

## Further information about the project

### THE OXFORD EDITION OF *THE WORKS OF JOHN MARSTON*

**General Editors**  
**Martin Butler (University of Leeds)**  
**Matthew Steggle (Bristol University)**

John Marston (1576-1634) is one of the most exciting and rewarding playwrights of the English Renaissance. The author or reviser of a dozen surviving plays, two volumes of verse, and two aristocratic entertainments, he had a short but sensational career as a London playwright before taking the cloth in 1609 and disappearing into a living in Hampshire.

As a writer, Marston achieved some spectacular successes and personal notoriety. His snarling satires, printed in 1598, were amongst a group of literary texts that were called in and burned. He was one of the central figures in the so-called 'War of the Theatres', in which playwrights traded insults from rival stages; Ben Jonson attacked him in his satirical comedy *Poetaster* (1601), and claimed to have beaten him and taken his pistol from him. Marston's collaborative play *Eastward Ho!* (co-written with Jonson and George Chapman) created a furore, offending the court so much that Jonson and Chapman were imprisoned, though Marston seems to have escaped by going into hiding. His other plays, and particularly his two enduring masterpieces, *The Malcontent* and *The Dutch Courtesan*, exhibit keen satire of political and social life. One contemporary claimed that he was 'sent away westward for carping both at court, city, and country' (A. Nixon, *The Black Year*, 1606); another describes him as 'lifting up [his] leg and pissing against the world' (*The Return from Parnassus*, part 2, ed. Leishman, 1.2.266). His ten years' productivity coincides with the most vigorous period of Elizabeth and Jacobean theatre, and he was one of that theatre's most distinctive figures.

Marston's work touches on major intellectual and political currents of his age, and exemplifies the conflicted Jacobean mindset. Machiavelli and Montaigne profoundly influenced his thought, but they register as disturbing rather than enabling influences. His view of the domestic world is tangled and his politics are conservative, yet his works are intellectually radical and formally innovative. The

plays adopt orthodox political and religious frameworks, but their closures are undermined by corrosive political disenchantment and philosophical scepticism. The famously contradictory hero of *The Malcontent* – who calls himself Malevole at one moment and Altofront at the next – embodies this unsettling self-divided mode.

Later times found Marston stimulating and shocking by turns. For example, T. S. Eliot deplored his indecency and formal incoherence, but used a snatch of Marston as the epigraph to one of his poems, and perceptively felt that he was ‘occupied in saying something else than appears in the literal actions and characters whom he manipulates’ (*Selected Essays*, 229). Eliot’s conflicted response echoed the playwright’s dizzying combination of aggressive self-assertion and nihilistic self-cancelling. Famously, Marston’s tomb carried the inscription *Oblivioni sacrum*.

Marston presents the unusual circumstance of a dramatist who was reluctant to see his work in print. When *The Fawn* was printed in 1606, it carried a preface explaining that it was meant only for the stage: ‘If any shall wonder why I print a comedy whose life rests much in the actors’ voice, let such know that it cannot avoid publishing; let it therefore stand with good excuse, that I have been my own setter-out’ (sig. A2). The only early collected edition, *The Works of Mr John Marston, being Tragedies and Comedies* (1633) appeared towards the end of his life. This reprinted six plays but excluded *The Malcontent*, and was issued without his approval: he intervened to have his name removed from the title-page. Thereafter the plays were unprinted for generations, and although in modern times he has received attention and respect, his complete works have never been adequately edited. There are various single-play student editions, but the canon as a whole has never been systematically treated. The only full-dress editions – by J. O. Halliwell (1856), A. H. Bullen (1887), and H. H. Wood (1935-39) – are incomplete or seriously flawed, and for the nearest equivalent to a reliable working text of the plays scholars still tend to go all the way back to Bullen’s Victorian volumes. The absence of a standard edition has reinforced the situation of respectful neglect, especially as all his fellow dramatists – Jonson, Middleton, Webster, Dekker, Chapman, Beaumont and Fletcher, Ford, Shirley, Massinger, Heywood, and Brome – have received careful editorial attention. Marston is the only significant Renaissance dramatist whose works lack a secure scholarly foundation. This edition will remedy that deficiency.

## **The edition**

Marston's canon has the advantage of being comparatively manageable. His writings all belong to a compact ten-year period, and his plays are mostly quite short. We will accommodate the canon in four volumes, which will be organised chronologically.

The printed edition will be produced in modern spelling, with full on-page annotation and short but thorough critical and textual introductions. The tendency in the editing of early modern drama currently runs strongly towards modern-spelling texts. Although the CUP Webster and OUP Ford are in old spelling, modern spelling has been preferred for the CUP Jonson and the OUP Middleton, Heywood, Shirley, and Brome. The case for modern spelling has become more compelling with the development of accessible electronic databases of early modern printed texts. It is now comparatively easy for scholars to access good quality facsimiles of scarce quartos (EEBO, Luna) and old-spelling transcriptions (EEBO/TCP, LION). Since the two main objectives in editing Marston are to draw his well-known plays back within the context of his output as a whole and to make the whole canon readily accessible to readers, students, and performers, a high quality authoritative modern-spelling edition will best fulfil these ambitions. Principles for modernization are spelled out in the detailed edition Guidelines. Editors are writing full commentaries, which address questions of semantics, sources, stage-performance, music, etc. Illustrations of title pages will be included.

At the same time, though, we are also preparing a full-dress critical old-spelling edition for presentation on the OUP online platform, Oxford Scholarly Editions Online (OSEO), to be nested inside and searched alongside a modern-spelling digital text. The old-spelling edition will consist of text and collation, but will have no separate introductions or commentaries. Old-spelling and modern-spelling texts will be keyed to one another to enable cross-reference between the print and digital components. The old-spelling edition will satisfy the needs of scholars who wish to consult the original orthography and punctuation as it appears in the earliest printed texts and manuscripts. It is being conservatively edited, to a high level of detail, and includes a comprehensive collation of emendations and variants. Nonetheless, for ease of reading, some limited regularization will be incorporated, such as standardization of speech-headings, limited correction of punctuation, and occasional insertion of stage directions to clarify difficult moments in the action. The bulk of the old-spelling edition is being prepared by Dr José A Perez Diez.

The team consists of fourteen editors, including the General Editors, who are taking responsibility for the general introductions, and for *Jack Drum's Entertainment* (Steggle) and the aristocratic masques (Butler). The poems are all being handled by a single editor (Colin Burrow: Oxford). The paired plays, *Antonio and Mellida* and *Antonio's Revenge*, are also being given to one editor (David Lindley, Leeds). The other editors are: Janet Clare (Hull; *What You Will*), Richard Dutton (Ohio; *The Malcontent*), Suzanne Gossett (Loyola; *Sophonisba*); José A. Pérez Díez (Leeds) and Clare McManus (Roehampton; *The Fawn*), Lucy Munro (King's, London; *The Insatiate Countess*), Helen Ostovich (McMaster) and Erin Julian (Western Ontario; *The Dutch Courtesan*), Tony Parr (Western Cape; *Histriomastix*), and Lois Potter (Delaware; *Eastward Ho!*). Additionally, the music advisor is Linda Austern (Northwestern), and the Italian consultant is Domenico Lovascio (Genova).

It is intended to have texts ready for publication by 2022. Several public events have been held in relation to the project: a colloquium on attribution (London, 2016), a performance workshop at the Sam Wanamaker Theatre; a seminar at the Shakespeare Association of America (2017), a book-in-hand performance of *Antonio's Revenge* (Leeds, 2018), a conference at Oxford (2019), and a book-in-hand performance of *The Fawn* (2019).

Work on the edition is by now well advanced, and most of the modern-spelling texts are nearing completion. Around two-thirds of the old-spelling edition is already in hand, but editorial work is still to commence on four old-spelling texts: *The Dutch Courtesan*, *Histriomastix*, *Jack Drum's Entertainment*, and the Poems. For each of these texts we have old-spelling transcriptions and a substantial collation of variants, but each needs to be checked thoroughly against the original witnesses, standardized according to the principles of the edition, and to have a full collation written. Achieving this will be the principal task of the new research fellow.