unfair to criticize a researcher too harshly for a following a pre-existing set of selection criteria. At the same time it is reasonable to expect that a declared set of criteria should be rigorously maintained, and that the intellectual basis of those criteria should be clearly stated and take some account of the historical reality of the period under examination. The ambitious task undertaken by the REED project is to be applauded, and it is to be regretted that the present volume falls somewhat short of the standards set by the project as a whole.

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T.F. Wharton (ed). *The Drama of John Marston: Critical Re-Visions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. Pp xiii, 233.

For a dramatist with at least three canonically important works (*The Dutch Courtesan*, *The Malcontent*, and *Antonio's Revenge*) contemporary critics have been especially chary of addressing John Marston's plays. Of those three works, one (*Antonio's Revenge*) finds general mention only as a spectacularized and stylized foil to *Hamlet*.[1] Indeed, only a single work – *The Dutch Courtesan* – today receives attention approaching any degree of regularity: Susan Baker, Donna Hamilton, and Jean Howard have each written outstanding materialist/feminist appraisals.[2] This continuing paucity of critical regard is especially surprising given the astonishing generic range and inventiveness of Marston's plays as well as their incisive representations of a particularly volatile period in early modern culture. Marston collaborated brilliantly with some of the most distinguished dramatists of the period (Ben Jonson and George Chapman on *Eastward Ho!*; John Webster on additions to *The Malcontent*) and also mischievously burlesqued the genres they themselves defined. As one of the principal players in the so-called war of the theaters and as director of St. Paul's, Marston proved to be one of the most powerful forces behind the resurgence of the private theater. The energy and dynamism of his works, choreographed in a brilliant fusion of histrionics, song, dumbshow, and spectacle, suggest a vision of dramaturgy unique upon the early Jacobean stage. And yet, T.S. Eliot's near century-old pronouncement that Marston's 'merits are still a matter for controversy' remains as true today as ever.[3]

The Drama of John Marston: Critical Re-Visions, a collection of twelve essays, sets out to challenge this continuing oversight. In the volume's introduction, T.F. Wharton reflects upon this history of critical neglect, concluding that today's postmodern condition allows contemporary readers an 'instant acces-

sibility' to Marston's 'de-centered and destabilizing, anarchically playful, constantly transgress[ive]' works. As Wharton notes, each of the following essays eschews the moralist tradition that historically has dominated critical evaluations of Marston (although such a summation unfortunately overlooks P.J. Finkelpearl's outstanding study, which directed attention away from Marston's 'excessive' product to the diverse and often ideologically contradictory factors of its production).[4] However, his generalized depiction of the philosophical, ideological, and aesthetic properties of postmodern culture and its attempted part-and-parcel application to Marston's plays serves more to illustrate the continued difficulty in appreciating his works rather than afford an easy solution to the oversight. For, as both essays by Rick Bowers and Reavley Gair on the performative conditions of the plays explain, Marston was an especially acute critic of the ideological factors dominating theatrical modes of representation on the Jacobean stage. In his discussion of the *Antonio* plays, Bowers assiduously dismantles traditional suppositions that the works must be judged in light of (and were indeed informed by) classical moral frameworks. Gair provides an enlightening historical complement to Bowers's essay with his examination of Marston's carefully constructed dramatic response to the changing physical environments of his playhouses and the aesthetic/ideological demands of their audiences. Both authors, in fact, demonstrate that Marston's pre-modern condition is decidedly *not* equivalent to our postmodern one, that in order to understand the dynamics of Marston's theatricality we must understand the contingent historical nature of the production of his plays and, subsequently, confront the *difference* of Jacobean and postmodern ideologies.

Matthew Steggle's essay offers an intriguing application of the preceding analyses' ideological implications with its claim that the paralleling of the dramaturgical methods (poetry, dumbshow, and especially the music) comprising *What You Will*, a particularly neglected comedy, produces a 'fantasy' allowing for an unprecedented level of creative play and freedom. Steggle notes that the theme and variation construction of the play (one which mirrors contemporary musical patterns) generates a representational mode profoundly different from the traditional Jonsonian model. Steggle's analysis is extended in Patrick Buckridge's subsequent offering, which lifts the stylized fantasy of *What You Will* to the level of a general dramaturgical project. Specifically, Buckridge suggests that Marston adopted a highly specific strategy – 'recreation' – to avoid the political scourge of censorship. Rather than mere rhetorical flourish, his plays' abundance of 'traditional encrypting devices' (including allegory, emblem, and typology) directs audience attention away from 'real

world' applications to the enjoyment of the literary process itself. Like most of the preceding essays, Buckridge finds special interest in Marston's inductions, particularly the prologues to *Jack Drum's Entertainment* and *Antonio and Mellida*. Far from serving simply as troupe introductions, Buckridge asserts, these audience exchanges are essential components of a calculated reception theory, one which focuses attention upon the structure and method of the fictive creations rather than transcendent moral truth. In his rendering, the constant play and slippage between the ideal of art and the real of entertainment are the true foci of Marston's efforts. Attention to aesthetic process rather than ideological product (Buckridge calls Marston's plays 'surprisingly apolitical and ethically neutral') thus becomes a necessary condition if a 'transgressive' theater is to survive the mandates of an increasingly repressive society.

Indeed, if there is a weakness to the volume it comes in this continuing widespread disavowal of Marston's interest in or engagement with the political. For instance, both Richard Scarr and William W.E. Slights' essays ostensibly focus upon the connection between gender and discourse as manifested in the plays. Scarr finds that Marston's notoriously lewd punning proliferates throughout individual plays until the audience is irrevocably caught up within this 'ejaculatory' wet dream. Slights interprets Marston's portrayal of the onanstic, pornographic, fantasy-infected males of *The Fawn* as a daring commentary on the narcissistic world of the patriarchal order – the ultimate practice of 'self-abuse'. Both authors are certainly correct in their claims that the young women of Marston's plays are often far more playful, frank, and ostensibly 'healthy' in their views toward sexuality than are his (sexually) self-absorbed and anxiety-ridden male protagonists. But both prefer to examine the politics of performance, turning criticism once again to the satirical 'nature' of Marston's drama, rather than the politics of the discourses that themselves construct such dichotomies. In this manner, each eschews the particularly 'transgressive' correlation between discourses of monarchical authority and discourses of gender in works such as *The Fawn* and *The Malcontent*, a correlation which exposes the politics at the very core of representation itself.

Wharton's own contribution to the volume, in fact, focuses upon this very connection. As Wharton explains, the theatrical representation of the correlation between sex and politics in *The Malcontent* serves as an extended parody of King James' own political theater, here taking the form of an all-pervasive 'aggressively sexualized' atmosphere that is itself a by-product of anxiety-ridden masculinity. In a compelling attempt to identify the source of Marston's defiant lack of thematic consistency, Kiernan Ryan subsequently uncovers a

Lacanian hysteria within Altofronto/Malevole, the usurped protagonist of *The Malcontent*. His anxiety-ridden masculinity is thus itself a symptom of the capitalism's insatiable demand – a 'frantic struggle' over the integrity of his sexual identity which manifests itself in an assault against all that is perceived as feminine. Sukanya Senapati's outstanding essay delves even deeper into these politics of gender, exposing how Marston's plays are truly 'radical' in Jonathan Dollimore's sense of the term. Reaching far beyond stylized fantasy and 'recreation', they interrogate from within the very foundations of gender politics. Senapati convincingly claims that Marston not only critically engages the homosocial discourse of the early modern patriarchy, but that he also offers an alternative understanding of patriarchal ideology through the varied and complex arguments of an ideologically diverse group of female characters who refuse to accept their subordinate and abject conditions. Although her proleptic reading of post-Englightenment hetero- and homosexual subject positions into early modern drama is somewhat problematic, Senapati's essay offers an important extension of gender theory into Marston studies.

The volume's concluding offerings return once again to issues of censorship, satire, and performance. Janet Clare argues that Marston consistently attempted to assert his poetic liberty even as political censure moved ever closer to outright censorship. David Pascoe re-traces Marston's transposition of classical and continental sources such as Lucretius, Virgil, and particularly Montaigne, in *The Dutch Courtesan*. And, recalling Wharton's introduction, Michael Scott calls for a serious reconsideration if not of Marston's literary greatness then certainly of his compelling dramaturgical pyrotechnics and surrealist theatricality. If, as a whole, the volume fails to fulfill its opening claim that renewed attention is due Marston for his adumbration of a postmodern dramaturgy and mindset, certainly several of its individual essays – particularly those by Senapati, Ryan, and Buckridge – offer important new and potentially influential perspectives upon a playwright whose political and aesthetic achievements have been too long overlooked by modern critics.

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Notes

1 See Peter Mercer, *Hamlet and the Acting of Revenge* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1987) for a particularly compelling interpretation of *Antonio's Revenge* in this vein.
2 Susan Baker, "Sex and Marriage in *The Dutch Courtesan*", *in In Another Country*, ed. Susan Baker (Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1991), 218–32. Donna B. Hamilton, "Language as Theme in *The Dutch Courtesan*". *Renaissance Drama* 5 (1972): 75–87. Jean Howard, "Mastering Difference in The Dutch Courtesan", *Shakespeare Studies* xxiv (1996): 105–17.
3 T.S. Eliot, *Essays on Elizabethan Drama* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1956).
4 Philip J. Finkelpearl, *John Marston of the Middle Temple* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969).