

The Poets' War Revisited

Rebecca Yearling, Keele University

After a hundred years or so of relative neglect, the War of the Poets—the literary quarrel between a small group of playwrights, including Ben Jonson, Thomas Dekker, John Marston and perhaps William Shakespeare, in the late 16th and early 17th centuries¹—has begun to come back into favor as a subject for serious literary investigation.² However, despite the valuable work done by a number of recent studies, there is much about the War that still remains puzzling—and one of the central puzzles is the question of quite how and why John Marston got involved. The fact that Jonson and Dekker participated in the War to at least some extent is undeniable—their plays *The Poetaster; or, The Arraignment* (1601) and *Satiromastix; or The Untrussing of the Humourous Poet* (1601)—are clearly topical, and contain personal attacks by each playwright on his rival(s). However, Marston's role is harder to pin down. On the one hand, we have what appears to be a piece of relatively solid evidence: in 1619 the Scottish poet William Drummond, a friend of Jonson's, reported that Jonson

had many quarrels with Marston: beat him, and took his pistol from him; wrote his *Poetaster* on him. The beginning of them were that Marston represented him in the stage.

(‘Informations to William Drummond’ 216-8)

On the other hand, that is virtually *all* we have. There is no evidence that Marston worked on *Satiromastix*³, and Marston's only direct allusion to the poets' quarrel in his own work suggests his desire to remain (or, at least, to appear to remain) detached: in *What You Will*, the witty Quadratus pointedly refuses to enter into a slanging-match with his rival Lampatho, and when told, “I'll be reveng'd,” he answers mockingly, “How prithee? in a play?” (4.1.1555).⁴ Moreover, those characters in Marston's plays who have been suggested by

critics as possible caricatures of Jonson are all, in various ways, problematic, in that they often seem to resemble Marston himself at least as much as they do his competitor.

In this essay, I hope to show why some previous interpretations of the War—particularly those of James Bednarz—may be open to dispute. I want to argue that Marston and Jonson each employed the personal caricatures of the Poets' War to a very different end. While Jonson was using the War's personations as a technique to distinguish himself from his literary competitors, promoting his own works as being superior to those of his rivals, Marston was working to blur such distinctions, to emphasize the kinship between himself and Jonson, rather than their differences.

1

The earliest character in Marston's work who might be intended as a portrait of Jonson is Chrisoganus in *Histriomastix*. Indeed, some critics have suggested that Chrisoganus is the 'application' that kicked off the Poets' War: the original place where Marston "represented [Jonson] in the stage."⁵ Bednarz favors this view:

Like Jonson, Chrisoganus is an impoverished poet, scholar, and playwright who seeks advancement through patronage and commercial drama [...] Like Jonson, he is a talented poet, known for his dedication to the pursuit of universal knowledge as the foundation of good writing. Like Jonson, he is known as a translator, who specializes in writing satires, epigrams, and plays that employ a characteristically "smooth" style. And like Jonson, Chrisoganus is enraged by the lack of respect he receives from the professional players with whom he negotiates the sale of his scripts.⁶

Bednarz makes a passable case for the identification of Chrisoganus with Jonson, but there are aspects of his argument that seem tenuous. For example, Bednarz implies that Chrisoganus is like Jonson in his "characteristically 'smooth' style", but in fact Jonson's style is *not* particularly 'smooth'. His verse is less syncopated and convoluted than Marston's, true, but it is far more rugged than—for example—the typical verse of Shakespeare from this period. Furthermore, we know very little of Jonson's relationships with the professional

playing companies in the last years of the sixteenth century: the claim that Jonson is like Chrisogonus in being “enraged by the lack of respect he receives” from such people is therefore based on scant evidence. Equally, Chrisogonus may “seek[] advancement through patronage and commercial drama”, but the same might have been said of multiple dramatists of the time; it was hardly an ambition limited to Jonson.

Bednarz seeks to buttress his argument with the claim that the name ‘Chrisogonus’ had already been used to refer to Jonson. This idea comes from Tom Cain’s edition of *Poetaster*, in which he comments “Marston probably took the name from the epigram ‘Of Chrysogonus’ in his cousin Everard Guilpin’s *Skialetheia*.”⁷ However, the original epigram seems to have very little in it that might lead one to assume it was specifically intended as an attack on Jonson:

Chrysogonus each morning by his glasse,
Teacheth a wrinckled action to his face,
And with the same he runnes into the street,
Each one to put in feare that he doth meet:
I prythee tell me (gentle Chrysogone)
What needs a borrowed bad face to thine owne?

Guilpin’s Chrysogonus is an ugly man who makes ugly faces. Jonson, too, was notoriously ugly. However, without more evidence (Guilpin’s Chrysogonus is not identified as a writer, nor does he have any other features that connect him with Jonson), this seems a somewhat inconclusive link between the pair, and Bednarz’s claim that “Guilpin’s epigram is the first published parody of Jonson” thus seems an over-confident one.⁸

There are, therefore, clearly features that might link Chrisogonus to Jonson, but several of these are features that might also link him to other dramatists of the time, including to Marston himself. Chrisogonus is a satirist and so was Jonson, but so too was Marston. Chrisogonus and Jonson are both ‘translators’, but Marston’s early works also owed something to translation. His erotic epyllion *The Metamorphosis of Pigmalion’s Image*

(1598) was based on Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and also made use of Ovid's *Amores*, while his verse satires are modelled on the works of classical satirists. Indeed, in Satire 6 of *The Scourge of Villainy*, 'Hem nosti'n', his satiric alter ego Kinsayder protests against readers who accuse him of merely putting together a hodge-podge of bits of classical translation, as he introduces the character of foolish Friscus, who is imagined attacking the satires, saying "[T]hat's Persius vaine, / That's Juvenals, heere's Horace crabbed straine...". Moreover, Chrisoganus's satirical rants against his society sound as much like Marston's verse satires as they do the rantings of Jonson's Asper or Macilente in *Every Man Out Of His Humour* (1599). If either Jonson or Marston was to be accused in the late 1590s of "think[ing] you carry just *Ramnusia's* whippe / To lash the patient", as Chrisoganus is (2: 258), then Marston is just as likely a candidate. Indeed, in *The Scourge*, Marston had actually written that "I Beare the scourge of just *Rhamnusia*, / Lashing the lewdnes of *Britania*" ('Proemium in librum primum'). By this reading, Chrisoganus seems as much an ironic self-portrait as it is a hostile caricature of a rival.

2

Besides Chrisoganus, there are two other characters in Marston's plays who have been repeatedly identified as portraits of Jonson: Brabant Senior in *Jack Drum's Entertainment* (c.1600) and Lampatho Doria in *What You Will* (c.1601).

Brabant Senior is one of *Jack Drum's* principal satirical targets: a self-satisfied would-be wit, who enjoys exposing and mocking fools, and who believes that his pleasure in the folly of others displays his intelligence and taste:

BRABANT SR.: Why tis the recreation of my Intellect, I think I speake as significant, ha, ha, these are my zanyes, I fill their paunches, they feed my pleasures, I use them as my fooles faith, ha, ha.

(1:193)

One important argument for the identification between Jonson and Brabant Senior comes in Act 4, in which the following exchange takes place between Brabant Senior, Planet, and Brabant's younger brother, Brabant Junior:

BRABANT JUNIOR: Brother, how like you our modern wits?

How like you the new poet Mellidus?

BRABANT SENIOR: A slight, bubbling spirit, a cork, a husk.

PLANET: How like you Musus's fashion in his carriage?

BRABANT SENIOR: Oh filthily; he is as blunt as Paul's.

BRABANT JUNIOR: What think you of the lines of Decius?

Writes he not good cordial sappy style?

BRABANT SENIOR: A surreined Jaded wit, but a' rubs on.

The three men are discussing new poets, and the line 'he is as blunt as Paul's' may imply that the three named poets are connected with the St Paul's theatre, for which Marston was currently writing.⁹ Furthermore, it has been suggested that 'Mellidus' may be a pseudonym for Marston, referring to his authorship of the 1599 *Antonio and Mellida*. If these two assumptions are true, then here, Brabant Senior is aiming a blow at Marston, the Paul's playwright, for being trivial and insubstantial. In Act 5, Brabant Senior goes on to attack the St Paul's theatre again. Planet and Brabant Junior have been praising the Paul's company, saying that the boys' performances have "pleasde [them] prettie, prettie well" and that the theatre audience is admirably select and refined. However, Brabant Senior complains,

I and they had good Playes, but they produce
Such mustie fopperies of antiquitie,
And do not suit the humorous ages backs
With cloathes in fashion.

(5:234)

Together, these two exchanges may seem conclusive. Jonson was an enemy of Marston's and, by extension, of the St Paul's theatre. Brabant Senior's dislike of Mellidus/Marston and the plays his company performs nicely tally with Jonson's own known attitudes and behavior from this period. Brabant Senior therefore equals Jonson.

However, again it is not that simple. Brabant Senior's words do indeed recall the attitudes of Jonson—but they also recall the attitudes of Marston. Indeed, they recall the words of Marston's own prologue to *Jack Drum*, in which he had promised

not to torment your listning eares
With mouldy fopperies of stale Poetry,
Unpossible drie mustie Fictions...
(179)

In Act 5 of *Jack Drum*, therefore, Brabant reiterates Marston's own criticisms of the St Paul's repertoire, in almost the same words. Moreover, it is interesting to note that Brabant's term for Marston/'Mellidus'—'slight'—is the same term that Marston uses repeatedly to describe himself and his works in his prologues and inductions.¹⁰

This has, I think, to complicate our response to Brabant Senior. It is true that the character resembles Jonson in some aspects. However, he *also* seems to resemble Marston—and the play seems to want to draw that resemblance to the audience's attention, by having Brabant speak lines that are very similar to the author's own lines in the play's prologue. As with the character of Chrisoganus, we may therefore feel confused: how can Brabant Senior be a hostile portrait of Jonson if he is also, in some sense, a portrait of Marston?

The other contender as a caricature of Jonson in Marston's works is Lampatho Doria in *What You Will*. Lampatho is a scholar, playwright and satirist in the Juvenalian mould: a bitter and misanthropic man who rails at the world in a manner that recalls Asper, the principal spokesman in the induction to Jonson's *Every Man Out*:

LAMPATHO: Dirt upon dirt, fear is beneath my shoe;
Dreadless of racks, strappados, or the sword,
Maugre informer and sly intelligence,
I'll stand as confident as Hercules,
And with a frightless resolution
Rip up and launce our time's impieties.
(3.2.1121-6)

Lampatho spends much of the play sparring with a very different kind of playwright: the witty and ‘fantastical’ Quadratus, who criticizes Lampatho for his bitterness and jealousy of the world, and whom modern critics often read as a self-portrait by Marston.

In fact, though, nineteenth century scholars such as Fleay identified Lampatho as a caricature not of Jonson but of Marston himself, and believed that Jonson was represented in the play as Quadratus. Their main evidence for this claim was the line in *What You Will* in which Quadratus attacks Lampatho by calling him “Don Kinsayder”: Marston’s own satiric persona from his verse satires:

QUADRATUS: Away idolator! why you Don Kinsayder,
Thou canker-eaten rusty cur,
Thou snaffle to freer spirits!
(2.1.531-3)

Bednarz explains these lines by arguing that Marston had moved on since writing the verse satires:

Lampatho Doria unfortunately matches Don Kinsayder’s worst traits in the context of a play that emphasizes Marston’s greater tolerance for fantasy and pleasure. [...] Marston no longer represented himself in that manner [i.e. as a railing Kinsayder-type], and rather than identifying himself with Lampatho Doria, the overly harsh critic of *What You Will*, he forcefully denigrated his discarded persona and by implication all those, such as Jonson, who emulated its castrating wit.¹¹

However, again there are problems in identifying Lampatho unequivocally with Jonson. It seems just as possible that Marston is mocking himself and his own earlier persona from the verse satires here as he is mocking Jonson’s current persona. Indeed, he began to distance himself from the Kinsayder persona, and mock it, from the last satire of *The Scourge of Villainy* itself, in which he announced, “Here ends my rage, though angry brow was bent / Yet I have sung in sporting merriment.” (‘Humours’).

Lampatho does, of course, have some things in common with Jonson. Both are satirists and playwrights; both are capable of bitterness, and attracted by the idea that satire could “rhyme [men] dead” (WYW 2.1.518); both use plays as vehicles for attacking their

enemies; both are scholars (although Lampatho is explicitly a university man, of seven years' standing, whereas Jonson was self-taught after grammar school). However, there are also aspects of Lampatho that link him with Marston—and not merely the Kinsayder reference. In Act 2, for example, Lampatho is seen fawning on a French lord, only to mock and abuse him to Quadratus the moment he is gone. This seems hard to square with the image of Jonson as a proud dramatist who, in his inductions and prologues, staunchly refuses to flatter or pander to fools¹²—and again, it seems closer to the persona developed by Marston in his own inductions and prologues, in which he typically posed as a (possibly insincere) flatterer of his spectators:

For we do know that this most fair-filled room
 Is loaden with most Attic judgements, ablest spirits,
 Than whom there are none more exact, full, strong,
 Yet none more soft, benign in censuring;

 Now if that any wonder why [the author's] drawn
 To such base soothings, know his play's – The Fawn.
 (*The Fawn* prologue 23-6, 34-5)

Meanwhile, in Act 4 of *What You Will*, Lampatho reads out a couple of lines of verse that he has written:

LAMPATHO: *Adored excellence, judicious sweet—*
 QUADRATUS: 'Delicious sweet'! good, very good.
 LAMPATHO: *If thou canst taste the purer juice of love —*
 QUADRATUS: 'If thou canst taste the purer juice': good still, good still. I do relish it, it tastes sweet.
 LAMPATHO: Is not the metaphor good, is't not well followed?
 (4.1.1541-6)

As Charles Cathcart points out:

[T]he line which Lampatho recites, and Quadratus repeats, resembles Marston's verse rather than Jonson's, and does so both in its use of the comparative without a referent and in its very choice of phrase. The prologue to *Antonio and Mellida* wishes that 'our muse... might press out the rarity of art, / The pur'st elixed juice of rich conceit / In your attentive ears.' [...] Are we faced, therefore, with the possibility that Marston is in *What You Will* satirizing his own writing? Or, more precisely, articulating Ben Jonson's satire of his own work? [...] ¹³

In addition, Lampatho is described in the play as being “A pretty youth, a pretty well-shap’d youth, a good leg, a very good eye, a sweet ingenious face, and I warrant a good wit...” (WYW 4.1.1611-3). This may or may not have been the way in which Marston would characterize his own appearance, but, as Finkelpearl points out, it certainly doesn’t sound much like Jonson, given that he was described in *Satiromastix* as being dark and ugly.¹⁴

The figure of Lampatho Doria is therefore a problematic one, just as those of Chrisoganus and Brabant Senior are. The majority of modern critics—scholars such as Anne Barton, Bednarz, Tom Cain and Matthew Steggle—read him as either partly or wholly a Jonson-figure, but there are many dissenting voices. David Farley-Hills argues that Lampatho is a self-parody by Marston; M.R. Woodhead thinks Jonson is represented as Quadratus; Michael Neill, Macdonald P. Jackson and Charles Cathcart have all suggested that Lampatho may be a kind of amalgam of both Jonson and Marston; and Philip Finkelpearl has argued that the play is not part of the War of the Poets at all, and nobody in it is intended to represent *anybody* in the real world, while also noting that, in his opinion, Lampatho ‘embodies some of [Marston’s] traits and almost none of Jonson’s.’¹⁵

Marston’s role in the Poets’ War therefore seems enigmatic. Did he respond to Jonson’s attack on him in *Poetaster* and caricature his colleague in his own plays? If so, why are his ‘Jonson-figures’ not more clearly and unequivocally ‘Jonson-figures’? And why—even more mysteriously—do they seem so ready to turn also into ‘Marston-figures’?

3

There is a way, though, of explaining these oddities if we assume that, in his participation in the War of the Poets (such as it was), Marston was not working to the same ends as Jonson and Dekker. In plays like *Poetaster* and *Satiromastix*, the hostile intent behind the personations is evident: Jonson wants to mock and hurt Marston and Dekker, and Dekker

wants to mock and hurt Jonson in return. However, Marston's attitude is rather different: in his plays from this period, he seems to be not out to attack Jonson so much as he is to emphasize the similarities between himself and his colleague. Rather than using the War to distinguish himself from his rivals, as Jonson attempts to do, Marston uses his personations as ways of blurring real life individuals together. By creating characters—Chrisogonus, Brabant Senior, Lampatho—who can be read as either dramatist or as both, Marston implies that he and Jonson have much in common.¹⁶

This, of course, would almost certainly have only served to irritate Jonson. On the evidence of *Poetaster*, he did not like Marston's literary style, disapproving of his convoluted diction and syntax. Moreover, he may have disliked the idea of anyone else competing with him on his own turf, writing the same kind of satirical comedies that he was engaged on. Jonson was not keen on having competition; he did not want to be seen as Marston's equal or equivalent. Crispinus/Marston's claim that he and Horace/Jonson were alike, though, cannot be quickly dismissed. Indeed, as David Riggs comments in his 1989 biography of Jonson,

Jonson and Marston had so much in common that an informer observer, looking at the two men in 1601, might have supposed they were mirror images. They were the two prominent figures in the satirical movement of the late 1590s; they both set out to free satire from "those strict and regular formes, which the nicenesse of a few (who are nothing but forme) would thrust upon us," and they both agree with Horace that the satirist was, nevertheless, obliged to preserve a measure of decorum.¹⁷

Whatever Jonson tried to insist to the contrary, there were similarities between himself and Marston during this period. Both were experimental playwrights; both were interested in both the practice and the theory of dramatic satire, and in exploring the complexities of the relationship between the didactic playwright and his audience. Jonson was eager to distinguish himself from his colleague by painting himself in *Poetaster* as a true artist and Marston as merely a plagiarising hack. Marston, however, worked against Jonson's attempt

to create a sense of distinction and hierarchy, by suggesting that in fact he and Jonson were essentially brothers under the skin.

Marston's reasons for this cannot, of course, be known. Perhaps he genuinely wanted Jonson to recognize him as a kindred spirit, creating a kind of community of satiric theatre poets. That said, the portraits of Lampatho and Brabant Senior, in particular, are not flattering¹⁸, so perhaps Marston's aim was itself more satirical: he wanted to make fun of the follies of would-be satirists and social critics and so created characters that might recall both himself and his rival, the two most eminent practitioners of satiric drama at the time.¹⁹ A third possibility, however, is that Marston was simply trying to annoy Jonson in the most effective way possible. In his own writings from this period, Jonson repeatedly insists that he is indifferent to negative criticism. He "knows the strength of his own muse" and cannot be hurt by "that common spawn of ignorance, / Our fry of writers", who try to slander him and his works (*Poetaster* induction 85, 79-80). Jonson's typical pose during the War, as seen in his inductions, prologues and epilogues, is one of aloofness and superiority. Given that, perhaps the approach that Marston deemed most likely to infuriate him was not a direct attack, but an imputation of likeness: a suggestion that Jonson was not as unique or special as he liked to think. Ironically, perhaps, the best way to attack Jonson during this period was to proclaim oneself not his enemy but his reflection.

¹ The conflict is also sometimes referred to as the War of the Theatres, although this phrase has slightly different connotations, and is usually used to describe not so much the quarrel between the playwrights themselves as the apparent rivalry between the boy companies of the private theatres and the adult companies of the public ones. The War of the Poets, by

contrast, seems to have continued even when Jonson was himself writing for a boy company, with *Cynthia's Revels* at the Blackfriars.

² For early studies of the War, see Frederick Gard Fleay, *A Biographical Chronicle of the English Drama, 1559-1642*, 2 vols. (London: Reeves and Turner, 1891); Josiah Penniman, *The War of the Theatres* (Boston: Ginn, 1897); R.A. Small, *The Stage-Quarrel Between Ben Jonson and the So-Called Poetasters* (Breslau: M. & H. Marcus, 1899); William Gifford, *The Works of Ben Jonson*, Vol. 2 (London: Bickers and Son, 1875) 453. Many of the findings of these early studies are queried in Morse S. Allen, *The Satire of John Marston* (1920; New York: Haskell House Publishers Ltd., 1971) 31-42, and John J. Enck, 'The Peace of the Poetomachia,' *PMLA* 77.4 (1962) 386-96. For important recent studies, see Cyrus Hoy, *Introductions, Notes, and Commentaries to Texts in The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, 4 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980) vol. 1, 179–310; Tom Cain, *Introduction, Poetaster* ed. Tom Cain (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995); Matthew Steggle, *Wars of The Theatres: The Poetics of Personation in the Age of Jonson*, English Literary Studies Monograph Series No. 75 (Victoria BC: Victoria University Press, 1998); James Bednarz, *Shakespeare and the Poets' War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001); Charles Cathcart, *Marston, Rivalry, Rapprochement and Jonson* (Aldershot and Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2008).

³ Some critics have suggested that Dekker and Marston may have collaborated on this play, based on the fact that in the address that prefaces the published edition of *Satiromastix*, Dekker writes that "the Poetasters untruss'd Horace" ('To the World' 12). However, this may simply mean that within the play, the characters Crispinus and Demetrius—the two poetasters from *Poetaster*—are seen getting their revenge on Horace/Jonson. The play was published only under Dekker's name and, throughout, it sounds more like his work than it does Marston's.

⁴ There is currently no good, comprehensive edition of Marston's complete works, so for quotations from Marston I have used the following editions: for *What You Will*, ed. M.R. Woodhead, Nottingham Drama Texts (Nottingham: Nottingham University Press, 1980); for *Parasitaster; or The Fawn*, ed. David A. Blostein, Revels Plays (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978); for *Histriomastix* and *Jack Drum's Entertainment*, *The Plays of John Marston* vol. 3, ed. H. Harvey Wood (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1939). This latter edition is the only currently available printed text of these plays, and it preserves original spelling and punctuation. Because the Wood edition has no line numbers, quotations from these two plays will be followed by act and page number. Quotations from *The Scourge of Villainy* are taken from *The Poems of John Marston*, ed. Arnold Davenport (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1961). For all quotations from Jonson's works, I have used the Cambridge Edition of *The Works of Ben Jonson*, 7 vols, ed. David Bevington, Martin Butler and Ian Donaldson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁵ Marston's authorship of *Histriomastix* has been disputed by Rosalyn Knutson in 'Histriomastix: Not By John Marston,' *Studies in Philology* 98 (2001): 359-77. The play's history is somewhat obscure, and Knutson has argued that it may not be Marston's at all as, in her view, it is not in his usual style: 'it lacks not only the marks of Marstonian prosody and imagery, but also the topicality of Marstonian allusions'. Knutson's argument is interesting, but not conclusive: she ignores the fact that if Marston wrote the play, it was probably in the late 1590s, very early in his career, when he might not yet have established his familiar dramatic style. Moreover, it is possible that in *Histriomastix* Marston was reworking an older play, which would explain some of its apparently 'un-Marstonian' elements. Its pageant-like qualities and heavy symbolism certainly feel old-fashioned for the late 1590s. Thirdly, as Philip Finkelpearl suggests, *Histriomastix* may well have been written under specialised circumstances—perhaps for performance at the Inns of Court—which might explain some of

its oddities. As Finkelpearl points out, the exceptionally large cast required by the play would seem to put it beyond the capabilities of an ordinary acting company. *Histriomastix* ‘require[s] the kind of manpower that only an academic environment could supply’.

Meanwhile, Bednarz, Lake and Cathcart give highly convincing analyses of the play in which they argue that it does fit with Marston’s known work in terms of its themes, preoccupations and techniques. They conclude—and I agree—that it seems likely to have been either a Marstonian rewriting of an earlier work or a piece by Marston that was then ‘lightly overwritten by another hand.’ Philip Finkelpearl, *John Marston of the Middle Temple: An Elizabethan Dramatist in His Social Setting* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1969): 120-3; D.J. Lake, ‘*Histriomastix*: Linguistic Evidence for Authorship,’ *Notes and Queries* 226 (1981): 148-52; Bednarz, ‘Writing and Revenge: John Marston’s *Histriomastix*,’ *Comparative Drama* 36.1/2 (2002): 21-51; Cathcart, 10-12.

⁶ Bednarz, ‘Writing and Revenge’ 25-6.

⁷ Cain, 32.

⁸ Bednarz, *Poets’ War* 85.

⁹ St Paul’s Cathedral had, at the time, a flat, ‘blunt’ roof.

¹⁰ *Antonio and Mellida*’s prologue, for example, describes itself as “a present of slight idleness”, while *What You Will*’s induction characterizes the play as “a slight toy, lightly composed”. Charles Cathcart discusses Marston’s “obsessive” use of the word “slight” in *Marston, Rivalry* 95-6, 98

¹¹ Bednarz, ‘Writing and Revenge’ 33-4.

¹² See, for example, the famous epilogue to *Cynthia’s Revels*: “To crave your favour with a begging knee / Were to distrust the writer’s faculty.”

¹³ Cathcart, 22-3.

¹⁴ Finkelpearl, 163.

¹⁵ David Farley-Hills, *Shakespeare and the Rival Playwrights 1600-1660* (Routledge, 1990) 54; M.R. Woodhead, iii; Jackson and Neill, xiv; Cathcart, 72 (and throughout); Finkelpearl, 164.

¹⁶ This idea had been put forward by critics before Cathcart. Anne Barton, for example, suggested that Chrisoganus in *Histriomastix* may well be intended as a composite Jonson-Marston figure, created in order to suggest “that the two men were fundamentally in alliance”. Barton, *Ben Jonson, Dramatist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984): 60-1.

¹⁷ David Riggs, *Ben Jonson: A Life* (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1989): 79.

¹⁸ The question of whether Chrisoganus is a flattering portrait or a hostile one is more difficult to answer. He is presented as a learned scholar and skilled poet, but he is also ineffectual, unable to reform his society through his satirical attacks. Moreover, while Chrisoganus rails at the follies of others, he fails to acknowledge the ways in which he too is flawed—most notably, the fact that he suffers from the vices of Envy and Pride. For discussions of how to interpret Chrisoganus see, for example, Alvin Kernan, ‘John Marston’s Play *Histriomastix*,’ *Modern Language Quarterly* 19 (1958) 137-8; George L. Geckle, *John Marston’s Drama: Themes, Images, Sources* (London: Associated UP, 1980) 36-47; Barton, 59-61.

¹⁹ Or perhaps, more specifically, as Cathcart has suggested, he was aiming to mock the ridiculousness of satirical dramatists who attempted to present themselves on stage in a flattering light, portraying themselves within their own plays as wise, learned and kind-spirited. Cathcart, 165, notes that Marston ‘seems rather alive to the ridiculous element in these self-serving mechanisms’.