

A Letter in Reply to Joseph A. Porter

To the Editor:

Joseph A. Porter's "response" to the *Malcontent* debate is directed toward both Slight's and my essays, but in actuality addresses neither of them. No sustained critique of either paper, there are only desultory musings from one who prefers to take potshots ("argumentative recklessness?") rather than commit himself to issues. The comments on Marston's stage directions extrapolate the notion of doubleness, but lead to a most precious conclusion. There is, as well, a teasing reference in footnote 1 to the moot question of whether Marston's disjunctive technique is in any way indebted to Mannerism.

The epoch style known as Mannerism (foregrounded virtuosic technique, etc.) may have been an actual influence upon Lyly, Donne, Shakespeare, Marston, and others; but it was so vague and diffuse an influence as to remain an interpretive conundrum. For, just as plausibly, it may have been simply a contemporaneous cultural analogue (cf. *La Vida Es Sueño* and *The Tempest*) and no direct influence at all. I of course based my argument for doubleness upon concrete textual evidence and Marston's self-declared inclinations, not upon suppositional influence. Had Porter posited a solid implication of Mannerism for *The Malcontent*, or brought to bear any relevant historical or modern document, I would have risen to the occasion. But I won't take the mere bait of his wisecrack about "a shadow campaign to rehabilitate Old Possum." My essay stands firmly on its own evidential foundations.

Porter's final sentence tosses out another critical moot point (the oral or scribal provenance of Homer's epic poetry) that is, once again, critically extraneous. It goes without saying that my essay would tend to support the partisans of orality (but not conclusively, as with the question of priority regarding the chicken or the egg).

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