for Franceschina. Freevill is finally forced to concede that his friend cannot overcome his obsession, regardless of all his earlier boasts: “Of all the fools that would all men out-thrust, / He that ’gainst Nature would seem wise is worst” (1.2.160-61). He is aware of Malheureux’s plight because he has committed the same error in the past, but where the two men differ is in Freevill’s awareness of the consequences of lust, which helps him avoid any further moral transgressions. This is not the case with Malheureux, as the immorality of his infatuation sets him on a slippery slope to heinous crime.

Marston thus deepens the contrast between his two central characters in order to accentuate the different natures of their respective romantic relationships. Unlike the immoral impact of Franceschina’s ravishing beauty on Malheureux, Freevill’s new love,
Beatrice, reforms him. She is the woman “whose eyes, / Full of lov’d sweetness and clear
cheerfulness, / Have gag’d my soul to her enjoyings, / Shredding away all those weak
under-branches / Of base affection and unfruitful heats” (2.1.3-5). Susan Baker notes that
“[s]anctification legitimates sexuality; moderation is not a goal or a standard in itself, but
rather a beneficial result of sanctification” (222). Beatrice’s attraction lies not in an
extravagant appearance but in her plain godly loyalty:

Oh, let not my secure simplicity
Breed your mislike, as one quite void of skill;
’Tis grace enough in us not to be ill.
I can some good, and, faith, I mean no hurt;
Do not, then, wrong sober ignorance.
I judge you all of virtue, and our vows
Should kill all fears that base distrust can move. (2.1.20-26)

Naturally, Freevill sees in Beatrice’s qualities the foundation of a relationship that can
transcend human mortality: “Only you / Shall make me wish to live, and not fear death, /
So on your cheeks I might yield latest breath. / Oh, he that thus may live and thus shall
die / May well be envied of a deity!” (2.1.44-48). Freevill’s and Beatrice’s exchange
represents a perfect match in the context of Montaigne’s thoughts on marriage because of
Beatrice’s mention of “secure simplicity.” Montaigne insists on similar foundations for
matrimony—the plain delights of constancy: “Wedlocke hath for his share honour,
justice, profit and constancie: a playne, but more generall delight” (III.5.512). After
Freevill and Beatrice exchange assurances, the scene ends appropriately with Beatrice
presenting him with a ring: “[w]ear this slight favour in my remembrance” (2.1.55). The
gift will signify Freevill’s loyalty to her, and he promises to keep it as religiously as he
keeps his hope in salvation: “Which when I part from, Hope, the best of life, / Ever part from me” (2.1.56-57).56

The contrast between Freevill and Malheureux at this point could not be sharper. While Freevill contemplates a relationship of transcendent potential, Malheureux envies the state of animals because their sexual lust is not subject to ethical judgement:

O you happy beasts,
In whom an inborn heat is not held sin,
How far transcend you wretched, wretched man,
Whom national custom, tyrannous respects
Of slavish order, fetters, lames his power,
Calling that sin in us which in all things else
Is Nature’s highest virtue! (2.1.72-78)

Instead of thinking of the immortality of the after-life, Malheureux continues to focus more and more closely on the corrupted life on earth. He conceives of moral custom and order as an undeserved tyranny imposed on humanity. His thoughts would be progressive if they did not justify an obsession that will eventually lead him to contemplate murder. Freevill realizes that the only way for Malheureux to overcome his infatuation is to be placed in a situation which would make him confront the full gravity of his actions.

At first, Freevill argues that the only way for Malheureux to reclaim his virtue is to satisfy his desire for Franceschina: “I’ll tell thee what, take this as firmest sense: / Incontinence will force a continence; / Heat wasteth heat, light defaceth light; / Nothing is spoiled but by his proper might” (2.1.119-22). Yet Freevill’s speech is modelled on Montaigne’s condemnation of vices in ancient societies: “I will omit the writings of some Philosophers, who have followed the sect of Epicurus, protectresse of all manner of sensualitie and carnal pleasure,” and “Belike we must be incontinent that we may be continent, burning is quenched by fire” (“Upon Some Verses of Virgil” III.5.515).

56 See Susan Baker for a discussion of similar attitudes in English Renaissance marriage literature (221-22).
Freevill’s comment therefore is not to be taken at face value; it is a trick to set up Malheureux for his final reformation. Freevill’s further lines make this plan clear, as he obviously disapproves of Malheureux’s infatuation with the prostitute but is forced to pretend that he can do nothing about it: “again, as good make use of a statue, a body without a soul, a carcass three months dead—yet since thou art in love—” (2.1.133-35).

Freevill is correct in his apprehension of his friend’s uncontrollable lust, as its object, Franceschina, soon emerges as the play’s diabolical villain. When she discovers Freevill’s marriage, she appears on stage “with her hair loose, chafing” (2.2.S.D.). The character’s appearance is clearly intended to convey her raging anger (Dessen and Thomson 45, 107). Her mad fury resembles that of a revenge tragedy heroine, but her accent and her viciousness undermine any sympathy her predicament might invite: “O Divila, life o’ mine art! Ick sall be reveng’d! Do ten tousand hell damn me, ick sall have the rogue troat cut; and his love, and his friend, and all his affinity sall smart, sall die, sall hang” (2.2.40-43). Unlike the “poor, decayed mechanical man’s wife” and the prostitute Sindefy from Marston’s collaborative comedy *Eastward Ho*, Franceschina is allowed no sympathetic excuse for taking up the trade (1.1.95). On the contrary, her profession has condemned her to evil: she is a provider of physical temptation to test the virtue of those who, like Malheureux, are naive enough to assume moral strength without experience. In addition, she also profanes God’s creation in selling her body, as she abuses its moral purpose by making profit from lust. Like Mammon’s, her plight may be tragic nowadays, but it does not seem intended as such originally. Marston hints at her iniquity by having

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57 For further context on conditions forcing early modern English women into prostitution, see Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr.’s discussion of the marginalization of women in the male-dominated trade market (31-33).
her snatch the ring Beatrice has given Freevill, thus endangering their theologically sound
affection.

Even though Franceschina reveals her evil side, Malheureux cannot abandon his
passion for her: “I am no whit myself. Video meliora proboque, / But raging lust my fate
all strong doth move: / The gods themselves cannot be wise and love” (2.2.97-99). He has
a feeling that he is doing something wrong, but his lust is so overwhelming that it leads
him to imagine a world under the influence of the decadent gods of pagan mythology,
notorious for their susceptibility to the passions. In this world, Malheureux desires not the
grace of God but the love of his prostitute: “Let me be vicious, so I may be lov’d. /
Passion, I am thy slave! Sweet, it shall be my grace / That I account thy love my only
virtue” (2.2.110-12). In his eagerness, he wants Franceschina to give herself to him when
she has just been abandoned by Freevill:

FRANCESCHINA. Fait, me no more can love.
MALHEUREUX. No matter; let me enjoy your bed.
FRANCESCHINA. O vile man, vat do you tink on me? Do you take me to
be a beast, a creature that for sense only will entertain love, and not
only for love, love? O brutish abomination! (2.2.124-28)

Although her pleading may impart sympathy at this point, Franceschina is manipulating
Malheureux only in order to exact her revenge on Freevill. The first favour the prostitute
requests from Malheureux is that he kill Freevill and bring her the ring Beatrice has given
him. She intends to spend no time with Malheureux, however, even if he dispatches her
orders, as she plans to have the survivor of the altercation, whoever he may be, executed
for the murder of the other man: “First, friend sall kill his friend; / He dat survives, I’ll
hang” (2.2.193-94). Franceschina’s manipulation of Malheureux thus raises obvious
concerns, especially in the context of Montaigne’s perspective on it, as the French thinker

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warns specifically against indulging lust at all costs: “My conscience also was engaged therein, even unto incontinencie and excesse, but never unto ingratitudine, treason, malice or cruelty. I bought not the pleasure of this vice at all rates; & was content with it’s [sic] owne and simple cost” (III.5.534).

At this point, Marston’s unhappy character appears to admit the moral implications of his passion. As he begins to justify Freevill’s murder, Malheureux recoils at the depravity of his own thoughts. He witnesses clearly how his reason attempts to muster a natural explanation to mask his criminal intent:

The body of a man is of the selfsame soil
As ox or horse; no murder to kill these.
As for that only part which makes us man,
Murder wants power to touch’t. O wit, how vile,
How hellish art thou when thou raisest nature
’Gainst sacred faith! Think more, to kill a friend
To gain a woman, to lose a virtuous self
For appetite and sensual end, whose very having
Loseth all appetite and gives satiety—
That corporal end, remorse and inward blushings
Forcing us loathe the stream of our own heats,
Whilst friendship clos’d in virtue, being spiritual,
Tastes no such languishings and moments’ pleasure
With much repentance, but like rivers flow,
And further that they run, they bigger grow! (2.2.201-15)

Malheureux’s contrast between the transience of his lustful urges for Franceschina and the potential for constancy in his friendship with Freevill is also based on Montaigne:

In true friendship, it is a generall & universall heate, and equally tempered, a constant and setled heate, all pleasure and smoothnes, that hath no pricking or stinging in it, which the more is in lustfull love, the more is it but ranging and mad desire in following that which flies us.
(“Of Friendship” I.27.91)

As Malheureux fails to justify the murder of his friend in the moral framework of his faith, he comes face to face with the sin he is about to commit: “Lord, how was I
misgone! How easy 'tis to err / When passion will not give us leave to think!” (2.2.216-17). He can finally see that his claim to strength of moral judgement is weak, as he has failed in his first encounter with temptation: “Not he that’s passionless, but he ’bove passion’s wise” (2.2.223).

As the main plot exposes Malheureux’s moral degradation, the sub-plot reveals the hypocrisy of the Mulligrubs in further detail. Mistress Mulligrub confesses to the contradiction between her professed religiosity and her unreligious profession: “Truth, husband, surely heaven is not pleas’d with our vocation. We do wink at the sins of our people, our wines are Protestants, and—I speak it to the burden of my conscience—we fry fish with salt butter” (2.3.7-11). Appropriately, the vintner and his wife receive another bout of swift punishment at the hands of Cocledemoy, who steals this time the bag of money Master Mulligrub has prepared to buy replacements for the goblets Cocledemoy has stolen. The jester thus takes away from the Mulligrubs what they have acquired through immoral means in an attempt to make them aware of their sins. The Mulligrubs, however, are hardened in their ways and fail to see that they lose only what they have no right to keep. Their ongoing ridicule at Cocledemoy’s hands is Marston’s way of presenting the members of nonconformist Protestant sects as hypocrites committing sins despite their godly appearance. Through their caricature, he attempted to discredit the Puritan movement and to support the established church.

While the sub-plot’s critique of religious nonconformism is located in its presentation of Master Mulligrub’s immorality, its critique of illegitimate romantic relationships is centred on Mistress Mulligrub’s affairs. Talking with a goldsmith’s servant, she mentions that his master “knew [her] before [she] was married” (3.3.5). She
also confides that “full many fine men” borrow money from her and repay her with “a piece of flesh when time of year serves,” an obvious pun on sexual favours (3.3.23-24).

Finally, she exposes the questionable morality of her religious sect, in her attempt to remember how she knows the meaning of the word “methodically”: it turns out that “Sir Aminadab Ruth,” has asked her to “kiss him methodically” (3.3.54-55). To these admissions of promiscuity, Mistress Mulligrub adds another confession of transgressive behaviour, her smoking of tobacco. She has given it up “since one of [her] elders assured [her], upon his knowledge, tobacco was not used in the congregation of the Family of Love” (3.3.48-50). In her sins, Mistress Mulligrub resembles Franceschina. Even if her actions are not as sinister as those of the courtesan, she exposes her bogus godliness herself and her admissions sanction another strike by Coedemoy. He manages to steal both the Mulligrubs’ dinner and new bowl, after which Master Mulligrub decides to give up his fake piety altogether, “I will never more say my prayers” (3.3.96). The vintner even intends to leave the Family of Love and form his own sect, “I’ll go no more to the synagogue. Now I am discontented, I’ll turn sectary; that is fashion” (3.3.149-51). In his caricatures of the Mulligrubs, Marston again presents the English reformist sects as propagators of immorality and purposeful underminers of the preferable status quo. Despite their devotion, they intend not to uphold piety but to disguise immoral actions under the cover of reformed religious practice.

Whereas the Mulligrubs are far from repentance at this point, Malheureux’s morals appear to be on the mend when he admits Franceschina’s plan to Freevill. Yet his words still betray his persistent moral weakness: “My lust, not I, before my reason would; yet I must use her. That I, a man of sense, should conceive endless pleasure in a body
whose soul I know to be so hideously black!” (3.1.234-36). He still cannot extricate himself from his desire: “I do malign my creation that I am subject to passion. I must enjoy her” (3.1.241-42). In order to oblige his friend, Freevill proposes that he and Malheureux stage a fight in which Freevill will be reported murdered. Then Malheureux can enjoy Franceschina, while Freevill is in hiding, and everyone will be happy in the end: “Show her the ring, enjoy her, and, blood cold, / We’ll laugh at folly” (3.1.256-57). Somewhat improbably, the fight happens on Freevill’s wedding night, but the timing allows Marston additional melodrama. Freevill’s real purpose, of course, is to let his friend face actual murder allegations.

Even with their plan half-executed, Freevill still attempts to dissuade Malheureux from sleeping with the prostitute. He appeals to his friend’s virtue and reason to overpower unbridled passion:

Cannot thy virtue, having space to think  
And fortify her weakened powers with reason,  
Discourses, meditations, discipline,  
Divine ejaculatories, and all those aids against devils—  
Cannot all these curb thy low appetite  
And sensual fury? (4.2.7-12)

Regardless of his pleas, Freevill’s attempt is doomed to failure, as is evident from Montaigne’s original:

It is a hard matter (although our conceit doe willingly apply it selfe unto it) that Discourse and Instruction, should sufficiently be powerful, to direct us to action, and addresse us to performance; if over and besides that, we doe not by experience and exercise frame our minde, to the traine whereunto we wil range-it: otherwise, when we shall be on the point of the effects, it will doubtless finde it self much engaged and empeached. And that is the reason why amongst Philosophers, those that have willed to attaine to some greater excellence, have not beene content, at home, and at rest, to expect the rigors of fortune, for feare she should surprise them unexperienced, and find them novices, if she should chance to enter fight
with them; but have rather gone to meete and front hir before, and witting-
earnestly cast themselves to the triall of the hardest difficulties.
(“Of Exercise or Practice” II.6.214)

Malheureux cannot overcome his lustful desire for Franceschina, as his virtue is
inexperienced. Despite his confidence in his moral strength at the beginning of the play,
Malheureux’s obsession now leads him to deny God’s power again: “There is no God in
blood, no reason in desire” (4.2.13). In his words, the young man sums up the
consequence of his carnal desire: his is an immoral choice because of his preference for
sexual satisfaction at the expense of appreciation of God’s creation. Instead of enjoying a
spiritual relationship with a godly partner, Malheureux allows himself to be manipulated
willingly by a partner with no principles whatsoever.

For this reason, Freevill is forced to expose his friend to the consequences of his
decision. He sets up a meeting-place at a jeweller’s shop, where Malheureux can find him
and clear himself of murder. Before he goes into hiding, however, Freevill reminds his
infatuated friend again that the worst sinners are the ones committing evil in full
awareness of it: “those worst of all, / Who with a willing eye do, seeing, fall” (4.2.26-27).
Malheureux is risking his salvation and eternal life, and Freevill explains that he can help
his friend only by compromising his virtue:

Nay, if there be no means I’ll be thy friend,
But not thy vice’s; and with greatest sense
I’ll force thee feel thy errors to the worst.
The vildest dangers thou shalt sink into.
No jeweller shall see me; I will lurk
Where none shall know or think; close I’ll withdraw
And leave thee with two friends—a whore and knave.
But is this virtue in me? No, not pure,
Nothing extremely best with us endures.
No use in simple purities; the elements
Are mix’d for use. Silver without alloy
Is all too eager to be wrought for use:
Nor precise virtues ever purely good
Holds useful size with temper of weak blood. (4.2.32-45)

Freevill’s speech demonstrates his awareness that while his actions are not completely moral, they are yet better than Malheureux’s “precise” virtue from the beginning of the play. Freevill’s words are again derived from Montaigne’s essays: “The weaknes of our condition, causeth, that things in their naturall simplicitie and puritie cannot fall into our use” (“We Taste Nothing Purely” II.20.388-89). In this fashion, Freevill, the moderate moral man, delivers a blow not only to the unjustified moral confidence of Malheureux but also to the ostentatious godliness of radical Protestant sects in England. Their claims for the correctness or precision of their discipline were no doubt as unjustified in Marston’s eyes. His conformist position dictated that humanity could not lay claim to such perfection in its fallen state without God’s help. As God’s grace is believed to work in mysterious ways in the human world, the assumption of precision is tantamount to ungodly arrogance. This is the case with both Malheureux, who demonstrates Puritanical leanings at the beginning of the play, and the hypocritical Mulligrubs, members of the Family of Love sect.

Freevill’s decision to expose Malheureux becomes even more logical when Franceschina takes the stage after Freevill’s alleged murder. Malheureux is hoping that he will finally be able to have her, but the courtesan has other plans. Now that she believes Freevill dead, she wants to get Malheureux hanged for murder and gloat over Beatrice’s grief: “Freevill is dead; Malheureux sall hang; and mine rival, Beatrice, ick sall make run mad” (4.3.28-30). Pleased, Franceschina pledges herself to the devil and renounces God: “Dere sall be no Got in me but passion, no tought but rage, no mercy but blood, no spirit but divla in me” (4.3.40-42). She also proceeds to accuse Malheureux of
Freevill’s murder and taunt the distraught Beatrice by revealing Freevill’s past use of her services. As proof, she even produces the ring that Beatrice has given Freevill earlier in the play. Marston thus leaves no doubt about the seriousness of Malheureux’s error to pursue Franceschina at all costs. His character is facing certain death and perhaps eternal damnation for his lustful infatuation, as it has happened immediately before his certain execution.

Freevill, on the other hand, is basking in God’s grace, because of his relationship with Beatrice. Marston contrasts sharply Franceschina’s diabolical viciousness with Beatrice’s saintly integrity. Beatrice answers Franceschina’s taunts with the modest reply that she is disappointed not because Freevill loved another woman, but because she was not the only one to love him. Having set her thoughts on meeting Freevill in the after-life, Beatrice also asks her sister, Crispinella: “Sister, shall we know one another in the other world?” (4.4.67-68). Marston thus endows Beatrice’s love with a transcendent quality, which is in itself an awareness of God’s moral design of the world. By thinking of the after-life, Beatrice demonstrates her neglect of the corrupt world on earth, which makes her another privileged character in the play. Marston is able to capitalize further on the melodrama of this scene because it takes place immediately after Beatrice and Freevill’s wedding and because Freevill is allowed to witness his wife’s grief in his disguise. The new husband is astounded that his wife does not lose faith despite Franceschina’s revelations:

   Heaven! to have such a wife  
   Is happiness to breed pale envy in the saints.  
   Thou worthy, dove-like virgin without gall,  
   Cannot (that woman’s evil) jealousy,  
   Despite disgrace, nay, which is worst, contempt,  
   Once stir thy faith? (4.4.79-84)
He decides against revealing himself, however, as he is certain that providence, God’s prescient care for His creation, will see the predicament to its just end:

Oh, the dearest of heaven!
Were there but three such women in the world,
Two might be saved. Well, I am great
With expectation to what devilish end
This woman of foul soul will drive her plots:
But Providence all wicked art o’ertops,
And impudence must know (though stiff as ice)
That fortune doth not always dote on vice. (4.4. 90-97)

Freevill’s faith is thus stronger than Sir Edward Fortune’s in *Jack Drum’s Entertainment*. The young man is aware of God’s ultimate control of destiny, and he resigns completely to God’s mercy. He demonstrates his obedience and humility, the two characteristics appropriate to post-lapsarian humanity. Simultaneously, he is also a likely agent of God, as he works secretly to test both his wife and friend, and to bring the prostitute to justice.

Unlike Freevill, Master Mulligrub is bent on thwarting God’s moral design rather than obeying it. The vintner wants Cocledemoy doomed to eternal death for stealing from him: “I’ll hire some sectary to make him an heretic before he die” (4.5.12-13). Marston again implicates religious sects in bringing damnation to their followers. Accepting nonconformist beliefs, especially before death, amounts to certain damnation, as instead of making peace with God, one turns away from the promises of heaven. Mulligrub is immediately punished for his profane words, as Cocledemoy manages to trick the city constables into believing that Mulligrub is a thief himself. Although the jester’s acts may appear insidious, his thefts and deception are free from moral fault, as he intends only the reformation of the corrupt vintner. Like Freevill, Cocledemoy believes that God looks
down favourably on his tricks “Afore the Lord God, my knavery grows unperegal” (4.5.124-25).

However, the beginning of the play’s final act promises anything but the resolution of redemption, as Franceschina tricks Malheureux into admitting to Freevill’s murder, and he is dragged to prison. Ironically, Freevill is present on stage, in disguise, and when everyone exits, he lays open the damnation that common exploitation has brought on the courtesan:

Ay, for hell!
O thou unreprievable, beyond all
Measure of grace damn’d immediately!
That things of beauty created for sweet use,
Soft comfort, and as the very music of life,
Custom should make so unutterably hellish!

Franceschina appears beyond grace, despite her natural beauty, because of the iniquity of her profession. The holy love of a modest wife is to be preferred to hers:

O heaven,
What difference is in women and their life!
What man, but worthy name of man, would leave
The modest pleasures of a lawful bed,
The holy union of two equal hearts,
Mutually holding either dear as health,
The undoubted issues, joys of chaste sheets,
The unfeigned embrace of sober ignorance. (5.1.65-72)

Again Marston paints pure sexual desire as the sign of moral depravity. Ignorance in lust is the proper basis of a healthy relationship, while consorting with a prostitute is the vile infatuation with “a creature made of blood and hell, / Whose use makes weak, whose company doth shame, / Whose bed doth beggar, issue doth defame!” (5.1.77-79). With this statement, Freevill returns to his critique of brothels and prostitution from the beginning of the play. He concludes that the exploitation of prostitutes affects their moral
sensitivity: “Their use so vile takes away their sense!” (5.1.76). Franceschina’s rabid insistence on seeing “dat Beatrice would but run mad, dat she would but run mad, den me would dance and sing” justifies Freevill’s condign judgement (5.1.82-83).

Marston pushes Franceschina even further in her wickedness, as she drives Freevill’s wife to suicide. Crispinella attempts to save Beatrice by reminding her: “we must do what God will,” but the grief is too much for her sister (5.2.4). Distraught, Beatrice puts God’s providence in doubt:

What God will! Alas, can torment be His glory? or our grief His pleasure? Does not the nurse’s nipple, juic’d over with wormwood, bid the child it should not suck? And does not heaven, when it hath made our breath bitter unto us, say we should not live? O my best sister, To suffer wounds when one may ’scape this rod Is against nature, that is, against God! (5.2.5-11)

In her grief, Beatrice is a clear example of humanity’s weakness, uncapable of grasping God’s mysterious ways. She resembles Sir Edward Fortune in this respect, as her protestations are also contrary to Calvin’s advice: “But we must keepe modestie, that we drawe not God to yelde cause of his doings, but let us so reverence his secret judgements, that his will be unto us, a most just cause of all things” (1.17.1). Marston makes this point clear by the dramatic irony of having Freevill stand in disguise next to his unsuspecting wife. She has no idea that her plight is all a consequence of Freevill’s ruse to effect the moral reformation of Malheureux.

Freevill discovers himself to Beatrice just in time to save her from despair. She faints and wakes up to the face of her husband, believing she is in heaven:

Where am I, ha? How have I slipp’d off life? Am I in heaven? O my lord, though not loving, By our eternal being, yet give me leave To rest by thy dear side. Am I not in heaven? (5.2.46-49)
Her speech is a carbon copy of Katherine’s in *Jack Drum’s Entertainment* (3.p.215).

Freevill apologises for pushing his wife too far: “Only I presum’d to try your faith too much, / For which I most am grieved” (5.2.56-57). Yet, despite his seemingly unfair indulgence, his purpose is justified in the overall design of the play, as Beatrice’s faith to him is also a faith in God’s providence. The fact that she questions God’s purpose in her suffering is a weakness, but it is justifiable in her, as she is only human. In the context of her previously consistent loyalty, an isolated slip is understandable. In allowing her doubts, Marston also demonstrates the same nuanced rendition of positive characters he adopts in Antonio and Sir Edward Fortune.

Malheureux and Mulligrub, on the other hand, are examples of Marston’s nuanced approach to negative characters. Both of them are sentenced to death at the end of the play. Despite his innocence in Freevill’s murder, Malheureux resigns himself to his fate when he declares his execution “most just” (5.3.11). It is the central moment towards which the plot has been driving, the moment in which Malheureux grasps his proper place in God’s universe and the humility appropriate to it. He renounces his carnal obsession with Franceschina, and prepares to die. Regardless of his timely transformation, he is not entitled to credit for it, as the plot makes clear. His change is practically effected by Freevill, who works behind the scenes as the inscrutable God. Ultimately, Freevill saves his friend and punishes the courtesan by revealing himself. Freevill’s apology to his friend makes such an interpretation even more convincing:

Sir, your pardon; with my this defence,
Do not forget protested violence
Of your low affections; no requests,
No arguments of reason, no known danger,
No assured wicked bloodiness,
Could draw your heart from this damnation.
Therefore, to force you from the truer danger,
I wrought the feigned, suffering this fair devil
In shape of woman to make good her plot;
And, knowing that the hook was deeply fast,
I gave her line at will till, with her own vain strivings,
See here she’s tired. O thou comely damnation!
Dost think that vice is not to be withstood? (5.3.35-40, 43-49)

The unrepentant courtesan is quickly dispatched to prison, and Malheureux admits that his lust has been too strong for his virtue: “before, / The beast of man, loose blood,
distemper’d us. / He that lust rules cannot be virtuous” (5.3.65-67). His initial arrogant tone is gone, as he accepts his weakness and its implications. The experience has humbled him before God and made him obedient. Marston thus continues to uphold his conception of human morality. Marston does allow for moral reformation not only in Malheureux, but also in Lampatho from *What You Will*, in Pietro and Aurelia from *The Malcontent*, and in Hercules from *Parasitaster or the Fawn*. In his collaborative comedies *Eastward Ho* and *Histrio-Mastix*, Quicksilver and the nobles are also allowed a moral recovery. What Marston does not seem to allow is the credit of human agency in these reformations, as God’s divine grace is always the only plausible agent for it.

As Freevill saves Malheureux, Cocledemoy saves Master Mulligrub, but not before he reveals his wife’s infidelity. Disguised as a sergeant and leading Mulligrub to his execution, Cocledemoy flirts with Mistress Mulligrub and she assures him openly that he can pay her a visit any time. Master Mulligrub, however, repents his sins and forgives both her and Cocledemoy. In return, Cocledemoy throws off his disguise in order to exonerate Mulligrub and restore his possessions. In this fashion, Marston brings his comedy to its conventional, if improbable, end of festivity and reconciliation. Friends are friends again and couples are brought together. Freevill and Beatrice are reunited, and so
are the Mulligrubs. Even Crispinella, who initially vows that she will not obey a
“tyrannous creature” as is a husband (3.1.79-80), agrees to marry her suitor Tysefew,
“God’s my record […] that if I ever marry it shall be you” (4.1.63-64). Like Melletza
from What You Will, Crispinella has tamed her suitor, and by the end of the play he is
ready to promise, “If you will be mine, you shall be your own” (4.1.76). Crispinella thus
also anticipates characters like Fletcher’s Maria in The Tamer Tamed, but she is not as
politically conscious as they are.

While some of these developments are foreshadowed, their final occurrence is
still surprising. They are another allusion to the mysterious divine power working
secretly in the world of Marston’s plays. It is the power that saves the obedient, reforms
the ungodly, helps the unwilling, and punishes the reprobate. Because of it, the romantic
relationships of the faithful prosper, as they are formed in His acknowledgement;
whereas those of the wicked collapse, because their denial of His power provokes its
demonstration. As George Geckle points out, “Marston’s play is a profoundly moral one
based on a sound ethical foundation, and he is unnecessarily modest in his prologue when
he tells us that he strives ‘not to instruct, but to delight’ (line 8)” (John Marston’s 172).
CHAPTER 3: Political Rulers

The Malcontent (1600-1604)\(^{58}\)

Out of all of Marston’s plays, The Malcontent and Parasitaster come perhaps closest to an expression of political theory. Both comedies feature dukes as their protagonists—Altofronto and Hercules—and both dukes are granted the status of primary moral agents in their respective plots. This privilege reveals again Marston’s conservative bias. Not only are the two dukes given the special roles of moral reformers, but the empowering cover of their disguise is a clear allusion to the unlimited power of the all-seeing God. Besides glorifying their monarchs, The Malcontent and Parasitaster also denounce sectarian tendencies strongly as causes of political instability. Both comedies thus agree with the philosophies of establishment apologists from the end of Elizabeth’s and the beginning of James’s reigns. Both of them also rely on Marston’s customary New Comedy structure in which the surprising reversal from solemn atmosphere to a happy ending signifies the unpredictability of divine providence, and the frequent use of dramatic irony, the privileged position of the character in disguise.

The religious aspect of The Malcontent first appears in Marston’s address, “To the Reader,” printed at the beginning of all three quartos of 1604. The playwright insists that his satire is fair; that is, his targets of ridicule are not the godly and virtuous but those who undermine the established church:

\(^{58}\) I use G. K. Hunter’s Revels edition of The Malcontent, based on the third quarto, even if “less securely” so than other modern editions (Introduction xxxviii). In Hunter’s version, the text of the play is the collaborative work of Marston and John Webster. Marston was responsible for the first two quartos, but he later expanded their original for the public theatre, while Webster added the induction and the scenes featuring the character of Passarelo. The fact that Marston created the original design of the play, and the distinct qualities of Marston’s and Webster’s later additions, outlined in D. J. Lake’s “Webster’s Additions to The Malcontent: Linguistic Evidence,” make it possible to regard Marston as the primary creative force behind this comedy and its values.
Surely I desire to satisfy every firm spirit, who, in all his actions, proposeth to himself no more ends than God and virtue do, whose intentions are always simple; to such I protest that with my free understanding I have not glanced at disgrace of any but of those whose unquiet studies labour innovation, contempt of holy policy, reverend comely superiority, and established unity. (To the Reader, 16-22)

Marston’s address is perhaps the closest reflection of the political ideas in the pamphlet *Obedience or Ecclesiastical Union*, written by his father-in-law, Dr. William Wilkes, in 1605 and reprinted in 1608.59 *Obedience* opens with a quotation from King James I on the matter of congregations abandoned by dissenting ministers:

And the Bishops and others whom it concerneth, provide meete parsons to be substitutes in the place of those who shall wilfullie abandon their charges upon so light causes. Assuring them that after that day, we shall not faile to do that which Princely providence requireth at our hands. That is to put in execution all grounds and occasions of Sects, devisions, and unquitnesse, wherof as we wish there may never be occasion given us to make prove, but that this our admonition may have equall force in all mens hearts to worke an universal conformitie. (A4r-v)

In his warning, King James attacks nonconformist religious leaders as the agents of political instability and argues that their suppression is necessitated by his God-like providential care for his Church. Dr. Wilkes followed the lead of his employer and sovereign. The preacher also asserts the divine right of kings and the consequent expectation of conformity from the people (3-4). He likewise equates the danger of radical religious reform with the threat of radical political change (19). In the end, he comes to his central point that personal opinion in religious matters must be kept in line with the doctrines of the established church, because if left free, it can endanger both church and state:

Abandon from you the maisters of *noveltie* and workers of *innovation*, what apparance soever there be in the *noveltie*, you are sure to loose by the

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59 The 1608 reprint was published under the title *A Second Memento for Magistrates*, as Anthony Wood points out (299).
bargaine, the utilitie cannot be so helpful, but the noveltie would be more hurtfull. For if it should be lawfull for every man to cast the frame of religion in the mould of their owne fancies, The [sic] scruples and inconveniences would be no lesse in the Church, then the suites at the common-lawe, in number infinite, if every man had power to create a newfound estate intaille. (39)

The conservatism of Dr. Wilkes’s pamphlet resembles the conservative attitudes in Marston’s satires and comedies. Wilkes’s emphasis on the restraint of “the head long course of self-will” and his disapproval of dangerous political reform such as “democracy” are similar to the attitudes on the individual human will and the unreliable mob expressed in Marston’s verse and drama (31, 60). Both Marston and Dr. Wilkes are in line with Hooker’s view that “the will of man” is “inwardly obstinate, rebellious, and averse from all obediēce unto the sacred lawes of his nature” (I.10.70). In turn, Marston’s affinity with Hooker’s and Wilkes’s ecclesiastical politics is evident in his disapproval of religious individualism in the verse satires, What You Will, The Dutch Courtesan, The Malcontent, and Eastward Ho.

Besides King James I, Dr. William Wilkes, and Richard Hooker, Marston’s other recognizable influences in this comedy are religious and moral writers as well. Two central speeches in this play reflect passages from Josuah Sylvester’s translation of La Sepmaine; ou, Creation du monde (1578) and La Seconde Sepmaine (1584) by the French Protestant poet Guilleaume de Salluste Du Bartas.60 Marston models his protagonist’s address to the night (3.1.1-14) after Du Bartas’s “First Day of the First Week of Creation” (19-21), and he borrows a later description of life in solitude (4.5.12-22) from “The Fourth Book of the First Day of the Second Week” (359-60). Another important influence on The Malcontent is John Dymock’s 1602 translation of Giovanni Battista

60 Du Bartas is also one of the poets Marston defends against Joseph Hall’s alleged attacks in his Certain Satires (iv.36-44).
Guarini’s *Il pastor fido* (1590). Guarini composed his tragicomic innovation with a moral purpose, in order to counter the deeds of “mercenary and sordid persons who have contaminated [comedy] and reduced her to a vile state” and to create a drama more fitting his Christian age which had rendered the genres of pagan Greece and Rome obsolete (*Compendium* 523). Marston adapted several smaller passages from *Il pastor* for his purposes, and he may have developed his overall style of comedy from Guarini’s if he had access to the Italian’s works before Dymock’s translation appeared.61

*The Malcontent* creates ample opportunities for moral commentary with its court setting. Adultery, affectation, and manipulation are rampant in it, and Philip J. Finkelpearl observes that “Marston takes great pains throughout the play to create an atmosphere of overpowering, nearly irresistible corruption” (*John Marston* 180). Young courtiers and favourites are seen in the chambers of the Duchess Aurelia too often, and an old procuress by the name of Maquerelle is perverting Aurelia’s ladies by teaching them the art of infidelity. With the help of this unwholesome background, the playwright conveys his two main concerns: the decline of human morality and religion. The two problems are closely connected: compromise in personal morality inevitably leads to compromise of the religious institution and vice versa. Personal expedience is presented as taking over the moral principles of religious conformity and evolving into sectarian opportunism. The impact of this degradation ultimately affects the political state as a whole, a development logical in the warnings of Hooker, James I, and Dr. Wilkes.

61 The parallel passages are as follows: 1.6.39-41 and E2v, 1.6.91-93 and D2v, 1.7.87-88 and I2, 2.4.42-44 and H4, 3.1.11-14 and I2, and 5.3.12-14 and H4, C3. As for Guarini’s opinion on the suitability of his new genre to Christianity, it lies in his statement on tragedy: “And to come to our age, what need have we today to purge terror and pity with tragic sights, since we have the precepts of our most holy religion, which teaches us with the word of the gospel?” (523). Marston perhaps saw the same connection between his serious comedies and his religion.
In the midst of this moral chaos, the malcontent Malevole rises as the character of moral authority of the play. He is the sanctioned moral critic at the court of Pietro, the current Duke of Genoa:

PIETRO. Come down, thou ragged cur, and snarl here. I give thy dogged sullenness free liberty; trot about and bespurtle whom thou pleasest.
MALEVOLE. I’ll come among you, goatish-blooded toderers, as gum into taffeta, to fret, to fret. I’ll fall like a sponge into water, to suck up, to suck up. Howl again. I’ll go to church, and come to you.

[Exit above.]

PIETRO. This Malevole is one of the most prodigious affections that ever conversed with nature, a man, or rather a monster, more discontent than Lucifer when he was thrust out of the presence; his appetite is unsatiable as the grave, as far from any content as from heaven. His highest delight is to procure others vexation, and therein he thinks he truly serves heaven; for ’tis his position, whosoever in this earth can be contented is a slave and damned; therefore does he afflict all in that which they are most affected. (1.2.10-26)

At first, Malevole seems to be a diabolical court jester, according to Pietro’s words. Yet the malcontent’s more serious side emerges when the Duke mentions his view on worldly happiness. Malevole is not simply a bizarre distraction; on the contrary, his disgust serves as a constant reminder to those around him of their sin and its implications for their after-life.62 His motivation is ultimately religious: “I’ll go to church, and come to you.” He vexes Pietro’s courtiers in order to prevent their attachment to the ephemeral life on earth and the eternal damnation it entails. Pietro claims to appreciate the malcontent’s helping him “understand those weaknesses which others’ flattery palliates,” but the play offers little evidence of the Duke’s moral profit at this point (1.2.29-30). His permission of the malcontent’s freedom of speech, however, is an important gesture that signifies his moral potential.

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62 Georgia Brown observes that in this comedy, “[d]isgust confers a sense of superiority on those that experience it, because it defines the self against that which is low and objectionable” (135).
Malevole’s role is therefore indisputable: he is the chief vehicle of moral satire in the comedy. His conversation with Pietro reveals that the church in Genoa and, by association, the church in England have begun to suffer a worrying decline:

PIETRO. [...] And, sir, whence come you now?  
MALEVOLE. From the public place of much dissimulation, the church.  
PIETRO. What didst there?  
MALEVOLE. Talk with a usurer; take up at interest.  
PIETRO. I wonder what religion thou art?  
MALEVOLE. Of a soldier’s religion.  
PIETRO. And what dost think makes most infidels now?  
MALEVOLE. Sects, sects; I have seen seeming Piety change her robe so oft, that sure none but some arch-devil can shape her a petticoat.  
PIETRO. O, religious policy!  
MALEVOLE. But damnation on a politic religion! (1.3.3-15)

In Malevole’s opinion, the church is corrupted by nonconformists who frequent it only to pretend conformity and do business. They change their religion as quickly as mercenary soldiers change their allegiances, and their disloyalty brings about sects which in turn engender more heretical believers. Malevole’s complaint is thus another strong parallel between Marston’s play and the opinions expressed in Dr. Wilkes’s pamphlet. Although Malevole criticizes the church, he aims his attacks not at the establishment itself but at the nonconformists undermining it.63

The malcontent does not spare the moral transgressions of the Genoan court either. The Duke’s wife, Aurelia, has been having an affair with her favourite Mendoza, and Malevole explains to Pietro how adultery, if undiscovered, may lead to incest, and is therefore a sin second in offence only to simony:

MALEVOLE. [...] Nay, ’tis frequent, not only probable but, no question, often acted, whilst ignorance, fearless ignorance, clasps his own seed.  
PIETRO. Hideous imagination!

63 Janet Clare points out that the word “church” was removed from the first two quarto editions but restored in the third augmented one ("Marston" 201).
MALEVOLE. Adultery? why, next to the sin of simony, 'tis the most horrid transgression under the cope of salvation.

PIETRO. Next to simony?

MALEVOLE. Ay, next to simony, in which our men in next age shall not sin.

PIETRO. Not sin? Why?

MALEVOLE. Because (thanks to some churchmen) our age will leave them nothing to sin with. (1.3.136-47)

In Malevole’s speech, the moral situation in the state of Genoa emerges in its full gravity. Adultery puts the dukedom’s succession in danger. The widespread practice of simony, or illegal traffic in ecclesiastical properties, threatens to deprive the church of its estates. This fictional religious crisis is no doubt another attempt on Marston’s part to touch on abuses in the Church of England, the first being Quadratus’s sarcastic comment in *What You Will* (2.p.258-59).64

Malevole’s solution to Pietro’s predicament is somewhat un-Christian at first. He encourages the Duke not to wait on heaven but to punish Aurelia and Mendoza himself. Yet the malcontent’s words have a certain irony to them because Pietro is not exactly in the position to be a moral judge. At this point, Marston reveals that Pietro is only a puppet usurper, while Malevole is the rightful but banished Duke of Genoa, Giovanni Altofronto, disguised as a malcontent in order to reclaim his throne. Altofronto has been exiled because his “severer” style of government has jarred with the masses, despite its fairness. Pietro has capitalized on this popular discontent and sided with Aurelia’s father, the Duke of Florence, who has taken over Genoa and put Pietro in Altofronto’s place:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{My throne stood like a point in midst of a circle,} \\
\text{To all of equal nearness, bore with none,} \\
\text{Reigned all alike, so slept in fearless virtue,} \\
\text{Suspectless, too suspectless; till the crowd} \\
\text{(Still lickerous of untried novelties),}
\end{align*}
\]

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64 As in *What You Will*, Marston here takes the side of the establishment again. See Church of England injunction 26.
Unwarranted disloyalty has thus put an end to Altofronto’s moral regime in Genoa. Scruples have yielded to expedience and religion to political machinations. To survive in this world of realpolitik, the banished Duke has to temporize. His, however, is not the temporizing that Quadratus advises in What You Will, which involves the sarcastic dictum “[s]erve God and Mammon, to the Divill goe” (2.p.258). Unlike his enemies, Altofronto never compromises his moral integrity but bides his time in the faith that his divine right to the throne of Genoa will see him eventually restored.65 He knows that Pietro’s corrupt court, propped up through an unlawful coup, will collapse. In this respect, the play is again consonant with the negative conception of individual will and the politics of the populace in the writings of James I, Dr. Wilkes, and Hooker. Further, not only is the disguised Altofronto a positive impersonation of establishment conservatism, but his secret work is also a subtle allusion to God, whose invisible and mysterious power affects human existence.

Altofronto’s belief in his eventual triumph emerges in his conversation with Aurelia’s lover, Mendoza:

MENDOZA. Out, beggar!
MALEVOLE. I once shall rise.
MENDOZA. Thou rise!
MALEVOLE. Ay, at the resurrection.
“No vulgar seed but once may rise, and shall;
“No King so huge but ’fore he die, may fall.” (1.5.14-19)

65 William M. Hamlin notes: “Temporizing, for Altofronto, ineluctably amounts to hoping […]. It amounts, in short, to the assumption of a degree of humility entirely alien to the standard Machiavellian dissimulation with which we are familiar, for instance, from Marlowe’s Barabas or, better still, Kyd’s Lorenzo” (314).
Altofronto masks his confidence in his restoration with an allusion to the inevitable fate of all humanity at the Judgement Day. His words assert his belief in the justice of the final day, based on moral character rather than on class status. Altofronto’s restoration to the throne and the consequent “moral, or spiritual, regeneration of Genoa” are therefore inevitable (Geckle John Marston’s 110). However, the irony here is that the ostensibly vulgar malcontent is a duke in disguise and the favourite in power, Mendoza, is a commoner, so the radical abolition of class on the day of the Resurrection will not make a difference. On the contrary, the Duke is destined to preserve his divine right, whereas the insidious favourite is doomed to fall even lower.66

Given his faith, Altofronto’s use of religious language is appropriate, whereas the villains in the play cannot but abuse moral diction when they attempt it. For instance, Mendoza conveys his admiration for women in heavenly terms:

> Sweet women, most sweet ladies, nay, angels! by heaven, he is more accursed than a devil that hates you, or is hated by you; and happier than a god that loves you, or is beloved by you—you preservers of mankind, life-blood of society. Who would live, nay, who can live without you? O Paradise! (1.5.32-39)

The problem with this exclamation is that it is a travesty. Mendoza’s illicit relationship with the Duchess Aurelia will not earn him a spot in heaven. The play underscores this impossibility, as the favourite’s scheme to gain more power soon runs into trouble. The young courtier Ferneze ousts Mendoza as Aurelia’s lover, and his view of women changes drastically: “Damnation of mankind!” (1.6.82). Mendoza’s ungodliness is

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66 William W. E. Slights notes that Altofronto is practically identical with his alter ego, Malevole: “Although critics have assumed that Altofronto is acting a role alien to his own temperament, what we know of Altofronto is consistent with Malevole’s contempt for the sordid struggle for transitory, worldly rewards (“‘Elder’” 364-65).
exposed again, when he is unable to say his prayers, as Pietro threatens to kill him for his affair with the Duchess:

   PIETRO. Say thy prayers.  
   MENDOZA. I ha’ forgot ’um. (1.7.2-3)

Judging from his actions, Mendoza hardly cares about his after-life, but he does not want to die either, so he is willing to talk the moral talk in order to save his own skin. He tells the suspicious Pietro that the reason for his rant on women is not his loss of Aurelia’s favour but the fact that women’s tricks jeopardize men’s salvation in general:

   Heart! I hate all women for ’t: sweet sheets, wax lights, antic bedposts, cambric smocks, villainous courtains, arras pictures, oiled hinges, and all the tongue-tied lascivious witnesses of great creatures’ wantonness—what salvation can you expect? (1.7.45-49)

Affecting concern for his after-life, Mendoza successfully directs Pietro’s suspicions away from himself and towards Ferneze, Aurelia’s new lover. He even offers to help Pietro catch Ferneze in the act of adultery and kill him. The morally weak Pietro agrees with Mendoza and puts all his confidence in the favourite. He fails to catch the blatant contradiction between Mendoza’s professed concern about salvation and his inability to say his prayers even under the threat of death.

   Mendoza’s manipulation of Pietro thus reveals another aspect of the abuse of political power at Genoa’s court. The fallen favourite is ready to trample on any moral principle, just so he can secure more power:

   Nothing so holy, no band of nature so strong, no law of friendship so sacred, but I’ll prophane, burst, violate, ’fore I’ll endure disgrace, contempt, and poverty.  
   Shall I, whose very “hum” struck all heads bare,  
   Whose face made silence, creaking of whose shoe  
   Forced the most private passages fly ope,  
   Scrape like a servile dog at some latched door? (2.1.15-21)
Genoa soon falls at the mercy of Mendoza’s moral disregard, and it remains in this state until the end of the play. The Duchess’s former lover manages to turn Pietro against his malcontent in order to consolidate his grasp on power. Altofronto calls Pietro on his change of trust: “What religion wilt thou be of next?” (2.3.12). What he implies is that the Duke’s new faith in Mendoza is tantamount to a religious conversion from true belief.

Despite Pietro’s weakness, Marston is careful not to compromise him completely. The playwright ensures sympathy for his character by having him approach the capture and punishment of his wife and her latest lover with misgivings:

My Lords, the heavy action we intend
Is death and shame, two of the ugliest shapes
That can confound a soul; think, think of it.
I strike; but yet, like him that ’gainst stone walls
Directs his shafts, rebounds in his own face,
My Lady’s shame is mine, O God, ’tis mine! (2.3.54-59)

Marston takes another step in humanizing the usurper by having him confess that he still loves Aurelia despite her infidelity (2.3.65). Pietro’s overwhelming grief at the thought of bringing shame upon the Duchess makes him think of his own death, and he unwisely pronounces Mendoza his successor. These minor signs of moral awareness foreshadow the usurper’s eventual reformation in the play, and critic R. W. Ingram observes that “[Pietro] is brought more convincingly to repentance than many characters in Elizabethan drama” (111).

Meanwhile, Mendoza persists in his manipulations. He pretends to try to save Ferneze after stabbing him mortally, and he also presents himself as the innocent victim of manipulation when he discovers that Aurelia has slept with Ferneze:

O God, O God! how we dull honest souls,
Heavy-brained men, are swallowed in the bogs
Of a deceitful ground, whilst nimble bloods,
Light-jointed spirits spent, cut good men’s throats,
And ’scape. Alas, I am too honest for this age,
Too full of phlegm, and heavy steadiness; […] (2.5.59-64)

Finally, Mendoza also tricks Aurelia into believing that he will make her his duchess if he can dispose of Pietro. Blinded by iniquity, Aurelia fails to discern that Pietro’s death will leave her at Mendoza’s mercy, and Mendoza relishes her naivety: “I see God made honest fools to maintain crafty knaves” (2.5.98).

Despite his skill, however, Mendoza cannot fool the godly Altofronto. When he tries to enlist the disguised Duke as one of his henchmen, Altofronto gives Mendoza a hint that serving him would be equal to betraying and destroying one’s religion:

MENDOZA. Ferneze; there he is, prithee bury him.
MALEVOLE. O, most willingly; I mean to turn pure Rochelle churchman, I.
MENDOZA. Thou churchman! why, why?
MALEVOLE. Because I’ll live lazily, rail upon authority, deny King’s supremacy in things indifferent, and be a Pope in mine own parish.
MENDOZA. Wherefore dost thou think churches were made?
MALEVOLE. To scour plough-shares. I ha’ seen oxen plough up altars.
MENDOZA. Strange!
MALEVOLE. Nay, monstrous; I ha’ seen a sumptuous steeple turned to a stinking privy; more beastly, the sacredest place made a dog’s kennel; nay, most inhuman, the stoned coffins of long-dead Christians burst up, and made hogs’ troughs: Hic finis Priami. (2.5.117-32)

In Altofronto’s eyes, to help Mendoza is the same as becoming a radical reformist, like the French Huguenots arriving in England from the city of Rochelle, denying the authority of the King in insignificant matters of church discipline and assuming absolute power in local ecclesiastical affairs. The impact of such Presbyterian undermining of the political and religious establishment has led to the sacrilegious destruction of temples and cemeteries. Altofronto concludes that the demise of religion is certain in a state where nonconformism thrives. Nevertheless, Mendoza fails to decipher the malcontent’s
ostensibly rambling tirade. Like Aurelia, the favourite is a prime example of humanity’s vulnerability when left without the grace of God, as he cannot foresee the strength of the power he is facing.

While Altofronto is caustic with reprobate types like Mendoza, he shows his compassionate side to those who have even an unconscious potential to change their ways. For instance, when Ferneze survives Mendoza’s attack, Altofronto remarks how lucky the young courtier is not to have died in the sin of lust:

Thy shame more than thy wounds do grieve me far:  
“Thy wounds but leave upon thy flesh some scar;  
“But fame ne’er heals, still rankles worse and worse;  
“Such is of uncontro’d lust the curse.  
“Think what it is in lawless sheets to lie;  
“But, O Ferneze, what in lust to die!” (2.5.146-51)

The disguised Duke arranges a safe place for Ferneze away from court, so he can recover both physically and spiritually. Unlike Mendoza, who gets his henchmen through manipulation, Altofronto enlists his allies through reformation. Having secured Ferneze’s repentance, he turns his attention to Pietro.

Marston has already foreshadowed Pietro’s reformation and continues to build up to it. The usurper’s knowledge of his wife’s infidelity makes him renounce knowledge in general. In this sense, Pietro renounces also the drive that has brought about Adam’s original sin: “Good God, that men should / Desire to search out that which, being found, kills all / Their joy of life! To taste the tree of knowledge, / And then be driven from out Paradise!” (3.1.15-18). Pietro decides to inform Aurelia’s father, the Duke of Florence, of her infidelity, and states his preference for ignorance once more: “There’s naught that’s safe and sweet but ignorance” (3.1.33). His latest actions are therefore morally sound in the world of the play, as they favour humility and obedience, and they also turn the tide
of events in Altofronto’s favour. The news of Aurelia’s disgrace brings the end to Florence’s support for Pietro and Aurelia’s rule of Genoa, and an opportunity for Altofronto to reclaim his throne (3.3.14-24).

Altofronto thus reclaims his power not through cynical manipulation, like Pietro and Mendoza, but with the help of divine grace. Marston has Altofronto’s enemies working to his benefit unaware, as God no doubt favours the faithful banished Duke. Mendoza, for example, puts all his trust in Altofronto by ordering him to murder Pietro. The power-hungry favourite reveals that he is Pietro’s heir, and that once Pietro is murdered, he intends to marry Altofronto’s wife, Maria, in order to make his hold on Genoa legitimate. As a result of this confession, Altofronto gains complete control over Mendoza’s affairs and proceeds to his own restoration. Instead of killing Pietro, he reveals Mendoza’s plan to him, disguises him as a hermit, and sends him to court to tell a melodramatic story of himself jumping to his death in the sea (4.3.12). Altofronto thus convinces Mendoza that Pietro is no longer an obstacle, and Mendoza banishes Aurelia. Yet Mendoza’s ostensibly growing power is undermined by the dramatic irony of having Altofronto as his henchman. Marston contrasts the disguised Duke with Mendoza, as the play draws to its conclusion. Mendoza’s power is empty as it is in open disregard of God. Altofronto, on the other hand, submits to God, and Mendoza plays into his hands. Genoa’s rightful Duke is consequently not only the epitome of orthodox Protestant faith but also an impersonation of the mysterious power wielded by God.

Eventually, Mendoza brings about his own fall, when he decides to eliminate both his henchmen, the disguised Pietro and Altofronto. First, he orders Pietro to poison the malcontent. Mendoza tells the holy man that he will make “an excellent Elder / In a
deformed church” in what is another of his travesties of religious language (4.3.98-99).

He then orders the disguised Altofronto to poison the hermit, hoping that his two servants will murder each other without leaving a trace of his involvement. What drives Mendoza is his selfish desire for the benefits of political power. He admits: “We that are great, our sole self-good still moves us” (4.3.136). Mendoza is therefore a victim of the clash between his overreaching individualism and the world of the play which encourages the self-denial of humility and obedience. Politically, the favourite is Marston’s embodiment of the nonconformist urges attacked by Richard Hooker, King James I, and Dr. William Wilkes.

Mendoza’s plans lead Pietro and Altofronto to launch an invective on the corruption surrounding them. Pietro laments: “All is damnation, wickedness extreme; there is no faith in man” (4.4.16-17). Altofronto agrees:

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World! ’tis the only region of death, the greatest shop of the devil, the cruelest prison of men, out of the which none pass without paying their dearest breath for a fee; there’s nothing perfect in it but extreme, extreme calamity, such as comes yonder. (4.4.27-31)
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The world that humanity inhabits is under the mark of death, as it is the place corrupted by Adam’s original sin: “one sinne entred into the whole worlde, and death by sinne, and so death went over all men foreasmuch as all have sinned” (Calvin 2.1.6). This doctrine is also reflected in Article 9 of the Church of England: the original sin is the cause for “the fault and corruption of nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam […] so that the flesh lusteth always contrary to the Spirit; and therefore in every person born into this world, it deserveth God’s wrath and damnation” (Bicknell 171). No genuine happiness is possible in worldly life, only grief, suffering, and wickedness like that of Mendoza. The only hope of the faithful few, therefore, is the world of the after-
life, available via the immortality of the soul, itself the result of Christ’s sacrifice: “by the grace of Christ, righteousness and life is restored unto us” (Calvin 2.1.6).

Marston follows Altofronto’s speech appropriately with the entrance of the distraught Aurelia. It is an apt segue, presenting the former Duchess who has pursued secular pleasure only to find out its transient nature. Her despair is so overwhelming that she no longer believes in the ability of God to remit her sins:

I can desire nothing but death, nor deserve anything but hell.  
If heaven should give sufficiency of grace  
To clear my soul, it would make heaven graceless;  
My sins would make the stock of mercy poor;  
O, they would tire heaven’s goodness to reclaim them! (4.5.4-8)

Aurelia is an example of the dangerous loss of faith against which Calvin warns in his works. The French theologian advises that while awareness of human imperfection is commendable, it should not be so overwhelming as to undermine faith in God: “But such fear he meaneth as may make us more heedfull, not such whereby we should be troubled and utterly fall” (3.2.23). The same concern is behind the Church of England’s injunction 17. Yet God is all powerful, and Aurelia’s despair is paradoxically her salvation. She addresses her lament to the hermit, who is her disguised husband, Pietro. Marston employs dramatic irony again to showcase not only his character’s genuine contrition but also the limited state of fallen humanity, incapable of grasping God’s benevolent intentions. Aurelia’s desperate cries reconcile her with her previously estranged husband, while her ignorance of his presence assures him of her sincerity.

The Duchess has fond memories of Pietro’s love, and she describes it in the terms of perfect love customary for every exemplary romantic relationship in Marston’s comedies:
O heaven!
As the soul loved the body, so loved he;
’Twas death to him to part my presence,
heaven to see me pleased.
Yet I, like to a wretch given o’er to hell,
Brake all the sacred rites of marriage,
To clip a base ungentle faithless villain,
O God! A very pagan reprobate—
What should I say?—ungrateful, throws me out,
For whom I lost soul, body, fame, and honour.
But ’tis most fit. Why should a better fate
Attend on any who forsake chaste sheets,
Fly the embrace of a devoted heart,
Joined by a solemn vow ’fore God and man,
To taste the brackish blood of beastly lust
In an adulterous touch? (4.5.31-46)

Aurelia’s illicit relationship with Mendoza has led her against her sacred marriage vows made before God. She has exchanged a holy union of immortal potential for an ephemeral affair with a reprobate. Yet, although her sins make her salvation unlikely in her mind, her poignant speech in front of her disguised husband is enough to save her in his eyes, especially as she manages to summon the courage to wish joy to Pietro’s ghost and ask for pardon herself (4.5.50).

While Aurelia’s speeches impart hope, Pietro’s old marshal Bilioso seems doomed. He returns from Florence to discover that Mendoza has been crowned duke and Pietro is reported dead. When Altefronzo asks him about his allegiance—“What religion will you be of now?”—Bilioso answers, “Of the Duke’s religion, when I know what it is” (4.5.93-94). The marshal’s opportunism, however, will not save him: “[h]ere’s a fellow to be damned” (4.5.103). It also leads Altefronzo to deliver another speech on the human world as a place of death. For him Bilioso, like Mendoza, is another reminder of the post-lapsarian state of human corruption:
Think this—this earth is the only grave and Golgotha wherein all things that live must rot; ’tis but the draught wherein heavenly bodies discharge their corruption; the very muck-hill on which the sublunary orbs cast their excrements. Man is the slime of this dung-pit, and princes are the governors of these men; for, for our souls, they are as free as emperors’, all of one piece; there goes but a pair of shears betwixt an emperor and the son of a bagpiper; only the dyeing, dressing, pressing, glossing, makes the difference. (4.5.110-19)

Altofronto’s speech cures the repentant Pietro completely. The usurper’s one-time lust for power that has seen him team up with Aurelia’s father and take control of Venice vanishes. He realizes that earthly power is an illusion of a mortal world, and its influence is non-existent in the after-life, where distinction is based on moral excellence. Altofronto’s speech thus adumbrates the play’s overall moral insistence on human humility and obedience. Mendoza’s similar attempts to climb up the social ladder via the manipulation of power at the expense of Christian morality are doomed to failure, too, as he goes against the divine laws that govern the world of the play and guarantee Altofronto’s right to Genoa’s throne.

As Altofronto’s and Pietro’s understanding of the world becomes identical, Marston can bring about their reconciliation. It happens in the same fashion as Aurelia’s inadvertent confession before her disguised husband, another allusion to the mysterious presence of God. Pietro declares his reformation before the disguised Altofronto, unaware that the person he refers to is in front of him:

PIETRO. O, I am changed; for here, ’fore the dread power,
In true contrition I do dedicate
My breath to solitary holiness,
My lips to prayer; and my breast’s care shall be,
Restoring Altofronto to regency. (4.5.127-31)

Altofronto throws off the malcontent disguise and reveals himself to his usurper-turned-ally. He knows he can trust Pietro now, as Pietro believes in the same moral principles to
which he subscribes himself. Unlike Aurelia, Pietro does not doubt heaven’s power to forgive his sins. His vows “stand fixed in heaven, and from thence / [He] crave[s] all love and pardon” (4.5.139-40). It is the only course available to a character who has recognized his helplessness in a world in which a mightier power is at play. To make up for his transgressions, he wants to restore the former ruler of Genoa to his throne and retire in a religious order.

As a reward, Altofronto translates Pietro’s awareness of his sins into a reason for confidence: “Who doubts of Providence, that sees this change? / Hearty faith to all!” (4.5.141-42). Pietro’s repentance is proof of God’s existence and His care for humanity. Altofronto’s acknowledgement also makes it clear that he does not demand credit for his success. The banished duke prospers not because “the cosmos is itself unstable,” but because he has unwavering faith in a God that will eventually and mysteriously reward the faithful and punish the godless (Leggatt, *Introduction* 81). Unlike Mendoza’s, Altofronto’s success is rather “a matter of faith, hope and providential intervention rather than intrigue” (G. K. Hunter, *Introduction* lxx).

The final act of *The Malcontent* introduces yet another character who shares in Altofronto’s moral principles. This is Altofronto’s imprisoned wife, Maria, whom Mendoza is hoping to marry. Mendoza chooses the old procuress Maquerelle to take his offer of marriage to Maria because of Maquerelle’s experience in perverting women. The panderess suggests that Maria could get around the moral scruples by changing her faith. She tells Maria of “a sect that maintained, when the husband was asleep the wife might lawfully lie with another man; for then her husband was as dead,” (5.3.7-10). However, in what is another attack on religious nonconformism, Maria scorns the suggestion to be
involved in polygamy, the alleged practice of Anabaptist and Familist sects.67 She also discards Maquerelle’s claim that chastity is “devised by jealous fools to wrong our liberty” (5.3.14), and she rejects Mendoza’s idea that marriage is just a ritual, “merely Nature’s policy” (5.6.3). Marriage and chastity are not merely human constructs but part of the divine design of the world and therefore sacred.

Like the other of Marston’s exemplary female characters, Maria regards marriage as a union of souls, the illegal dissolution of which is worse than death itself. For this reason, she believes Mendoza’s separating her from her husband is worse than death:

O thou far worse than Death! he parts but soul
From a weak body; but thou soul from soul
Disseverest, that which God’s own hand did knit—
Thou scant of honour, full of devilish wit! (5.6.14-17)

Maria’s belief is thus reminiscent of the spiritual love Pasquil advocates in *Jack Drum’s Entertainment* and Freevill describes in *The Dutch Courtesan*. Her words also reflect Calvin’s idea that even if not a sacrament per se, marriage is “a holy ordinance of God,” and its union is a heavenly one (4.19.34).

The final scenes of *The Malcontent* enact Maria’s triumph and Mendoza’s fall. Although he orders her death and attempts to poison her disguised husband, divine providence turns Mendoza’s world upside down. Altofronto, who has been lying ostensibly poisoned on the stage, stands up and tells his ally Celso that everyone is on his side, including God: “the people pray for me, and the Great Leader of the just stands for me: then courage Celso! / For no disastrous chance can ever move him / That leaveth nothing but a God above him” (5.5.90-94). In addition, Aurelia makes an unexpected entrance at Mendoza’s coronation and spoils its festivities, as she is the living proof of

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67 See Hamilton on the Family of Love (37, 117, 133) and Calvin on the Anabaptists (3.3.14).
the harm inflicted by Mendoza’s rise to power. Dressed in mourning habit, she reminds everyone that “Life is a frost of cold felicity, / And death the thaw of all our vanity” (5.6.45-46). Finally, instead of a salute from the ghosts of Genoa’s illustrious ancient rulers, Mendoza gets the ironic performance of the two former dukes he thinks he has murdered. When the masquers remove their disguises, Mendoza cannot but plead with them to let him live until he has had the chance to reconcile himself with God: “O lend me breath till I am fit to die. / For peace with heaven, for your own soul’s sake, / Vouchsafe me life” (5.6.121-23). His surprising supplication saves both his life and the play’s comic ending.

As Marston brings about Altofronto’s restoration, he provides his title character with a brief political sermon. Philip J. Finkelpearl notes that “when Marston lengthened the play for public theatre performance, he added thirteen lines to Altofronto’s speech” (John Marston 191). This added part contains Altofronto’s political manifesto:

O, they that are as great as be their sins,  
Let them remember that th’ inconstant people  
Love many princes merely for their faces  
And outward shows; and they do covet more  
To have a sight of these than of their virtues.  
Yet thus much let the great ones still conceit  
When they observe not Heaven’s imposed conditions,  
They are no kings, but forfeit their commissions. (5.6.137-49)

The restored Duke continues to insist that the affection of the populace is no guarantee for prosperity, and political usurpers are hoisted to power without the moral strength of Heaven’s law. His last two lines implicate not rightful monarchs as King James but the
Mendozas and Pietros who have forfeited “their commissions” (149). God makes certain that legitimate rulers are always restored despite the corruption of the mortal world.  

Through Altofronto, Marston imparts to the audience the value of obedience in line with the official policies of England’s establishment. He suppresses the characters who choose to serve their individual drives for power much in the same way that Richard Hooker, Dr. William Wilkes and King James I dismiss nonconformist attempts to decentralize church and state government. Altofronto’s reference to “Heaven’s imposed conditions” practically reflects James’s statement that:

> the further a king is preferred by God above all other ranks & degrees of men, and the higher that his seat is above theirs, the greater is his obligation to his maker. And therefore in case he forget himselfe (his unthankfulnes being in the same measure of height) the sadder and sharper will his correction be; and according to the greatnes of the height he is in, the weight of his fall wil recompense the same: for the further that any person is obliged to God, his offence becomes and growes so much the greater, then it would be in any other. (Political Writings 83)  

In the very final moments of the play, Marston has Altofronto mete out justice according to his divine right. He welcomes Maria back and reunites Pietro with his Aurelia. He rewards faithful subjects like Celso and the citadel captain, and he banishes the moral transgressors Mendoza, Biliozo, and Maquerelle. Lucy Munro suggests that “Malevole’s refusal to let the story end in tragedy, transforming the revenge into tragicomedy, becomes a moral comment on revenge itself” (110).  

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68 Alvin Kernan states that Altofronto’ speech insists on “the ultimate necessity of moral conduct” (The Cankered Muse 219). William W. E. Slight points out that “Marston stresses the responsibility of the would-be ruler to possess such virtues as temperance and justice, which his flawed and self-defeating schemers, Pietro, Ferneze, and Mendoza, lack” (“Political Morality” 138-39).  
69 As I interpret Altofronto to be intended not only as the undeserving victim of an immoral usurpation but also as the chief agent of Genoa’s moral restoration, my analysis differs from readings which see The Malcontent as challenging the ideology of obedience: Janet Clare (202), Douglas E. Rutledge (10), and Albert H. Tricomi (Anticourt 20-21).
As in the other of Marston’s comedies, it may seem that “the sheer speed of the speech deflates its seriousness,” yet Altofronto’s fast-paced address can also be read as Marston’s attempt to limit his agency (Leggatt, Introduction 85). The Duke has been Marston’s allusion to God’s mysterious power, but Marston puts the ultimate credit for his protagonist’s triumph out of his reach and in the hands of God. The Duke is nothing more than “a servant of the Providence he invokes” (Wine xxii). He has surrendered to God throughout the play by presenting his right to political power as contingent on his acceptance of God’s law. As Brian Gibbons notes, Marston’s enactment of “the instability and weakness of individuals in political and private life” is “ruthless in its candour and its pessimism” (74). For this reason, Marston’s comedy restrains its protagonist. To give Altofronto or any other character the exclusive credit for the final reformation would pose a conflict with Marston’s values and his alliance with the establishment. Yet in The Malcontent and in Parasitaster, Godlavishes His rewards on the disguised protagonists, because these two characters are true spokesmen for the conservative values of godly obedience and humility.
Parasitaster, or the Fawn (1604-1606)

Like The Malcontent, Parasitaster also upholds traditional political and religious values. Its central character is a disguised duke as well, and despite his initial moral confusion, he emerges as this play’s central moral agent. As Altfronto reforms his Genoa, Hercules, Duke of Ferrara, cleanses Urbin’s court of its perversions and ensures the stability of its society with a sustainable marital union and ducal succession. His work as his alter ego of Faunus or the Fawn is also an allusion to the power of God, invisible to mortal humanity on earth. At different points in the play, Hercules may defend liberties like surrender to sexual desire or the importance of free speech, but his ultimate handling of the affairs of Urbin leaves little doubt about the play’s conservative stance. Through him, Marston creates in Parasitaster another statement in support of centralized political and religious government and in denial of the value of individual human experience independent of traditional power structures. His comedy’s philosophical framework is based again on Michel de Montaigne’s ideas on the institution of marriage and the faculty of reason.

Parasitaster’s beginning, however, does not immediately support this reading. At the age of sixty-five, Hercules has surprisingly taken it upon himself to ensure Ferrara’s succession, following his son, Tiberio’s, refusal to marry. The old Duke has sent Tiberio to negotiate his marriage with Dulcimel, the fifteen-year-old Princess of Urbin, but he follows his son in disguise:

HERCULES. […] I have vowed to visit the court of Urbin, as thus: my son, as you can well witness with me, could I never persuade to marriage, although myself was then an ever-resolved widower, and though I proposed to him this very lady to whom he is gone in my right to negotiate. Now how his cooler blood will behave itself would I have an only testimony. Other contents shall I give myself, as not to
take love by attorney, or make my election out of tongues; other sufficings there are which my regard would fain make sound to me.

(1.1.19-29)

Hercules’ choice may appear well-meant at first, but Marston quickly casts a shadow of suspicion on his protagonist’s motives. First, the Duke has decided to pursue a match that the play renders scandalous because of the vast age difference. Second, the Duke’s brother Renaldo—obviously sceptical—sends him off by reminding him that he is not above God: “I commend all your wisdom, and yours to the Wisest” (1.1.32). Finally, when left alone, Hercules himself reveals that his intentions have nothing to do with the political stability of his state and everything to do with the satisfaction of his own sexual desire:

    HERCULES. And now, thou ceremonious sovereignty—
        Ye proud, severer, stateful complements,
        The secret arts of rule—I put you off;
        Nor ever shall those manacles of form
        Once more lock up the appetite of my blood.
        ’Tis now an age of man—whilst we all strict
        Have lived in awe of carriage regular
        Apted unto my place, nor hath my life
        Once tasted of exorbitant affects,
        Wild longings, or the least of disranked shapes—
        But we must once be wild; ’tis ancient truth—
        O fortunate, whose madness falls in youth! (1.1.37-48)

The Duke of Ferrara has clearly decided to escape the limitations inherent in his rank for the sole reason of indulging his lust. Anthony Caputi’s claim that “Ferrara sends his son to Urbino to woo the girl for him, hoping that Tiberio’s exposure to her will prompt him to take her for himself” is difficult to support, as the Duke’s only concern is his own gratification (203). By proclaiming “an age of man,” Hercules puts his lust before God’s moral law and thus inverts the traditional theological hierarchy by placing imperfect mortal humanity on its pinnacle.
Hercules also reduces the necessity of human respect for moral integrity by comparing it to the mere need to satisfy popular expectations:

Shall I because some few may cry, “Light, vain,”
Beat down affection from desired rule?
He that doth strive to please the world’s a fool.
To have the fellow cry, “O mark him, grave,
See how austerely he doth give example
Of repressed heat and steady life”
Whilst my forced life against the stream of blood
Is tugged along, and all to keep the god
Of fools and women, Nice Opinion,
Whose strict preserving makes oft great men fools
And fools of great men. (1.1.51-61)

Hercules diminishes morality to an unnecessary preoccupation with popular whim, a notion justified in Marston’s time with the insignificance ascribed to individual opinion. In this way the old Duke also relegates the significance of humanity’s recommended reunion with God to the status of an unnecessary concern. As it is evident from Marston’s verse satires and other comedies, Hercules’ decision puts him on a collision course with the moral laws of Marston’s moral universe. In The Scourge of Villainy, Marston states that lust has “dusk’d the fairest splendour of our soule: / Nothing now left, but carkas, lothsome, foule” (III.viii.169-70). The Duke’s unruly sexual drive makes him therefore a victim of the “concupiscence” that Calvin saw as the main reason for humanity’s fall from God’s grace (2.1.8). The Church of England linked lust with

70 For instance, Marston’s fellow satirist Everard Guilpin attacks personal opinion for its negative effects on reason and sanctioned religious belief:

If reason bandy with opinion,
Opinion winnes in the conclusion:
For if a man be once opinionate,
Millions of reasons nill extenuate
His fore-ceited malice: conference
Cannot asswage opinions insolence.
But let opinion once lay battery
To reasons fort, she will turne heresie,
Or superstition, wily politist,
But she will winne those rampires which resist. (Skialetheia vi.31-40)
“the nature of sin” in Article 9 as well (Bicknell 171). Hercules’ abandonment of his God-given ducal right for the satisfaction of his lust constitutes therefore a serious religious and political error.

The consequences of Hercules’ decision emerge immediately, even though he is not fully conscious of them at first. When he arrives at Urbin, the Duke is greeted with a sinister description of the fireworks celebrating the princess’s fifteenth birthday: “There’s […] crackers which run into the air, and when they are at the top, like some ambitious strange heretic, keep a-cracking and a-cracking, and then break, and down they come” (1.2.9-12). Hercules resembles the overreaching heretic in his insistence on “an age of man,” and he is likewise destined to fall because of his denial of established hierarchies, a comparison that also hints at Parasitaster’s attitude to nonconformists. Hercules’ fall seems all the more certain in Urbin, as its court provides his lechery with like-minded company. Brian Gibbons points out that “disordered sexuality is a prominent feature of this society” (76). John Scott Colley agrees: “the zanies who inhabit the dukedom betray crimes of morality as striking as the murderous schemes of the best of Marston’s villains” (John Marston’s 156). Frank Whigham also offers a similar interpretation: “[e]ach courtier Hercules encounters is defined by sexual deviance” (142). Therefore, far from having “very little to do with each other,” the courtiers’ intrigues are in fact identical in their consequences (Caputi 209). They threaten the society of Urbin with their perverse obsessions, as Hercules’ lust threatens Ferrara, and Aurelia’s infidelity threatens Genoa in The Malcontent. Marston makes the risks associated with random lust especially clear, as he pins the hopes for individual and communal prosperity in Parasitaster on the “blessed assurance of heaven’s favour,” which is “to have many children” (2.131-33). In
this respect, William Slights argues that “Marston is unimpressed by the supposed virtues of a private self that stands apart from public responsibilities” (102). The playwright intends to put limits to sexual liberty, as it undermines social stability. Yet, up to this point, the play encourages the neglect of such values in its portrayal of sexual perversions.

Soon, however, the old Duke of Ferrara receives a rude awakening, as the Urbin courtiers do not spare his sins, even if they are oblivious of their own. Liberated by their ignorance of his true identity, they treat him to their free thoughts on his match:

Horn on him, threescore and five, to have and hold a lady of fifteen. O Mezentius! a tyranny equal if not above thy torturing; thou didst bind the living and the dead bodies together, and forced them to pine and rot, but this cruelty binds breast to breast not only different bodies, but if it were possible most unequal minds together, with an enforcement even scandalous to nature. (1.2.199-206)

The courtiers see Ferrara’s upcoming marriage to Dulcimel as equivalent to perversed torture for the Princess. Hercules avoids confrontation by switching the focus from himself to his son Tiberio, whose excellent qualities will no doubt “attract the metal of the young princess rather to the son than to the noisome, cold, and most weak side of his half-rotten father” (1.2.267-70). The courtiers concur: “Now dare we speak boldly as if Adam had not fallen, and made us slaves. Hark ye, the duke is an arrant, doting ass” (1.2.271-73). Apart from giving their opinion, the courtiers reveal the strong influence of Calvinist morality on the politics of the play. They are not allowed free speech under normal circumstances, because of their inferior state as inheritors of Adam’s original sin. They are thus denied the right to free expression, as their fallen status precludes the questioning of superior moral authority; such a liberty implies the potential of

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71 See Calvin (2.3.14) and Bicknell (171).
questioning God Himself. Yet pretending that they are free from such restrictions, the
Urbin courtiers tell the disguised Hercules that they hope the “old doting iniquity of age,
that only-eyed lecherous duke thy lord, shall be baffled to extremest derision” (1.2.302-
305).

Confronted with his depravity, the Duke of Ferrara changes his rhetoric
completely. His appreciation of the courtiers’ bold criticism features notable references to
his advanced age, to God as the powerful Creator of humanity, and finally to his own
misjudgement and mortality:

I never knew till now how old I was.
By Him by whom we are, I think a prince
Whose tender sufferance never felt a gust
Of bolder breathings, but still lived gently fanned
With the soft gales of his own flatterers’ lips,
Shall never know his own complexion.
Dear sleep and lust, I thank you: but for you,
Mortal—till now—I scarce had known myself.
Thou grateful poison, sleek mischief, flattery,
Thou dreamful slumber (that doth fall on kings
As soft and soon as their first holy oil),
Be thou forever damned. I now repent
Severe inductions to some sharp styles;
Freeness, so’t grow not to licentiousness,
Is grateful to just states. Most spotless kingdom,
And men—O happy—born under good stars,
Where what is honest you may freely think,
Speak what you think, and write what you do speak,
Not bound to servile soothings! (1.2.318-36)

Hercules’ new perception of the world is thus finally in tune with the moral laws of
Marston’s moral universe. The Duke’s lustful desires have revealed to him his mortality,
a reference to Montaigne’s critique of carnal desire which Marston uses in The Dutch
Courtesan as well (“Upon Some Verses” III.5.527[ii]). Hercules is also prepared to give
God and His moral law their due importance. Aware of his mortal state, Ferrara repents
his stifling of honest critics, as it has promoted yes-men counsellors, ready to support his poor decisions only to remain in favour. He praises reasonable free speech for its beneficial effects, but his new appreciation of this liberty does not pave the way for the complete enfranchisement of either Urbin or Ferrara. True to his conservative bias, Marston grants this freedom solely to the Duke, who uses it in his reformation of the very critics he has just praised.

Because he perceives himself as a victim of flattery, Hercules decides to indulge the sins of the court of Urbin through insincere praise until their perpetrators are confronted with the staggering enormity of their shame:

I vow to waste this most prodigious heat,  
That falls into my age like scorching flames  
In depth of numbed December, in flattering all  
In all of their extremest viciousness,  
Till in their own loved race they fall most lame,  
And meet full butt the close of vice’s shame. (1.2.345-50)

Marston thus raises Hercules to the moral integrity and vision he grants Altofronto in *The Malcontent*. Even though he shows the Duke of Ferrara to be susceptible to moral error in the beginning, the playwright reforms him quickly and makes him the prime moral agent of the play. As a magistrate, Hercules is presented as capable of swift reform under God’s careful providence and hardly in need of a replacement. He is quickly transformed from a dirty old man to the moral judge of those who have opened his eyes. Ironically but conveniently, Marston makes the Urbin courtiers victims of the same vices as the Duke’s. He also allows his protagonist to earn an enviable fame at the court of Urbin and thus the opportunity to realize his reformation project: “He hath gotten more loved reputation of virtue, of learning, of all graces, in one hour, than all your snarling reformers” (2.16-18).

Yet the Duke does not limit himself to obsequiousness only but exposes the moral
consequences of the vices he encounters with the help of sarcasm and caustic remark as well, echoing at times the scathing tone of *The Scourge of Villainy*.

The first courtier Hercules meets is the womanizer Nymphadoro, who suffers from an extreme form of concupiscence: “‘tis my humour, the natural sin of my complexion: I am most enforcedly in love with all women, almost affecting them all with equal flame” (3.1-4). He has assembled a collection of sixty-nine mistresses on which Hercules congratulates him sarcastically: “An excellent justice of an upright virtue: you love all God’s creatures with an unpartial affection” (3.5-6). In reply, the womanizer confides that “above all I affect the princess—she is my utmost end,” but when the Princess’s lady Donetta happens to pass by, he immediately runs after her (3.72). For a moment, she is to him “the only perfection of your sex, and astonishment of mankind” (3.92-93). Once Donetta leaves the stage, Sir Amoroso’s wife, Garbetza, becomes Nymphadoro’s paragon of perfection: “Can any man love another that knows you, the only perfection of your sex, and admiration of mankind?” (3.118-20). Finally, Dulcimel appears, and Hercules mocks Nymphadoro that she is now his “most only elected, too” (3.136). Because of his random infatuations, Nymphadoro is the first example of the moral corruption in the Urbin court. His wandering eye removes him from the sanctity of monogamy in Marston’s world and also from God’s moral purpose in human procreation. Nymphadoro’s superficial fixation on women as collectibles that provide casual pleasure is a far cry from the moral awareness evident in Tiberio’s later praise of Dulcimel (3.512-21).

Like Nymphadoro, Sir Amoroso Debile-Dosso is also a victim of his lust. He has spent his youth frequenting prostitutes until the ravages of venereal disease have rendered
him impotent. Hercules adopts his sarcastic tone again, “I perceive, knight, you have children. O, ’tis a blessed assurance of heaven’s favour, and long-lasting name, to have many children” (2.131-33). When the knight replies in the negative, the disguised Duke pretends that the old man’s impotence is news to him and says exactly what the lecher wants to hear: “once with child, the very Venus of a lady’s entertainment hath lost all pleasure” (2.141-42). Hercules’ flattery sums up aptly Sir Amoroso’s preoccupation with sexual gratification. As Nymphadoro points out, Sir Amoroso is obsessed with carnal pleasure for its own sake; he uses “all the nurses of most forcible excited concupiscence” with “most nice and tender industry” (2.154-56). The Duke’s sarcasm thus reveals the moral consequences of Sir Amoroso’s lust: as God’s grace is manifested in the ability to create legitimate children, Sir Amoroso has clearly removed himself from God by his preference for sexual gratification. Although he is married now, he appears doomed to both physical and spiritual mortality.

Sir Amoroso’s impotence happens also to lead indirectly to the transgressions of his brother, Herod, who is having an affair with Sir Amoroso’s wife, Donna Garbetza. Because of the fraternal aspect of his adultery, Herod is also guilty of incest, and Hercules is much too frank for flattery: “to lie with one’s brother’s wedlock, O, my dear Herod, ’tis vile and uncommon lust” (2.195-97). Yet Herod feels no shame whatsoever but proceeds to boast that his numerous amorous conquests have brought him to exhaustion. The disguised Duke claims he understands the difficulty of resisting lust, but he also knows that all of Herod’s conquests are imaginary except one:

Right, Herod, true for imagine all a man possessed were a perpetual pleasure, like that of generation, even in the highest lusciousness, he straight sinks as unable to bear, so continual, so pure, so universal a sensuality. (4.107-10)
Herod’s further complaint—that women take advantage of men’s desires—reveals his lies: “Why did reasonable nature give so strange, so rebellious, so tyrannous, so insatiate parts of appetite to so weak governess as woman?” (4.114). Hercules immediately checks the braggart’s claims: “O, sir, nature is a wise workman. She knows right well that if women should woo us to the act of love, we should all be utterly shamed: how often should they take us unprovided, when they are always ready” (4.130-33). Yet Herod continues to brag: “Ay, sir, right, to some few such unfortunate handsome fellows as myself am, to my grief I know it” (4.134-35). At this point, the recently reformed Duke of Ferrara exposes Herod’s claims, as he reveals that the letters the braggart alleges to have received from his female admirers are instead letters he has been sending himself to solicit sexual favours. Herod is therefore yet another example of the lust which rots the Urbin court, because of his psychotic obsession with imagined amorous conquests and because of his adulterous relationship with his brother’s wife.

The last courtier Hercules “flatters” is Don Zuccone. Zuccone has proclaimed his innocent wife guilty of infidelity on the sole basis of his uncontrollable jealousy, and he has banished her from his bed. He has therefore denied himself the moral rewards of begetting legitimate offspring, much like Nymphadoro, Sir Amoroso, and Herod. To free herself from him, his wife, Donna Zoya, stuffs her dress with feathers to make herself look pregnant (4.435). There is no doubt in her mind that her husband’s behaviour is morally reprehensible: “he has the most dishonourably, with the most sinful, most vicious obstinacy, persevered to wrong me” (2.337-38). Don Zuccone immediately falls into her trap and announces that he will be “separated” (4.283). His unjustified jealousy thus not only prevents him from having children but also leads him to divorce a faithful spouse.
He may have desired offspring initially—“I married thee in hope of children” (4.308)—but his madness gets the better of him, and he unwittingly liberates Donna Zoya from his paranoid surveillance.

Don Zuccone’s divorce, however, is not the end of his immoral obsession. Because of his distrust of women, he openly rejects God’s established way of procreation: “O heaven, that God made for man no other means of procreation and maintaining the world peopled but by women! O, that we could increase like roses but by being slipped one from another, or like flies procreate with blowing, or any other way than by woman” (4.385-90). In his ridiculous misogynist rant, Zuccone also claims that women are governed by their will instead of God: “Above them naught but will, beneath them naught but hell” (4.394-95). The play immediately punishes the jealous husband with a discovery that his wife has been “more clearly chaste than ice or frozen rain” (4.412). He is thus humiliated and made to regret divorcing her, as Hercules rubs in the absurdity of his suspicions: “the graces made her soul as soft as spotless down upon the swan’s fair breast that drew Cytherea’s chariot” (4.498-500). The Duke also points out that now even the most desperate of women would not marry Don Zuccone, and that he is thus doomed to die without progeny, like the rest of the courtiers.

In the midst of all these sinners, Marston makes Hercules his unlikely rock of moral integrity. The old Duke of Ferrara, recently reformed from his own lustful obsession, is now ironically the only reliable moral judge of lust in the play:

Amazed, even lost in wond’ring, I rest full Of covetous expectation: I am left As on a rock, from whence I may discern The giddy sea of humour flow beneath, Upon whose back the vainer bubbles float And forthwith break. (2.575-80)
Yet the Duke’s hurried transformation should not necessarily be taken to impart doubt about his sincerity. It can also be read as proof of God’s powerful invisible work: the “workings of the spirit in us” that are “so privy & secret” but capable of redeeming the worst sinners if they accept His grace (Hooker III.8.147). Having accepted God’s influence, Hercules swears that he will use his stay at the court of Urbin in order to learn how to rid a state of its vice. His initial sexual obsession, his “heat,” has now become a virtuous drive:

Another’s court shall show me where and how
Vice may be cured; for now beside myself,
Possessed with almost frenzy, from strong fervour
I know I shall produce things mere divine:
Without immoderate heat, no virtues shine. (2.592-96)

In his virtuous intent, the Duke of Ferrara accepts God’s superiority again. Marston creates his speech from Montaigne’s idea that humanity can best apprehend the realm of God when its mortal faculties give way in unconscious surrender:

[…] no eminent or glorious vertue, can be without some immoderate and irregular agitation. […] Dares not Philosophie thinke, that men produce their greatest effects, and nearest approaching to divinitie, when they are besides themselves, furious, and madde? We amend our selves by the privation of reason, and by hir drooping. The two natural waies, to enter the cabinet of the Gods, and there to fore-see the course of the destinies, are furie and sleepe. This is very pleasing to be considered. By the dislocation, that our passions bring unto our reason, we become virtuous; by the extirpation, which either furie or the image of death bringeth us, we become Prophets and Divinies. I never believed it more willingly. It is a meere divine inspiration, that sacred truth hath inspired in a Philosophicall spirit, which against his proposition exacteth from him; that the quiet state of our soule, the best-settled estate, yea the heathfulllest that Philosophie can acquire unto it, is not the best estate. Our vigilancie is more drouzie, then sleepe it selfe: Our wisdome lesse wise, then folly; our dreams of more worth then our discourses.

(“An Apology of Raymond Sebond” II.12.329-30)
Hercules’ rage, following his observations at the Urbin court, constitutes a similar release in which he is no longer the prime agent, carrying out a moral reformation of his own volition, but the instrument of God in his reformed passion. The Duke is now completely different from the Urbin courtiers, because he has decided to put his lustful drive to a morally positive use, whereas they continue in their destructive ways. Marston again privileges magistrate over subjects in his conservative rendition of political morality. Like Hooker, Hercules advocates the surrender of human reason to God’s influence, and he does so in order to ensure the political power of his house, as Hooker did to defend the institutions of the religious establishment. Like Marston, Hooker held that natural man, left on his own, was a “deprave [sic] minde little better then a wild beast,” and like the Urbin courtiers, the common people in Hooker’s treatise require close political control, so that their unpredictable actions constitute “no hindrance unto the common good for which societies are instituted” (I.10.70).

Apart from curing Urbin of its sins, Hercules has yet another project on his hands. He needs to encourage and protect the only morally acceptable match in the play, that between his son, Tiberio, and the Princess of Urbin, Dulcimel. Lucy Munro observes that the duke now “works for altruistic political and dynastical purposes” (46). Whereas Hercules has so far been the main obstacle to their union, his part is swiftly taken over by Gonzago, the Duke of Urbin, who is a carbon copy of Shakespeare’s self-admiring but unprescient Polonius. The first symptom of Gonzago’s deficient judgement is that while he preaches the restraint of passion under the rule of reason—“hold heedy guard over thy passions, and still keep this full thought firm in thy reason” (1.2.85-87)—his court is rife with immoral obsessions that he does not notice. Further, instead of supporting his
daughter’s interest in the heir of Ferrara, Gonzago does everything in his power to keep Dulcimel and Tiberio apart, so that Dulcimel can marry Tiberio’s aging father: “thou must shape thy thoughts / To apprehend his father well in years, / A grave wise prince, whose beauty is in his honour” (1.2.93-95). Thus, the Duke of Urbin unwittingly favours Hercules’ immoral lust at the expense of his daughter’s much more acceptable love for Tiberio.

Hercules is fortunate, however, that Dulcimel decides to exploit her father’s gullibility in order to make her feelings known to Tiberio. Her manipulative complaints lead Gonzago to berate Tiberio for actions he has not committed, and Tiberio eventually realizes that Dulcimel is sending him encoded messages. Yet, at first, his innocent ignorance renders Gonzago’s self-admiring moral castigations completely absurd:

   GONZAGO: Peace, be not damned, have pity on your soul.
       I confess, sweet prince,
       For you to love my daughter, young and witty,
       Of equal mixture both of mind and body,
       Is neither wondrous nor unnatural;
       Yet to forswear and vow against one’s heart
       Is full of base, ignoble cowardice,
       Since ’tis most plain, such speeches do contemn
       Heaven, and fear men (that’s sententious now). (3.408-16)

Tiberio is, of course, in no danger of damnation whatsoever, as he has nothing to hide, but Gonzago berates him nonetheless, while the Urbin courtiers carry on their immoral antics unperturbed. The Duke of Urbin is thus a deficient politician, failing not so much because of conscious immorality but because of inadvertent interference. Marston makes sure nevertheless that Gonzago is eventually reformed and in possession of his throne, another sign of the conservative bias of Parasitaster.72 Even the critical Hercules checks

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72 My interpretation provides an alternative to the view that Marston created Gonzago and his Urbin as satirical reflections of King James I and his court. See Alexander W. Upton (1048), Philip J. Finkelparl
Gonzago’s fool for his ridicule of the Duke’s order to have all the fools of Urbin shipped away, “because he would play the fool himself alone, without any rival” (4.235-36).

Marston’s conservative bias is also evident in the character of Tiberio. Although he is aware of his father’s advanced age, Tiberio continues to respect Hercules’ decision to marry the Urbin Princess:

> Shall I abuse my noble father’s trust,  
> And make myself a scorn, the very food  
> Of rumour infamous? Shall I, that ever loathed  
> A thought of women, now begin to love  
> My worthy father’s right, break faith to him  
> That got me, to get a faithless woman? (3.469-74)

Up to this point, Tiberio is the epitome of unquestioning filial obedience. He even sees his unwarranted aversion to marriage as justified by Dulcimel’s manipulation of her father: “O woman, thou art made / Most only of, and for, deceit” (3.463-64). Yet Hercules reforms his son’s mind himself. Still in disguise, he accuses Tiberio of risking his rightful inheritance—and by implication the political stability of Ferrara—only to serve “[t]he ambitious quickness of a monstrous love” (3.489). Tiberio immediately confesses that it is impossible to look on Dulcimel and not be ravished with God’s miraculous work in the creation of woman:

> Thou last and only rareness of heaven’s works  
> From best of man made model of the gods—  
> Divinest Woman: thou perfection  
> Of all proportions, Beauty—made when Jove was blithe,  
> Well filled with nectar, and full friends with man:  
> Thou dear as air, necessary as sleep  
> To careful man—Woman! Oh, who can sin so deeply  
> As to be cursed from knowing of the pleasures  
> Thy soft society, modest amorousness,  
> Yields to our tedious life! (3.512-21)

(John Marston 223), Linda Levi Peck (121), Douglas E. Rutledge (117), and Albert H. Tricomi (Anticourt 22-23).
With this speech, Tiberio embarks on a morally and politically acceptable relationship, exactly because of his awareness of God’s moral purpose. He may be perceived as disobedient, but he is encouraged by the very person he must obey. He forsakes his unwarranted dislike of women in order to comply unwittingly with his father’s statement that legitimate children are “a blessed assurance of heaven’s favour” (2.131-33). By accomplishing this change in his son, Hercules engineers the consolidation of political power over both dukedoms in the hands of the House of Ferrara. His eventual success is similar to Altofronto’s restoration in *The Malcontent*, as both appear to be divine rewards for the acknowledgement of God’s invisible but omnipotent power.

Another sign of Hercules’ forthcoming triumph is his admiration for Dulcimel’s moral mentor, the chaste lady Philocalia. It marks the extent of his transformation: from his obsession with lust to his appreciation of pious intellect. Unlike the other denizens of the Urbin court, who indulge in irrational obsessions, Philocalia devotes herself to meditation and charity:

HERCULES. Philocalia! What, that renowned lady, whose ample report hath struck wonder into remotest strangers, and yet her worth above that wonder? She whose noble industries hath made her breast rich in true glories and undying habilities? She that whilst other ladies spend the life on earth, Time, in reading their glass, their jewels, and (the shame of poesy) lustful sonnets, gives her soul meditations, those meditations wings that cleave the air, fan bright celestial fires, whose true reflection makes her see herself and them? She whose pity is ever above her envy, loving nothing less than insolent prosperity, and pitying nothing more than virtue destitute of fortune? (3.153-165)

The Duke’s description of Philocalia embodies his ideal of the reformed post-lapsarian human being, aware of his or her inferiority in the big picture of God’s moral design. Through her meditations, Philocalia has acquired reliable knowledge of herself, which has saved her from the excesses of lust and jealousy overwhelming Urbin. As
Nymphadoro points out to the disguised Hercules: “There were a lady for Ferrara’s duke: one of great blood, firm age, undoubted honour, above her sex, most modestly artful, though naturally modest; too excellent to be left unmatched, though few worthy to match with her” (3.166-70). Hercules, however, remains the “ever-resolved widower” he has been before his moral lapse in the beginning of the play, and Philocalia apparently elects to remain single also (1.1.22).

Marston uses Philocalia’s exemplary virtue next as a moral test for Dulcimel’s love for Tiberio. The Princess of Urbin begins with the same complaint that has jolted Hercules out of his lustful desires: “tell me if it be not a scandal to the soul of all being, proportion, that I, a female of fifteen, of a lightsome and civil discretion, healthy, lusy, vigorous, full, and idle, should forever be shackled to the crampy shins of a wayward, dull, sour, austere, rough, rheumy, threescore and four” (3.189-94). Dulcimel wants to marry Tiberio, and her reasons are morally acceptable: “because I love him, and because he is virtuous, I love to marry […] with him his virtues” (3.208-9, 211). Philocalia, however, finds the Princess’s explanation objectionable: “Alas, sweet princess, love or virtue are not of the essence of marriage” (3.212-13). Marston no doubt intended the lady’s opposition as a foil to highlight the morality of Dulcimel’s reasoning, as he bases Philocalia’s objection on Montaigne’s statement that “[t]hose who thinke to honour mariage, by joining love unto it (in mine opinion) doe as those, who to doe vertue a favour, holde, that Nobilitie is not other thing then Vertue” (“Upon Some Verses” III.5.510). Yet his adaptation of Montaigne’s idea excludes not only love but also virtue, an extreme line of reasoning in the context of *Parasitaster* and in that of Montaigne’s
original. Marston will make Philocalia later the sole witness of Dulcimel’s eventual clandestine marriage to Tiberio (5.1.S.D.), another sign that her part in this scene is that of a devil’s advocate.

Predictably, Dulcimel counters Philocalia’s arguments by pointing out her own persistence in chastity thus far—“the noblest vow is that of virginity, because the hardest” (3.234-35)—another borrowing from Montaigne (III.5.517). She attacks also her father’s misguided opposition to her love for Tiberio: “no sooner had my father’s wisdom mistrusted my liking but I grew loth his judgement should err; I pitied he should prove a fool in his old age, and without a cause mistrust me” (3.244-47). When Philocalia questions Dulcimel further—“why did not your hopes perish?” (3.249)—the Princess explains that difficulties motivate her rather than discourage her: “difficulty only enflames me: when the enterprise is easy, the victory is inglorious” (3.250-51). In this conversation, Marston highlights the Princess’s perseverance as an excellent example of the faith in God that Calvin recommends (1.17.1). Because of her faith and virtue and because of Tiberio’s morally acceptable love for her, Dulcimel is no doubt a privileged character in the moral universe of the play, despite her playful references to physical love and despite Philocalia’s man-of-straw opposition. Her marriage to the Prince of Ferrara will restore the morality and political stability absent from Urbin. As David Blostein observes, the play does nothing to challenge the institution of marriage (22).

To marry Tiberio, however, the Princess of Urbin has to trick her father, Gonzago, one last time. She complains that Tiberio has conjured up a plan to marry her in

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73 Montaigne also adds: “Wedlocke hath for his share honour, justice, profit and constancie: a playne, but more generall delight. Love melts in onely pleasure; and truly it hath it more ticklishe, more lively, more quaint and more sharpe: a pleasure inflamed by difficulty: there must be a kind of stinging, tingling and smarting” (III.5.512).
secret, and Gonzago reprimands the Prince for it, thus tipping him off about Dulcimel’s arrangements. Following Gonzago’s inadvertent instructions, Tiberio climbs “[a] tree” to enter Dulcimel’s chamber, where she awaits him with her lady Philocalia and a priest (5.1.S.D.).

Elated, Hercules gives his blessing in the hope of longevity for his line’s succession:

You genital,
You fruitful well-mixed heats, O, bless the sheets
Of yonder chamber, that Ferrara’s dukedom,
The race of princely issue, be not cursed,
And ended in abhorred barrenness.
At length kill all my fears, nor let it rest—
Once more my tremblings—that my too cold son
(That ever scorne of humaner loves)
Will still contemn the sweets of marriage,
Still kill our hope of name in his dull coldness. (5.5-14)

Hercules also sees this secret but legitimate union of his son with Dulcimel as a fitting finale to his moral project in Urbin. Although admittedly an example of “human weakness,” their marriage is motivated by such perseverance and virtue that it is capable of correcting all of the play’s transgressions: it can “close all the various errors / Of passages most truly comical / In moral learning” (5.16, 21-23). Hercules’ words make Marston’s edifying purpose in Parasitaster even more explicit: in their chaste attraction, Tiberio and Dulcimel are models to be followed, as they avoid the lustful obsessions of the rest of the Urbin court.

Marston follows the reward of his privileged couple with the meting out of justice for the moral culprits in Parasitaster. To address their transgressive relationships, Hercules creates the entertainment of the Love Parliament, ostensibly intended as a celebration of Tiberio’s ambassadorial visit (5.127-28). However, Cupid, the court’s chief

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74 Dessen and Thomson state that “the scaling of a stage post seems likely” (236).
judge, arrests Nymphadoro under the “act against the plurality of mistresses”; Sir Amoroso for “knowing himself insufficient” but daring “to entertain any lady as wife or mistress”; and Herod under the “act against forgers of love letters, false braggarts of ladies’ favours, and vain boasters of counterfeit tokens” (5.212, 274-76, 297-99). This entertainment seems to be a more serious version of Benjamin Rudyerd’s *Le Prince D’amour*, an account of a mock court of love taking place during the Middle Temple Christmas revels of 1599 (B3v-B4v). While the verdicts appear playful, the punishments are less so. The disguised Hercules takes advantage of the ship of fools, commissioned by Gonzago to rid his dukedom of fools, and commits Nymphadoro, Sir Amoroso, and Herod to it (4.233-34). On the ship, the courtiers are supposed to join, among others, nonconforming clerics: “priests that forsook their functions to avoid a thwart stroke with a wet finger” (4.198-99). Hercules thus purges the disruptive elements in Urbin, and their removal is similar to, if less sinister than, that of the burning ambitious heretic from the beginning of the play (1.2.9-12).

Lastly, in his well-orchestrated reformation, Hercules also arrests the jealous Don Zuccone and Gonzago, the Duke of Urbin, himself. Don Zuccone’s merciful wife takes pity on his repentance and saves him from banishment (5.318-21). Gonzago, however, is exposed for a supreme fool because of his unwitting part in Dulcimel and Tiberio’s wedding. He is convicted of “most deep treason,” and committed to the ship of fools too (5.394-96). At this moment, Marston brings his sombre comedy to a genuine tragic

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75 The staging may have been similar to that of an actual trial (Dessen and Thomson 236).
76 Together with a variety of other fools, the priests manage to obtain an exemption on the grounds of being “madmen” (4.204), but their easy surrender of ecclesiastical responsibility evokes the defections of “those who shall wilfullie abandon their charges upon so light causes,” that is, the ministers King James accused of injudicious defection to nonconformist sects in Dr. Wilkes’s pamphlet, *Obedience, or Ecclesiastical Unity* (A4r-v).
moment, as Hercules practically deposes his counterpart. In retaliation, Gonzago threatens to throw the flatterer in jail and arrest Dulcimel and Tiberio: “I will have them both bound together, and sent to the Duke of Ferrara presently” (5.464-65). Hercules, however, throws off his disguise and welcomes the newly-married couple. Gonzago is immediately reformed: “But I know now wherefore this parliament was. What a slumber have I been in!” (5.473-75).

It is another conventional ending for Marston, as he eliminates disruptive urges, such as lust and jealousy, and promotes instead acceptable sentiments in Dulcimel and Tiberio’s love. The latter guarantee a morally legitimate succession and thus the longevity of accepted social and political hierarchies. So do the moral survivals of both Hercules and Gonzago, the two dukes, who are allowed to retain their positions, their respective lapses notwithstanding. In them, Marston no doubt imparts the assurance of God’s special care for His anointed deputies on earth. Although Gonzago portrays the helplessness of misguided humanity for the whole duration of the action, his eventual transformation exemplifies the reforming power of God’s grace. Hercules might be guilty of lust initially, but he is also changed to ensure the re-establishment of order.

Parasitaster is therefore another of Marston’s comedies that privileges traditional power structures over political innovation, and conventional moral restraint over individual liberty. The dukedom of Urbin is a clear metaphor for the necessity to restrain lustful urges in order to achieve sustainable political continuity. It reflects Marston’s insistence on humanity’s helplessness outside the indispensable laws that Hooker claimed God left to His fallen human creation. These laws, of course, coincide with the political and religious establishment in Marston’s time.
CHAPTER 4: Moral Education

_Eastward Ho (1605)_77

The most prominent aspect of Marston’s two comic collaborations, _Eastward Ho_ and _Histrio-Mastix_, is the necessity of adequate moral education. Both plays associate moral learning with the conservative values of humility and obedience, and both make moral decline a direct result of misconstrued individual freedom from the traditional hierarchies implied in that learning. The plays’ rhetoric is therefore not necessarily parodic, even if it is persistently edifying. For example, _Histrio-Mastix_ can be a plausible apology for the moral and political value of academic disciplines, whereas _Eastward Ho_ can be a homely tribute to the social virtues of honest manual trade. As the neglect of learning brings about the collapse of society in _Histrio-Mastix_, the neglect of labour in _Eastward Ho_ leads its characters predictably to calamity. In the end, however, misfortune converts even the most vehement enemies of edifying education, and their sudden repentance imparts hope, because it asserts the invincible power of divine providence, capable of saving even those of weakest faith.

Where _Eastward Ho_ differs from Marston’s comic canon, however, is its criticism of King James’s rather generous bestowal of knightly titles and the alleged influx of Scottish favourites in his court, following his coronation. Marston’s collaborators,

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77 For analyses of Marston’s involvement in _Eastward Ho_ and summaries of previous discussions, see D. J. Lake, “_Eastward Ho: Linguistic Evidence for Authorship_,” and C. G. Petter’s Introduction to his New Mermaids edition of the play (xx-xxi). Lake identifies Marston’s main contribution as act 1 with another two possible scenes in 2.1 and 3.3. Petter agrees with Lake on act 1 and the first scene in act 2, but he adds 2.3.102-60, 3.4, and 4.2.215-39 instead. With regard to the overall structure of the play, Anthony Caputi has stated that Marston’s involvement is “distinctly improbable,” because this play uses “a scheme of related character contrasts” and it is “devoid of literal seriousness” (222-23, 227). Yet _Eastward Ho_ can be interpreted as a serious comedy, and Marston does use character contrasts, most notably in _Jack Drum’s Entertainment_ and _The Dutch Courtesan_. I therefore discuss _Eastward Ho_ in its entirety, as a text which agrees with the conservative values in Marston’s satires and comedies, despite some exceptions and the fact that Marston’s input may not have been as comprehensive as in _The Malcontent_ and _Histrio-Mastix_.

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Chapman and Jonson, were briefly detained over this issue, but Marton never was, most likely because of his connection to Dr. William Wilkes. Further, while the King certainly took offence over the satire of Scots, he did acknowledge his mishandling of knighthoods before Parliament, and he even attended a revival of *Eastward Ho* at court in 1614 (Van Fossen 39). The problem thus may not have been as serious as Jonson presented it later—“the report was that they shoūd then had their ears cūtt & noses” (Drummond 140)—and Marston’s specific contributions may not have caused the authorities serious concerns.

For a comedy professing the virtues of edifying trade, *Eastward Ho* begins appropriately with the contrasting entrances of Quicksilver, the profligate apprentice, more interested in fashion and pastimes than in hard work, and Touchstone, his industrious master: “*Enter MASTER TOUCHSTONE and QUICKSILVER with his hat, pumps, short sword and dagger, and a racket trussed up under his cloak*” (1.1.1.S.D.).

Quicksilver is sneaking out to play tennis, but this transgression is not the only cause for his master’s displeasure. Apparently, the young man’s store account is already missing the then substantial sum of £140, which prompts Touchstone to deliver a moral lecture on the rudiments of successful business:

> Seven score pound art thou out in cash, but look to it, I will not be gallanted out of my moneys. And as for my rising by other men’s fall, God shield me. Did I gain my wealth by ordinaries? no! By keeping of gallants’ company? no! I hired me a little shop, bought low, took small gain, kept no debt book, garnished my shop, for want of plate, with good wholesome thrifty sentences—as, “Touchstone keep thy shop, and thy shop will keep thee”; “Light gains make heavy purses”; “‘Tis good to be merry and wise.” […] And I grew up, and, I praise Providence, I bear my brows now as high as the best of my neighbours; but thou—well, look to the accounts; your father’s bond lies for you: seven score pound is yet in the rear. (1.1.49-60, 66-70)

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78 Dessen and Thomson note that Quicksilver’s costume also establishes a further contrast between him and his fellow apprentice, Golding: it sets off “the dutiful Golding” from “the frivolous Quicksilver” (175).
Touchstone attributes his modest success to both his prudent business practices and his belief in God’s invisible and prescient care for His creation. His wisdom is homely, but not necessarily ridiculous, and he need not be perceived as a caricature of the “complacency” or “self-celebration of the early modern bourgeoisie” (Caputi 225, Zwierlein 86). He can be read just as convincingly as a sympathetic character in a conservative and conformist moral framework, resembling Thomas Dekker’s Simon Eyre from The Shoemaker’s Holiday (1599). Touchstone’s speech sets the moral guidelines for Quicksilver’s development, but the apprentice’s gentry background makes him rebel against their restrictions. Quicksilver’s insistence on his gentleman’s status must have also rung hollow, as “[i]n many ways this was the most nebulous of social categories, since it was increasingly difficult to ascertain which features defined a gentleman” (Munro 66).

The goldsmith’s other apprentice, Golding, is Quicksilver’s complete opposite. He espouses his master’s work ethic, and Touchstone praises him by telling Quicksilver: “Well if he thrive not, if he outlast not a hundred such crackling bavins as thou art, God and men neglect industry” (1.1.82-84). Not only does Quicksilver not follow Golding’s example, but he attempts to corrupt his fellow apprentice: “We are both gentlemen […]; let’s be no longer fools to this flat-cap Touchstone” (1.1.131-32). Critic Charles Nicholl observes that “[t]he play’s moral grouping is underlined by an alchemical notation, drawing in pre-formed ideas and images associated with common mercury, gold and the touchstone” (107). In his effort to tempt Golding into a life of fashionable clothes, womanizing, drinking, and gambling, Quicksilver “addresses himself to Golding just as crude mercury does to gold: he attempts to ‘work on’ him, to corrupt and corrode him”
Golding, however, refuses to be lured and predicts Quicksilver’s tragic fate: “Go, thou most madly vain, whom nothing can recover but that which reclaims atheists, and makes great persons sometimes religious—calamity” (1.1.168-71). Golding’s religious references sharpen the moral contrast between the two apprentices. While he, like Touchstone, stands for conservative faith in the virtues of humble trade, Quicksilver represents the moral iniquity of the rebellion against it. Touchstone’s and Golding’s humility concedes superiority to the almighty God in the world of His creation, whereas Quicksilver discards the moral consequences of abandoning his assigned place in God’s moral universe.

Another character who shares in Quicksilver’s rebellion is Touchstone’s elder daughter, Gertrude. Her fixed idea is to marry above her lowly background of a goldsmith’s daughter in order to obtain the status of a lady. Touchstone explains that the difference between Gertrude and her sister, Mildred, is identical to that between Quicksilver and Golding:

As I have two prentices, the one of a boundless prodigality, the other of a most hopeful industry, so have I only two daughters, the eldest of a proud ambition and nice wantonness, the other of a modest humility and comely soberness. The one must be ladyfied, forsooth, and be attired just to the court cut and long tail. So far is she ill natured to the place and means of my preferment and fortune that she throws all the contempt and despite hatred itself can cast upon it. (1.1.94-104).

Touchstone’s conservative world-view thus makes him naturally sceptical of class intermarriage: “Where ambition of place goes before fitness of birth, contempt and disgrace follow” (1.2. 40-42). In his eyes, Gertrude’s forthcoming wedding to the supposedly rich knight Sir Petronel Flash is in violation of a stable class system that precludes upward mobility and guarantees reliable, if rigid, identities. Gertrude does not
share her father’s concerns but sees her future social status surprisingly as an advantage in terms of religious salvation. Her condescending tone to Mildred is perhaps more naive than malicious, but it belies a serious moral error nonetheless: “when I am a lady, I’ll pray for thee yet i’faith. Nay, I’ll vouchsafe to call thee sister Mil still, for though thou art not like to be a lady as I am, yet sure thou art a creature of God’s making, and mayest peradventure to be saved as soon as I” (1.2.50-55). Gertrude’s desire to escape the class into which she was born is also an inadvertent desire to escape the remnants of divine order in the post-lapsarian human world. For this reason, she cannot hope for salvation, as she is denying the very moral framework that entails it.

Gertrude’s obsession with marrying a knight also initiates *Eastward Ho*’s mild satire on the devaluation of the knighthood in the beginning of James I’s reign. While Master Touchstone is suspicious of his future son-in-law, Mistress Touchstone blames her husband for not taking advantage of the title’s easy availability, as Sir Petronel has:

MISTRESS TOUCHSTONE. Ay, that he is a knight, and so might you have been too, if you had been aught else than an ass, as well as some of your neighbours. And I thought you would not ha’ been knighted, as I am an honest woman, I would ha’ dubbed you myself. I praise God I have wherewithal. (1.2.113-18)

Her smug assertion that she could have given him the title herself pokes fun at King James’s rather generous bestowal of knighthoods following his coronation. In April and early May 1603, the King “doled out knighthoods with a more than lavish hand” (Wormald). In that year alone, he created “well over nine hundred knights, which was more than Elizabeth had done during the entire course of her reign” (Lockyer 203). The King acknowledged his excessive generosity before Parliament—“I rather crave your pardon that I have been so bountifull”—and justified it partly as an expression of
gratitude to his new English subjects and partly as “[his] owne infirmitie” (Political Writings 144, 145).

The issue affected class identity, however, as London saw increased numbers of knights who had no special merit or hereditary distinction to justify their titles. Their higher social status was thus meaningless, and their recent promotion a cause for suspicion. This mismatch is the second reason for Touchstone’s lukewarm support for Gertrude’s marriage: “thank me for nothing but my willing blessing; for—I cannot feign—my hopes are faint” (1.2.132-34). The master goldsmith knows that Sir Petronel’s alleged ancestral country estate is in contradiction with his all-too-recent knighting. Therefore, Touchstone would rather support the much more plausible marriage of his younger daughter to Golding. His reference to providence and modesty in their blessing is yet another sign of the conservative moral bias of the play: “Thou art towardly, she is modest; thou art provident, she is careful. She’s now mine. Give me thy hand; she’s now thine. Work upon that now” (1.2.175-78). Mildred’s obedient reply is in unison with her father’s morality: “Sir, I am all yours: your body gave me life, your care and love happiness of life; let your virtue still direct it, for to your wisdom I wholly dispose myself” (1.2.186-89). Her acknowledgement of her father’s power over her is an allusion to God’s proper order in the world, which implies a parallel between a child’s obedience to the father and humanity’s obedience to God. For this reason, Touchstone concludes the first act with the statement that class intermarriage implies presumptuous disregard for God’s established order:

This match shall on, for I intend to prove
Which thrives the best, the mean or lofty love:
Whether fit wedlock vowed twixt like and like,
Or prouder hopes, which daringly o’erstrike
Their place and means. 'Tis honest time’s expense,
When seeming lightness bears a moral sense. (1.2.193-98)

Touchstone’s conservatism receives additional emphasis, as the authors of *Eastward Ho* openly assert their play’s moral aspect. Although a form of light entertainment, this comedy is edifying nonetheless, and the goldsmith’s ideas are no doubt privileged in its moral framework.

Meanwhile, Quicksilver sinks deeper in his attempts to pursue a lifestyle that would elevate him above his status of an apprentice. He enters drunk on the morning after Gertrude’s wedding, claiming that his drinking exploits will augment Touchstone’s reputation. Yet to Touchstone Quicksilver’s behaviour is a pattern of immorality that is affecting the whole city. London’s inhabitants make sure they compensate even for their occasional moral restraint with excessive depravity, but never vice versa: “because we commit seldom, we commit the more sinfully; we lose no time in our sensuality but we make amends for it; O that we would do so in virtue, and religious negligences!” (2.1.50-53). Thus, as in Marston’s other comedies, religion and virtue are neglected in a world that is obsessed with immediate secular gratification. This obsession is clearly at the root of Quicksilver’s social ambition.

The moral implications of Quicksilver’s gentlemanly aspirations are further put into perspective through their juxtaposition with Mildred’s recurrent praise of humility. Unlike Gertrude, Mildred is content with the modest rewards of the goldsmith trade. She tells her husband that a rapid rise from one’s assigned status is impossible for humanity to handle, as it compromises reason’s moral control by providing multiple accessible temptations:
I have observed that the bridle given to those violent flatteries of fortune is seldom recovered; they bear one headlong in desire from one novelty to another; and where those ranging appetites reign, there is ever more passion than reason: no stay, and so no happiness. Nature hath given us legs to go to our objects, not wings to fly to them. (2.1.69-77)

Because of these apprehensions, Mildred prefers the modest gains of her husband’s occupation over the luxurious lifestyles of her other suitors, and Golding promises her exactly what she wants: “what increase of wealth and advancement the honest and orderly industry and skill of trade will afford” (2.1.86-89). In contrast, Quicksilver suffers from the very risks against which Mildred cautions: he is now regularly drunk and keeps “a whore in town” (2.1.128-29). Touchstone throws him out, and although the young man celebrates the loss of his apprenticeship as a long-desired liberation, his freedom is deceptive, as it drives him into further dependence. Golding, on the other hand, is rewarded for his loyalty to the trade with a promotion to partner. Touchstone promises him a feast as lavish as that of Gertrude’s wedding, but the exemplary apprentice modestly declines: “only your reverent presence and witness shall sufficiently grace and confirm us” (2.1.176-78).

As Golding slowly rises in reputation but not in class, Quicksilver descends into a world of crime. To finance his lavish lifestyle, he resorts to theft and the services of the unscrupulous usurer Security to sell the stolen goods:

SECURITY. My privy guest, lusty Quicksilver, has drunk too deep of the bride-bowl, but with a little sleep he is much recovered; and I think is making himself ready to be drunk in a gallanter likeness. My house is as ’twere the cave, where the young outlaw hoards the stol’n vails of his occupation; and here when he will revel it in his prodigal similitude, he retires to his trunks, and (I may say softly) his punks. (2.2.1-9)

Ironically, Quicksilver regards this sordid existence as enfranchisement:
QUICKSILVER. […] I now am free, and now will justify
My trunks and punks. Avaunt, dull flat cap, then!
Via, the curtain that shadowed Borgia!
There lie, thou husk of my envassalled state.
I Samson now have burst the Philistines’ bands,
And in thy lap, my lovely Dalida,
I’ll lie and snore out my enfranchised state. (2.2.36-42)

The association with the biblical hero Samson, in which the authors of the comedy convey Quicksilver’s supposed liberation, warns of the vulnerability of even the mightiest human power. Sindefy—Quicksilver’s whore, who has been enslaved after Quicksilver has tricked her to the city with a so far empty promise of marriage—also challenges his notion of freedom. She points out the futility of his plans to swap the goldsmith trade for an employment at court: “But he is worse than a prentice that does it, not only humouring the lord, but every trencher-bearer, every groom that by indulgence and intelligence crept into his favour, and by panderism into his chamber” (2.2.87-91). If anything, Quicksilver’s loss of his trade implies further loss of personal freedom. Uncomfortable perhaps for the first time, he asks Sindefy, “Who taught you this morality?” (2.2.99).

Instead of profiting from Sindefy’s moral interrogation, however, Quicksilver continues in his criminal partnership with Security. Like Mammon, Security is an anti-Semitic Renaissance stereotype of the Jewish usurer. With customary arrogance, he argues that his profession is “more godly” than that of a merchant, a farmer, or an artisan, because their dependence on weather or market conditions leads them to complain against heaven (2.2.120). Security makes this assertion while profiting from the sale of goods that Quicksilver has stolen, and Quicksilver’s dependence on his new master leads
him to launch a bone-chilling tirade which reveals both his frustration and the play’s intense hatred of religious nonconformists, both Jews and Puritans:

O ’tis an egregious pander! What will not an usurous knave be, so he may be rich? O ’tis a notable Jew’s trump! I hope to live to see dog’s meat made of the old usurer’s flesh, dice of his bones, and indentures of his skin, and yet his skin is too thick to make parchment, ’twould make good boots for a Peterman to catch salmon in. Your only smooth skin to make fine vellum is your Puritan’s skin; they be the smoothest and slickest knaves of the country. (2.2.227-36)

Quicksilver’s imagery of human dismemberment screams violent intolerance against dissident religious groups, consistent with Marston’s support for the established Church of England and with the widespread anti-Semitism in Europe at the time. The comedy, no doubt, capitalizes on such feelings when it allows Security’s plans to prosper temporarily.

Besides exploiting the down-and-out Quicksilver, Security also manages to profit from the poor knight Sir Petronel Flash. Their whole conversation is rendered in the diction of mock-piety. Sir Petronel is desperate to leave London for the English colony of Virginia in the New World, where his creditors will not be able to arrest him. Aware of his wife’s land, Security sees a business opportunity but swears on his “religion” that he wants to buy Gertrude’s property solely to do Sir Petronel “a pleasure” (2.2.168). Quicksilver immediately suggests to Petronel that he can raise the money for his journey by selling Gertrude’s inheritance to Security, and the knight greets his friend as a messenger of God: “There spake an angel” (2.2.301). To facilitate the process further, Security also places Sindefy in Gertrude’s company, as a lady who desires to be a nun and whom Gertrude should “put out of her honest humours forsooth” (2.2.374-75). Gertrude cannot be more amenable: already distracted by the handsome Quicksilver and obsessed with her husband’s non-existent country castle, she is ready to sell her land
Yet, while Security and Petronel depend on mock-piety in their scheme to cheat Gertrude out of her inheritance, they also set themselves up for their inevitable reversals of fortune, guaranteed by the moral framework of the play. Quicksilver’s association with them dooms him to the same fate.

Whereas Gertrude’s marriage is revealed to be a scam, her sister Mildred’s wedding is an exemplary union in its godly humility. The three playwrights convey this point by making Gertrude’s ostentatious departure for Sir Petronel’s estate coincide with Mildred and Golding’s return from their modest ceremony. Quicksilver ridicules the newlyweds for going to church “in all the haste, that the cold meat left at [Gertrude’s] wedding might serve to furnish their nuptial table” (3.2.66-68). The pious couple, however, stand their ground despite both the scorn in Quicksilver’s allusion to Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and the unjustified class superiority in Mistress Touchstone’s condescending remarks on Golding. The humility of Golding’s reply not only does not appear parodic but bodes marital stability and eventual professional triumph:

GOLDING. […] though I confess myself far unworthy so worthy [sic] a wife (being in part her servant, as I am your prentice), yet (since I may say it without boasting) I am born a gentleman, and by the trade I have learned of my master (which I trust taints not my blood) able with mine own industry and portion to maintain your daughter, my hope is heaven will so bless our humble beginning that in the end I shall be no disgrace to the grace with which my master hath bound me his double prentice. (3.2.111-21)

Golding’s language elevates Touchstone to the role of an almost heavenly father who has lavished his grace on his unworthy apprentice, another allusion to God’s provident care for unworthy humanity. Naturally, Golding’s obedience to his master and loyalty to the trade see him prosper, as the godly faithful prosper in God’s unfathomable providence.

The authors of *Eastward Ho* place even more emphasis on the conservative values of
obedience and humility by following Golding’s speech with Touchstone’s prophetic advice: “Come, my poor son and daughter, let us hide ourselves in our poor humility and live safe. Ambition consumes itself with the very show” (3.2.151-54).  

This dangerous self-consuming ambition, however, is the reason Quicksilver abandons his virtuous trade in order to find his coveted freedom. The former apprentice is therefore an emblem of the disobedience which spurred prelapsarian human nature to rebel against God’s law and reach for independence from His power. The same malady plagues Sir Petronel, when he celebrates prematurely his last night in London at the Blue Anchor tavern. Emboldened by cheating Gertrude out of her inheritance, the knight sends Quicksilver to bring Security’s wife, Winifred, so he can abscond with her to Virginia (3.2.283). Security, a victim of ambition himself, facilitates Winifred’s exit, as he believes that she is the lawyer Bramble’s wife. The success of this scheme makes Sir Petronel even more complacent. Like Quicksilver, he mistakenly believes that his trickery will bring him freedom: “Now the sweet hour of freedom is at hand. Come, drawer, fill us some carouses” (3.3.68-70). Blinded by arrogance, he disregards the tavern drawer’s warning about a looming storm: “Can we not reach Blackwall, where my ship lies, against the tide, and in spite of tempests?” (3.3.160-62). Not only does the knight ignore the elements—whose power hints at his human vulnerability and at God’s wrath—but he also invites everyone present to a Bacchanalian ritual at the remains of Sir Francis Drake’s ship, “where with full cups and banquets, we will do sacrifice for a prosperous voyage. My mind gives me that some good spirits of the waters should haunt the desert
ribs of her, and be auspicious to all that honour her memory, and will with like orgies enter their voyages” (3.3.169-75). This pagan ceremony could not be more misguided from the play’s perspective.

Predictably, Sir Petronel and Quicksilver fail to even reach their ship, let alone have a smooth journey across the Atlantic. Having discovered the absence of his wife, Security tries to catch up with them but is appropriately washed up at the shrine of St. Luke, the patron saint of victims of adultery. Security’s arrogance evaporates immediately, and he is overwhelmed with shame and despair: “I will creep on the earth while I live, and never look heaven in the face more” (4.1.57-59). After Security, Quicksilver emerges on the river bank, bare-headed and palpably shaken:

Accursed, that ever I was saved or born.  
How fatal is my sad arrival here!  
As if the stars and Providence spake to me,  
And said, “The drift of all unlawful courses,  
Whatever end they dare propose themselves,  
In frame of their licentious policies,  
In the firm order of just Destiny,  
They are the ready highway to our ruins.”  
I know not what to do; my wicked hopes  
Are, with this tempest, torn up by the roots.  
Oh which way shall I bend my desperate steps,  
In which unsufferable shame and misery  
Will not attend them? (4.1.135-47)

The genuine despair of his speech reveals the first signs of moral awareness in Quicksilver. He perceives his ordeal on the river as God’s inevitable punishment for his immoral life, a punishment that leaves him painfully helpless and confused. The once arrogant apprentice, desperate to be free from the restrictions of his trade and of his master’s morality, is now equally desperate because of that same freedom. He has willingly removed himself from God’s grace but is now bemoaning the misery of that
voluntary removal. Worse, he does not believe he can be redeemed in the eyes of “just Destiny.” As Golding correctly predicts at the beginning of the play, calamity begins to reform Quicksilver’s moral depravity, but at this point he is far from complete recovery.

*Eastward Ho* then returns more explicitly to its satire of King James’s all too generous bestowal of knighthoods. When Sir Petronel finally emerges from the river, he is apparently still so inebriated that he believes he has drifted as far as the coast of France! He attempts to speak French to the two gentlemen he meets, only for them to reply in English. English, that is, except for one of their sentences: “I ken the man weel; he’s one of my thirty-pound knights” (4.1.196-97). Its Scottish accent clearly identifies this gentleman as the King himself, who recognizes Sir Petronel as one of his cheap knights. The second gentleman attempts to save face by denying the connection—“No, no, this is he that stole his knighthood o’ the grand day for four pound, giving the page all the money in ’s purse”—but the association between Sir Petronel and James I lingers (4.1.199-201). This seems to be the case, especially in the light of an earlier suggestion, made by one of Sir Petronel’s fellow adventurers, that England can get rid of the Scots that have followed the Scottish King to England by shipping them off to Virginia: “And for my part, I would a hundred thousand of ’em were there, for we are all one countrymen now, ye know; and we should find ten times more comfort of them there than we do here” (3.3.48-52).

Even if the King did acknowledge his excessive generosity with knighthood titles, the matter of the Scots in London was quite different, as it was closely related to his proposed union of England and Scotland. In 1607, for example, James went to great lengths in order to palliate English fears and defend his policy:
Some thinke that I will draw the Scottish Nation hither, talking idely of transporting of Trees out of barren ground into a better, and of leane cattell out of bad pasture into a more fertile soile. Can any man displant you, unlesse you will? or can any man thinke that Scotland is so strong to pull you out of your houses? or do you not thinke I know England hath more people, Scotland more wast ground? So that there is roumth in Scotland rather to plant your idle people that swarme in London streets, and other Townes, and disburden you of them, then to bring more unto you; And in cases of Justice, if I bee partiall to either side, let my owne mouth condemne me, as unworthy to be your King.

(Political Writings 165)

The palpable irritation in his tone betrays the King’s sensitivity over this issue and provides context for the satire of the Scottish presence in London in Eastward Ho. The union of Scotland and England was central to his vision of his new reign. Eastward Ho, however, opposes this union strongly, an opposition that marks the sole political inconsistency between this play and Marston’s other comic drama. The existing evidence for Marston’s exact contributions to Eastward Ho and those of Chapman and Jonson does not exclude Marston’s involvement in the play’s satire altogether. Yet, even if Marston did participate knowingly in the interrogation of his sovereign’s judgement, there is little evidence that the authorities held him responsible. In fact, the incident failed to make a serious mark on James’s memory: Marston was commissioned to compose The Spectacle, a London pageant for the visit of Christian IV, James’s brother-in-law, in the summer of 1606, and James himself attended a revival of Eastward Ho at court in 1614. Thus, Marston’s connection at court and the conformist ideology of his other writings must have spared him any serious consequences or any consequences at all.

80 Lake states that although these particular satirical lines were most likely Chapman’s, “all three authors were responsible” for the play’s overall content, as he believes they were equally involved in its planning (“Eastward Ho” 166). Petter, on the other hand, assigns the shipping of Scots to Virginia to Chapman and the King’s accent to Jonson (xxi).

81 Both Chapman and Jonson denied responsibility for the offensive passages in letters they sent to their patrons from jail. Chapman claimed that he and Jonson stood accused for “two Clawes, and both of them not our owne” (Van Fossen, “Letters” 218). Jonson, on the other hand, apologized for his part in the play
After its satirical comment on the union of the two nations, *Eastward Ho* proceeds with the tribulations of Quicksilver. His earlier moral awakening has already foreshadowed his eventual repentance, but for the sake of suspense, the playwrights allow him to revert to type one last time. With Sir Petronel preparing to surrender himself to his creditors, Quicksilver conjures up unlikely confidence and dissuades his partner in crime: “‘Sfoot, knight, what an unknighthly faintness transports thee! Let our ship sink, and all the world that’s without us be taken from us, I hope I have some tricks, in this brain of mine, shall not let us perish’” (4.1.222-26). Yet his individualist belief in his own power is once again criminal. The former apprentice offers to support himself and Sir Petronel by counterfeiting gold: “I will blanch copper so cunningly that it shall endure all proofs but the test” (4.1.239-40). His rebellion is doomed, while Golding’s obedient humility continues to distinguish him. The exemplary apprentice earns himself a membership in the City’s Common Council and becomes a deputy alderman for his area. Touchstone exclaims: “Note the reward of a thrifty course. The wonder of his time!” (4.2.62). Golding, however, is quick to dismiss ambition as his motivation: “Sir, as I was not ambitious of this, so I covet no higher place; it hath dignity enough, if it will but save me from contempt” (4.2.71-73). Still, his reluctance to acknowledge his potential does not stop Touchstone from predicting that Golding’s modesty will see him promoted even

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but said he knew not what offended the King: “The cause of my commyttment I understand is his Majesties high displeasure conceived against me; ffor wth I am most Inwardlie sorie; but how I should deserve it, I have yet I thanke God so much integritie as to doubt” (Van Fossen, “Letters” 222). In addition, Jonson later told William Drummond that “he was delated by S’ James Murrey to the King for writting something against Scots in a play Eastward hoe & voluntarily Imprissonned himself w’ Chapman and Marston, who had written it amongst y’thm” (Drummond 140). However, Jonson’s claims in his conversation with Drummond conflict with the information from his letter above, as the letter makes it evident that he did not surrender voluntarily and that Marston was not imprisoned (hardly a surprise given Dr. Wilkes’s position as one of the King’s favourite preachers).
further: “Excellently spoken; this modest answer of thine blushes, as if it said, ‘I will wear scarlet shortly’” (4.2.77-78).

Thus, the comedy begins to restore the order lost after Quicksilver leaves his trade and Gertrude attempts to abandon her original social status. Gradually, the invisible power of heaven brings the characters to their respective deserved ends. Master Touchstone heralds the eventual capture of Quicksilver and Sir Petronel Flash as “[a] miracle! The justice of heaven!” (4.2.104). He then welcomes his conned but unrepentant daughter Gertrude with a sarcastic apology that his house is not adequate accommodation for a lady of her stature. Mistress Touchstone tries to talk sense into Gertrude, but Master Touchstone is certain that Gertrude’s unwarranted pride cannot last long: “let pride go afore, shame will follow after” (4.2.184-85). His homely proverb is also true of Quicksilver, Sir Petronel, and Security, as he prepares serious criminal charges against them (4.2.264-67). Ironically, Golding is assigned to preside over their trial in a scene which marks the unconditional triumph for edifying trade over social ambition. Despite the gravity of the three men’s crimes, however, the atmosphere of their arrest does not preclude hope for their redemption. As Golding addresses Quicksilver, his voice is notably sympathetic:

GOLDING. [...] It is great pity: thou art a proper young man, of an honest and clean face, somewhat near a good one—God hath done his part in thee—but thou hast made too much, and been too proud of that face, with the rest of thy body; for maintenance of which in neat and garish attire, only to be looked upon by some light housewives, thou has prodigally consumed much of thy master’s estate; and being by him gently admonished, at several times, hast returned thyself haughty and rebellious in thine answers, thund’ring out uncivil comparisons, requiting all his kindness with a coarse and harsh behaviour, never returning thanks for any one benefit, but receiving all as if they had been debts to thee, and no courtesies. I must tell thee, Francis, these are manifest signs of ill nature; and God doth often punish such pride
and outrecuidance with scorn and infamy, which is the worst of misfortune. (4.2.297-315)

Golding’s admonition of Quicksilver identifies his dissolute conduct as the result of excessive self-esteem, unjustified in mortal humanity. Quicksilver’s behaviour constitutes a rebellion not only against his trade master, Touchstone, but also against his heavenly master, God. His infamous end is therefore inevitable, and so is Sir Petronel’s. In an act of mercy, Golding spares both men from dangerous military duty in the religious wars of the Low Countries, but he cannot spare them the charge of felony, and they are thrown in jail to await their trial. So is Security. 82

Touchstone himself sums up Quicksilver’s and Sir Petronel’s fate with the proverbial cycle of moral decline, a version of which provides the unusual six-act structure of Marston’s second collaboration, Histrio-Mastix:

TOUCHSTONE. Nay, on, on; you see the issue of your sloth. Of sloth cometh pleasure, of pleasure cometh riot, of riot comes whoring, of whoring comes spending, of spending comes want, of want comes theft, of theft comes hanging; and there is my Quicksilver fixed. (4.2.366-71)

His conclusion, much like that of the protagonist in Histrio-Mastix, is that although the neglect of a moral occupation allows for a focus on the self, it also leads to the self’s destruction. For example, Quicksilver’s decision to leave his apprenticeship has not only failed to secure him his coveted individual freedom, but it has actually put him in jail and in danger of execution. The young man’s chief moral error is clearly his unwarranted assumption that he can obtain the power of absolute freedom even though he is merely a mortal human being. The freedom Quicksilver wishes for is the sole prerogative of God, while obedience and humility are the more becoming sentiments for him.

82 “A sense of prison was probably generated by one or more prisoners in chains / fetters / gyves / manacles / shackles accompanied by a jailer / keeper with keys” (Dessen and Thomson 171).
The gloom continues to gather regardless of *Eastward Ho*’s comic form. Touchstone refuses to receive letters from Quicksilver, Petronel, and Security, even though he decides to hear out Wolf, the prison officer who describes the three men’s stirring moral transformation. Wolf’s speech works in two different ways. On the one hand, it connects with Quicksilver’s earlier moral awakening, to impart sympathy for him and build up to his sudden redemption. On the other, it is another sign of the play’s religious intolerance, together with Quicksilver’s earlier remarks on Jews and Puritans:

WOLF. […] I protest I was never so mortified with any men’s discourse or behaviour in prison; yet I have had of all sorts of men i’ the kingdom under my keys, and almost of all religions i’ the land, as Papist, Protestant, Puritan, Brownist, Anabaptist, Millenary, Family o’ Love, Jew, Turk, Infidel, Atheist, Good Fellow, etc.

GOLDING. And which of all these, thinks Master Wolf, was the best religion?

WOLF. Troth, Master Deputy, they that pay fees best; we never examine their consciences farther. (5.2.32-42)

The religions that Wolf lists are all nonconformist compared to the established Church of England: Catholicism, radical continental Protestantism, equally radical domestic sectarianism, Judaism, Islam, atheism, and even pagan folk beliefs. Wolf has had all their representatives as inmates more likely because of their religious dissidence than because of their secular crimes. Prudently, the prison officer refuses to venture an opinion on the advantages of their faiths, content with collecting fees only. Yet he quickly regains his

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83 Based on this build-up, my analysis of Quicksilver’s repentance provides an alternative interpretation to critical readings that see it as parodic. For example, C. G. Petter claims that “Quicksilver’s repentance is more expedient than sincere” (xxxvi). R. W. Van Fossen also states that the conversion of all the moral culprits “is presented that we may laugh at it—at its pretentiousness, its pomposity, its undue solemnity, its exaggeration” (37). Alexander Leggatt is of the same opinion: “By far the subtlest and most elaborate parody of the standard prodigal story is to be found in *Eastward Ho*” (*Citizen Comedy* 47). And so is Brian Gibbons: “[t]he hypocritical nature of Quicksilver’s repentance, incidentally, is implied simply by the fact that he expresses it in Puritan jargon” (11). I follow instead Alizon Brunning’s suggestion that Quicksilver’s “penitence and forgiveness and his subsequent return to the arms of his ‘family’ all indicate a spiritual and communal regeneration” (145). A more nuanced understanding of *Eastward Ho*’s religious elements makes it possible to read this play as a serious text, intended to advocate plausible moral values. My reading thus also differs from Heather Hirschfeld’s argument that *Eastward Ho* is a parody of *Westward Ho*, even if *Eastward Ho* refers to *Westward Ho* in its prologue.
eloquence when he praises the virtues of the newly-reformed Quicksilver and Sir Petronel.

Both characters demonstrate humility following their earlier arrogance: they choose cells in a section of the prison for inmates of lower social standing, and they engage in rigorous devotional activity. Wolf admits, “I never knew or saw prisoners more penitent, or more devout. They will sit you up all night singing of psalms, and edifying the whole prison” (5.2.49-52). Security also participates in the devotions, but Quicksilver’s transformation is the most staggering:

WOLF. He has cut his hair, too. He is so well given, and has such good gifts! He can tell you almost all the stories of the Book of Martyrs, and speak you all the Sick Man’s Salve without book. [...] And he has converted one Fangs, a sergeant, a fellow could neither write nor read; he was called the Bandog o’ the Counter, and he has brought him already to pare his nails, and say his prayers, and ’tis hoped he will sell his place shortly and become an intelligencer. (5.2. 60-64, 67-72)

The previously arrogant apprentice, who has left his master’s edifying trade, is now educating even the most inveterate of inmates, until they are reformed from cynical criminals to pious believers of good hygiene and eventually to cooperating undercover agents. Acting as the invisible and merciful God, Golding rewards Quicksilver and Sir Petronel by secretly arranging that all their needs be met. Touchstone, however, remains unconvinced of the two men’s reformation and refuses to drop the charges: “Tell hypocrisy it will not do; I have touched and tried too often; I am yet proof, and I will remain so” (5.2.78-80).

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84 In her will, Marston’s wife, Mary, mentioned a copy of John Foxe’s partisan work of Protestant religious history, The Book of Martyrs or Acts and Monuments: “To my Kinsman Mathew Poore Sonne of Edward Poore of Bemerlee in Wilshire [sic] a Trunke full of bookes with Lock and Key and a booke of Martyrs in three Volumes not in the Trunke.” Thomas Becon’s Sick Man’s Salve was a Protestant meditation on death in the form of dialogue, first published in 1561 and going through some eighteen editions by 1631.
To counter his doubts, however, the play continues to impart sympathy for its repentant sinners by employing different speakers. Following Wolf’s report, two prisoners also confirm Quicksilver’s change from arrogance to humility: “O that’s voluntary in him; he gave away all his rich clothes, as soon as ever he came in here, among the prisoners; and will eat o’ the basket, for humility” (5.3.55-58). Quicksilver has apparently chosen to eat from a basket of alms despite Golding’s secret arrangement to provide for him. He does so in order to prepare himself for his pending capital punishment: “he has no hope of life. He mortifies himself. He does but linger on till the sessions” (5.3.60-61). By renouncing earthly temptations and embracing repentance, Quicksilver undoubtedly hopes to strengthen his faith and remain in God’s unpredictable grace. He has finally overcome his obsession with mortal life and has focused instead on life eternal. He has also forsaken his earlier egoism and has espoused an altruistic attitude. He desires to inspire a similar alteration in his fellow inmates, by helping them with anything he can: “O he has penned the best thing, that he calls his ‘Repentance,’ or his ‘Last Farewell,’ that ever you heard. He is a pretty poet, and for prose—you would wonder how many prisoners he has helped out, with penning petitions for ’em, and not take a penny” (5.3.62-67). Having completed his transformation from an unruly apprentice to a humble educator, Quicksilver finally seems ready to die.

Like Marston’s independent comic plays, *Eastward Ho* reaches a genuine tragic moment. As Quicksilver and Sir Petronel seem destined for execution, the former apprentice commits himself obediently to God: “For my part, I commit my cause to him that can succour me; let God work his will” (5.3.95-97). The chorus of onlooking prisoners wish that “God send him good luck” (5.3.102). With what appear to be his final
words, Quicksilver confirms again his moral conversion, which consists in the subjection of his own, previously ambitious, will to that of God. In a surprise twist, however, the play swings back to comedy, as Golding tricks Touchstone to witness Quicksilver’s transformation first-hand. Golding knows that his old master will take pity on Quicksilver, and he manages to get Touchstone to prison just in time to hear Quicksilver perform his ballad “Repentance”:

Yet I desire this grace to win,
That I may cut off the horse-head of Sin,
And leave his body in the dust
Of Sin’s highway and bogs of Lust,
Whereby I may take Virtue’s purse,
And live with her for better, for worse. (5.5.103-108)

Far from another act of iniquity, taking Virtue’s purse is Quicksilver’s vow to live in poverty, as Virtue is not traditionally depicted adorned with an overflowing purse. Quicksilver’s performance moves Touchstone to repent himself: “Heaven pardon my severity” (5.5.76-77). The old master is grateful to Golding’s “charitable soul” which demonstrates “a high point of wisdom and honesty” (5.5.114-15). Convinced in Quicksilver’s sincerity, Touchstone is finally ready to drop the charges: “I can no longer forbear to do your humility right” (5.5.134-35). In his joy, he proceeds to forgive everyone else, too, including Security, and declares the day “sacred to mercy” (5.5.163).

Thus, from the tragic threat of impending execution, Eastward Ho jolts abruptly into the conventional comic ending of romantic unions and reunions. The repentant Gertrude is reunited with her repentant Sir Petronel, and the humbled Quicksilver marries the prostitute Sindefy, whom he has initially lured to the city with a promise of marriage.

85 Quicksilver’s ballad is appropriately based on the sentiments expressed in A Woeful Ballad, Made by Mr. George Mannyanton, allegedly composed by Mannyanton before his own execution (Arber, vol. 2, 135v). A version of the text can be found in Clement Robinson’s A Handful of Pleasant Delights (1584), 65-68.
As in Marston’s independent comic plays, this drastic change in atmosphere once again presupposes God’s invisible providence, working miracles in the least humble of characters. Like Golding, God moves behind the scenes to bolster His offspring’s faith in their salvation. Marston’s collaboration with Chapman and Jonson, therefore, is as much about the difference between “gentry and mercantile values” as it is about the moral awareness of human weakness (Jankowski 164). This malady of humanity affects all social classes, as King James acknowledges in his discussion of the moral weakness of kings (Political Writings 83). The only difference between the various estates lies in the judge presiding over them: for example, apprentices are judged by their masters while kings are judged by God. However, the fact that this play chooses to enact the triumph of hard work and humility over social ambition does not make it a document celebrating the superiority of citizen mercantilism over gentry tradition. What it celebrates instead is the triumph of religious humility over unwarranted individual ambition, evident even in the representatives of more elevated classes, such as Hercules from Parasitaster and the nobility from Histrio-Mastix.

This conservative bias of Eastward Ho is finally highlighted again, as Quicksilver asks to walk through London in his prison clothes “as an example to the children of Cheapside” (5.5.216-17). Touchstone’s final speech leaves no doubt either that the comedy’s events are designed to impart a moral:

Now, London, look about,
And in this moral see thy glass run out:
Behold the careful father, thrifty son,
The solemn deeds, which each of us have done:
The usurer punished, and from fall so steep
The prodigal child reclaimed, and the lost sheep. (5.5.218-24)
The solemnity of this final scene asserts the paramount importance of obedience and the mortal dangers inherent in the illusion of human freedom. Yet, despite its serious tone, the ending is a hopeful one, as the sinners are reclaimed exactly when they seem to be irrevocably lost. Marston’s collaboration with Chapman and Jonson thus continues to insist on the conservative conception of humanity as the weak and fallible offspring of a strict but also merciful divine father. The playwrights portray the inordinate human preoccupation with its fallen self as morally detrimental and the self’s neglect as beneficial. In their comedy, the moral education of manual trade makes a crucial difference, as its inculcation of the values of hard work and humility reflects the same self-effacing ideology they preach. The same philosophy is behind the praise of the academic disciplines in Marston’s other collaboration, *Histrio-Mastix.*
Histrio-Mastix (1598-99)\textsuperscript{86}

In his analysis of *Histrio-Mastix*, Philip J. Finkelpearl notes the play’s fervent insistence on learning, and like *Eastward Ho*, this play illustrates the virtues of moral education (*John Marston* 119-24). Here, academic disciplines inspire commendable obedience and humility by revealing “sacred knowledge of divinest things” and constitute the key to prosperity in the play’s allegorical kingdom (2.p.257). The neglect of learning, on the other hand, brings about violent conflict and sacrilegious destruction: “Pitty and Piety are both exiled, / Religion buried with our Fathers bones / In the cold earth; and nothing but her face, / Left to adorne these grosse and impious times” (5.p.288). This anxiety in *Histrio-Mastix* most probably derives from its morality play origins. The play’s reference to *Lusty Juventus* and possible dependence on *Impatient Poverty* make it clear that Marston and his collaborator were well aware of earlier morality convenions, and their character types confirm this parallel beyond reasonable doubt. For instance, the three estates in *Histrio-Mastix* derive from the weak morality protagonists evident in morality plays; the scholar Chrysoganus, on the other hand, is based on the stock character of Knowledge or Conscience. Even the cycle of fall and redemption that the three estates undergo in this play is typical of the Tudor morality patterns. However, if

\textsuperscript{86} D. J. Lake’s “Histrio-Mastix: Linguistic Evidence for Authorship” is perhaps the most convincing recent discussion both of Marston’s involvement in this play and of the approximate date of the play’s composition. Based on topical references, Lake narrows considerably the time-frame given in *Annals of English Drama* to 1598-99 (148). He also assigns to Marston act 3, p. 273, to act 5, p. 285 (with the rest of the text to an anonymous playwright), but he observes that “Marston had a main finger in *Histrio-Mastix*, and may even have been the leading spirit behind the collaboration” (152). For this reason, I discuss *Histrio-Mastix* in its entirety, like *Eastward Ho*, as a text which agrees with the conservative world-view evident in Marston’s verse and comic drama. For other discussions, in favour of Marston’s collaboration, see Richard Simpson (3), Brinsley Nicholson (66), Adolphus Ward (490), Josiah H. Penniman (31), Roscoe Addison Small (68-71), E. H. C. Oliphant (415), E. K. Chambers (The Elizabethan Stage 382), Alfred Harbage (Annals 70), and James P. Bednarz (83). For arguments in favour of Marston’s sole authorship, see F. G. Fleay (103), John Palmer (46), Alvin Kernan (“John Marston’s” 134), Anthony Caputi (82), David Bevington (279), Philip J. Finkelpearl (John Marston 124), Alan Dessen (32), and George Geckle (205-22). Finally, for arguments denying Marston’s involvement altogether, see A. C. Swinburne (124) and Roslyn Knutson (“Histrio-Mastix” 376-77).
weak humanity is the focus of the morality plays, *Histrio-Mastix* places its emphasis firmly on its “Knowledge” character, Chrisoganus, a decision that can be read as the intent to create an exemplary protagonist, free of moral compromise.

The presentation of academic knowledge in *Histrio-Mastix* is thus markedly different from that in *What You Will*. Whereas knowledge is the source of Lampatho’s confusion in that play, for the protagonist of *Histrio-Mastix*, the scholar Chrisoganus, it is the path to moral existence. Lampatho’s confusion results in weak faith, as he attempts to understand the human soul through texts in conflict with Reformation theology. In contrast, Chrisoganus pursues learning which does not conflict with Protestant doctrine and his faith is unwavering. This distinction between Lampatho and Quadratus is best captured in Calvin’s view on the benefits and dangers of learning:

> If it have beene the Lordes wil that we should be holpen by the travell and service of the wicked in naturall Philosophie, Dialectike, the Mathematicall knowledges, and other: let us use it, least if wee neglect the giftes of God, willingly offered in them, wee suffer just punishment for our slouthfulnes. But least any should thinke a man to be blessed, when under the elements of this worlde there is graunted unto him so great an abilitie to conceive trueth, it is also to be added that all this power to understande, & the understanding that followeth thereof, is a vanishing and transitory thing before God, where is not a stedfast foundation of trueth. (2.2.16)

In the play’s opening speech, Chrisoganus eliminates the above reservations by exalting mathematics over natural philosophy but subjecting it to God’s creation:

> CHRISOGANUS. […] the naturall Philosopher
> Consider things as merely sensible;
> The Mathematician; ut mente abiunctas a materia sensibili; 87
> But this requireth time to satisfy;
> For ’tis an Axiome with all men of Art,
> Mathematicum abstrahentem non comittere mendacium: 88
> And (for the beauty of it,) what can be

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87 “The Mathematician [regards things] as separated by the mind from perceptible matter.”
88 “The Mathematician who is abstracting does not commit error.”

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Urg’d (more extractive) then the face of heaven?
The misteries that Art hath found therein:
It is distinguisht into Regions,
Those Regions fil’d with sundry sorts of stares:
They (likewise) christned with peculiar names,
To see a dayly use wrought out of them,
With demonstrations so infallible,
The pleasure cannot bee, but ravishing. (1.p.252-253)

Chrisoganus’s speech thus establishes a connection between the discipline of
mathematics and the world of God’s heaven visible to mortal humanity. The discipline
offers a glimpse of God’s laws in the universe, and this glimpse is tantamount to a
religious rapture. This is the reason that the academic sciences are said to teach “sacred
knowledge of divinest things” later in the play (2.p.257).89 Education is therefore an
activity in which “that pure knowledge by which wee know / A thing to bee, with true
cause how it is” does not allow man to forget “[t]he end of his creation” (1.p.249,
5.p.291-92). The scientific pursuit in Histrio-Mastix is therefore not confusing like that in
What You Will, but reassuring, as it illuminates the world of God’s creation.

Like Calvin, Histrio-Mastix contrasts the virtues of education with the dangers of
their neglect. The play enacts a cycle in which the nobles, citizens, and peasantry of a
kingdom pass through times presided over by the allegorical figures of Peace, Plenty,
Pride, Envy, War, and Poverty. As Ejner Jensen observes, the play “is built upon a
society’s decline from prosperity to large-scale disintegration” (134). In the end,
however, the action returns to Peace, but not before learning and repentance take place.
This cycle is triggered by the nobles’ preference for plays, hunting, and clothes over the
academic disciplines of semi-divine status, Grammar, Logic, Rhetoric, Arithmetic,
Geometry, Music and Astronomy: “adjuncts fit to waite on Peace, / Who being courted

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89 The inventory of Dr. Wilkes’s possessions lists: “One Geometricall or Astronomicall Instrumt called an
Astrolabe wth the Study of Bookes and other things there” (Last Will).

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by most searching spirits, / Have alwayes borne themselves in God-like state” (1.p.247). Their neglect leads gradually to a godless state of affairs, as the subjects of the kingdom forget the moral purpose of their existence. David Bevington points out that Marston “consciously revives the outmoded morality play, with its soul struggle, to dramatize the spiritual seriousness of the choice” (280).

Although the scholar Chrisoganus manages to convince the reluctant nobles and citizens to embrace learning initially, he soon loses them to the variety of entertainments made available to them in the times of Peace and Plenty. When Peace brings about easily accessible abundance, the nobleman Mavortius finds it difficult to pursue studies because he cannot be satisfied with secluded reading when the world outside offers so much more:

MAVORTIUS. What dullards thus, would dote in rusty Arte?

Plodding upon a booke to dull the sence,
And see the world become a treasure-house,
Where Angells swarme like Bees in Plenties streets,
And every Peasant surfets on their sweets? (2.p.257)

The nobleman’s reaction reminds one of Juventus’s easy lapse from his godly learning under the tutelage of Good Councell to prodigal consorting with the lady Abhominable Living (Wever 785-903). Like the character of Good Councell, Chrisoganus cannot understand his pupil’s reluctance: “What better recreations can you find, / Then sacred knowledge in divinest thinges” (2.p.257). Arguing in favour of learning, he echoes an earlier exhortation by the deity of Peace: “What is a man superiour to a beast / But for his mind? nor that ennobles him, / While hee dejects his reason; making it / The slave unto his brutish appetite” (1.p.248). This crucial role of the human intellect for moral life is consistent with Marston’s ideas in his verse (The Scourge III.viii.173-78). Mavortius,
however, has a ready answer: “I must pursue my pleasures royally, / That spung’d in sweat, I may returne from sport, / Mount mee on horse-back, keepe the Hounds and Haukes” (2.p.257). And although hunting seems a fairly innocuous pastime, its implications in the moral scheme of the play are sinister, as it is evident from Calvin’s views on the neglect of learning. Mavortius’s refusal to apply himself to education soon proves a slippery slope, as the following act ushers in the reign of Pride, and the noble characters’ moral degradation is underscored by the revealing clothes of one of their wives: “Our brests lie forth like conduicts of delight / Able to tice the nicest appetite” (3.p.273).

The gradual cycle from Peace to Poverty is thus the direct consequence of immoral choices. The reigns of Pride and Envy reveal the blasphemy and sacrilege of spiritual decline, thus highlighting the significance of learning for religion. As the lawyer Vourcher describes his desire to use his profession in order to secure undeserved promotion, he makes a telling analogy between his pride and the Biblical emblem of presumption, the Tower of Babylon: “The Dubious Law shall nurse dissention, / Which being pamper’d with our feeding helpes, / Wee’le swell in greatnesse and our palace Towers / Shall pricke the ribs of Heaven with proud height” (4.p.281). His language would no doubt elicit Pasquil’s question in *Jack Drum’s Entertainment*, “Why prick you heavens ribbes with blasphemie?” (4.p.225). Vourcher’s fellow citizens become blasphemous, too, threatening a disastrous end and pushing the atmosphere of the play closer and closer to tragedy.

*Histrio-Mastix* features yet another agent that drives the action to a tragic ending. It comes in the unlikely shape of an extremely unskilled amateur acting company. It
consists of several artisans and a ballad poet who have decided to leave their trades and become actors in order to secure better and easier income. They are somewhat like the mechanicals who stage “Pyramus and Thisbe” in Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (1594-1598). The play they produce is advertised ambitiously as “The best that ever trode on stage. / The Lascivious Knight, and Lady Nature,” a combination between the love-story of Troilus and Cressida and the morality of the prodigal youth Juventus (2.p.259). The prologue offers a doggerel summary of the Troilus plot:

PROLOGUS. Phillida was a faire maid; I know one fairer then she, 
*Troylus* was a true lover; I know one truer than he:
And *Cressida* that dainty dame, whose beauty faire & sweet,
Was cleare as is y² Christall streame, that runs along y² street.
How *Troyll* he that noble knight, was drunk in love and bad goodnight,
So bending leg likewise; do you not us despise. (2.p.264)

The actors follow this introduction with the crude antics of “a roaring *Divell* with the *Vice* on his back, *Iniquity* in one hand; and *Juventus* in the other,” possibly a cheap rendition of *Lusty Juventus* or a similar story (2.p.265).90 One of the “admirable wits of Italy” and a sophisticated spectator, the Italian Lord Landulpho,91 does not hide his disapproval:

- Most ugly lines and base-browne-paper-stuffe
- Thus to abuse our heavenly poesie,
- That sacred off-spring from the braine of Jove,
- Thus to be mangled with prophane absurds,
- Strangled and chok’t with lawlesse bastrards words. (2.p.264)

Like Marston’s *The Scourge of Villainy*, Landulpho’s speech also connects poetry with God. According to the Italian, poetry is of divine origin, and the performance he is watching is destroying exactly this divinity, an aspect that is beyond conspicuous in R.

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90 For more instances of the staging of devils, see “devil” in Dessen and Thomson (68).
91 Note the similarity in name with the character Pandulpho from Marston’s *Antonio’s Revenge* (Characters of the Play 219).
Wever’s version of the Juventus story. John Peter notes in Landulpho’s comment
Marston’s approach in his other plays: “it is therefore perhaps understandable that, devot as [Marston] was, he should have set to work with such ardour to perfect the divine utterance in his plays” (“John Marston’s Plays” 135).

In response to Landulpho’s criticism, the actors attempt to commission a more sophisticated moral play from Chrisoganus, but they find his price of £10 too expensive. Some of them recognize Chrisoganus’s rhetorical skills—“The fellow doth talke like one that can talke” (3.p.274)—but their jealous poet Post-Haste rejects Chrisoganus’s services: “O sir, your morall lines were better spent, / In matters of more worthy consequent” (3.p.275). Post-Haste’s statement thus highlights the cause of moral decline in which his company is implicated. The entertainment that his actors provide is mangled and sensationalist instead of morally inspiring.92

As a result of their addiction to inappropriate pastimes, nobles and citizens slowly descend into primitive aggression, having lost track of their “owne true glories” (2.p.257) and the moral purpose of their creation (5.p.292). The citizens begin to envy the social status of the aristocracy and decide to prey on their expensive habits, so they can accumulate enough wealth to afford their own social elevation. Their portrayal resembles that of the usurer Mammon in Jack Drum’s Entertainment, whose accumulation of wealth is also criticized as immoral. Following suit, the nobles come to blows amongst

92 A number of War-of-the-Theatres proponents have suggested that Marston’s character of Chrisoganus is either a deliberate satirical attack on Jonson or a compliment which Jonson mistook for a satirical attack: see Bednarz (88), Palmer (46), Penniman (34), and Fleay (71). Unlike Brabant Sr., however, Chrisoganus is hardly an obvious caricature of Jonson. He is a positive character and a spokesperson for the moral views of Marston’s satires, as evident from the readings of Finkelpearl (John Marston 124), Bevington (280), and Caputi (87). What provoked Jonson’s ridicule of Histrio-Mastix is more likely its technical scholarly language, which he may have perceived as pretentious. Chrisoganus is also markedly different from Quadratus, the character that Marston may have intended as a compliment for Jonson, another mismatch that makes the argument in favour of misunderstood flattery implausible.

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themselves over ownership of land and anxiety that the citizens’ increasing wealth will obliterate the special status of noble birth. At the root of all these conflicts is their initial neglect of learning, ironically brought about by the comfortable time of Peace:

This ill nurs’d age of Peace,
That foster [sic] all save vertue; comforts all
Saving industrious art, the soules bright gemme,
That crusseth downe the sprowting stemmes of Art,
Blasts forward wits with frosty cold contempt,
Crowning dull clodds of earth with honours,
Wreath guilding the rotten face of barbarisme
With the unworthy shine of Eminence. (4.p.281)

This deterioration ultimately brings about the reign of War, which launches an assault on religion. War enters the stage with a retinue of Ambition, Fury, Horror, and Ruin, and the first command is that Horror greet “the wrinckled vizard of Devotion” (5.p.284). War’s next order to Ruin is an attack not only on cities but also on the Church itself:

Ruine thou faythfull servant to grimme Warre,
Now teach thy murdering shot to teare mens limm’s,
Thy brazen Cannons how to make a breach,
In fayre Citties bozome; teach thy fiers
To climbe toppes of houses, and thy mines,
To blow up Churches in th’ offended skye. (5.p.285)

This rampant sacrilegious destruction brings confusion to the whole state. In the midst of it, Chrisoganus seems to be the only one fully aware of the import of the situation. While the characters representing the different estates of the kingdom are involved in an acrimonious strife for supremacy, he laments the devastation around him with a moving speech: “Pitty and Piety are both exiled, / Religion buried with our Fathers bones / In the cold earth; and nothing but her face, / Left to adorne these grosse and impious times” (5.p.288).
Chrisoganus’s concerns are not unjustified moral paranoia, and the actions of the common folk, the “Russetings and Mechanicalls” led by Fury, prove it. Their initial call for liberty is exposed as a mindless cry for anarchy and sacrilege:

OMNES. Liberty, liberty, liberty.
1. Well then: what exploit shall we do first?
2. Marry Ile tell you:
   Let’s pluck downe the Church, and set up an Ale-house.
OMNES. O excellent, excellent, excellent, a rare exploit, a rare exploite. (5.p.288)

This image of the unbridled mob is reminiscent of the “grotesque excesses” of the Cade rebellion in Shakespeare’s Henry VI, Part Two (1590-92) (Bevington 239). It is also similar to the political attitudes to the multitude in both Antonio and Mellida and The Malcontent. The liberation of the masses from close centralized control in Marston’s independent plays and collaborations is as unwelcome as it is in the writings of Dr. William Wilkes, Richard Hooker, and King James I. Their enfranchisement is dangerous without question, as their inability to make adequate moral and political decisions is bound to cause chaos.

Chrisoganus greets the fall of traditional hierarchy with a speech similar to Hamlet’s “[w]hat a piece of work is a man” (2.2.303). Having escaped the violence that takes place on the stage, the scholar is allowed the privilege of a soliloquy to express his views in a direct address to the audience:

CHRISOGANUS. Thus Heaven (in spite of fury) can preserve,
The trustfull innocent, and guiltless Soule;
O, what a thing is man, that thus forgets
The end of his creation: and each houre
Strikes at the glory of his maker thus?
What brazen visage, or black yron soule
Hath strength to justifie so Godless deeds? (5.p.291-292)
In his speech, *Histrio-Mastix* delivers its strongest religious message. Distracted by secular concerns, the noblemen, citizens, and common people bring about the collapse of their kingdom. In their physical violence against one another, they abuse God, their Creator. Unlike them, Chrisoganus remains aware of humanity’s moral purpose, “that pure knowledge by which wee know / A thing to bee, with true cause how it is” (1.p.249). His moral consciousness protects him during the time of civil conflict and ensures his eventual triumph.

The sixth and last act of this play presents the reign of Poverty and her servants Famine, Sickness, Bondage, and Sluttishness. The nobles and their wives are distraught at the loss of their riches and their high social status. For the first time since the beginning of the play, they genuinely want to devote themselves to learning. Ironically, they return to the teacher whom they have abandoned in the beginning of the play. Chrisoganus embarks on their moral re-education by explaining that they have made a serious error in pursuing material pleasures. The nobles’ material preoccupation has given birth to pride, which in turn has plunged them into conflict:

> When thou wast rich and Peerelesse in thy pride,  
> Content did never harbour in thy brest,  
> Nor ere had love, her residence in thee,  
> (I meane the love of perfect happinesse)  
> But skillesse grudging from a haughty spirit  
> Did blind the sences with a slender merit. (6.p.296)

Chrisoganus advises his newly reformed followers to cultivate the riches of wisdom instead. As with Quicksilver in *Eastward Ho*, the nobles’ ultimate cure lies in submission and repentance, the rituals which recognize the power of God and the helplessness of humanity. Only through them can their kingdom heal and function like the parts of the pre-lapsarian human body:
CHRISOGANUS. First entertaine submission in your soules
To frame true concord in one unity.
Behold the faire proportion of a man,
Whome heavens have created compleate,
Yet if the arme make warre against the head,
Or that the heart rebel against the braine,
This elementall bodie (thus compact),
Is but a scattred Chaos of revenge; [...] (6.p.296)

The nobles embrace his advice, “Thou Sonne of knowledge (richer then a man) / We
censure thy advise as oracles” (6.p.296). Mavortius, the first to abandon learning in the
beginning of the play, now shows appreciation for Chrisoganus’s education: “We
followed beasts before but now a man” (6.p.296). The exultation of the scholar over the
aristocracy at this point may also be loosely connected to the final reminder for the
nobility in Lusty Juventus: “to mayntayne the publike wealth over us” and “seke a
reformation, and se it redrest” if “truly admonished” by the “wrongfulli opprest” (Wever
1161-67). Chrisoganus is therefore difficult to read as the cause of his society’s
destruction (Kernan, The Cankered Muse 148). On the contrary, as Feldman argues, he is
“[t]he virtuous man, incapable of succumbing to temptation” (115). Finkelpearl in turn
suggests that “[his] accession to the status of moral and intellectual mentor of a
commonwealth at the end of Histrio-Mastix sounds like an ego fantasy of the scourge of
villainy” (John Marston 124). His triumph is thus another masterful instance of dramatic
irony, adumbrating the inevitable human vulnerability of his previously arrogant pupils.

In Mavortius’s final acknowledgement of Chrisoganus, the play completes a full
circle, as the nobleman’s words echo Peace’s initial exhortation to the nobles, “What is a
man superiour to a beast / But for his mind?” (1.p.248). This echo drives home the play’s
central message: the cultivation of the intellect through education is the key to
humanity’s moral purpose in God’s universe. As this moral is reiterated, the play
appropriately segues into a masque in praise of Queen Elizabeth I, head of the Church of England. Peace re-enters the stage with Bacchus, Ceres, and Plenty bearing Cornucopiae while Poverty and her servants vanish out of sight. Fame ushers in Astrea who is

“supported by Fortitude and Religion, followed by Virginitie and Artes” (6.p.301). The idle artisans-turned-actors are appropriately shipped away and “set a shore no man / [k]nowes where” (6.p.299), much like the offenders against love in Marston’s

Parasitaster.

There is little doubt throughout Histrio-Mastix that its fictitious kingdom is an allegory for England, and a stage direction identifies Astrea as “Q. Eliza.” (6.p.301). The character of Peace, who is in charge of the masque, addresses the Queen with:

[...] live as long
As Time hath life, and Fame a worthy tongue.
Still breathe our glory, the worlds Empresse,
Religions Guardian, Peaces patronesse;
Now flourish Arts, the Queene of Peace doth raigne,
Vertue triumph, now shee doth sway the stemme,
Who gives to Vertue, honours Diadem. (6.p.301)

This encomium constitutes another tentative parallel with Lusty Juventus, as at the end of that play, the character of Good Counsell prays for “the prosperous estate of our noble & vertuous king / That in his godly procedynges he may stil persever / Which seketh the glory of God above al thing” (1155-57). In Histrio-Mastix, however, education is added to religion in the last speech and in the allegorical spectacle on stage. Their union is a tribute to both the scholar Chrisoganus and the illustrious Queen Astrea, guardian of religion and patroness of the arts. The prominence of these two elements in this play is thus consistent with Marston’s religious and political conservatism in his satirical verse and his other comic dramas. The negative depiction of human ambition, on the other
hand, matches his customary patterns of redemption from disobedience to humility. In all of them rebellion, even if allowed to play itself out, is inevitably sacrificed in a conservative affirmation of obedience.
CONCLUSION

Marston’s life after his brief foray in the world of London theatre demonstrates the same dedication to the political and religious establishment as his comedies and comic collaborations. He left play-writing in order to devote himself exclusively to the Church of England, a career path he likely contemplated as early as his time at Oxford. Both his university education and his subsequent interest in philosophy had prepared him for the clergy, and his conformist affinities no doubt earned him Dr. Wilkes’s support. The prospect of a stable ecclesiastical career must have thus tempted the young playwright away from the “above better desert” of his “stage-pleasings” (*Parasitaster*, To My Equal Reader 5-6). It allowed him also, among other things, to pursue more completely his lifelong endeavour “to know myself than to be known of others” (1-2). And pursue it he did, as following his ordination in 1609 he spent twenty-two years in service of the Church of England—initially at Barford St. Martin, Wiltshire, and from 1616 on at Christchurch, Hampshire. He retired in 1631 and passed away in 1634, shortly after moving back to London.93

Marston’s decision to leave the theatre provoked several comments by contemporaries. In 1609, Thomas Floyde wrote to William Trumbull, the de facto English ambassador at Brussels, that “Marston the poet is minister and hath preached at Oxon” (Floyde 248). A year later, in his collection of epigrams, John Davies of Hereford identified a retrospective connection between Marston’s *The Malcontent* and his ordination:

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93 Marston’s confession in *Parasitaster* echoes that cancelled part from his father’s will: “god blesse hym and give hym trewe knowledge of himself to forgoe his delighte in playes vayne studdyes and fooleryes” (O’Neill 444). As I mention in the introduction, his father changed this remark later to: “man purposeth and god disposeth his will be donne and send him his grace to feare and serve him” (Marston, Sr.).
To ingenious Mr. John Marston
Epig. 217
Thy Male-content, or, Male-contednesse,
Hath made thee change thy Muse as some do gesse:
If Time mispent, made her a Male-content;
Thou needst not then her timely change repent.
The end will shew it: mane while do but please
With vertuous paines, as erst thou didst with ease:
Thou shalt be prais’d; and kept from want and wo;
So, blest are Crosses, that do blesse us so.

Davies’s humorously prophetic reassurance turned out to be accurate. Not only did
Marston’s new career keep him “from want and wo,” but it also afforded him a
comfortable existence. As his will demonstrates, his earnings enabled him to provide for
both his immediate community at Christchurch and for his friends and relations across
southern England. His circumstances were therefore hardly “wretched,” as a letter
attributed to Francis Beaumont may suggest (Chambers, William Shakespeare 225).94

Several of Marston’s bequests reflect his continued commitment to the ideas
expressed in his comic drama. The first item of interest is “the somme of twentie eight
pound of currant mony of England” he left to his wife’s relative Mary Fabian of
Christchurch “towards the educacon of hir five sonnes,” a likely testament to his lasting
belief in the moral value of learning (Last Will). Another relevant donation is “the
somme of five poundes” he gave to “the parrish Church of Christchurch,” proof for his

94 E. K. Chambers has argued that the letter, addressed “To Mr B: J:” from a certain “FB,” was written by
Francis Beaumont some time in 1615 and intended for Ben Jonson. The argument for its reference to
Marston rests on his ordination (ordainde to write the <grinne>) and his authorship of Parasitaster, or the
Fawn (the fawne):

what do you thinke of his
state, who hath now the last that hee could make
in white and Orrenge tawny on his backe
at Windsor? is not this mans miserie more
then a fallen sharers, that now keepes a doore,
hath not his state almost as wretched bee
as <h>is, that is ordainde to write the <grinne>
after the fawne, and fleere shall bee? as sure
some one there is allotted to endure
that Cross. (24-33)
continued support of the ecclesiastical establishment. This item must be added to the “one rich herse cloth [sic] of plush, and one rich cope” Marston donated in 1617, shortly after he became vicar of Christchurch, according to his church’s now-missing Book of Benefactors (Walcote 81). Marston’s gifts to the Church are further evidence for E. A. J. Honigmann’s and Susan Brock’s assertion that “the theatre was less antagonistic to the Church than some churchmen, particularly Puritans, were to the theatre” (5). Yet by far the most important indication of Marston’s religious convictions is his formulaic but certainly meaningful opening statement: “Imprimise I give and bequeath my soule into the hands of Allmightie God my maker and redeemer and my bodie to be buried in Christian burial.” Even if commonplace, this statement sums up aptly his acknowledgement of himself as a son of God, acutely aware of the Father’s strict moral law but also tacitly hopeful of eventual redemption.⁹⁵

Marston’s serious commitment to his religious beliefs may be also among the reasons for the removal of his name from William Sheares’s 1633 edition of his collected plays. As his now-missing tombstone at Temple Church stated, Marston’s last will was to consign his earthly existence to oblivion—“Oblivioni sacrum”—perhaps in tacit hope that this renunciation would make him more worthy of salvation. The removal of his name from Sheares’s edition, a year before his passing, fits with Marston’s last disavowal

⁹⁵ Honigmann and Brock state that while “a statement of religious commitment was not a required part of a will,” it was very much “the norm in this period” (19). For example, Marston’s father’s will reads: “And firste I comend my soule to Almighty God trustinge assuredly that by the medyation death and passion of my Saviour Jesus Christ my synnes shalbe forgvyen me, and my soale saved and redeemed from eternall death and dampnaton and to lyve eternally with the electe and Stts of god” (Marston, Sr.). Mary Marston’s will adopts a similar formula: “ffirst I bequeath and humbly surrender upp my Soule into the handes of God that gave it hoping and trusting God that all my Sinnes shall be blotted out and washed away with the pretious blood of my holy Redeemer the Lord Jesus Chirst. And I thanke God that it is his good pleasure to give me that good hope to be an Anchor to my weake and unstable Soule.” Dr. Wilkes follows this pattern as well: “ffirst, as an humble devotive, I yield up into the hands of God Almighty my soule and body, beseeching him by his mercyes, and through the meritts of his sonne to gorgive me my sinnes” (Last Will). He also adds: “[w]hom I have any wayes offended, I meekely desire to forgive mee, and I freely and fully forgive them, as I would have my sinnes (which are great and grievous) forgiven me at the hands of God.”
of mortal human life. His plays may have been conceived in “due reverence and devotion” of God’s name (Certain Satires iv.56), but they were also part of a corrupt world: “the only region of death, the greatest shop of the devil, the cruellest prison of men, out of the which none pass without paying their dearest breath for a fee” (The Malcontent 4.4.27-31). As part of it, they were of no use to him where he believed he was going.96

Yet according to Sheares—even if he said so only to ensure his profit—Marston’s drama was morally commendable and he had no reason to be ashamed of it:

Sheares’s statement is interesting given the fact that Marston’s comedies certainly contain the odd sexual innuendo. Of course, Sheares most likely did not read Marston’s plays carefully before he printed them. Had he done so, however, his opinion may not have changed significantly, if judged by the failure of erotic writing to register as offensive even with press censors. As Richard McCabe points out with respect to the earlier practices of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London, “[n]one of

96 The floor stone marking Marston’s grave at Temple Church, London, is reported as missing in Arundell Esdaile’s 1933 account of Temple Church Monuments (181). It was perhaps removed as part of the “Gothic” restoration of the church in 1826-27, if decay had not destroyed it much earlier (10-33). Also, if Marston was indeed responsible for the removal of his name from the Sheares edition, he certainly relied on his old friend Henry Walley, then clerk at the Stationers’ Company (Finkelpearl, “Henry Walley”). On his death, Marston left “the somme of five poundes a piece” for “George Wallie and James Walley sonnes of mr Henry Wallie” (Last Will). Later, Marston’s wife named Henry Walley as executor of her will and gave him her husband’s portrait, her rings, and a monetary gift for his youngest son: “I bequeath my dear husband’s picture and my three rings I usually weare unto his auncient ffriend Master Henry Wally of Stationers Hall, my good ffriend, and unto his youngest Sonne Thomas Walley I give five pounds good Currant monie of England as a token of good Will.”
[their] extant letters deals with immorality or indecency, but they are all in one way or another concerned with matters of public order and policy” (“Elizabethan Satire” 189). Thus, this statement of Marston’s publisher—together with the comments of Guilpin, Davies, and Jonson—is another piece of evidence emphasizing Marston’s serious religious preoccupation and that of his comic works.

Building on a similar interpretation of Marston’s early work—an interpretation striving to grasp the finer nuances of religion in his time—I have argued that Marston’s comic plays and collaborations can be read plausibly as consistent expressions of his conservative religious understanding of the human soul, romance, politics, and education. His fictional comic worlds may be deeply infused with an acute “sense of sin,” but they also impart an unassuming hope for eventual salvation (Leggatt, *English Drama* 119). They do not necessarily fall victim to “intellectual confusion” but can be said to engage with humanity’s accepted corruption and its dependence on the mysteriously unpredictable but all-powerful grace of God (Colley, *John Marston’s* 181). Even if their view of human possibilities is “emphatically pessimistic,” they are still not “shrouded in unrelievable gloom” (Jensen 124). Their preoccupation with vice may be graphic, but it is not necessarily the sign of cynical despair or morbid obsession. It is rather an assertion of the importance of religious and political obedience, the humble mindset that can lead humanity to the moral existence and adequate faith in God indispensable for salvation.

I see Marston’s insistence on human vulnerability in the prophetic warnings for characters inflated with “venom’d arrogance” in *Antonio and Mellida* (1.1.56) and for those presumptuous enough to claim “free-will in supernaturall / [e]ffects” in *What You Will* (3.p.265). It is also evident in the expressions of spiritual romantic desire that
acknowledge God’s moral purpose, in both Jack Drum’s Entertainment—“with chaste and virtuous arme I clip / The rarest modell of thy workemanship” (3.214)—and in The Dutch Courtesan—“my soul showed me the imperfection of my body, and placed my affection on a lawful love” (1.2.90-91). The emphasis on spirituality in these two comedies clearly privileges God over human self, and their philosophy is also at work in The Malcontent and Parasitaster. In its finale, The Malcontent asserts “Heaven’s imposed conditions” as the only reliable principles of political government, a triumph over the disobedience of “th’inconstant people,” manipulated by opportunistic usurpers (5.6.148, 143). Parasitaster, on the other hand, presents the transformation of “wild longings” into a force to cleanse the “extreme viciousness” of an entire dukedom, yet another victory for divine law (1.1.46, 1.2.348). Finally, Marston’s two collaborations, Eastward Ho and Histrio-Mastix, are also consistent with the bias towards human humility in his other comic plays. They present claims for individual freedom—“I now am free”—as virtually delusional (Eastward Ho 2.2.36). Likewise, celebrations of ostensible political enfranchisement—“[l]iberty, liberty, liberty”—entail little more than sacrilege—“[l]et’s pluck downe the Church, and set up an Ale-house” (Histrio-Mastix 5.p.288). For this reason, both plays insist on human acknowledgement of God’s power: “let God work his will” (Eastward Ho 5.3.97) and “entertain submission in your soules” (Histrio-Mastix 6.p.296). This acknowledgement, of course, can happen only after adequate moral education.

Marston’s insistence on human weakness and its implications are also reflected in his recurrent use of tragedy and irony in his comic drama. For this reason, the plays I have discussed here are comic much more because of their happy endings than because of
their abundant humour. Their entertainment derives mainly from the suspense of their almost tragic plots and from the caricatures of their dark satire. The echoes of famous tragedies, the reliance on socially elevated characters, and the exploitation of high passions suit the gravity of their moral preoccupation. Often, their oppressive seriousness is mitigated with irony which may allow the audience a sneak peek at a positive resolution, unavailable yet to the character on stage. However, while irony does diffuse tragic tension in certain scenes, it also has a reverse effect in others in that it paints the abject insufficiency of fallen human perception in even starker colours. Far from a powerful being, humanity is instead practically blind in its delusions, obsessions, and limitations, and these shortcomings may be projected not only in the characters on stage but also in the audience watching them.

My discussion has thus demonstrated the important influence religion and theology had on Marston’s engagement with comic conventions. My approach has deliberately targeted a more nuanced understanding of the religious politics of Marston’s time in order to illuminate the import of religious references in his comic drama. I have contextualized Marston’s satire and comedy with the help of primary texts such as John Calvin’s influential writings, the Injunctions and Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England, the nonconformist pamphlets of Martin Marprelate, the publications of bishops John Whitgift and Richard Bancroft, and the works of Richard Hooker, Dr. William Wilkes, and King James I. I have also relied on the seminal recent studies of early modern religious politics by Patrick Collinson, Peter Lake, and Kenneth Fincham among others. This contextualization has made it possible to interpret Marston’s comic drama as convincingly conservative and conformist. It has made plausible the view that not all
references to religion in Marston’s comedy can be interpreted as derisive, and that, on the contrary, most of them can be read as extremely serious. Therefore, this study’s first central conclusion is that Marston’s comic plays can be consistent in their expression of a philosophy that reflects the policies of the political and religious establishment of his time. The second main inference here is that Marston’s perceived dramatic failures can be also regarded as creative decisions consistent with this philosophy. Both these conclusions are the result of my deliberate attempt to take Marston’s comic plays on their own terms, not as the imperfect vehicles of *ad hominem* satire or sensational parody, but as the output of a skilled playwright with an earnest agenda.
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