

‘A Herd of snivelling, grinning Hypocrites’: Religious Hypocrisy in Restoration Drama

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This article explores the various manifestations of religious hypocrisy to be found in new plays written in England between 1660 and 1720. It shows how the dramatists used hypocrisy both as a polemical weapon at times of religious conflict, and as an engaging form of theatricality. Exploring hypocrisy through drama is apposite as many of the key characteristics of hypocrisy – masks, role-playing, disguise and dissimulation – have been features of the theatre since ancient Greek times. The post-Restoration dramatists created worlds of masquerade for their hypocritical characters to inhabit, while the plays themselves offer examples of unself-conscious casuists, disreputable clerics, predatory monsters, and those who dissimulate religious beliefs, or have none at all.

The restoration of the episcopal Church of England in 1660 led to decades of religious turmoil as the various denominations grappled with the new religious settlement. A climate of religious conflict and uncertainty was generated by a number of factors throughout this period: attempts by the regime to enforce uniformity on a pluralistic religious society; intense anti-Catholicism in the wake of the Popish Plot of 1678; and the growing debate concerning the issue of toleration. As groups and individuals searched for polemical weapons, one prominent feature of these debates was the recourse to accusations of hypocrisy. Most religious groups were accused of being false Christians; papists were assumed to be hiding everywhere in masquerade; nonconformists were seen as dissemblers seeking to avoid penal laws through occasional conformity; and many conformists were seen as papists in disguise. In 1673, the playwright William Wycherley described the period as a ‘masquerading age’.¹

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¹ William Wycherley, *The gentleman dancing-master* (London, 1673), 10.

One of the most distinctive features of the changing cultural landscape after 1660 was the reopening of the theatres, closed since 1642, a reawakening that generated a rich repertoire of new plays. This article will show that these plays provide prominent examples of how hypocrisy could be weaponized during periods of religious conflict. Mark Knights has observed that hypocrisy often involves ‘an inner (often sinister) self that was being disguised, one that could be revealed, unmasked, and exposed’.² Disguise and the mask are key features of hypocrisy, and they are also, of course, theatrical concepts. At a fundamental level, all actors disguise themselves in their characters, but many plays take this a step further when the characters themselves adopt disguises, usually with the intention of deceiving others. The stage, therefore, offers an excellent medium for engaging with the theme of hypocrisy. After all, the etymology of the word hypocrite includes the Greek word for an actor on the stage, ὑποκριτής (‘the acting of a part on the stage, feigning, pretence’).³ In *The Folly of Priestcraft* (1690), the earliest extant printed text to include the word ‘priestcraft’ in its title, the heroine Leucasia draws the parallel between hypocrisy and acting: ‘Of all the Men by God and Nature curs’d, / Surely the fawning Hypocrite is worst. / To his compar’d, the Player’s Life is ease; / He always Acts—They only when they please’.⁴ The concept of the hypocrite as actor offers theatre audiences a multi-layered way of exploring how performance and disguise can conceal or reveal.

The figure of the stereotypical religious hypocrite appears in many of the plays examined here. This is usually a cleric and, therefore, a man; there is disreputable behaviour, often a mix of lasciviousness, drunkenness, avarice and gluttony; and there is usually some element of dissimulation, deception or disguise. There are, of course, variations to these tropes, including hypocritical members of the laity, and some fascinating female characters. These tropes are used in similar ways against characters of all religious denominations, including the Church of England. The preponderance of clerics in this article reflects a potent strain of anticlericalism in this period. Indeed, this

² Mark Knights, *The Devil in Disguise: Deception, Delusion, and Fanaticism in the Early English Enlightenment* (Oxford, 2011), 7.

³ ‘Hypocrite, noun’, *OED*, online at: <www.oed.com>, accessed 20 December 2023.

⁴ Anon., *The converts, or, The folly of priest-craft* (London, 1690), 9 [hereafter: *The folly of priest-craft*].

sense of anticlericalism is driven home by the absence (in these plays) of positive or benign clerics. Even the names of the clerics are highly distinctive and are often used to denigrate: such names include Smerk, Doublechin, Wordy, Bull, Littlesense, Turbulent, Shittle, Wolf, Soaker, Tickletext, Sneake, Quibble, Humdrum, Dunce, Thummum, Pricknote, Noddy, Dogsears, Stiffrump, and Snuffle.⁵ These clerical characters probably amused many in the theatre audiences. ‘Did your Lordship ever perceive that the Gentry were ever better pleas’d with a Play, than when the poor Parson was jeer’d?’, asks a character in the anonymous 1690 pamphlet play *The Folly of Priestcraft*.⁶ The Restoration dramatists did not, of course, invent the trope of the religious hypocrite. The plays of the previous century offer many famous examples, including Malvolio in Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night* (1601), Tribulation in Ben Jonson’s *The Alchemist* (1610), Zeal-of-the-Land Busy, ‘a notable hypocritical Vermine’, in Jonson’s *Bartholomew Fair* (1614), and Stupido, ‘that plodding puritane, That artless ass, and that earth-creeping dolt’, in the anonymous *The Pilgrimage to Parnassus* (1597–1601).⁷

Scholars have, however, warned against treating hypocrisy as a one-dimensional term. David Runciman emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between different kinds of hypocritical behaviour: ‘deliberate and inadvertent, personal and collective, self-deceptions and other-directed deceptions’.⁸ Similarly, Brian Walsh offers a differentiation between what he calls self-conscious and unselfconscious hypocrisy in his examination of puritans on the Shakespearean stage. We will see examples of what he describes as ‘predatory monsters’, as

⁵ Abraham Cowley, *The Cutter of Coleman Street* (London, 1663); Thomas Shadwell, *The humorists* (London, 1671); Edward Howard, *The man of Newmarket* (London, 1678); Thomas Rawlins, *Tunbridge Wells* (London, 1678); Aphra Behn, *The feign’d curtizans* (London, 1679); Thomas Shadwell, *The Lancashire witches* (London, 1682); Thomas Jevon, *The devil of a wife, or, A comical transformation* (London, 1686); Aphra Behn, *The widow Ranter* (London, 1690); Thomas Durfey, *Love for money* (London, 1691); Thomas Durfey, *The marriage-hater match’d* (London, 1692); Peter Anthony Motteux, *Love’s a jest* (London, 1696); John Vanbrugh, *The relapse* (London, 1697); John Gay, *The wife of Bath* (London, 1713); Christopher Bullock, *The cobler of Preston* (London, 1716); Colley Cibber, *The non-juror* (London, 1718); Archibald Pitcairn, *The Assembly* (Edinburgh, 1752).

⁶ Anon., *The folly of priest-craft*, 16.

⁷ Ben Jonson, *Bartholmew fayre* (London, 1640; first publ. 1614), 6; Anon., *The pilgrimage to Parnassus* (London, 1649; first publ. 1597), 14.

⁸ David Runciman, *Political Hypocrisy: The Mask of Power, from Hobbes to Orwell and Beyond*, rev. edn (Princeton, NJ, 2018; first publ. 2008), 11.

well as the type of character whom he sees as ‘more psychologically complex and identifiably human figures hobbled by ... self-delusion’.⁹ Lucia Nigri has also explored hypocritical characters in plays from the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, concluding that their complexity and dynamism make them both entertaining and thought-provoking.¹⁰ Kristen Poole argues that, in contrast to the image of the abstemious puritan, we must not lose sight of the representation in early modern literature of the ‘drunken, gluttonous, and lascivious puritan’.¹¹ This article will show that the analysis of these scholars is also relevant to many religious characters in the plays of the Restoration period.

The characters under attack in these plays are not restricted to puritans and dissenters, but range across the denominational spectrum. For example, as we will see below, Poole’s ‘puritan Bellygod’ finds its most explicit Restoration equivalent in the Roman Catholic Fr Dominic.¹² Peter Lake has argued that anti-popery and anti-puritanism were polemically ambiguous and ‘could be bent to a range of often widely divergent political and polemical ends’.¹³ This use of polemical ambiguity can most obviously be seen in adaptations of one play, Molière’s *Tartuffe*, first performed at Versailles in 1664. Scholars have identified a range of plays that are obvious versions of *Tartuffe* or have been influenced by it.¹⁴ Roseann Runte includes a table of over twenty plays in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which have been ‘usually cited as bearing some

⁹ Brian Walsh, *Unsettled Toleration: Religious Difference on the Shakespearean Stage* (Oxford, 2016), 46.

¹⁰ Lucia Nigri, ‘Religious Hypocrisy in Performance: Roman Catholicism and the London Stage’, in eadem and Naya Tsentourou, eds, *Forms of Hypocrisy in Early Modern England* (New York, 2017), 57–71, at 70.

¹¹ Kristen Poole, *Radical Religion from Shakespeare to Milton* (Cambridge, 2000), 12.

¹² *Ibid.* 45.

¹³ Peter Lake, ‘Anti-Popery: The Structure of Prejudice’, in Richard Cust and Ann Hughes, eds, *Conflict in Early Stuart England: Studies in Religion and Politics, 1603–1642* (London, 1989), 72–106, at 79; *idem*, ‘Anti-Puritanism: The Structure of a Prejudice’, in Kenneth Fincham and Peter Lake, eds, *Religious Politics in Post-Reformation England: Essays in Honour of Nicholas Tyacke* (Woodbridge, 2006), 80–97, at 94–5.

¹⁴ Roseann Runte, ‘Cross-Cultural Influences: Versions of “Tartuffe” in Eighteenth-Century France and Restoration England’, *Romance Notes* 36 (1996), 265–76; Noel Peacock, ‘Molière Nationalised: Tartuffe on the British Stage from the Restoration to the Present Day’, in David Bradby and Andrew Calder, eds, *The Cambridge Companion to Molière* (Cambridge, 2006), 177–88.

resemblance' to *Tartuffe*.¹⁵ The relevance of these versions to this article relates to the shifting religious denomination of the title character. The earliest English translation of the play was Thomas Shadwell's *The Hypocrite* (1669), but this is sadly lost to us.¹⁶ The first version to share Molière's title appeared in 1670, and its author, Matthew Medbourne, gave it a subtitle of 'or the French Puritan'.¹⁷ As the subtitle suggests, Medbourne portrays his *Tartuffe* in the tradition of the hypocritical puritans of the early Restoration satires. When the playwrights turned their fire on Roman Catholics in the wake of the Glorious Revolution, Crowne wrote a version of Molière's play called *The English Friar* (1690). The target changes again in *The Non-Juror* (1717) by Colley Cibber, in which *Tartuffe* becomes a nonjuror (although this character turns out to be a Roman Catholic in disguise). This denominational flexibility shows that portrayals of hypocrisy were weaponized in plays against the perceived enemies of the moment, whether puritans, Roman Catholics, dissenters, nonjurors, or even some conformists. In addition, the dramatists' use of polemical ambiguity sometimes added another dimension to their anti-clerical attacks. By using established tropes of anti-Catholicism or anti-puritanism, audiences could be shown a disreputable cleric, not only as a representative of his own denomination, but also as a representative of the entire class of clerical hypocrites. As the late seventeenth-century anti-theatrical critic Jeremy Collier observed, the playwrights 'attack Religion under every Form, and pursue the Priesthood through all the Subdivisions of Opinion. Neither Jews nor Heathens, Turks nor Christians, Rome nor Geneva, Church nor Conventicle, can escape them.'¹⁸

As similar tropes are used whichever group is under attack in these plays, this article will not use a denominational analysis, but will offer four alternative categories for exploration. The first takes up Walsh's idea of the unselfconscious hypocrite. In Restoration drama, this usually manifests itself in the form of casuistry, as we watch characters struggle to find justifications for their actions which are contrary to religious norms. The second category includes those characters who

¹⁵ Runte, 'Cross-Cultural Influences', 275.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 266.

¹⁷ Peacock, 'Molière Nationalised', 177–8.

¹⁸ Jeremy Collier, *A short view of the immorality, and profaneness of the English stage together with the sense of antiquity upon this argument* (London, 1698), 110–1.

profess religious adherence, but whose disreputable behaviour – licentiousness, gluttony, drunkenness, and other forms of excess – contravenes the expectations of their religion. Michael D. Bailey has described accusations of this kind of behaviour against religious opponents as ‘a standard component in Christian moralists’ rhetorical tool-kit’.¹⁹ This category will be limited to modes of behaviour of a personal kind that do not seriously harm others. The harmful kind, Walsh’s predatory monsters, make up the third category. These will be defined as those whose hypocritical behaviour usually involves deception that is used for the acquisition of power or wealth, irrespective of the potential damage caused to others. Finally (and fourthly), there is religious dissimulation: those characters who pretend to adhere to one faith while inwardly believing in another, or to disguise the absence of any faith at all. Miriam Eliav-Feldon and Tamar Herzig see the entire early modern period as a ‘heyday of religious dissimulation and of the authorities’ preoccupation with unmasking it’, and Andrew Hadfield argues that early modern life in England had come to be characterized by a culture of lying. Hadfield also sees literature as ‘often a testing ground for ideas about lying’, using Shakespeare’s *Othello* as a case study to explore the complex ways in which dissimulation can be represented, including equivocation, which he argues lies at the heart of the play.²⁰ The plays examined in this article reveal some of the political reasons for dissimulation, together with examples of dissimulation for more personal reasons. In some cases, we will see how the dramatists create a metaphorical world of masquerade for their characters to inhabit.

Before examining the plays, it is worth highlighting some interesting gender issues that will emerge. Attitudes to the participation of women in the world of the theatre eased after the Restoration. Women started appearing on stage and, although the number of female dramatists in the period was small (only ten are recorded, which is just over five per cent of the total), some of them were now able to make a living from writing for the stage. The only one of these women who engaged with hypocrisy was Aphra Behn, and

¹⁹ Michael D. Bailey, ‘Superstition and Dissimulation: Discerning False Religion in the Fifteenth Century’, in Miriam Eliav-Feldon and Tamar Herzig, eds, *Dissimulation and Deceit in Early Modern Europe* (London, 2015), 9–26, at 13.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 3; Andrew Hadfield, *Lying in Early Modern English Culture: From the Oath of Supremacy to the Oath of Allegiance* (Oxford, 2017), 4, 30, 304.

we will see that she adopted a nuanced approach by offering the audience, as well as the usual clerical male hypocrites, some lay female hypocrites, one of whom outclasses the men. Most of the characters examined in this article, however, are male, in plays written by men. Every cleric in the period was male, but it is interesting to note that the fiercest criticism can be seen in *The Female Prelate* (1680), where Elkanah Settle seized this rare opportunity to add misogyny to his anticlericalism and anti-Catholicism.

CASUISTRY

Navigating the complex religious pathways of the late Stuart age could be very challenging, particularly for those with tender consciences, and casuistic arguments were often used to find a solution, or at least a compromise. Casuistry has been primarily associated with Jesuitical reasoning, but some historians have also identified an important strain of casuistry in puritan and nonconformist writing.²¹ Although casuistry had been a prominent feature of moral reasoning for a century, it had become subject to attack in some quarters, most notably from the French religious philosopher Blaise Pascal in his *Provincial Letters* in 1656/7. As Barbara Warnick has observed, casuistry had allowed so many caveats and exclusions that it was felt by many that 'the force of moral law was thoroughly dissipated'.²² This was particularly pertinent in issues relating to oaths. This negative attitude to casuistry can be seen in some of the early anti-puritan satires of the period.²³ The character Lockwhite in *The Rump* (1660) argues that 'He that will live in this world, must be endowed with these three rare Qualities; Dissimulation, Equivocation, and Mental reservation'.²⁴ In *The Cutter of Coleman Street* (1661), two lovers

²¹ Keith Thomas, 'Cases of Conscience in Seventeenth-Century England', in John Morrill, Paul Slack and Daniel Woolf, eds, *Public Duty and Private Conscience in Seventeenth-Century England: Essays Presented to G. E. Aylmer* (Oxford, 1993), 29–56, at 43; Edward Vallance, 'Oaths, Casuistry, and Equivocation: Anglican Responses to the Engagement Controversy', *HistJ* 44 (2001), 59–77.

²² Barbara Warnick, 'The Abuse of Casuistry: A History of Moral Reasoning', by Albert R. Jonsen and Stephen Toulmin', *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 24 (1991), 76–80, at 78.

²³ Susan Staves sees 'villainous puritans invariably justifying the most transparent perjuries with Jesuitical casuistry': Susan Staves, *Players' Scepters: Fictions of Authority in the Restoration* (Lincoln, 1979), 192, 203.

²⁴ John Tatham, *The Rump* (London, 1660), 8–9.

(who have sworn to their parents that they will not speak to each other) solve their problem by hatching a plan ‘to save their Oathes like cunning Casuists’ by marrying in the dark and in silence.²⁵ The cleric in this play – the ‘fuddling little Deacon’ Soaker – is satirized for his behaviour and his acceptance of casuistry. He is usually to be found in the buttery, and he agrees to marry the silent lovers in the dark and says they should give their consent by using ‘reverences and giving of hands’, rather than breaking their oath by speaking to each other.

Criticism of casuistry reaches its apogee in John Wilson’s *The Cheats* (1663), in which the nonconformist minister Scruple sells his religious adherence to the highest bidder; the winners are a group of dissenters and not the Church of England. In the play, Scruple often calls on casuistry to support his disreputable arguments and flawed behaviour. When calling for a ‘great tankard’, he argues that ‘The Casuists, speak comfortably in this point—A man may eat, and drink abundantly, without any necessity, but merely for his pleasure’.²⁶ He also shows disrespect for marriage when he calls on the casuists to justify adultery:

If a Woman, great with Child, long for another man, besides her Husband, and this Husband will not give consent; In this case we say, (and so we generally agree) that she may follow her natural inclination; Provided always, she have no intention of sin, but only to satisfy her longing.

and abortion:

If a young woman, of a godly Parentage, do fall into a holy Fornication (not out of Lust, but Love) and thereupon prove with Child; In such case we say, That it may be lawful to procure Abortion, provided always, it be not done, with an intention of Murder, but only to save Life, or Reputation.²⁷

Scruple’s most egregious display of casuistry relates to the question faced by all clergy at the time: whether to conform, or not, to the restored Church of England following the 1662 Act of Uniformity. The act had been enforced just a few months before

²⁵ Abraham Cowley, *The Cutter of Coleman Street* (London, 1663), 31.

²⁶ John Wilson, *The cheats* (London, 1664), 15.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 23.

the play was first performed, making this a very topical issue. The act plunged many clergy into a crisis of conscience that led to the ejection of over a thousand of them from their livings, some of whom suffered considerable distress. Despite the misery experienced by these ejected clergy, many conformists took an unsympathetic view. They saw struggles of conscience as nothing but a mask that would lead to what Thomas Ashenden would later call ‘a monstrous medley of mischiefs’.²⁸ Although there is extensive primary material relating to the act, *The Cheats* is the only play of the period that engages with it.

In the play, when Scruple is offered a £300 living if he will conform, we watch him alone on stage as he calls on casuistry, equivocation and every other possible methodology to help him to justify his conformity and his abandonment of his ‘brethren’. He also tries to negotiate his way around the issue of oaths. The monologue is long, rambling and highly entertaining, and Scruple reaches the climax of the speech with a rapturous conclusion:

I have found an Expedient (and yet not mine, but our Brethrens still)
The Swearer is not bound to the meaning of the Prescriber of the Oath,
or his own meaning—How then?—Sweetly:—To the reality of the
thing sworn:—I think the hair is split:—But who shall be Judge of
that?—Of that hereafter:—In the mean time— Here is 300 l. a year,
and a goodly house upon’t:—I will Conform, Reform, Transform,
Perform, Deform, Inform, any Form: —Form—Form— ‘Tis but
one syllable, and has no very ill sound—It may be swallowed.²⁹

The word ‘form’ becomes the central image in this virtuoso display of formlessness. Having made this enormous effort to arrive at the decision to conform, he is then offered more money to stay with his non-conformist brethren, which he accepts.

Another casuistic cleric can be found in John Dryden’s *The Spanish Fryar* (1680), written at the height of the Popish Plot. Dryden’s portrayal of the Roman Catholic Fr Dominic is a vividly drawn character assassination. Dominic’s drunkenness and avarice are clear from his first appearance when he imbibes several drinks in swift succession and accepts a bribe from Lorenzo to deliver a letter to the object of Lorenzo’s love, Elvira. Dominic is her confessor and is the only man her jealous husband Gomez will allow into her

²⁸ Thomas Ashenden, *No Penalty, No Peace* (London, 1682), 19.

²⁹ Wilson, *The cheats*, 73.

presence. Once he is with her, he takes on the role of what Collier described as ‘a pimp for Lorenzo’.³⁰ Like Scruple in *The Cheats*, Dominic uses casuistic arguments that undermine the sacrament of marriage. He tells Elvira that a marriage vow ‘is a very solemn thing; and ’tis good to keep it: —but, notwithstanding, it may be broken, upon some occasions.’ He asks her whether she has ‘striven with all [her] might against this frailty?’ She says she has, and he absolves her by saying that ‘when we have done our utmost, it extenuates the Sin.’³¹ This sense of ‘when all else fails’ is emphasized later when Dominic tells her that ‘when the Spiritual means have been apply’d, and fails: in that case, the Carnal may be us’d.’³²

The next scene that features Dominic highlights the perceived connection between hypocrisy, costume and disguise. Dominic sees another friar in the street, only to discover that it is Lorenzo in disguise, ‘my noble Colonel in Metamorphosis’. Lorenzo has decided to try to get access to Elvira dressed as a friar. For him, the similarity between his disguise and Dominic’s normal attire is not just about their dress. Lorenzo emphasizes Dominic’s hypocrisy by observing that ‘my holiness, like yours, is meer out-side’. What is a temporary costume for Lorenzo is a fundamental and hypocritical disguise for Dominic. Lorenzo also generalizes the hypocrisy of clerical dress, ‘a Habit that in all Ages has been friendly to Fornication’.³³ Lorenzo asks Dominic to go with him to Elvira. In a soliloquy before they arrive, Elvira declares that her conscience is not troubled by her impending adultery because Dominic ‘has given it a Dose of Church Opium, to lull it.’³⁴

These plays have shown us lay and clerical characters twisting and turning along narrow moral pathways to arrive at the answers they need to justify their hypocrisy. As Scruple proclaims, ‘I think the hair is split.’³⁵

DISREPUTABLE BEHAVIOUR

In the plays, we see very few sober, moderate, slim, honest and chaste clerics: Fr Dominic also provides an example of the disreputable hypocritical cleric and the ‘Bellygod’. In the first scene of *The Spanish*

³⁰ Collier, *A short view*, 98.

³¹ John Dryden, *The Spanish fryar* (London, 1681), 26.

³² *Ibid.* 27.

³³ *Ibid.* 29.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 30; this anticipates Marx’s famous quote about religion.

³⁵ Wilson, *The cheats*, 73.

Fryar, we hear a description of Dominic before he appears, and even before his name is mentioned. In this speech by Colonel Pedro, Dryden weaves together anti-Catholic comments with the wider anti-clerical tropes of gluttony and lechery:

I met a reverend, fat, old, gouty Fryar;
With a Paunch swoln so high, his double Chin
Might rest upon't: A true Son of the Church;
Fresh colour'd, and well thriven on his Trade,
Come puffing with his greazy bald-pate Quire,
And fumbling o'er his Beads, in such an Agony,
He told 'em false for fear: About his Neck
There hung a Wench; the Labell of his Function;
Whom he shook off, 'faith, methought, unkindly.³⁶

Hypocritical Roman Catholics were not the only targets for dramatists, and clerics of the Church of England did not escape criticism. In Wycherley's *The Gentleman Dancing-Master* (1673), Don Diego, an old rich Spanish merchant, portrays the clergy as sexually untrustworthy. He says that 'we are bold enough in trusting them with our Souls, I'll never trust 'em with the body of my Daughter', whom he keeps locked up at home.³⁷ This parental concern can also be seen in Durfey's *The Marriage-Hater Match'd* (1692). Lady Bumsiddle says of her niece: 'if she were my Daughter, I had as lieve trust her with a Dragoon as a Parson'.³⁸ In *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688), Thomas Shadwell portrays the parson as hypocritical and gluttonous: 'tappes'd in some Ale-house, Bawdy-house, or Brandy shop He's a brave swinging Orthodox'.³⁹ And in John Vanbrugh's *The Relapse* (1697), Chaplain Bull is accused of many faults:

For as Chaplains now go, 'tis probable he eats three pound of Beef to the reading of one Chapter—This gives him Carnal desires, he wants Money, Preferment, Wine, a Whore; therefore we must Invite him to Supper, give him fat Capons, Sack and Sugar, a Purse of Gold, and a plump Sister.⁴⁰

³⁶ Dryden, *The Spanish fryar*, 3.

³⁷ Wycherley, *The gentleman dancing-master*, 22.

³⁸ Durfey, *The marriage-hater match'd*, 12.

³⁹ Thomas Shadwell, *The squire of Alsatia* (London, 1688), 72.

⁴⁰ Vanbrugh, *The relapse*, 89.

Nonconformists were also subjected to attack. In Thomas Jevon's *The Devil of a Wife* (1686), Lady Lovemore's chaplain Noddy is described as 'A Hypocritical Phanatick Parson, loves to eat and cant'.⁴¹ His gluttony is prodigious: he orders two chickens, some bacon and a pie, together with 'a Bottle of Sack, a Bottle of Ale and a Bottle of March Beer' just to get him through till supper time.⁴²

Aphra Behn was similarly adept at turning her barbed pen towards the nonconformists. The wife of *Sir Patient Fancy* (1678) describes his religious friends as 'a Herd of snivelling grinning Hypocrites that call themselves the teaching Saints, who under pretence of securing me to the number of their Flock, do so sneer upon me, pat my Breasts and cry, fy, fy upon this fashion of tempting Nakedness'. Once again, we see polemical ambiguity at work as the conforming Lady Fancy is herself portrayed as a dissembling cheat who accuses religious hypocrites of pretence.⁴³ In *The Roundheads* (1681), the hypocrisy and lasciviousness of the puritan cleric Gogle is clear from his first appearance. Within moments of being left alone on stage with Lady Desborough, he is fondling her breasts. When she rejects his advances, he defends himself by explaining that many 'Ladies of high Degree in the Commonwealth' take up the opportunity offered by clerics of sexual encounters without risk of public exposure.⁴⁴ In *The Feigned Curtizans* (1679), the character Timothy Tickletext describes himself as 'principal holder forth of the Covent Garden Conventicle, Chaplain of Buffoon-Hall in the County of Kent'. At his first appearance, we see him preening himself for the ladies. In contrast to the plays in which lovers disguise themselves as clerics, Tickletext adopts an antithetical disguise when he sets off 'wenching'. He sees his clerical habit as a restriction and, once it is cast off and he is 'disguised' as a member of the laity, he is free to follow his sexual urges. He takes hypocrisy and dissembling to a new level: 'Certo 'tis a wonderfull pleasure to deceive the World'.⁴⁵ This image of the hypocrite relishing his deception is also a key factor in the next category.

These portrayals of clerics and other religious adherents present such bad examples of how to behave that their hypocrisy undermines

⁴¹ Thomas Jevon, *The Devil of a Wife* (London, 1686), 'The Actors Names', unpaginated.

⁴² *Ibid.* 5.

⁴³ Aphra Behn, *Sir Patient Fancy* (London, 1678), 14–15.

⁴⁴ Aphra Behn, *The Roundheads* (London, 1682), 30.

⁴⁵ Aphra Behn, *The Feign'd Curtizans* (London, 1679), 34.

the doctrines of their religious groups, and perhaps of religion in general.

PREDATORY MONSTERS

Some plays offer a more sinister manifestation of hypocrisy, with religious characters manipulating others for their personal gain, whether political or financial. We have already seen how the hypocrisy of the puritan cleric Gogle in *The Roundheads* reveals itself in licentiousness, but hypocrisy goes deeper in this play. In the wake of the Tory backlash after the Popish Plot, dramatists sought to link the Whigs with the puritans of the republican period by returning to the style of the early Restoration anti-puritan satires. Behn went a step further by adapting John Tatham's *The Rump* (1660), using some of Tatham's text. In this play, the leading puritans of the republican leadership after the death of Cromwell take pride in their ability to dissimulate and equivocate, which is so effective that they can 'out-do the Jesuits'.⁴⁶ General Lambert boasts to his wife that he believes he has secured the highest office through bribery, promises of preferment, and 'Hypocrisie and Pretence of Religion'.⁴⁷ Later in the play, when Lord Desborough says he has lost the ability to dissimulate, Gogle says he has lost a great virtue and pleads: 'let us not lose the Cause for Dissimulation and Hypocrisie, those two main Engines that have carry'd on the great Work'.⁴⁸

The issue of polemical ambiguity can be seen in John Crowne's two-part *The Destruction of Jerusalem by Titus Vespasian* (1677). Although the plays are set during the Romans' destruction of the city of Jerusalem and its Temple in 70 CE, one of the major subplots is the violent division between two groups of Jews: the establishment Sanhedrin and the dissenting Pharisees. At a time when nonconformists were under attack in the campaign for religious uniformity, Crowne reflects the conflict between the Church of England and the nonconformists. In the epilogue to Part I, Crowne draws a clear parallel between the Pharisees and the nonconformists with the line 'Fanaticks are but Jews uncircumciz'd'.⁴⁹ The leader of the

⁴⁶ Aphra Behn, *The Roundheads* (London, 1682), 8.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 11.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 35.

⁴⁹ John Crowne, *The destruction of Jerusalem by Titus Vespasian* (London, 1677), part 1, 56.

rebellious Pharisees is John, described in the list of characters as ‘A dissembling Pharisack Jew’.⁵⁰ Despite his speeches and his plotting against the Sanhedrin, it is clear to the audience that he is a hypocrite. His real intention is his own advancement and, in an aside in Part I, he admits that ‘One more Religious Lye, the Mitre’s mine’.⁵¹ In Part II, one stage direction says that John is wearing ‘Pontifical Vestments’.⁵² Linking an object of aversion with Roman Catholicism was a common trope of the period and conformists frequently sought to undermine dissent by linking it with Roman Catholicism. In *The Roundheads*, Lady Desborough calls Gogle ‘the very Pope of Presbytery’, and in an early Restoration play, *The Pragmatical Jesuit New-Leavened* (1665?) by Richard Carpenter, the character Aristotle calls two other characters a ‘Puritanical Jesuit’ and a ‘Jesuitical Puritan’, and accuses them of being ‘both Enthusiasm’d with a singular spirit’.⁵³ This idea of a commonality of beliefs is articulated by Durfey in the preface to his play *The Royalist* (1682): ‘I am sure your Papist and Phanatick have an entire Union and agree to a hair’.⁵⁴

Crowne turned his fire directly on Roman Catholicism in *The English Friar* (1690), his version of Molière’s *Tartuffe*, and the first new anti-Catholic play after the Glorious Revolution. *The English Friar* appears to be set during the reign of the Roman Catholic James II. Fr Finicall is the title character of the play and is a model of hypocrisy and deception. As with the other examples in this category, Finicall seeks to manipulate others for his own gain, but his attitude strikes wider and brings the integrity of the entire Roman Catholic faith into question. He admits that the stories told by priests in this world can never be tested until after death: ‘My trade is a fine easy gainful cheat, / How easy ’tis, Saintship to counterfeit; / And pleasing fables to invent and spread; / And fools ne’re find the cheat, till they are dead’.⁵⁵ The trope that Roman Catholics are not true Christians is amplified in the play when Lady Pinch-gut’s servants describe her as ‘a damn’d Papistical Heathen. She’s a Papist,

⁵⁰ Ibid., ‘The NAMES of the PERSONS in both Plays’, unpaginated.

⁵¹ Ibid. 37.

⁵² Crowne, *The destruction of Jerusalem* (London, 1677), part 2, 27.

⁵³ Behn, *The Roundheads*, 29; Richard Carpenter, *The pragmatical Jesuit new-leven’d* (London, 1665), 34.

⁵⁴ Thomas Durfey, *The Royalist* (London, 1682), preface.

⁵⁵ John Crowne, *The English frier* (London, 1690), 41.

Sir, but no Christian'. They also describe her priests as irreligious – 'cunning Knaves; they have more Wit than to trouble themselves with Religion' – and avaricious – 'They'll have Religion for you, if you'll pay for't'.⁵⁶ Finicall embodies this avarice as he is attempting to cheat Sir Thomas Credulous of his estate. But Sir Thomas is aware of the plan and, in his plot to expose Finicall, he dissimulates a religious conversion and says he will 'pretend I am a Convert, and sick and dying', a deceptive deathbed conversion that is put to good use.⁵⁷

Lord Wiseman's description of Fr Finicall adds licentiousness to the charge-sheet – 'the lov'd, slick, wash'd, clean, comb'd, curl'd shock o' the Ladies ... 'tis thought he lyes between their Sheets' – and, in a later scene, we are shown clear evidence of this as he attempts to seduce Pansy, Lady Credulous's woman.⁵⁸ His justification for 'carnal Communion' with Pansy leads him to confess the hypocrisy and deception not just of himself, but of the entire Roman Catholic Church. His argument is that the ends justify the means and 'our frauds holy being for holy ends'. He talks of the 'holy Stratagem o' Priests ... thereby religiously to deceive the world' and 'we Priests are forc'd to appear in many shapes'. He uses the metaphor of performance to show how their outward show conceals their frauds: 'And though like the Bearers o' my Lord-Mayors Pageant, we may have many a secret foul step, we must keep our Pageant pure, for that is seen, we are hid'.⁵⁹ There is a contrast here with *The Spanish Fryar*. In that play, Dominic uses casuistry to justify his statements and actions, but Finicall paints an explicit self-portrait of hypocrisy and irreligion. He is not, however, above using casuistry himself. He justifies cheating 'Lord Stately, and other Protestant fools' as a way of saving their souls: 'so we make 'em do some good; and are false to them, but sincere to our calling of Priesthood'.⁶⁰ This idea that deception is a job requirement for a priest substantiates the hypocrisy of the stage cleric.

⁵⁶ Ibid. 9.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 26.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 13.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 50–1.

⁶⁰ Ibid. 51.

The idea of the predatory monster reaches its apotheosis in *The Female Prelate* (1680), Settle's version of the legendary ninth-century female pope. The audience learns that, before the play even begins, Joanna was already an adulteress, a murderer and a dissembler. As the play progresses, we see her resort to blatant lying, intense lasciviousness and increasing violence. She has no redeeming features, and this character deserves to join the panoply of great stage dissembling anti-heroes, such as Iago, Richard III and Tartuffe. It is also a play rich with deception, with the elevation to the papacy of a woman disguised as a man and dissembling as a priest. Settle creates a world of masquerade for Joanna to inhabit. For example, the word 'false' appears eighteen times in the text; Amiran, a confidant of Joanna, spends the entire play disguising her gender as Joanna's page; and a double bed-trick is engineered to satisfy the lust of Joanna and her lover Lorenzo. The primary dissembler is, of course, Joanna herself. Her first disguise had been adopted years before the action of the play begins. She had been a lover of the old duke of Saxony and, when she was spurned, she decided to return to his court to seek her revenge. She chose to do this disguised as a Benedictine monk. 'Thus mask'd and Shrowded in his borrowed Russet', she became the duke's confessor and eventually murdered him.⁶¹ She was able to maintain her disguise, both as a man and a cleric, even within the church, and 'Deceived the blinded world; for seven long years / My Arts and Sex concealed: nay, and to heighten / The miracle, I have lived an undiscovered Woman, / Bred amongst Priests, high fed, hot-blooded Priests ... Yet I've defyed their keenest eyes to track me'. Lorenzo is full of admiration and describes her as 'my dear mask'd Divinity'.⁶² When Joanna is chosen as pope, she is highly satisfied by her brilliant dissembling, asking: 'How dost thou like the Port our Greatness bears, / Do we not play the Royal Masquerader nobly?'⁶³ There is another level of dissembling in this play, which is that Joanna is not a true Roman Catholic and, as we will see below, probably not even a Christian.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Elkanah Settle, *The Female Prelate* (London, 1680), 27.

⁶² *Ibid.* 5.

⁶³ *Ibid.* 25.

⁶⁴ Susan Owen argues that Joanna's religion is 'a fraud': Susan J. Owen, *Restoration Theatre and Crisis* (Oxford, 1996), 142.

These predatory monsters have no difficulty in exploiting others to advance their own positions. In many of these examples, this exploitation also requires a degree of dissimulation. It is to the theme of religious dissimulation that we now turn.

RELIGIOUS DISSIMULATION

In a period when toleration was limited, religious dissimulation could be useful for maintaining a quiet life and, in some cases, as a means of self-preservation, particularly for Roman Catholics. The trope of the disguised Roman Catholic is explicit in the anonymous *The Excommunicated Prince* (1679), which is set in Georgia where Greek Orthodoxy is the established religion. The Jesuits look forward to the time when ‘We need not then in these strange Shapes appear. / Wear others Looks, or speak in Character.’⁶⁵ They look back at many years of successful dissembling – ‘These forty Years, unseen as Night, I’ve gone / Through snaky Ways; and more strange Shapes put on.’⁶⁶ They seek revenge against those who ‘all our Cheats display; / Take off our Masks, and shew us to the Day.’⁶⁷ Some of the prince’s friends see through the masquerade, but the prince does not. One of his friends is appalled at how the Jesuits pretend to be true to the Grecian church and use this as ‘An holy Mask for their black Perjury! / Yet with such Paint they shadow the Deceit.’⁶⁸ As Roger L’Estrange’s character Citt declared, ‘your Papist in Masquerade, your Concealed Papist, these are all of ’em forty times worse than your Known, Jesuited, and Barefaced Papist.’⁶⁹

In *The Roundheads*, Lady Desborough decides Gogle can be useful and turns to blackmail, promising that she will not report his lascivious hypocritical behaviour if he will rescue her lover from prison and bring him to her. We already know that Lady Desborough is a closet Royalist – her lover Freeman has told us that she feigns nonconformity – but she gives such an effective pretence of religion that her nonconformist husband believes she can be trusted with a Cavalier

⁶⁵ William Bedloe, *The excommunicated prince, or, The false relique a tragedy* (London, 1679), 9.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 10.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 22.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 26.

⁶⁹ Sir Roger L’Estrange, *Citt and Bumpkin, or, A learned discourse upon swearing and lying and other laudable qualities tending to a thorow reformation* (London, 1680), part 2, 6.

because she 'goes to a Conventicle twice a day, besides long Prayers and lowd Psalm-singing'.⁷⁰ Lady Desborough says to Gogle: 'for know, Sir, I am as great an Hypocrite as you, and know the Cheats of your Religion too; and since we know one another, 'tis like we shall be true.'⁷¹

Religious dissimulation can sometimes be hard work, and this can be seen in *The Cutter of Coleman Street* (1661). Colonel Jolly is a Royalist whose estates were sequestered, and he is also portrayed as a religious hypocrite. His neglect of religion is clear when he asks for a prayer book and his daughter, Aurelia, tells him that it is 'all mouldy, I must wipe it first'.⁷² Jolly has two aims in the play. The first is to bring about the marriage of his ward in such a way that enables him to keep her substantial marriage portion. The second is to recover his sequestered estates by marrying the widow of the puritan who acquired them, 'Collonel Fear-the Lord-Barebottle, a Saint and a Sope-boyley'.⁷³ But the widow will only marry him if he converts to her religion. He dissembles conversion but finds it exhausting, 'a damn'd constraint and drudgery me-thinks, this Dissimulation'.⁷⁴

The effort of dissimulation is also shown in *The Folly of Priestcraft*. Once again, hypocrisy and disguise are everywhere, as the dramatist creates another example of a world of masquerade. Almost every character dissembles at some point in the play and many of them do so in disguise. Even the 'hero' Turnabout is riddled with hypocrisy. At the start of the play, Turnabout is in love with Leucasia, but she is resisting him. He believes he will improve his chances if he becomes a Roman Catholic, but bewails that there is already too much conversion going on: 'this changing a Man's Religion is a meer drug, 'tis grown too common'.⁷⁵ As the play progresses, Leucasia starts to feel sorry for Turnabout and finds ways to rescue him from what she describes as the 'continual Drudgery of a whining Hypocrisy'.⁷⁶

The epitome of this religious promiscuity can be seen in the title character in Thomas Durfey's *Sir Barnaby Whigg* (1681), who is

⁷⁰ Behn, *The Roundheads*, 18.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* 31.

⁷² Cowley, *The Cutter*, 23.

⁷³ *Ibid.* 5–6.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 32.

⁷⁵ Anon, *The folly of priest-craft*, 1.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 19.

described as willing to ‘change his Opinion as easily as his Coat’, another use of a clothing metaphor to describe a hypocrite.⁷⁷ It is money and power that drives him, and he admits that his soul is ‘always in the heart of the City—in Lumbard street’.⁷⁸ He starts the play as a nonconformist and a member of the Church Militant but, when he hears a rumour that power is shifting towards the Church of England, he decides he will conform and impeach his ‘quondam Brethren’.⁷⁹ The play was first performed in the autumn of 1681 when, in the wake of the discrediting of the Popish Plot, power was shifting towards the Tories and against the nonconformists. This change of coat is, however, only the first of Sir Barnaby’s transformations. When he tells Wilding that he is now fixed in his conformity and ‘I love Bishops with all my heart’, Wilding decides to play a trick on him by getting his footman Swift to disguise himself as a Roman Catholic priest.⁸⁰ Swift persuades Sir Barnaby that a very wealthy widow is in love with him. Although she is the niece of the Grand Vizier, Swift says she is a devout Roman Catholic and causes Sir Barnaby serious discomfort by asking what his religion is. Sir Barnaby doesn’t give a straight answer and so Swift says that only a ‘honest, godly Roman Catholick’ will win her. Sir Barnaby immediately declares that he has ‘ever lov’d and honour’d’ the Pope.⁸¹ But yet another trap has been laid for him. A letter arrives from the widow’s uncle, without whose consent she cannot marry, saying that any future husband must ‘immediately turn Musselman’. Sir Barnaby promptly says he will ‘turn Turk’. He shamelessly admits his religious promiscuity by adding that ‘I’le turn Turk, man, Jew, Moor, Græcian, any thing: Pox on’t, I’le not lose a Lady, and such a sum for the sake of any Religion under the Sun’.⁸² He then adds that he will fight for the Turks in the forthcoming battle, whereupon Wilding and the Justice (who have been eavesdropping) emerge and Sir Barnaby is arrested for treason. The idea that such religious flexibility was not uncommon at the time is shown in a brief exchange after Sir Barnaby has been taken away. Wilding asks ‘Was there ever

⁷⁷ Thomas Durfey, *Sir Barnaby Whigg* (London, 1681), 9.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 10. Lumbard Street (now Lombard Street) was in the financial centre of the City of London.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 30.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 41.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* 49.

⁸² *Ibid.* 50.

such a Rascal?’ and his friend answers ‘Yes, Thousands in their hearts’.⁸³

Religious dissimulation could go further than concealing an inconvenient faith. It could also be used to conceal the absence of any faith at all. In *The Female Prelate*, an analysis of Joanna’s religious position reveals an absence of religious commitment that borders on atheism. There is a mocking tone to the way she talks about the Roman Catholic faithful – ‘poor little unambitious Church men’ – and their beliefs – ‘the airy Dreams of Faith, Religion, Piety’.⁸⁴ She is particularly scathing about those Roman Catholics who leave money to the church at the end of their lives: ‘those / Dull pious dying fools, who in despair / To buy Eternity, make the Church their Heir.’ She is, of course, very happy to pocket the cash ‘which we in Lust consume’.⁸⁵ This highly derogatory attitude to the Roman Catholic Church and its followers does not mean she is entirely without belief. Although she hardly mentions God, there are a number of references to the devil. Before the new pope is elected, Joanna offers a Faustian pact to become pope: ‘Bring me some God, or what else power beside, / Some kinder Devil, but toth’ Roman Chair, / And I am thy Slave for ever.’⁸⁶ She clearly believes the pact is in place because, on two occasions later in the play, she calls on her ‘Adored dear Devil’ to save her from a dangerous situation.⁸⁷ Also, when confronted by the ghost of the old duke, she refers to him as ‘This Messenger Of Hell’.⁸⁸ None of this would have been a surprise to Andrew Marvell who saw all Roman Catholic priests as adopting ‘bold imposture ... under the name of Christianity’.⁸⁹

Another example of an atheist dissembling as a cleric can be found in Dryden’s *Don Sebastian* (1689). The play is set in Islamic Barbary and the religious leader is the Mufti. When the emperor asks him to annul his marriage, the Mufti gets himself out of this tight spot by telling the emperor that, although the law forbids him to marry a Christian, there is no prohibition to his ravishing her. This

⁸³ Ibid. 51.

⁸⁴ Settle, *The Female Prelate*, 55.

⁸⁵ Ibid. 47.

⁸⁶ Ibid. 5.

⁸⁷ Ibid. 50, 69.

⁸⁸ Ibid. 50.

⁸⁹ Andrew Marvell, *An account of the growth of popery, and arbitrary government in England* (Amsterdam, 1677), 5.

willingness to bend the religious laws is only one aspect of the Mufti's hypocrisy. Early in the play he says that, although the law requires fasting and abstaining from alcohol, this should only apply to 'the Vulgar' and not to 'Kings and to their Guides', presumably including himself.⁹⁰ Feasting and fasting are used metaphorically by his wife to emphasize his hypocrisy: 'The Mufti wou'd feast himself upon other Women, and keep me fasting'.⁹¹ When threatened with torture, he sets himself apart from the vulgar with his hypocrisy: 'we may preach Suffering to others, but alas, holy Flesh is too well pamper'd to endure Martyrdom'.⁹² These are, however, minor infringements compared to his soliloquy in Act IV when he confesses not only his hypocrisy, but also his atheism. Religion is, to him, no more than a stepping stone to power: 'This 'tis to have a sound Head-piece; by this I have got to be chief of my Religion; that is, honestly speaking, to teach others what I neither know nor believe myself. For what's Mahomet to me, but that I get by him?'⁹³

The hypocrisy of religious promiscuity has been clearly portrayed in these examples. The implication of this behaviour is that their religious commitment must be shallow. In some cases, we have seen a lack of any religious belief, usually concealed beneath a veneer of piety.

CONCLUSION

These portrayals of atheists masquerading as religious leaders cast doubt on the faith of the earlier examples of religious hypocrites. Through the contorted reasoning of the casuists, the scandalous behaviour of the reprobates, the deviousness of the predators, and the deceit of the dissimulators, the post-Restoration dramatists created an image of a world pervaded by religious hypocrisy. The use of these different forms of hypocrisy in the portrayals of religious characters across all the religious denominations shows that the trope of the religious hypocrite was not specific to puritans, dissenters or Roman Catholics, but had a much wider application. The remorselessness of these negative portrayals also raises the question of the

⁹⁰ John Dryden, *Don Sebastian* (London, 1690), 6.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* 60.

⁹² *Ibid.* 96.

⁹³ *Ibid.* 75–6.

attitude shown in the plays to religion in general. Dramatists could have included more examples of honest, decent religious characters to counterbalance the many negative portrayals, and this might have been expected if they themselves held religious beliefs and were not writing with the intention of undermining religion. Since they did not do this, it seems plausible that they did not care about the effect their works were having on religion in general. Their remorseless use of the religious hypocrite in their plays presents an impression of a society that goes beyond Wycherley's evocation of a masquerading age, and shows us instead a profoundly hypocritical one.