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## **‘Marston wrote his father-in-law’s preachings, and his father-in-law his comedies’: *Of Obedience, or Ecclesiastical Unity* and the Dating of *The Malcontent***

*The point of Jonson’s joke, that ‘Marston wrote his father-in-law’s preachings, and his father-in-law his comedies’ has never been explained. The discovery that the father-in-law, William Wilkes, quotes directly from The Malcontent in his Of Obedience, or Ecclesiastical Unity reveals an important context of the play, the puritan push for church reform from the beginning of James’s reign, culminating in the 1604 Hampton Court conference and the subsequent removal of nonconformists from the clergy. Wilkes and Marston were at one in resisting puritan ‘innovation’. This reference dates the play within the first year of the reign, probably to early 1604.*

Among the jests, anecdotes, tall tales, and snippets of personal history with which Jonson regaled William Drummond of Hawthornden in the winter of 1618/19, none is more enigmatic than the bald claim that ‘Marston wrote his father-in-law’s preachings, and his father-in-law his comedies’.<sup>1</sup> It was twelve years and more since Marston had given up the world of the playhouse circa 1606 and made the transition to become a priest of the church of England; he was ordained in September 1609. Yet Marston was still fresh in Jonson’s memory. He also told Drummond that the two of them, together with Chapman, had been imprisoned over *Eastward Ho!* (‘The report was that they should then had their ears cut and noses’, [209–10]) and about the antagonism between them during the ‘War of the Theatres’: ‘He 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’ (216–18).

Making some allowance for the possibility that Drummond may not have transcribed everything perfectly and besides that Jonson was evidently drunk a good deal of the time (‘drink is one of the elements in which he liveth’ [556–7]),

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these items square more or less with the biographical record. The letters which Chapman and Jonson wrote from prison make no mention of Marston being with them, but *Eastward Ho!* certainly placed all of them in danger for having been performed without a licence.<sup>2</sup> And though there is no independent verification of Jonson beating Marston and taking his pistol from him (something he perhaps boasted of twice [117]), there is little doubt that Crispinus in *Poetaster* is a satiric portrait of Marston.

But scholarship has been largely baffled by the assertion that father-in-law and son-in-law wrote each other's works. As Ian Donaldson notes, in glossing this item in *Informations*, 'Marston's translation from the stage to the pulpit had attracted public notice, but there is no evidence to suggest that Jonson's jest was literally true' (154–5n). In an obscurely published article of 1966 R.E. Brettle came closest to the matter in his wider account of relations between Marston and his father-in-law, the reverend William Wilkes; he observed that

The wording of the preface to *The Malcontent*, 1604, is strangely reminiscent of Dr Wilkes's tract, *Of Obedience or Ecclesiastical Unity*. '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, reverent comely superiority, and established unity'.<sup>3</sup>

But he does not pursue the claim of strange reminiscence — enhanced by the echoing of 'established unity' in *Ecclesiastical Unity* — though such a claim is, as we shall see, well grounded.<sup>4</sup>

Now Matthew Steggle has identified a stronger tie between these two works: Wilkes quotes directly from the play.<sup>5</sup> He denounces 'weightless youths [who] preach insolently to your abused *ignorance* ... and make religion their stalking horse, under whose belly they shoot at what their *appetites* do most affect'.<sup>6</sup> This passage unmistakably draws on *The Malcontent* when the would be Machiavelian villain, Mendoza, tries to justify murdering the Hermit of the Rock (actually Duke Pietro in disguise):

Beware an hypocrite;  
A churchman once corrupted, O, avoid!  
A fellow that makes religion his stalking-horse,

(Shoots under his belly.)

*He breeds a plague.*

(4.3.127–30)<sup>7</sup>

We can see the force of this borrowing if we examine the whole passage in which Wilkes incorporates Marston's phrasing:

The more unreasonable are those your *Parish Bishops*, which do so undutifully reject what is commanded, and contentiously seek the *innovation* of *order* established, without warrant of that *ground* whereupon the change must grow; such *inconsideration* cannot be well borne within them, whom *learning* hath enabled much more soundly to discern of these differences, if *partiality* did not transport their resolutions beyond the rule of *judgement*.

You never saw a good *scholar* arrogant, for the more he knows, the more of his *weakness* he understands. *Youth* and *Ignorance* are the *Founts* of *Schism*. The least *knowledge* is ever most proud. This, in some of your conceits, dejects reverend fathers; and, to your better liking, blows up weightless youths to preach insolently to your abused *ignorance*, who flatter your preposterous zeal, *sink your treasure*, undo your corporations, decay your trades, impoverish your *citizens*, seduce your *children*, mislead your *servants*, and make religion their stalking horse, under whose belly they shoot at what their *appetites* do most affect.<sup>8</sup>

The image of the stalking horse in fact unpacks one of the most notorious lines in *The Malcontent*. When Pietro asks Malevole where he has come from, he replies 'From the public place of much dissimulation, the church' (1.3.4–5). This is how the text first appeared in Q1, but it apparently made some people — quite possibly within the printing house itself — very nervous. In several copies of that imprint the words 'the church' have been cut out with a sharp knife (as in the Bodleian's copy and one of the Folger's), while in later copies of Q1 (Dyce, Morgan, Sion College, and the Folger's other copy) the type has been closed up to remove them entirely. Q2 simply replaces the missing words with a pair of empty brackets — an invitation to readers to supply their own candidates. Then somehow Q3 managed to replace 'the church', though again some surviving copies have it cut out. The church is indeed a place of much dissimulation if it harbours puritans who 'make religion their stalking horse, under whose belly they shoot at what their *appetites* do most affect', though some may be uncomfortable saying so openly.

The subject matter, if not exactly the language, of Wilkes's passage compares most interestingly with another passage in *The Malcontent*:

MALEVOLE ... I mean to turn pure Rochelle churchman, I.

MENDOZA Thou churchman! Why? Why?

MALEVOLE Because I'll live lazily, rail upon authority, deny kings' supremacy  
in things indifferent, and be a Pope in mine own parish.

MENDOZA Wherefore dost thou think churches were made?

MALEVOLE To scour ploughshares. I ha' seen oxen plough up altars. *Et nunc  
seges ubi Sion fuit.*

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.* (2.5.118–26)

To be 'a Pope in mine own parish' is exactly on a par (if more provocatively phrased) with 'your Parish Bishops' — clergymen who operate by their own authority and inspiration, in defiance of authority accumulated over centuries of spiritual scholarship and of 'established unity'. Marston identifies such an iconoclast as a 'pure Rochelle churchman', that is a Huguenot, a French Calvinist Protestant, by self-definition 'pure' (i.e. puritan). Such identification is the more pointed because only five lines earlier Malevole addressed Mendoza as 'Huguenot': 'Let's be once drunk together, and so unite a most virtuously strengthened friendship; shall's, Huguenot, shall's?' (111–13).

This phrasing indirectly calls him a hypocrite — which their opponents commonly supposed all puritans to be, as we see in Jonson's comedies and elsewhere. Puritan sects often identified as 'friends', presbyterian congregations in which all members were equal, in contradistinction to episcopal churches like that of England, governed by a hierarchy of archbishops and bishops and presided over by the king, its supreme governor. To suggest that such a friendship might be 'virtuously strengthened' by the two of them getting drunk together, of course, ridicules the whole idea. When Malevole imagines himself 'deny[ing] kings' supremacy in things indifferent' he engages in Reformation theological controversy; 'things indifferent' were specifically issues deemed not necessary for salvation.<sup>9</sup> To suggest that the king's supremacy might not apply to such matters, however, was to threaten to undermine the whole authority upon which the hierarchy of the English Protestant church depended. There is no linguistic overlap here with Wilkes's tract, but the central issues addressed are identical.

For a play with no priests among its cast, *The Malcontent* returns surprisingly often to matters related to the church. In the wider context of the play, Malevole's identification of Mendoza as 'Huguenot' links his Machiavellian plotting to usurp Duke Pietro's throne to the fundamental challenge to traditional authority represented by puritan theology. This connection is partially ironic, in that Pietro himself is a usurper and has no more right to ducal authority than Mendoza would. That irony gets worked into the plot when Malevole has the repentant Pietro don the disguise of the Hermit of the Rock, in which role he tells the tale of his own supposed suicide (4.3.16–50). Mendoza stays true to his own 'hypocrisy' and assumes that the hermit must be a puritan of sorts, as amoral and unscrupulous as himself:

Hermit, thou art a man for me, my confessor;  
O thou selected spirit, born for my good,  
Sure thou wouldst make an excellent Elder  
In a deformed church. Come,  
We must be inward, thou and I all one.

PIETRO I am glad I was ordained for ye. (96–101)

Mendoza's seeming Freudian slip — 'deformed' for 'reformed' — tells it all. He speaks the language of the puritan sectaries, who claimed to be 'elect' by predestination (a 'selected spirit') and had elders appointed by the congregations over which they presided rather than a centrally appointed hierarchy of bishops and priests. But the actuality is deformation rather than reformation since when he claims that the hermit is predestined 'for my good' what he really supposes is that he will murder Malevole for him. Pietro's slyly ambiguous 'I am glad I was ordained for ye', playing on 'ordained' as meaning both predestined and admitted to the ministry of the church (as in conventional English church practice), shows that he — and via him the audience — sees through Mendoza's hypocrisy. Some twenty-five lines later the tables appear to be turned when Mendoza hires Malevole to murder Pietro (that is, Malevole and Pietro are expected to murder each other) with the very words which would later resurface in Wilkes's tract: 'Beware an hypocrite ...' (127 ff).

*The Malcontent* is a play about power and politics, deeply shot through with the conviction that these are not merely secular issues but spiritual ones too. Authority in the state is — or rather should be — underpinned by authority in the church, and the play's view of authority is entirely at one with Wilkes's *Of Obedience, or Ecclesiastical Unity*, repeatedly satirizing puritan thinking which would undermine such assumptions about the constitution of the state. Marston's concerns about the English church clearly extended into issues other than those on which

Wilkes focused. The passage quoted earlier about the desecration of holy sites, for example — ‘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’ — does follow the satirizing of anyone who would be ‘a Pope in mine own parish’, but does not indicate clearly that such disgraceful lack of respect is specifically a puritan failing.<sup>10</sup> It is not a failing that Wilkes singles out.

The same can be said of a joke at the expense of the self-seeking, complacently compliant Bilioso. Malevole asks, ‘What religion will you be of now? / BILIOSO Of the Duke’s religion, when I know what it is’ (4.5.93–4). ‘*Cuius regio eius religio*’ — ‘whose realm, his religion’ — was the pragmatic compromise adopted at the Peace of Augsburg (1555), but puritans, followers of their own consciences, would not willingly conform to it. Bilioso’s complacency, however, speaks to an utter lack of spiritual awareness, reducing faith to the level of convenience or appearance, making him in the language of the day, a timist.<sup>11</sup> The play underscores this point when Pietro asks Malevole why he greets such an objectionable ‘whoreson flesh-fly’: ‘Faith, as bawds go to church, for fashion sake’ (105–8). What runs through the play’s very mixed bag of topics — restoring a rightful ruler, the redemption of a usurping couple whose marriage and lives fall apart, cynical and self-seeking courtiers, Maquerelle and the sexual adventures of the court — is a concern with a world that has lost its moral centre; and it has done so because of the loss of sacred truths on which a Christian community is supposed to be founded. Wilkes’s concerns are not so widely spread, but he shares common ground with Marston on the issue of nonconformist puritans.

### ***Basilikon Doron* and the Hampton Court Conference**

Wilkes was a chaplain-in-ordinary to James I, and his tract is dedicated to the king. He clearly wrote it in the wake of the Hampton Court conference of January 1604, at which James and leading members of the official English church met with some of the puritan clergy who were pushing at the start of the new reign for further ‘reform’. These advocates for reform were puritan in the sense of wishing to return the church to what they perceived its state to have been in the early days of Christianity, before (in their view) Roman Catholic doctrine and practice deformed it. Pressures for further reformation persisted throughout Elizabeth’s reign (both from within the church and without), but on the whole the church hierarchy, under the queen’s own watchful guidance, controlled and contained them. But they became a very live issue almost from the beginning of James’s

reign. And that was in good part James's own fault, since he addressed puritanism in a reissue of *Basilikon Doron* (1603), which was clearly aimed at reassuring his new English subjects about his views on religion. In a new foreword, 'To the Reader', he had this to say about puritans:

First then, as to the name of puritans, I am not ignorant that the style thereof doth properly belong only to that vile sect amongst the Anabaptists, called the Family of Love; because they think themselves only pure, and in a manner without sin, the only true church, and only worthy to be participant of the sacraments; and all the rest of the world to be but abomination in the sight of God. Of this special sect I principally mean when I speak of puritans; diverse of them, as Browne, Penry,<sup>12</sup> and others ... and partly, indeed, I give this style to such brainsick and heady preachers, their disciples and followers, as refusing to be called of that sect, yet participates too much with their humours, in maintaining the above-mentioned errors; not only agreeing with the general rule of all Anabaptists, in the contempt of the civil magistrate, and in leaning to their own dreams and revelations; but particularly with this sect, in accounting all men prophane that swears not to all their fantasies; in making for every particular question of the policy of the church as great commotion, as if the article of the Trinity were called in controversy; in making the scriptures to be ruled by their conscience, and not their conscience by the scripture; and he that denies the least iota of their grounds, *sit tibi tanquam ethnicus et publicanus* [shall be like a heathen and a tax-collector]; not worthy to enjoy the benefit of breathing, much less to participate with them of the sacraments: and before that any of their grounds be impugned, let King, people, law and all be tread under foot ... It is only of this kind of men, that in this book I write so sharply; and whom I wish my son to punish, in case they refuse to obey the law, and will not cease to stir up a rebellion ... But on the other part, I protest upon mine honour, I mean it not generally of all preachers, or others, that likes better of the single form of policy in our [i.e. Scottish] Church, than of the many ceremonies in the Church of England; that are persuaded that their Bishops smells of a Papal supremacy, that the surplice, the cornered cap, and such like, are the outward badges of Popish errors. No, I am so far from being contentious in these things, (which for my own part I ever esteemed as indifferent) as I do equally love and honour the learned and grave men of either of these opinions. It can no ways become me to pronounce so lightly a sentence, in so old a controversy. We all (God be praised) do agree in the grounds, and the bitterness of men upon such questions doth but trouble the peace of the church; and gives advantage and entry to the Papists by our division. But towards them, I only use this provision, that where the law is otherways, they may content themselves soberly and quietly with their own

opinions, not resisting to the authority, nor breaking the law of the country; neither, above all, stirring any rebellion or schism: but possessing their souls in peace, let them press by patience and well-grounded reasons, either to persuade all the rest to like of their judgements; or where they see better grounds on the other part, not to be ashamed peaceably to incline thereunto, laying aside all preoccupied opinions.<sup>13</sup>

James may have come to regret this apparent reasonableness, his openness to debate, only setting the true extremists beyond the pale (in a way that William Wilkes would later develop) and apparently at that time regarding matters as diverse as the episcopal hierarchy and church vestments as ‘things ... indifferent’. Even as he made the journey from Edinburgh to London to take up his new throne, he was presented with the Millenary Petition, said to have been signed by a thousand puritan clergy. This document too was couched reasonably, asking that a range of practices be discontinued, including the signing of the cross during baptism and the administration of baptism by lay people such as midwives; the rite of confirmation, the use of the ring in marriage, bowing at the name of Jesus; and the practice of giving men multiple positions within the church, each with a separate stipend.<sup>14</sup> The petition also asked that the use of the surplice and cap might be made optional. James seemed at least prepared to consider all of these issues, but this openness had the unfortunate effect of encouraging subsequent petitions which made increasingly extreme demands — so much so that, by the time he agreed to the Hampton Court conference to debate these matters (originally planned for November 1603 but deferred to January 1604 by the plague), James seemed far less well disposed to his puritan clergy and blocked most of their demands.<sup>15</sup>

On fundamentals he proved immovable, especially as regards the government of the church. Throughout his reign in Scotland he had been at odds with the Presbyterian kirk, run by ministers and elders rather than by bishops and not recognizing the king’s authority in spiritual matters. He much preferred what he found in England, declaring ‘No bishop, no King. When I mean to live under a presbytery I will go to Scotland again, but while I am in England I will have bishops to govern the Church’, and he more broadly embraced the doctrines and practices established by the Elizabethan settlement.<sup>16</sup> By the end of the conference, while he agreed to certain changes in the Book of Common Prayer, which dictated the forms of English Protestant worship, in the powers of the bishops and the workings of church courts, James came down heavily in favour of requiring all clergy to conform, that is comply with the Prayer Book and subscribe to the established canons of the church. As to those who would not conform: ‘I will



make them conform themselves, or else I will harry them out of the land, or else do worse'.<sup>17</sup>

In a royal proclamation of 16 July 1604 James gave all members of the English clergy until the end of November to conform or be removed from their livings; Wilkes quotes key passages from this proclamation immediately after dedicating *Of Obedience* to the king. His selection contains, notably, this injunction:

So we do require all Archbishops, Bishops, and other ecclesiastical persons, to do their uttermost endeavours by conferences, arguments, persuasions, and by all other ways of love and gentleness, to reclaim all that be in the ministry, to the obedience of our Church laws... . And the like advertisement we do give to all civil magistrates, gentlemen, and others of understanding, as well abroad in the counties as in cities and towns, requiring them also not in any sort to support, favour, or countenance any such factious ministers in their obstinacy.<sup>18</sup>

According to Nicholas W.S. Cranfield, 'No fewer than 73 and no more than 83 ministers lost their benefices for their refusal to subscribe, of whom 7 later conformed and were reinstated'.<sup>19</sup>

Wilkes's tract is a whole-hearted endorsement of James's policy, published within months of the deadline running out (having been entered into the Stationers' Register on 22 February 1605). The text argues relentlessly for the rule of law and custom in spiritual government and denounces tirelessly 'masters of the faction' and 'the masters of *novelty* and workers of *innovation*'. The word 'innovation' recurs time and again, not merely in the sense of novelty and 'newfangelism' (of which he is also fond) but with all the reverberations of 'A political revolution; a rebellion or insurrection'.<sup>20</sup> The rhetoric of the tract shifts between addressing wayward clergy themselves, their supporters, and those who are in authority over them, but remorselessly hammers home the message that the king's word is law and that if the clergy cannot be brought to conform to it by reasoning they must be removed from their offices. So he demands to know

If it be lawful for every *passionate* spirit carried with an affectation of *novelty*, to *repeal* laws which authority hath enacted, to break *customs* which *antiquity* hath commended; to change *ordinances*, which *experience* hath approved, to pervert *order* which judgement hath established, and by suiting all occurrents to their private *humours*, to *innovate* that form of *government* which this *kingdom* hath happily followed, and *heaven* richly blessed?

— and answers himself resoundingly in the negative. To go down such roads is, above all, to deny ‘that supremacy which God hath impropriate to the Sceptre of Princes, as their peculiar right’.<sup>21</sup>

Here we can see why R.E. Brettell should find Marston’s words in ‘To the Reader’ (speaking ‘of those, whose unquiet studies labour innovation, contempt of holy policy, reverent comely superiority, and established unity’) ‘strangely reminiscent of Dr. Wilkes’s tract’. Marston even seems to be using ‘innovation’ with the same inflection — a revolutionary overturning of ‘established unity’. And his play’s satire on a ‘deformed church’ is entirely at one with his father-in-law’s defence of James’s policy in standing by the fundamentals of the established church of England, while in some respects going beyond it.

Jonson’s jest about Wilkes writing Marston’s plays while Marston wrote Wilkes’s preaching is, of course, an overstatement. But it contains an important kernel of truth about a significant degree of common sensibility between *The Malcontent* and *Of Obedience*. So much so that we may wonder whether Jonson, to whom the play was dedicated, was privy to personal communications between the two men, in which Wilkes might literally have contributed to aspects of the play, just as the text of the play evidently did contribute to the tract. Brettell adduces evidence that the families probably knew each other in the Coventry area, and this may explain how Marston came to marry Wilkes’s daughter, Mary, apparently in 1605. As James Knowles explains, ‘in his will (6 May 1630), Wilkes forgave Marston “all that is or may be due unto me for lodging and diet, for himself, his wife, his man and maid which he had of me eleven years”’. As Marston left the Wilkes household some time in 1616, the “eleven years” lodging implies a marriage in 1605’.<sup>22</sup> So the family connections were certainly *very* close in the years after the marriage, and may well already have been cordial beforehand.

*The Malcontent* was certainly written in the form that we know as Q1 by 5 July 1604 when it was entered in the Stationers’ Register. *Of Obedience, or Ecclesiastical Unity*, as we have noted, was similarly entered on 22 February 1605. So, in the normal way of things, it seems logical to infer that Wilkes borrowed the passage about those who ‘make religion their stalking horse’ from reading the play in print. To assert that Marston wrote his father-in-law’s preachings is then only a small exaggeration. But the phrasing in Marston which makes the borrowing unmistakable — ‘(Shoots under his belly)’ — is not present until Q2. The same is also true of the joke about Bilioso being ‘Of the Duke’s religion, when I know what it is’, which heads off an eight line passage (4.5.93–100) that does not appear in Q1. The distinctiveness of both of these belated changes to the text make it difficult to believe that anyone other than Marston himself undertook

them. Possibly they had been written earlier and inadvertently (or for some other reason) left out of Q1 and so were restorations here, as some believe.<sup>23</sup> But either way, Marston likely intervened to ensure their inclusion in Q2 and Q3. Both passages circle around uncomfortable questions about authentic religious faith. And that almost certainly explains why William Wilkes incorporated the essence of the first one in his *Of Obedience*.

In truth we do not know when any of Q1, Q2, or Q3 was actually printed: the latest of them could even date from early 1605, given old-style dating. But the balance of probability, giving time for Q1 to sell out, must be that Q2 appeared towards the end of 1604. Wilkes did not publish until some time after February 1605, and he could have started work on the tract any time after the end of the Hampton Court conference (January 1604); however, the king's proclamation of 16 July 1604 was perhaps specifically what gave him the incentive to write. Wilkes was probably writing his tract and Marston also amending (or reinstating) the precise wording of the passage that his father-in-law was to quote in an eight month window from July 1604 to February 1605. These were also presumably the months leading up to Marston's marriage, when he and Wilkes likely saw each other quite frequently; I have difficulty believing — given their common concerns about the state of the church — that they did not discuss the moves to impose conformity upon it, which began to happen in earnest in November 1604. Those changes to the Q2 text which seem to show Marston's own hand at work might in part have been the fruit of such discussions. It could be that this is what Jonson had in mind when he joked that Marston's father-in-law 'wrote ... his comedies'.

### Dating of *The Malcontent* and Wider Significance

The usual parameters to the dating of *The Malcontent* in its earliest form (Q1) have been (terminus a quo) the publication of 'Dymock's' translation of Giambattista Guarini's *Il Pastor Fido* (*The Faithful Shepherd*), first entered in the Stationers' Register in September 1601 and printed the following year — Marston quotes repeatedly from it — and (terminus ad quem) the play's own entry in the Stationers' Register on 5 July 1604. Between 1602 and July 1604 the other usual considerations have been firstly the fact that the play does not borrow from Florio's translation of Montaigne's *Essays* (printed 1603), though both his next two plays, *The Dutch Courtesan* and *The Fawn*, borrow from it extensively; and secondly a reference it contains to 'Signior St. Andrew Jaques' (5.5.24), which combines Scotland's patron saint with King James's name in French. This is the

one detail which immediately seems to give the play a footing in the new reign, though perhaps only just. We cannot rule out the possibility, however, that this rare outlier was not part of the original performance text but a late addition to the manuscript that went to Stationers' Hall.

A complicating factor in all of this is that the playhouses were closed for most of the period between 19 March 1603 (in anticipation of Queen Elizabeth's death) and 9 April 1604, when plague finally relented; only one brief remission, between 9 and 17 May 1603, is known to have occurred.<sup>24</sup> This closure disrupts calculations about the likely relationship between composition, performance, and print. The play had clearly been performed — Marston speaks of 'the pleasure it once afforded you when it was presented with the soul of lively action' — before it found its way into print ('To the Reader', 35–7). There may, therefore, have been a significant delay between the play's composition and its first performance, unless that occurred in that brief window in May 1603, just late enough to include a hot topical reference to 'Signior St. Andrew Jaques' — a reference which someone thought edgy enough to trim to 'Signior St. Andrew' in Q2 and Q3.<sup>25</sup> If not, the play could not have been performed until early April 1604, barely three months before its SR entry, a very rapid but not impossible transition from stage to page.<sup>26</sup> Given so many imponderables Martin Wiggins offers 'Best Guess 1603' as his dating of the play in *British Drama: A Catalogue*.<sup>27</sup>

What new light does the relationship between the play and Wilkes's *Of Obedience, or Ecclesiastical Unity* cast on Q1 *The Malcontent* and its dating? In one sense it actually tells us little that we did not already know or might reasonably have inferred from an alert reading. As George Hunter observes: 'I know of no play in the period which touches with so much acerbity on the tender points of church and state'.<sup>28</sup> Yet neither he nor other scholars have related these 'tender points' to the active and public debates going on at the time specifically in respect of nonconformity in the official English church. Once we see that Marston's play was in a conversation of sorts with Wilkes's tract, addressing popes and bishops in their own parishes for using religion as a stalking horse, it becomes apparent that Marston was not merely voicing quirkish or personal concerns but was engaged in that wider debate on nonconformity.

Hunter himself finally decides, amongst all the conflicting dating evidence, that the preferable 'alternative is to disregard the apparent reference to James ['Signior St. Andrew Jaques'] ... [and] assume that the Blackfriars performance preceded March 1603'.<sup>29</sup> But this is, in effect, to disregard his own insight into the play's concern for 'the tender points of church and state', which were far more openly addressed *after* March 1603 than they had been before (because of the

reissued *Basilikon Doron*) and even more so after the Hampton Court conference of January 1604. This claim also ignores the likely implications of evidence he examines in detail, building on the work of Fredson Bowers, that about half of Q2 was printed from Q1's standing type, contrary to the Stationers' Company's regulations; as he observes: 'The need to engage in this sharp practice would, of course, only arise if the book could be expected to sell quickly more than the 1500 copies permitted ... There is reason to believe that *The Malcontent* had a certain scandalous notoriety'.<sup>30</sup> Strikingly, Wilkes's printer was to follow the same practice with *Of Obedience*.

The notoriety of which Hunter speaks was very probably the result of the play's outspokenness about church matters at a time when they had become a matter of unprecedented public debate, in the early months of 1604. While we cannot rule out the possibility that Marston began work on *The Malcontent* in 1603 — but surely after James's accession — these considerations make it most likely that it took its Q1 shape in the first quarter of 1604. In this scenario it appears even more certain that the play was not actually staged until the playhouses were reopened in April 1604 — at a time when the ramifications of the Hampton Court conference were still working through, and nonconforming clergy seemed likely soon to be removed from office. This would, as I have mentioned, only have allowed an unusually short time between first performance and print, but that may well be a measure of its very timely subject matter.

The 'tender points' of nonconformity came to the fore yet again when Archbishop Whitgift died in February 1604 and was replaced the following month as president of the church convocation about to assemble by Richard Bancroft, who would formally succeed him as archbishop of Canterbury that November. Bancroft had a long record of opposition to nonconformist puritanism, which his leading role at Hampton Court had done nothing to diminish, and he demonstrated it again immediately: 'When it met, convocation proceeded to adopt 141 constitutions and canons that Bancroft had drawn from the articles, injunctions, and synodical acts passed in the reigns of Edward VI and Elizabeth. Convocation approved them in April 1604'.<sup>31</sup> These in effect enshrined the Elizabethan settlement in church law and lay behind James's proclamation of 16 July.

There could not have been a more timely moment for the publication of Marston's play. Nor are we likely to find a better explanation for why this play went through a remarkable three editions within a year, the second already half printed when the first went on sale. At the same time, we should note that what Hunter hypothesized as its 'scandalous notoriety' did not derive from unorthodox or heretical opinions. In its satire on puritan clergymen the play is clearly in sympathy

with Wilkes's deeply conservative tract and the stance taken by both the king and Bancroft to the challenges posed by nonconformism. What is so shocking, in fact, is only that such issues should be raised in a play performed on the public stage, and that — rather than denouncing puritan positions with theological argument — he shows his characters approving of them ('I'll live lazily, rail upon authority, deny kings' supremacy in things indifferent, and be a Pope in mine own parish', for example) and leaves it to the audience to make sense of his ironies. For the most part dramatists of the era trod very carefully in dealing with matters of church and state. But Marston apparently felt liberated — possibly by the reissued *Basilikon Doron* or more likely by the Hampton Court conference and its consequences — to deal boldly here with issues which those in authority had themselves placed in the public domain.

Even when he uses what may seem to be provocative language ('a Pope in mine own parish'), he is in fact echoing the words of the church fathers. As early as 1574 Whitgift (not yet archbishop) had written: 'let every minister be King and Pope in his own parish ... and you shall have as many kinds of religion as there is parishes, as many sects as ministers, and a Church miserably torn in pieces, with mutability and diversity of opinion'.<sup>32</sup> And there is similar phrasing in Thomas Bilson's *The Perpetual Government of Christ's Church*.<sup>33</sup> Bilson, by then bishop of Winchester, was one of the church leaders alongside Whitgift and Bancroft who confronted the puritans at Hampton Court. Did Marston read these mighty tomes himself, or might his father-in-law have steered him through their dense pages? No matter: Marston could hardly have been in better company. And we must suppose that he had no trouble convincing those who licensed the play, both for performance and for publication, that this was the case, since there is no evidence of any official objection to it. The puritans and their supporters presumably objected, bringing the rebuke alluded to in 'To the Reader': '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, reverent comely superiority, and established unity'.

It is not unreasonable to suggest that Marston's transition from playwright to priest had already, at some level, begun. And the evidence is not confined to *The Malcontent* but can also be found in his next play, *The Dutch Courtesan*, as Karen Britland demonstrates in her recent edition.<sup>34</sup> Marston focuses a good deal of his satire here on the extreme Protestant group known as the Family of Love who, as we have seen, are specifically singled out as a 'vile sect' by King James in 'To the Reader' in his reissued *Basilikon Doron*; perhaps following James, he would misidentify them as Anabaptists. Marston likely already had this much

maligned group in mind at the time of *The Malcontent*, when he writes of ‘a sect that maintained, when the husband was asleep the wife might lawfully entertain another man; for then her husband was as dead; much more when he is banished’ (5.3.7–10).

But as Britland suggests, ‘in 1604, Familism ... was ripe for parody. *The Dutch Courtesan* participates in this moment, making hay out of Franceschina’s illicit sexual practices and underlining the Mulligrubs’ avarice and hypocrisy.’<sup>35</sup> Yet Marston’s satire of this rather shadowy sect, whose mystic beliefs were popularly distorted to include extreme positions on both free will and free love, is never exploited merely for comedy. The play’s ‘religious vision is coherent: Freevill’s will is acted upon by an invisible force (divine grace) which brings him to repentance and a reformed life ... Mulligrub, acknowledging that his “hard heart” has brought him to the gallows, finally forgives “as [he] would be forgiven” (5.3.139–40, 125–6), while the Familists Franceschina and Mary Faugh remain unrepentant and “reprobate” (2.2.45).’<sup>36</sup> Marston’s focus here is not on the puritans within the English church, but those far removed from it who operate in a spiritual darkness unless they find divine grace. These are not Wilkes’s concerns and Marston does not draw here on his father-in-law’s tract. But his conservative religious convictions are as clear as they are in *The Malcontent*.

To conclude: the parallels between Marston’s *The Malcontent* and Wilkes’s *Of Obedience, or Ecclesiastical Unity* testify to the playwright’s deep interest in the church politics of the day and the issues that lay behind them; they strongly suggest that the former is a securely Jacobean text, written quite probably in the wake of the Hampton Court conference, performed as soon as conditions allowed in April 1604, and licensed for the press only days before James’s proclamation would supposedly resolve the vexed issue of nonconformity within the official English church once and for all.

## Notes

- 1 *Informations to William Drummond of Hawthornden*, ed. Ian Donaldson, in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson* (hereafter *CWBJ*), ed. David Bevington, Ian Donaldson, and Martin Butler, 7 vols. (Cambridge, 2012), 5.351–91, 154–5, <https://doi.org/10.3366/bjj.2013.0086>. Line numbers referencing this edition appear in parenthetical citations hereafter.
- 2 See *CWBJ*, 2.641–56. Chapman’s letter to the king, written on his own behalf and Jonson’s, says that the play’s ‘chief offences are but two clauses, and both of them not our own’ (*CWBJ*, 2.651, 4–5). In his letter to Lord Chamberlain Suffolk he also confesses that ‘our unhappy book was presented without your lordship’s allowance’ (2.652, 1–2). Since Marston was apparently a shareholder in the Blackfriars company by this time he might have been expected to acquire the licence.
- 3 R.E. Brettle, ‘The Rev. William Wilkes, D.D., Rector of Barford St Martin, Wiltshire, 1585–163, and John Marston, Dramatist (1575–1634)’, *The Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine* 61 (1966), 57. Subsequent references to *The Malcontent*, unless otherwise specified, cite act, scene, and line numbers in the Revels edition by G.K. Hunter (Manchester, [1975] 1999). This passage is ‘To the Reader’, 16–22.
- 4 Although Marston and Wilkes clearly have some such notion in mind, they do not speak precisely of ‘the Established Church’. That phrase dates from the 1570s, but the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) has no instance of its being used as synonymous with the church of England earlier than 1628.
- 5 Communicated in personal correspondence. Professor Steggle identified the borrowing — the only apparent instance of this passage being borrowed anywhere — in the course of an *EEBO:TCP* search. He found it in *A Second Memento for Magistrates* (1608), printed four years after the play was printed. But, as Brettle noted and I confirmed, title page apart, this volume is identical to *Of Obedience, or Ecclesiastical Unity* (1605): ‘it seems clear that part of the stock of the first printing was held and “remaindered” in 1608 and 1609 with a different title page only. The Epistle Dedicatory to the King, the quotation from the royal proclamation, and the body of the tract in twenty-one sections and 73 pages are unchanged’ (‘The Rev. William Wilkes, D.D.’, 62, n16).
- 6 William Wilkes, *Of Obedience, or Ecclesiastical Unity* (London, 1605; STC: 25633), 35.
- 7 Hunter essentially reproduces the passage as printed in the second and third quartos of the play (Q2, STC: 17480 and Q3, STC: 17481). In the first quarto (STC: 17479)



it appears without '(Shoots under the belly.)' The status of that insertion in Q2 and Q3 is the matter of some dispute among editors. Most regard it as a stage direction, suggesting that Mendoza mimes the action of shooting as if under the belly of a stalking horse which he has used to get close to his prey. Others, notably Bernard Harris, regard it as a late insertion of text, such that the second half of the passage should read: '*A fellow that makes religion his stalking-horse, / Shoots under his belly, he breeds a plague*' (*The Malcontent*, ed. Bernard Harris [London and New York, 1967], 4.3.125–6). The difficulty lies in the fact that in both versions this passage is one of many printed in italics, highlighting sententious thoughts or aphorisms. Similarly, both versions use italic for stage directions. The new passage appears in the right margin in Q2 and Q3, as stage directions commonly do, but in brackets, which no other stage direction has, so there is nothing typographically to determine its status.

8 Wilkes, *Of Obedience*, 35.

9 See John Whitgift, *The Defence of the Answer to the Admonition against the Reply of T.C.* (London, 1574; STC: 25430), 115, where Whitgift uses the phrase 'Pope in his own parish' in connection with his refutation of Calvin and Martin Bucer on 'things indifferent'.

10 This is also true of the simony (sale of church benefices or property) which he makes an issue at 1.3.140–7. But this only occurs in Q3, being part of one of the eleven new passages introduced in that edition (Hunter, *Malcontent*, xlv–liii). Simony is not connected with the issues raised by Wilkes — indeed it was to be one of the grievances to be raised by the puritan Millenary Petition (see p XXX) — and had been a concern of Marston's at least as early as *The Scourge of Villainy* (1598): 'What though pale Maurus paid huge simonies / For his half-dozen gelded vicaries' (2.5.64–5).

11 Overbury said in his 'Character of a Timist' that 'He hath no more of a conscience then fear, and his religion is not his but the Prince's'. In Sir Thomas Overbury, *The Overburian Characters*, ed. W.J. Paylor (Oxford, 1936), 9.

12 Robert Browne (1550s–1633) was the first man openly to secede from the official English Protestant church and the first to found a church of his own on congregational principles (known as the Brownists). John Penry (1559–93) was a radical Welsh preacher, whose unlicensed press produced the seven Martin Marprelate pamphlets, openly attacking the hierarchy of the church of England.

13 King James VI and I, *Basilikon Doron* (Edinburgh, 1603; STC: 14349), B4v–b2v (modernized). A London edition followed within the year (STC: 14354).

14 See note 10.

15 The principal record of the conference, William Barlow's *The Sum and Substance of the Conference ... at Hampton Court* (London, 1604; STC: 1456.5), was undoubtedly

published with the king's blessing and always paints him and his arguments in the best light.

- 16 Quoted in D.H. Willson, *King James VI and I* (London, [1956] 1963), 207, <http://doi.org/10.1086/ahr/62.1.118>. See more generally his chapter XII, 'The Enforcement of Conformity', 197–216, and also Pauline Croft, *King James* (Basingstoke and New York, 2004), 156ff, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4039-9017-4>.
- 17 G.P.V. Akrigg, *Jacobean Pageant* (Cambridge, MA, 1962), 306, <https://doi.org/10.4159/harvard.9780674729513>, citing Thomas Fuller, *The Church History of Britain* (Oxford, 1845), 5.280.
- 18 Wilkes, *Of Obedience*, B1v–B2v (modernized). The main body of Wilkes's tract is paginated and I quote from it by the page numbers, but the preliminaries are not.
- 19 *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (ODNB), c.v. 'Richard Bancroft, (bap. 1544, d.1610)', <https://doi-org.proxy.lib.ohio-state.edu/10.1093/ref:odnb/1272>.
- 20 *OED*, s.v. 'innovation' n, 2b
- 21 Wilkes, *Of Obedience*, 24, 39, 43, *ibid*.
- 22 *ODNB*, c.v. 'John Marston, 1576–1634', <https://doi-org.proxy.lib.ohio-state.edu/10.1093/ref:odnb/18164>; see also Brettle, 'The Rev. William Wilkes, D.D.', 55.
- 23 See, for example, W. David Kay, ed., *The Malcontent*, New Mermaids (London, 1998), xxxvi.
- 24 See Tom Cain, ed., *Sejanus* (Cambridge, 2012), *CWBJ* 2.200.
- 25 Q3 is very securely a Jacobean text, starting with an Induction which locates the play with the King's Men (royal patent 17 May 1603) and contains lots of jokes about the fool, Passarello, wearing velvet, as all the King's Men were now entitled to do as grooms of the king's chamber. There are also references to the 'Scotch barnacle' and 'Scotch boot' (3.1.47, 78), and to James's wholesale and indiscriminate creation of knights (1.8.29–30) and sale of other titles (5.3.85–6).
- 26 For arguments that Q1 *The Malcontent* is a late Elizabethan play, rather than an early Jacobean one, see Hunter, *Malcontent*, xlv–xlvi, and Kevin A. Quarmby, *The Disguised Ruler in Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (London, 2016), 61 ff, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315615592>.
- 27 Martin Wiggins and Catherine Richardson, *British Drama: A Catalogue*, 10 vols (Oxford, 2012), item 1391, 5.16–22.
- 28 Hunter, *Malcontent*, xxviii.
- 29 *Ibid*, xlvi.
- 30 *Ibid*, xxvii. See also F.T. Bowers, 'Notes on Standing Type in Elizabethan Printing', *Proceedings of the Bibliographical Society of America* 40 (1946), 205–24, <https://doi.org/10.1086/pbsa.40.3.24298583>.
- 31 Cranfield, 'Bancroft'.

- 32 Whitgift, *The Defence of the Answer to the Admonition*, 559. See also 115, where Whitgift uses the key phrase in connection with his refutation of Calvin and Martin Bucer on 'things indifferent'.
- 33 Thomas Bilson, *The Perpetual Government of Christ's Church* (London, 1593; STC: 3065), 310, 321.
- 34 Karen Britland, ed., *The Dutch Courtesan*, Arden Early Modern Drama (London, 2018), esp. 50–9.
- 35 Britland, *The Dutch Courtesan*, 54.
- 36 *Ibid*, 58.

