

Laughing at Hypocrisy: *The Turncoats* (1711), Visual Culture and Dissent in Early Eighteenth-Century England

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This article considers The Turncoats (1711), an anti-Dissent graphic satire published after the Tory victory in the 1710 General Election. The print ridiculed the hypocrisy of those Dissenters who abandoned their principles and conformed to the Church of England after that election, and pointed to the pervasiveness of religious hypocrisy in early eighteenth-century England more generally. This article contextualizes the print within the tense religious and political rivalries that developed after the 1688 Revolution and the trial of Henry Sacheverell. The Turncoats' ridicule resonated because it built on older traditions of stereotypes in anti-papery and anti-puritanism, which used mockery to attack those perceived to be hypocrites. Mockery is analyzed by considering how early modern culture understood laughter. It is argued that ridicule in The Turncoats expressed superiority over hypocrites by subjecting them to contempt and provided relief from anxieties about the prevalence of hypocrisy during the rage of parties.

Ridicule in *The Turncoats* (1711) was an uneasy mixture of celebration and concern (Figure 1).¹ The print celebrated the Tory victory in the general election of autumn 1710 as a triumph of sincerity over hypocrisy. At the same time, it expressed concern that, despite that victory, hypocrisy continued to corrupt the Protestant interest.

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¹ Frederic Stephens and Dorothy M. George, eds, *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires preserved in the Dept. of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum*, 11 vols (1870–1954), no. 1507 [hereafter: BM Satires]. Stephens dates the print to 1709. However, its publisher, William Pennock, advertised it in *The Evening Post*, 3–6 February 1711.

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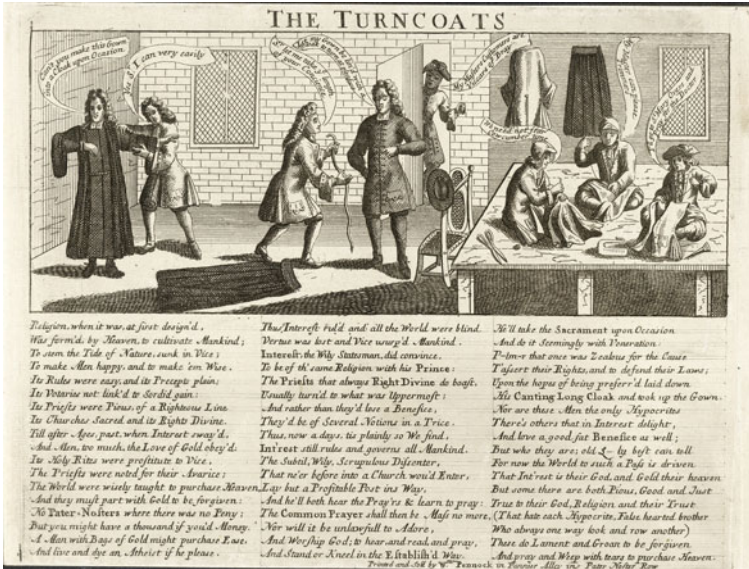


Figure 1. *The Turncoats* (1711). Reproduced by permission of The British Museum. Copyright of the Trustees of The British Museum.

A Tory victory was a victory for the high church party in England’s established church over those which it felt threatened that church, namely those Dissenting Protestants and low churchmen who had advocated for Dissenters’ place in English public life since their toleration after the 1688–9 Revolution. The fall of the Whig government in 1710 (and, with it, the low church interest) meant that Dissent would not be treated as leniently as it had been for the past twenty years, a change in fortunes that caused many ministers to conform to the established church that they had long claimed to be popish, seemingly putting preferment before principle. *The Turncoats* scoffed at the deftness of these conversions. It shows two ministers being measured in a tailor’s shop, *turning their coats* from Dissenting cloaks to high church gowns, and exposing their hypocrisy in the process. ‘Can’t you make the gown into a cloak upon occasion?’, the first minister asks his tailor, flaunting his intention to turn again in the future. ‘Let my gown by lin’d with a cloak to turn at pleasure’, demands the second, pointing at the cloak on the floor to indicate he will switch again when the situation suits. The

hypocrisy is galling. But the tailors have the Dissenters' measure: 'Sir, let me take the length of your conscience'.

As we unpick the scene, mockery piles on top of mockery. The ministers are derided by their social inferiors. An apprentice looks in on the workshop purely to mock them, while on the right, three gossiping labourers jest that they 'need not fear cucumber time' (i.e. summer, normally a quiet season for tailors), because they will be busy sewing new gowns. Old jokes about hypocrites are picked, magpie-like, from the bricolage of popular culture and rearranged into a new conceit: 'My masters are vicars of Bray', chides the apprentice at the back of the scene, referring to the time-serving cleric of proverb, print and song, who saved his own skin by shifting with the times. 'My masters can please trimmers', replies one of the labourers, riffing on multiple definitions of 'trimming', combining the tailors (trimming clothes), Dissenters (trimming consciences) and 'Trimmer', a slur against clergy or politicians who changed parties out of self-interest.² Hypocrites 'trimmed' in the nautical sense, in which a ship's sails were adjusted to make best use of the wind. Turncoat clergy changed vestments to find their best 'trim' for gain.

There is, therefore, a lot of ridicule in *The Turncoats*. But to what end? What did all this laughter *do*? This print (and many others produced during 1709–11) was part of a tradition of polemic that used mockery to expose religious hypocrisy to aggressive, moral emotions: anger, contempt and shame. Such polemic dated from the Reformation. Protestants denigrated Roman Catholic doctrine and tradition as a gaudy mockery of Christian truth, deriding its miracles and scoffing at its saints to expose it as Antichrist, the arch-hypocrite.³ This was a punishing, moral laughter which justified the Reformation by scorning what had gone before it.

There was much of this polemic in *The Turncoats*: Dissenting hypocrites were laughed to scorn. This is underscored by the politics of other graphic satires issued by *The Turncoats*' publisher, William Pennock, in 1710–11, which took a pro-Tory and -high church,

² 'Trimmer' was coined by George Saville, first marquess of Halifax, to celebrate the virtue of balance in politics in *The Character of a Trimmer* (London, 1682). It quickly became an insult.

³ Adam Morton, 'Glaring at Antichrist: Anti-Papal Images in Early Modern England c.1530–1680' (PhD thesis, University of York, 2011), 71–185. See also Patrick Collinson, 'Ecclesiastical Vitriol: Religious Satire in the 1590s and the Invention of Puritanism', in John Guy, ed., *The Two Reigns of Elizabeth I* (Cambridge, 1995), 150–70.

and anti-Whig, -low church and -Dissent, stance.⁴ It is argued below, however, that *The Turncoats* pushed at the conventional boundaries of party politics, decrying religious hypocrisy in general, alongside condemning Dissenting hypocrisy in particular.⁵ Ridicule reflected acute concerns about the prevalence of hypocrisy in public life which was a crucial factor in the crisis of politics during the first age of party (c.1678–1714).⁶ The public's growing political importance as voters, petitioners and readers was matched by growing worries about its ability to judge fairly in an era of rampant misrepresentation in which swollen volumes of partisan news used shams, cheats and frauds to distort truth to party ends. 'Hypocrisy is the profitable and consequently the reigning vice of the age', worried Richard Kingston, Jacobite turned informer, in 1709.⁷ Its pervasiveness during the first decade of the eighteenth century provoked a moral panic that marked the collapse of trust in public life.⁸

During that crisis, mocking exposés of religious hypocrisy continued to express anger, contempt and shame as they had since the Reformation. But ridicule also did something else: it provided release from anxieties caused by the perception that hypocrisy was prevalent in public life. How laughter was understood in early modern culture is revealing on this score. One theory saw laughter as a mark of the malicious joy found in feeling superior to someone or something else: we laugh at what is contemptible. Another theory, found most commonly in medical writing, saw laughter as relieving, a physical release of tensions in mind and body caused by feelings of misery or melancholy. We see both superiority and relief in *The Turncoats*' mockery of hypocrisy. The print ridiculed the contemptible (Dissenters) to

⁴ BM Satires, nos 1495, 1531, 1550 and 1570.

⁵ Previous discussions of the print have noted that its targets were wider than Dissent alone: see Carys Brown, *Friends, Neighbours, Sinners: Religious Difference in English Society, 1689–1750* (Cambridge, 2022), 118; and Brian Cowan, ed., *The State Trial of Doctor Henry Sacheverell*, Parliamentary History Texts and Studies 6 (Chichester and Maldon, MA, 2012), 159.

⁶ Mark Knights, *Representation and Misrepresentation in Later Stuart Britain* (Oxford, 2005), 3–11, 30–41, 223–72, 273–334. See also Kate Loveman, *Reading Fictions, 1660–1740: Deception in English Literary and Political Culture* (Aldershot, 2008), 19–46, 47–60, 85–108; and Rebecca Bullard, *The Politics of Disclosure, 1674–1725* (London, 2009), 1–26, 63–81, 183–9.

⁷ Richard Kingston, *Apothegmata Curiosa* (London, 1709), 17.

⁸ Mark Knights, 'Occasional Conformity and the Representation of Dissent: Hypocrisy, Sincerity, Moderation and Zeal', *PH* 24 (2005), 41–57.

celebrate the Tory-high church as morally superior; and it expressed horror that, despite that victory, hypocrisy was still a threat, for hypocrites were joining the church.

DISSENT AND HYPOCRISY

The roots of the hostility to Dissent portrayed in *The Turncoats* lay in the fallout of the 1688 Revolution. The nature of the revolution meant that no group was safe from accusations of hypocrisy. The established church struggled to reconcile the removal of James II with the doctrines of passive obedience and non-resistance. For non-juring Anglicans – who refused to swear oaths of allegiance to William and Mary, because doing so violated those sworn to James – there was no reconciliation: 1688 was an affront to God and conscience.⁹ That most Anglican clergy did take the oath was unsettling, because it smacked of interest trouncing principle and exposed an uncomfortable truth: hypocrisy was necessary for the new settlement to work. High churchmen accused their low church opponents of selling out the Church of England by supporting toleration and advocating for the place of Dissent within a comprehensive Protestant interest. High churchmen were in turn accused of hiding Jacobite sympathies under a pretended royalism; and Dissenters' sober dress and distain for socializing drew charges of hypocrisy, viewed as public displays of piety that masked the fanaticism that threatened England's church and state in the early eighteenth century as acutely as they had in the mid-seventeenth.¹⁰ Most troubling, however, was the fact that religion had become a plaything of politics. Whigs and Tories were accused of adopting positions on religious matters to con the public and win votes. Mark Knights has shown that, by 1710, it was widely accepted that 'religious language was ... used as a veneer covering private, sectional or group ends' and was 'deliberately chosen to hide

⁹ Richard Sharp, "'Our Mother, the Church of England': Non-jurors, High Churchmen, and the Evidence of Subscription Lists", in Paul Klébor Monod, Murray Pittock and Daniel Szechi, eds, *Loyalty and Identity: Jacobites at Home and Abroad* (Basingstoke, 2010), 167–79; Robert D. Cornwall, 'Divine Right Monarchy: Henry Dodwell's Critique of the Reformation and Defence of the Nonjuror Bishops', *Anglican and Episcopal History* 68 (1999), 37–66.

¹⁰ William Gibson, 'William Talbot and Church Parties, 1688–1730', *JEH* 58 (2007), 26–48.

nakedly political ambitions'.¹¹ Religious politics descended into the competitive unmasking of hypocrisy in which all sides decried their opponents' mendacity at all times. This caused a collapse in public trust in politics, provoking a moral panic about the decline of honesty and sincerity in English society. Where could the abuse of faith lead, but to apathy or atheism? As the author of *Moderation Truly Stated* (1704) noted, pretending in matters of faith 'gives religion the deepest wounds'.¹² No trust, no faith.

Much of this alarm can be traced to the religious settlement imposed by the Toleration Act of 1689. The act permitted all Trinitarian Protestant congregations who dissented from the established church to worship in their own meeting houses, jettisoning the ideal of uniformity that had been a cornerstone of the English Reformation.¹³ Dissenters benefited significantly from this change. Presbyterians, Baptists, Quakers and other minority Protestant groups were no longer persecuted for practising their faith (as they had been from 1662). Their new freedom to worship was accompanied by formal recognition that they were part of England's Protestant interest, partners with the established church in the fight against popery.¹⁴ Considering that 'puritans' had been joined with 'popery' as the twin terrors of that interest in conformist Protestant thought for over a century, this marked a substantial change in the public status of Dissent.

It was an embittered partnership, however. As Ralph Stevens has shown, the act did not end Anglican-Dissenter hostilities, but reframed them in the new context of the post-Revolution constitution.¹⁵ Tensions reflected differing interpretations of the Toleration Act. For many Dissenters, the 1689 legislation had not gone far enough. It was merely a step towards full freedom, which could only be realized with the abolition of the penal code, a platform on which to agitate against the legal restrictions that continued to make their position in English society unequal. For many Anglicans, the

¹¹ Knights, 'Occasional Conformity', 45.

¹² Mary Astell, *Moderation Truly Stated* (London, 1704), 33–4.

¹³ Jonathan Israel, 'William III and Toleration', in Ole Peter Grell, Jonathan I. Israel and Nicholas Tyacke, eds, *From Persecution to Toleration: The Glorious Revolution in England* (Oxford, 1991), 129–70.

¹⁴ 1 Will. & Mary c. 18.

¹⁵ Ralph Stevens, *Protestant Pluralism: The Reception of the Toleration Act, 1689–1720* (Woodbridge, 2018).

1689 Toleration was merely a temporary indulgence of Dissent, not an unbudgeable cornerstone of the constitution. High churchmen refused to accept the permanence of the new plural religious society, or the declining role of the established church in that society which followed on from it. They worked to restrain the scope of Dissenters' new religious freedoms in the period up to 1720, after which the declining political influence of their Tory allies left them with no feasible means of opposition.¹⁶ Toleration created a religious marketplace, and the Dissenters' claiming their new place in public life caused the established church to fear the loss of parishioners at a local level, and the control of public life at a national one. The construction of new meeting houses, funerals of prominent parishioners, and the growing involvement of Dissenters in the provision of children's education became new flashpoints of old intolerances in an era of legalized religious difference.¹⁷

Occasional conformity was the most serious of those flashpoints. The political authority of the Church of England was protected by the 1688/9 constitutions, which barred Dissenters from holding political office by requiring all office-holders to prove that they had received communion in the established church.¹⁸ Dissenters responded by practising occasional conformity, taking the Anglican sacrament once annually (while otherwise continuing to attend their meeting houses), thereby qualifying for political office via an unabashed act of public hypocrisy, receiving communion in a church that they had long held to be popish and persecutory, for naked political gain. They 'play[ed] bopeep with God Almighty', teased Daniel Defoe, for reasons of 'politick'.¹⁹

The debate about occasional conformity mapped onto existing divisions in England's fractious Protestant fraternity. Both the Whig politicians who steered the governments of William and Mary, and Anne, and the low churchmen who dominated the churches of their period, winked at occasional conformity as a means of promoting unity between Protestants, and extending the principle of toleration of the Revolution settlement.²⁰ This leniency

¹⁶ Julian Hoppit, *A Land of Liberty? England 1689–1727* (Oxford, 2000), 35–6, 216–36.

¹⁷ Brown, *Friends, Neighbours, Sinners*, 69–108, 151–230.

¹⁸ This was required by the Test and Corporation Acts: 13 Cha. II St. 2. c. 1; 25 Cha. II c. 2; 30 Cha. II St. 2.

¹⁹ Daniel Defoe, *An Enquiry into Occasional Conformity* (London, 1697), 11.

²⁰ Brent S. Sirota, 'The Occasional Conformity Controversy, Moderation, and the Anglican Critique of Modernity, 1700–14', *HistJ* 57 (2014), 81–105.

enraged high churchmen, who worried that allowing Dissenters into the political establishment gave them a platform from which to spread sedition and irreligion, and engaged in a bitter campaign to stop occasional conformity.²¹ Three bills, submitted in the parliamentary sessions of 1702–3, 1703–4 and 1704–5, proposed punitive fines on office-holders who attended Dissenting meetings. Attempts to ‘tack’ the third bill onto the granting of a subsidy necessary to continue war with France provoked fury and pushed the Whig regime to the point of crisis.²² The bills were defeated, but they underlined the extent to which concerns about Dissent and religious hypocrisy more generally destabilized English politics in the first decades of the eighteenth century.

Dissenting hypocrisy caused consternation because it played into long-standing stereotypes. Since the late sixteenth century, hypocrisy had been a major element of the anti-puritanism that now informed hostility to Dissent. ‘Puritans’ were popularly seen as irrational and seditious hypocrites, who hid their lust for power behind a pretend piety.²³ Those stereotypes had a long half-life in parishes across eighteenth-century England, and informed the ‘graduated layers of religious exclusivity’ which, as Carys Brown has shown, peppered everyday interactions between Protestant denominations in eighteenth-century England.²⁴ Yet hypocrisy took on new resonance after 1689, because of the emergence of polite, sober modes of speech, manners and behaviour as the guiding ideal of public life. Politeness rejected zeal in favour of moderation to limit the potential of religion to foment division.²⁵ Zealous or ‘enthusiastic’ displays of faith, such as the austere piety of many Dissenting congregations, were now

²¹ Geoffrey Holmes, *British Politics in the Age of Anne* (London, 1967), 99–103.

²² Clyve Jones, “‘Too Wild to Succeed’: The Occasional Conformity Bills and Attempts by the House of Lords to Outlaw the Tack in the Reign of Anne”, *PH* 30 (2011), 414–27. An Occasional Conformity Act was passed in 1711 (10 Anne c. 6) following the Tory General Election result.

²³ Peter Lake, ‘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; Adam Morton, ‘Anti-Catholicism: Catholics, Protestants, and the “Popery” Problem’, in Robert E. Scully and Angela Ellis, eds, *A Companion to Recusancy in Britain and Ireland: From Reformation to Emancipation* (Leiden, 2022), 410–48, at 433–8.

²⁴ Brown, *Friends, Neighbours, Sinners*, 230.

²⁵ Laurence Klein, ‘Liberty, Manners, and Politeness in Early Eighteenth Century England’, *HistJ* 32 (1989), 583–604.

deemed to be impolite, the foundation of the fanaticism which (in Anglican eyes) had caused the civil wars of the previous century. Politeness placed Dissenters in a bind. Conforming to the new mores led to suspicions of insincerity; rejecting them, to charges of hypocrisy and to accusations that these were pious performances that showed that Dissenters thought themselves to be ‘better’ Protestants than their Anglican brethren. Stereotypes drew connections between Dissenters’ unfashionable dress and their outmoded zeal, presenting their clothing as a cloak for their sedition that proved they should not be tolerated.²⁶

That Dissent had strong support within the Whig regimes of both William and Mary, and Anne, played into the Tory-high church ‘Church in Danger’ campaign that expressed fears that, since 1688, a conspiracy had been at work to undermine the established church. The campaign saw toleration, latitudinarianism and occasional conformity as corruptions of the constitution that provided platforms for religious heterodoxy and republican politics bent on undermining society.²⁷ Occasional conformity was about more than Dissent. It was totemic of broader tensions in the Revolution settlement about toleration and the place of the established church in the constitution. That some public figures were prepared to dissemble to gain power, and other political figures and parties were prepared to permit that dissembling, pointed to the decline of honesty, sincerity and piety in public life. This ‘Church in Danger’ platform was crucial to winning the Tory-high church party a landslide victory in the 1710 General Election.²⁸

THE SACHEVERELL AFFAIR

Doctor Henry Sacheverell (1674–1724) was the unlikely architect of this Tory-turn in late Stuart politics. A ‘Church in Danger’ preacher and long-standing anti-Dissenter firebrand, Sacheverell was tried for high crimes and misdemeanours in February and March 1710, having indicted the Whig government in his 5 November sermon at St Paul’s Cathedral, *The Perils of False Brethren*.²⁹ In that sermon,

²⁶ Brown, *Friends, Neighbours, Sinners*, 109–50.

²⁷ George Every, *The High Church Party, 1688–1718* (London, 1959), 105–47.

²⁸ Holmes, *British Politics*, 56–62, 97–106, 259–60.

²⁹ Geoffrey Holmes, *The Trial of Doctor Sacheverell* (London, 1973), 64–9. On Sacheverell, see also Alex W. Barber, *The Restraint of the Press in England, 1660–1715*:

Sacheverell proclaimed the established church to be corrupted by hypocrites, just like the church of Corinth described by St Paul. A conspiracy of Whigs, low churchmen and Dissenters had sought the undoing of Protestant England since 1688 by pursuing toleration, permitting latitude in doctrine and liturgy, and ignoring occasional conformity, thereby allowing heresy and sedition footholds in power. These false brethren, and the apostate Tories or high churchmen who did nothing to stop them, were hypocrites, pretend Protestants who put political interest over principle. What Sacheverell said was made doubly offensive by when he said it. Fifth of November sermons were a ritual set piece of Protestant memory, uniting parishes across England in collective thanksgiving for their nation's special place in providence. Preachers were expected to relate 5 November 1605 (the Gunpowder Plot) to 5 November 1688 (William of Orange's landing at Torbay) as a double deliverance from popery.³⁰ Sacheverell turned this celebration into mourning, damning the revolution as a seditious contravention of the church's doctrine (passive obedience and non-resistance), and the toleration as an act of schism.

At first, Sacheverell was laughed at, his sermon dismissed as having more spleen than substance. 'The roaring of this beast ought to give you no manner of disturb[ance]', affirmed Daniel Defoe, 'You ought to laugh at him, let him alone; he'll vent his gall, and then he'll be quiet'.³¹ Defoe was wrong; ire proved to be catching. Sacheverell was a lightning rod for pent-up prejudice against Dissent. On 1 March 1710, riotous crowds of Sacheverell supporters sacked meeting houses, tearing one down in Lincoln's Inn Fields, brick by brick, before celebrating their iconoclasm with a giant bonfire of its gutted

The Communication of Sin (Woodbridge, 2022), esp. 183–203; Brian Cowan, 'Relitigating Revolution: Address, Progress, and Redress in the Long Summer of 1710', in idem and Scott Sowerby, eds, *The State Trials and the Politics of Justice in Late Stuart England* (Martlesham, 2021), 204–23; idem, ed., *State Trial of Dr Henry Sacheverell*; Mark Knights, *The Devil in Disguise: Deception, Delusion, and Fanaticism in the Early English Enlightenment* (Oxford, 2011), 142–92; and idem, ed., *Faction Displayed: Reconsidering the Impeachment of Dr Henry Sacheverell*, Parliamentary History Book Series 31 (Chichester and Maldon, MA, 2012).

³⁰ David Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells: National Memory and the Protestant Calendar in Elizabethan and Stuart England* (Stroud, 2004), esp. 67–92, 110–29, 141–55.

³¹ Daniel Defoe, *A Review of the State of the British Nation* 6, 8 Dec 1709, 106. See also anon., *The Cherubin with a Flaming Sword* (London, 1709).

contents.³² Sacheverell's popularity was a captivating blend of sympathy and infamy that ensured his trial generated more public interest than any since Charles I's in 1649. Christopher Wren employed fifty workmen to build the stands commissioned for the crowds expected in Westminster Hall, ripping out vendors' stalls to make the auditorium as large as possible, and there was a frenzied black-market competition for tickets.³³ News that Sacheverell would preach at St Saviour's, Southwark, after being released on bail, left that church packed to the rafters. Rumours in the pews that he was actually at Newington caused the panicked crowd to rush there instead. On the first day of the trial proceedings, Sacheverell was collected from his lodgings in Temple in a coach made largely of glass, a 'tawdry chariot' from which he was visible to the crowds who lined the streets daily to wave his cavalcade of eight coaches and 400 supporters on their path to Westminster, where they met crowds of ticket holders who had been gathering since 7 a.m., two hours before the court's doors would open, and five before the trial would begin.³⁴

The trial was easily spun as proof that the conspiracy against the church of which Sacheverell spoke was real. He was found guilty, but the queen insisted on only a token punishment, a humiliation for the government that was greeted as a deliverance for the established church, and set in motion the downfall of the Whig regime. The Tories made full use of their new champion, trotting Sacheverell out as the prized prig of the 'Church in Danger' campaign to win seats across England in the general election that November.³⁵ In that election, and the campaign against Dissent that followed, he was a totem of sincerity besting hypocrisy. Sacheverell was briefly the most famous man in England, 'Huzza'd by the mob like a prize fighter' wherever he went.³⁶ Published on 25 November 1709, and selling over 100,000 copies by the following March, *The Perils of False Brethren* earned him an estimated readership of

³² Geoffrey Holmes, 'The Sacheverell Riots: The Crowd and the Church in Early Eighteenth-Century London', *P&P* 72 (1976), 55–82.

³³ Holmes, *Sacheverell*, 117–18.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 120–2, 126–8.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 242–8.

³⁶ Alexander Cunningham, *The History of Great Britain from the Revolution of 1688 to the Accession of George I*, 2 vols (London, 1787), 2: 300.

250,000, equivalent to the entire electorate.³⁷ Sacheverell was painted by Thomas Gibson, a leading portrait artist of the period, and mezzotint reproductions of his image flooded London during the trial in February and March 1710, and were widely displayed in private homes and public spaces as a mark of support for Sacheverell and the church his supporters felt was on trial with him.³⁸ A generation later, his portrait still stood as an icon of popular Toryism. Hogarth sneered at it, pasting Sacheverell's face at Moll's bedside in plate 3 of the 'Harlot's Progress' to mock cheap veneers of respectability (Figure 2).³⁹

Gilbert Burnet remembered the Sacheverell affair with astonishment as 'one of the most extraordinary transactions in my time'.⁴⁰ The most extraordinary aspect of the affair was its heat, which shocked contemporaries. Sacheverell entered the pulpit of St Paul's Cathedral with 'red overspread[ing] his face [and a] goggling wildness [in] his eyes ... like a sybil to the mouth of her cave', before proceeding to preach on the fiery tip of fury.⁴¹ 'I fancy he had bankrupt all the oyster-women, porters, watermen, coachmen and carmen in town to make up his collection', exclaimed one Whig, taken aback by the sermon's tone.⁴² 'I could not have imagined if I had not actually heard it myself', said the Rev. John Bennett, that 'so much heat, passion, violence and scurrilous language, to say no worse of it, could have come from a Protestant pulpit'.⁴³ Sacheverell had many critics. Even high churchmen sympathetic to his cause were embarrassed that his attack on the church and government was guilty of the sins with which he charged the Dissenters: enthusiasm, sedition and zeal. Much of the polemic that emerged from the trial, and the Tory turn that followed, proved his equal in raillery.

Sacheverell soon changed tack. As Brian Cowan has demonstrated, during his speech in his own defence on 9 March 1710, Sacheverell

³⁷ Holmes, *Sacheverell*, 74–5; Francis F. Madan and William A. Speck, eds, *A Critical Bibliography of Dr Henry Sacheverell* (Lawrence, KA, 1978), 19–23 (nos 57–74).

³⁸ John Chaloner Smith, *British Mezzotinto Portraits*, 4 vols (London, 1883), 3: 1 and 4: 11.

³⁹ BM Satires, no. 2061; Eirwen E. C. Nicholson, 'Sacheverell's Harlots: Non-Resistance on Paper and in Practice', *PH* 31 (2012), 69–79.

⁴⁰ Gilbert Burnet, *History of His Own Time*, 6 vols (Oxford, 1833), 5: 434.

⁴¹ Thomas Hearne, *Remarks and Collections of Thomas Hearne*, ed. Charles E. Doble, 11 vols (Oxford, 1885–1907), 2: 229.

⁴² J. P., *The Priest turn'd poet* (London, 1709), dedication.

⁴³ Hearne, *Remarks and Collections*, 2: 304–5, 317. See also William Bisset, *Remarks on Dr Sach's Sermon* (London, 1709), 2–7; George Ridpath, *The Peril of Being Zealously Affected, but not Well* (London, 1709), 6.



Figure 2. William Hogarth, *A Harlot's Progress* (1732), plate 3. Reproduced by permission of The British Museum. Copyright of the Trustees of The British Museum.

presented himself as a 'living martyr of the high church cause'.⁴⁴ Even his opponents thought that the sympathy his performance elicited was remarkable.⁴⁵ Sacheverell's temperate, humble speech won him victory in the court of public opinion. Printed copies ran through twenty editions in 1710 alone and shaped the representation of Sacheverell in the public sphere, coupling him with other Anglican martyrs, Archbishop William Laud and Charles I (whose portrait he was often pictured holding).⁴⁶ Cowan has shown that the speech also changed what was on trial. The Whig prosecution had been designed to defend the 1688 Revolution by condemning the high

⁴⁴ Brian Cowan, 'The Spin Doctor: Sacheverell's Trial Speech and Political Performance in a Divided Society', *PH* 31 (2012), 28–46, at 28.

⁴⁵ Cowan, ed., *State Trial*, 35–42; Burnet, *History of His Own Time*, 5: 440–5.

⁴⁶ *A Complete Collection of State Trials*, comp. Thomas B. Howell, 34 vols (London, 1809–28), 15: 364–78; *The Speech of Henry Sacheverell D.D. Upon his Impeachment at the Bar of the House of Lords, in Westminster Hall, March 7 1709/10* (London, 1710). For reprints, see Madan and Speck, eds, *A Critical Bibliography*, 72–7 (nos 248–67). For martyr portraits, see BM Satires, nos 1510, 1514, 1525 and 1545.

church principles that Sacheverell advocated so vehemently in his 5 November sermon: passive obedience and non-resistance. Styling himself as a martyr allowed Sacheverell to sidestep matters of controversy and present the trial as a partisan attack on the church: he was being persecuted for doing his duties as a minister, preaching the church's doctrine and rebuking sin.⁴⁷ Moderate language and pathetic oratory were essential to Sacheverell's studied performance of sincerity.

The crude logic of polemic dictated that if Sacheverell embodied sincerity, his opponents must embody hypocrisy. In the winter of 1710–11, Burnet was mocked as a hypocrite and so, with even less mercy, was the Whig cleric Benjamin Hoadly, who became Sacheverell's antithesis, the low church champion to the doctor's high. Dissenters were vilified with equal ferocity. The scathing tone of *The Preaching-Weathercock: A Paradox* (1712) by John Dunton, bookseller and founder of the Athenian Society, was typical.⁴⁸ Dunton attacked William Richardson, a former Presbyterian minister in Clerkenwell who had taken orders in the established church in 1711. Richardson's change of heart was public: he published the sermon delivered in his new parish of St Mary's, Whitechapel, in which he justified his conversion. It also brought him speedy preferment: within a year, he was chaplain to the earl of Londonderry. This did not make him popular. Nor did his telling his former brethren that there were no legitimate reasons for their Dissent from the established church, a choice he now labelled fanatical.⁴⁹ The gall of this was too much. Richardson became an embodiment of Dissenting hypocrisy, accused by Anglicans and Dissenters alike of converting for self-interest and gain. Even his own family condemned him.⁵⁰ Dunton had sharpened his hatchet:

Another – VICAR OF BRAY – (or *Preaching Weathercock*) is *Turncoat Will* – For with the FANATICS, you are Demure and Saintish – with

⁴⁷ Howell, ed., *State Trials*, 15: 366–75.

⁴⁸ For a discussion of Dunton, see Stephen Parks, *John Dunton and the English Book Trade* (New York and London, 1976). In *The Bull-Baiting* (London, 1710), Dunton had lambasted Sacheverell, but happily admitted that the doctor was on the nose when it came to Dissent in *The Preaching Weathercock: A Paradox* (London, 1712), 25.

⁴⁹ William Richardson, *God's Call of His Ministers* (London, 1711), 1–5, 14–15, 23–6.

⁵⁰ See William Richardson, *The Serpents Head Bruised* (London, 1713), 1–7, 12–13, 15–18, 20–2, an account of Richardson's trial for immorality; and idem, *Episcopacy Vindicated* (London, 1712) and idem, *Malice Defeated* (London, 1712), 4–6, on the public disputes around it.

HIGH CHURCH you can rail at Dissenters, and call ‘em Schismatics – with the TRIMMERS, you’re moderate, and good Natur’d And with ALL PARTIES, you can *Conform, Transform, Reform, and turn to any Form* for the sake of a good Living.....a meer VICAR OF BRAY....with the infamous Character of being TURNCOAT....and your *High-flying Brother* [Sacheverell] tells you as much in that scandalous sermon he bellow’d out at St. *Pauls*....But assure your self that your Turning thus with every Wind, gains you neither Credit, not Profit, but makes a sort of *Preaching Jest, or Vicar of Bray*.⁵¹

Richardson was a turncoat, a trimmer and a Vicar of Bray: the very insults hurled at Dissenting converts in *The Turncoats*.

VICARS OF BRAY

The Turncoats’ image, then, was an assortment of clichés. It asked its viewers to laugh at jokes they knew well and its ridicule was potent because it was direct. ‘Trimmers’, ‘turncoats’ and ‘Vicars of Bray’ were commonplaces, instantly familiar images that worked as insults because the associations of their mockery – deceit, insincerity, interest – were immediate. In the wake of the Sacheverell affair and the Tory-turn in politics that followed it, those associations had a new resonance. The alarmism of Sacheverell and the ‘Church in Danger’ campaign made commonplace images of hypocrisy more urgent.

Commonplace insults were remarkably changeable – they meant different things in different contexts. The Vicar of Bray is an instructive example. The vicar was a shorthand for a weathercock cleric whose principles turned with the prevailing wind. The proverb was recorded in Thomas Fuller’s *The Worthies of England* (1662):

The vivacious vicar [of Bray] living under King Henry VIII, King Edward VI, Queen Mary, and Queen Elizabeth, was first a papist, then a protestant, then a papist, then a protestant again. He had seen some martyrs burnt (two miles off) at Windsor and found this fire too hot for his tender temper.

⁵¹ Dunton, *The Preaching Weathercock*, 25–7. Italics original.

This vicar, being taxed by one for being a turncoat and an inconstant changeling, said ‘not so, for I always kept my principle, which is this – to live and die the Vicar of Bray’.⁵²

The tone here was merry, not mocking. Fuller teased clerical hypocrisy – he did not attack it. The proverb was circulated as a pleasantry in the period’s compendiums. Its incongruous humour (an *a*-moral priest) was enjoyed as an absurdity in works like ‘The Vicar of Bray: or, a Paradox in Praise of the Turncoat Clergy’ in Alexander Brome’s *Athenian Sport: Or two thousand paradoxes* (1707).⁵³ The time-serving vicar was the subject of a popular ballad. In it, he recalls that he was high church under Charles II, stout in support of the Royal Supremacy and divine right, before opposing both under James II, when ‘The Church of Rome I found would fit / Full well my constitution. / And I had been a Jesuit, / But for the Revolution’. After 1688, he ditched James for William III: ‘Old principles I did revoke, / Set conscience at a distance’, embracing the Whigs until Anne became queen, ‘The Church of England’s Glory’, and ‘Another face of things was seen / And I became a Tory’. He was Whig again after 1714, happy to swear loyalty to the Hanoverians for as long as ‘they can keep possession’. The ballad was a farce. Sixty years of religious history were collapsed into the hypocritical code of one cleric: interest over principle. The ballad’s refrain jests over and over: ‘And this is law, I will maintain / Unto my Dying Day, Sir. / That whatsoever king may reign / I will be the Vicar of Bray, Sir!’⁵⁴

Other reuses of the Vicar of Bray were more aggressive. Between 1660 and 1720, ‘Vicar of Bray’ was used to insult clergy of all stripes. It exposed the hypocrisy of Nonconformists and moderate Anglicans who supported comprehension or toleration. In his Lord Mayor’s sermon of 1682, John Evans sneered at ministers who turned with the times and made the Vicar of Bray ‘the vicar of the day’.⁵⁵ A year later, *The Character of A Church-Trimner* raged at hypocrites who loved

⁵² Thomas Fuller, *The History of the Worthies of England* (London, 1662), 82–3.

⁵³ Alexander Brome, *Athenian Sport* (London, 1707), 400–1; anon., *Anglorum Speculum* (London, 1684), 22; Anon., *The Compleat Book of Knowledge* (London, 1698), 102.

⁵⁴ Anon., *The Vicar of Bray* (London, 1714), single sheet. See also anon., *The Religious Turncoat: or, A Late Jacobite Turned Williamite* (London, 1693), single sheet.

⁵⁵ John Evans, *Moderation Stated* (London, 1682), 41.

power, not their church, and backed campaigns for toleration out of political expediency. ‘He resolves to be *somebody* (and not Vicar of *Bray* still)’, using Whig politics to graduate to ‘*Beelzebub* or Prince of TRIMMERS, the *Devil* of a Saint, and the Monster of a Man, into the bargain; for he is *Two-fold* all over’.⁵⁶ After 1688, however, the insult was less specific to Nonconformity. The readiness of so many Anglicans to renounce their oaths to James II was condemned as unctuous hypocrisy in texts like *Hysteron Proteron. A Sermon lately Preached by the Vicar of Bray* (c.1690).⁵⁷ The hypocrisy of William Sherlock, who performed a spectacular volte-face in August 1690, taking oaths to William and Mary having previously been a vociferous nonjuror, was met with dismay: ‘a right *Sherlockain* will live in every Air, side with every Government, and conform to all sorts of Revolutions [he is] a Harlot [who] resolves to be Vicar of *Bray*’.⁵⁸ *The State Proteus* (1690) unpicked Anglican justifications for taking the oaths as sophistry. ‘All honest men’ judged the oath ‘a mean and unworthy Compliance ... unbecoming of *Ecclesiastical Professours*’, the preserve of ‘such Vicars of *Bray*’ who are ‘well known to be a scandal to their function’ as clergy. There are *some* truths in Christianity which are beyond qualification, the author noted. Passive obedience was one of them.⁵⁹

The ire of these charges was a long way from Fuller’s merry proverb. The Vicar of Bray was a stock joke, and stock jokes are pliable. As a shorthand for clerical hypocrisy, its connotations of self-interest over principle were stable. But its effect varied according to how it was used. The ‘Vicar of Bray’ could be proverbial, the gentle ribbing of a type in order to amuse (after Fuller); or personal, the charging of an individual or group of clergy with hypocrisy in order to condemn. The same joke was a source of mirth in one text, and of invective in the other. Laughing at hypocrisy meant something different in each register. Stock jokes such as ‘trimmers’ and ‘Vicars of Bray’ had a different resonance in the moral panic of 1709–11 because they were

⁵⁶ Heraclitus his Ghost, *The Character of A Church-Trimmer* (London, 1683), n.p.; J. R., *Religio Laici* (London, 1688), 8. Italics original.

⁵⁷ No copy of this text survives. It was listed as for sale in anon., *Happy be Lucky, A catalogue to be sold by Lottery* (London, 1690), 3.

⁵⁸ Anon., *Sherlockianus Delineatus* (London, 1690), 2. Italics original.

⁵⁹ Anon., *The State Proteus* (London, 1690), 4; Abednego Seller, *The History of Passive Obedience* (London, 1689), 190. Italics original.

charged with the hostility of anti-puritan stereotypes. Stereotypes reduce people to categories: the repetition of stock jokes, familiar images and commonplace language is the root of their power. In religious polemic, those categories were moral: Protestants were good or bad, loyal or disloyal.

The 'Church in Danger' campaign pivoted on a binary. Dissenters (and their low church/Whig advocates) were hypocrites, while the high church was sincere; Dissenters sought the ruin of Protestant England, while the high church hoped to protect it.⁶⁰ Those binaries fell into a familiar polemical pattern. The twin ideologies of post-Reformation England – anti-popery and anti-puritanism – were structured around contrary couplings of good and evil, defining 'true' Protestants against their anti-Christian others.⁶¹ The 'Church in Danger' campaign was a continuation of anti-puritanism. Its presentation of the dangers of 'Dissenting' hypocrisy, fanaticism and zeal in the early eighteenth century echoed Restoration Anglicanism's condemnation of the danger of 'Nonconformist' hypocrisy, fanaticism and zeal, which in turn echoed conformist Protestant damning of 'puritan' hypocrisy, fanaticism and zeal as a danger to the Elizabethan and Jacobean state. In each case, a true Protestant 'us' defined itself by describing a false Protestant 'them', with mockery and stereotypes used as the means of demarcation. In reusing old jokes, *The Turncoats* dressed current concerns about the prominence of Dissent in the familiar clothes of the 'puritan' stereotype that stretched back to the 1580s, in what amounted to a crude historical logic: *they* have always been like *this*.⁶² Old images expressed current fears with new potency.

SETTLING SCORES

But not all the print's ridicule was so conventional or loud. *The Turncoat's* verses were subtle and allusive, ridiculing hypocrisy

⁶⁰ See Sandra J. Sarkela, 'Moderation, Religion and Public Discourse: The Rhetoric of Occasional Conformity in England 1697–1711', *Rhetorica* 15 (1997), 53–79.

⁶¹ Peter Lake, 'Anti-Popery: The Structure of a Prejudice', in idem and Ann Hughes, eds, *Conflict in Early Stuart England* (Harlow, 1989), 70–129.

⁶² Adam Morton, 'Fighting Popery with Popery: Subverting Stereotypes and Contesting Anti-Catholicism in Late Seventeenth-Century England', in Koji Yamamoto, ed., *Stereotypes and Stereotyping in Early Modern England: Puritans, Papists and Projectors* (Manchester, 2022), 184–217.

more cuttingly than the blunt crudities of anti-puritan stereotypes. The verses extended the image's ridicule of the Dissenters by accusing them of priestcraft, the practice of fraud, deceit and superstition behind which clergy throughout history had supposedly hidden their sinister pursuit of wealth and power. These charges had been levelled at the established church since the 1690s, a decade in which, Burnet recalled, 'priestcraft grew to become another word in fashion' and 'it became a common topic of discourse to treat all mysteries in religion as the contrivances of priests, to bring the world into a blind submission to them'.⁶³ The critique was part of a broader intellectual culture that subjected religion to reason to strip away superstition, leaving a primitive faith with a minimal creed, a Christianity spare in mystery.⁶⁴ This was an extended attack on Anglican authority, and it fuelled the 'Church in Danger' panic that feared that toleration, freethought and Dissent threatened to undermine the Protestant interest.⁶⁵ Freethinkers criticized the Church of England's doctrine, questioned the legitimacy of its political power, and challenged the scriptural basis of its claim to be an heir of the early church. They argued that the bases of clerical authority – doctrine, ritual, ordination and episcopacy – were not inherent in Scripture, but were the fabrications of priests who had slowly corrupted Christianity over the previous millennium, inventing superstitions in the interests of power and gain, and persecuting and censoring those who challenged their monopoly on the sacred. In this, the Anglican church was a sibling of Rome. The charge of priestcraft extended the core tenets of anti-popery to assault the tyranny of all established churches, not just the papal church.⁶⁶ The continued dominance of the established church and its attempts to curtail the role of Dissenters in English politics and society despite the

⁶³ Burnet, *A History of His Own Time*, 4: 387. On priestcraft, see Mark Goldie, 'Priestcraft and the Birth of Whiggism', in Nicholas Phillipson and Quentin Skinner, eds, *Political Discourse in Early Modern Britain* (Cambridge, 1993), 209–31.

⁶⁴ Some view claims of 'reform' as masking atheism: see David Berman, *A History of Atheism in England: From Hobbes to Russell* (London, 1987), 1–11, 48–70, 71–92; and Margaret Jacob, *The Radical Enlightenment* (Winchester, MA, 1981), 58, 75–89, 215–56, 280–9.

⁶⁵ Hoppit, *A Land of Liberty?*, 223–36.

⁶⁶ John Aubrey, *Brief Lives*, ed. Andrew Clark, 2 vols (Oxford, 1989), 1: 358. These themes are considered in Adam Morton and Rachel Hammersley, eds, *Civil Religion in the Early Modern Anglophone World 1550–1700* (Woodbridge, 2024).

comprehensive vision of the Protestant interest outlined in the 1688–9 Revolution were the latest examples of priestcraft at work.

The Turncoats' verses turned these charges of priestcraft on their head. The recent conversions showed that it was the Dissenters and their allies, the false brethren in the low church, who were guilty of priestcraft, self-interested hypocrites who wore principles lightly to mask their hunger for gain. The print mocked the Dissenters with their own language, undermining that language in the process. This was ridicule that cut to the quick, settling scores built up over twenty years of hostility.

This inversion was not immediately apparent. The verses gulled readers, appearing to relay a conventional account of priestcraft's slow ruination of Christianity as described by radicals like Charles Blount, John Dennis and Matthew Tindal.⁶⁷ *Priestcraft Expos'd* (1691), for example, depicted all priests as con men who abused religion, muddying faith with mystery to cast the world under their authority.⁶⁸ *The Turncoats* aped the language of these histories of priestcraft. Religion was 'Form'd by Heaven, to cultivate Mankind'. Originally, it had been pure, 'Its Rules were easy, and its Precepts plain; | Its Voterics not link'd to Sordid gain', but was corrupted by priests 'when Interest sway'd, | And men, too much, the love of Gold obey'd', selling superstition and conning the laity to buy a place in heaven rather than living by faith. Hypocrisy was the root cause of priestly corruption. History showed that priests changed their principles with the prevailing wind, 'And rather than they'd lose a Benefice, | They'd be of Several Notions in a Trice', sullyng religion with politics and interest.

This conspiracy was alive in the present: 'Thus, now a days, tis plainly so we find, | *Int'rest* still rules and governs all mankind'. But where accounts of priestcraft pointed to the established church (particularly its *jure divino* claims to authority), the print targeted Dissent:

The Subtil, Wily, Scrupulous Dissenter,
That ne'er before into a Church wou'd Enter,

⁶⁷ Charles Blount, *The Oracles of Reason* (London, 1693); John Dennis, *The Danger of Priestcraft* (London, 1702); Matthew Tindal, *An Essay Concerning the Power of the Magistrate* (London, 1697).

⁶⁸ Anon., *Priestcraft Expos'd* (London, 1691). See also Edmund Hicckeringill, *The History of Priestcraft* (London, 1705).

Lay but a Profitable Post ins Way,
And he'll both hear the Prayers & learn to pray:
The *Common Prayer* shall then be, Masse no more,
Nor will it be unlawfull to Adore,
And worship God; to hear and read and pray,
And stand or kneel in the *Establish'd* way.⁶⁹

Principles were abandoned for profit. When presented with a rich benefice, the Dissenters no longer saw the established church as popish, or the Book of Common Prayer as idolatrous. One (former) Dissenter was singled out:

P_lm_r that once was Zealous for his Cause
T'assert their Rights, and to defend their Laws;
Upon the hopes of being preferr'd laid down
His *Canting long Cloak* and took up the Gown.⁷⁰

Samuel Palmer, the former Presbyterian minister at Gravel Lane, Southwark, had taken orders in the established church in 1709. Parker's conformity was shocking. During the occasional conformity debates of 1703–4, he had been a public champion of Dissent, an advocate of the Dissenting academies attacked by an Anglican hierarchy keen to portray them as seditious conventicles. Palmer's hypocrisy galled because of its self-interest. He was suspected of seeking preferment in the church because he felt undervalued by the Dissenting hierarchy.⁷¹ *The Turncoats* held him up for shame: this was the sort of man who was infiltrating the established church.

The 'Anglican' conversions during the Tory-turn of 1710–11 exposed Dissenters as agents of the priestcraft they decried in others. By inverting the language of priestcraft, the verses underscored the sincerity of the high church party, alluding to Sacheverell in its praise for the few 'Pious, Good and Just' priests who were 'True to their

⁶⁹ BM Satires, no. 1507. Emphasis original.

⁷⁰ Ibid. Emphasis original.

⁷¹ Palmer championed the academies in two works: Samuel Palmer, *Defence of the Dissenters' Education in their Private Academies* (London, 1703) and idem, *A Vindication of the Learning, Loyalty, morals and most Christian behaviour of the dissenters towards the Church of England* (London, 1704). These responded to Samuel Wesley's *A Letter from a country divine to his friend in London* (London, 1703). William Gibson, *Samuel Wesley and the Crisis of Tory Piety, 1685–1720* (Oxford, 2021), 97–101.

God, Religion, and their Trust'. However, there was no absolute Anglican (sincere)/Dissenter (hypocrite) binary here. Mockery of Palmer bled into broader swathes of ridicule. Dissent was not uniquely crooked:

Nor are these Men [Dissenters] the only Hypocrites
There's others that in Interest delight,
And love a good fat *Benefice* as well ...
For now the World to such a Pass is driven
That Int'rest is their God, and Gold their heaven.⁷²

These hypocrites, the verses implied, were the majority. This was an indictment of the low churchmen who had supported toleration, Dissent and (in the eyes of high churchmen) encouraged and cultivated the freethought that threatened the church. Such men had exposed their true natures in 1688, breaking their oaths to James II to maintain preferment in the established church: 'The *Priests* that always *Right Divine* do boast, | Usually turn'd to what was Uppermost.'⁷³ But the indictment of hypocrisy went further. Charles Leslie – Tory, nonjuror and ally of Sacheverell – was damned as an arch-hypocrite who 'best can tell' where gain could be found. Leslie had a two-decade track record of vehement opposition to Dissent and the ideological foundations of the post-revolutionary regime (and had engaged in heated polemical exchanges about occasional conformity and passive obedience). Why would a pro-Tory, anti-Dissent print mock a man who was both of those things? In 1710, Leslie's extreme views on the Hanoverian succession (Burnet described him as 'the violentest Jacobite in the nation') led him to sever ties with Sacheverell and the Tories. Outlawed, he fled in 1711 to the Jacobite court at Saint-Germain-en-Laye, just outside Paris, where he advocated for an invasion.⁷⁴ Leslie, the print mocked, had turned coat on his own country.

⁷² BM Satires, no. 1507. Emphasis original.

⁷³ Ibid. Emphasis original.

⁷⁴ On the Hanoverian succession, see Charles Leslie, *The Good Old Cause, or, Lying in Truth* (London, 1710), written against Burnet. On Dissent, see Leslie's newspaper, *The Rehearsal* (1704–9) and his works *The Wolf-stript of his Shepherd's Clothing* (London, 1704) and *The New Association of those called Moderate Church Men* (London, 1702). On resistance, see his *Cassandra* (London, 1704) and *The Best Answer Ever Made* (London, 1709). Compare also Burnet, *History of His Own Times*, 5: 436; James

The tone of the ridicule here was uncertain. *The Turncoats* was unquestionably part of an anti-Dissent and pro-high church/Sacheverell polemic that celebrated the Tory ascendancy of 1710–11. At the same time, the lampooning of hypocrites here was not straightforwardly the us/them of party politics. Because the cast of hypocrites ridiculed was broader than those party boundaries, the print conveyed the impression that religious hypocrisy was pervasive in late Stuart society. *The Turncoats* was ambiguous: it was hostile to Dissent, but not solidly in support of the established church; it celebrated the Tory-high church victory of 1710–11, but worried that the hypocrisy of self-interested, turncoat clergy of many stripes threatened Protestant England despite that victory. This ambiguity responded to fears about religious hypocrisy in the early eighteenth century.

Those fears centred on public figures routinely dissimulating in matters of faith and thereby turning religion into a plaything of party politics. As Knights has shown, accusations of religion being used to cloak self- or party-interest became a normal part of politics. Whig and Tory, and churchmen high and low, competed to define themselves as sincere and moderate by painting their opponents as zealous hypocrites. This competition reached its apogee during the occasional conformity debates. High churchmen accused Dissenters of hypocrisy, but were in turn accused of adopting religious positions for party interests. Hypocrites were now celebrated ‘under the name of a Church-Man’, claimed the *Naked Truth of Phanaticism Detected* (1705), the ‘high’ label being merely the ‘specious pretence of the Church’ to win ‘places of trust and authority’ and bring down the government.⁷⁵ *Faults on Both Sides* (1710) saw the occasional conformity bills as cynical Tory devices designed to ‘disable’ Dissenters from voting Whig in the elections.⁷⁶ This saturation of the public sphere with a promiscuous use of images of hypocrisy was unnerving: ‘the claims and counter-claims of hypocrisy and sincerity around the Occasional Conformity Bills reflected a perception that interest rather

Macpherson, ed., *Original Papers: Containing the Secret History of Great Britain*, 2 vols (London, 1775), 2: 211–16.

⁷⁵ Gentleman of the Church of England, *The Naked Truth, or Phanaticism Detected* (London, 1705), 2–3.

⁷⁶ *A Fourth Collection of Scarce and Valuable Tracts, on the Most Interesting and Entertaining Subjects*, 4 vols (London, 1751), 3: 306.

than conscience prevailed' in religion and that this threatened the public good.⁷⁷ *The Turncoats*' ridicule responded to those anxieties.

LAUGHTER

Ridicule expressed contempt: ridiculing someone or something was a public indictment of their worth. 'Affectation', claimed Henry Fielding in 1741, is 'the only source of the true Ridiculous'. Vanity and hypocrisy were the worst affectations. Hypocrisy was the more ridiculous of the two because the gap between the hypocrite's inner and outer lives was greater, and therefore more contemptible, the hypocrite 'endeavours to avoid Censure by concealing vices under an Appearance of their opposite Virtues'.⁷⁸ Ridicule exposed those vices, shaming the hypocrite by subjecting them to derisive laughter. Ridicule was potent because it diminished its object.⁷⁹ 'They which wittely can ... use a nippyng taunte, shalbee able to abolishe a ryghte worthy man', noted Thomas Wilson, and 'no marvaile: for when ye iest is aptly applied, the hearers laugh immediately & who would gladly be laughed to scorn'.⁸⁰ The potency of ridicule was seen in satire, which its authors claimed could shame offenders into reforming their vices; in the rough justice with which communities humiliated the shrews, cuckolds and other transgressors of the patriarchal codes that bound them together;⁸¹ and in the use of derogatory libels in popular politics, the unseemly rhymes with which ordinary people protested against authority.⁸²

The potency of laughter disturbed early modern society. Caution was urged over who and what should be exposed to contempt. Laughing at religion itself (as opposed to its hypocritical practitioners)

⁷⁷ Knights, 'Occasional Conformity', 51.

⁷⁸ Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews* (London, 1741), ed. Martin C. Battestin (Oxford, 1967), preface, 7–8: quoted in Marcus Walsh, 'Against Hypocrisy and Dissent', in Paddy Bullard, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Eighteenth-Century Satire* (Oxford, 2019), 39–55, at 39.

⁷⁹ Adam Morton, 'Laughter as a Polemical Act in Late Seventeenth-Century England', in Mark Knights and idem, eds, *The Power of Laughter and Satire in Early Modern Britain: Political and Religious Culture, 1500–1820* (Woodbridge, 2017), 107–32.

⁸⁰ Thomas Wilson, *The Arte of Rhetorique* (London, 1553), sigs 74^v–75^r.

⁸¹ Martin Ingram, 'Ridings, Rough Music and "the Reform of Popular Culture" in Early Modern England', *P&P* 105 (1984), 79–113.

⁸² Alastair Bellany, 'Railing Rhymes Revisited: Libels, Scandals, and early Stuart Politics', *History Compass* 5 (2007), 1136–79.

was condemned as a path to atheism.⁸³ Rough laughter was also concerning because it could undermine authority and cause enmity and division. Satirists drew distinctions between their refined ridicule and the hacking raillery of lowly, immoderate mockery that sat uncomfortably with polite ideals.⁸⁴ Those ideals did not blunt the appeal of impolite laughter, however, which was a cruel and ever-present feature of eighteenth-century popular culture, as Simon Dickie and Vic Gatrell have shown in detail.⁸⁵ Early modern people were unnerved by laughter because they were uncertain about whether its causes were benign or malign. Was it a mark of good fellowship or malice?⁸⁶ That uncertainty was reflected in the words they used to describe laughter, which conveyed both mirth and malice. Laughter could be a ‘jesting’ or a ‘scoffing’, ‘bantering’ or ‘taunting’.

That uncertainty is present in modern theories of laughter, which fall into three categories: incongruity, superiority and relief.⁸⁷ Incongruity theories propose that we laugh when something surprises us. Laughter expresses delight at our expectations being subverted. Wordplay, innuendo and absurdities are obvious examples and were described as sources of mirth in Henry Peacham’s *Garden of Eloquence* (1577).⁸⁸ Frances Hutchinson discussed laughter in terms of incongruity, presenting it as an expression of wonder at novelty.⁸⁹ Where incongruity theories see laughter as benevolent, a good-natured source of pleasure, superiority theories stress its roots in malice and aggression. This understanding, articulated most fully by Thomas Hobbes, claims that laughter expresses the ‘sudden glory’ we feel in perceiving ourselves superior to a person, action or object.

⁸³ John Tillotson, *Works* (London, 1696), 40.

⁸⁴ John Dryden, *The Satires of Decimus Junius Juevenalis ... together with the satires of Aulus Persius Flaccus... to which is prefixed a discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire* (London, 1693), i–lii.

⁸⁵ Simon Dickie, *Cruelty and Laughter: Forgotten Comic Literature and the Unsentimental Eighteenth Century* (London and Chicago, IL, 2011); Vic Gatrell, *City of Laughter: Sex and Satire in Eighteenth-Century London* (London, 2006), 110–292.

⁸⁶ I am indebted here to Lucy Rayfield, ‘Rewriting Laughter in Early Modern Humour’, in Daniel Derrin and Hannah Burrows, eds, *The Palgrave History of Humour, History, and Methodology* (London, 2021), 71–91.

⁸⁷ Mark Knights and Adam Morton, ‘Introduction: Laughter and Satire in Early Modern Britain 1500–1800’, in eidem, eds, *The Power of Laughter and Satire*, 1–26, at 2–10.

⁸⁸ Henry Peacham, *Garden of Eloquence* (London, 1577), 34.

⁸⁹ Frances Hutchinson, *Reflections upon Laughter, and Remarks upon the Fable of the Bees* (Glasgow, 1750), 5–13, 19–22.

It dates from ancient Greece and Rome.⁹⁰ Plato described laughter as a malicious joy taken in others' misfortunes; Aristotle noted that we laugh at what is contemptible; and Quintilian characterized it as derisive and capable of diminishing an opponent.⁹¹ Laughter of this sort was used in sermons to convey the superiority of one religious faction over another, to level scorn at stereotypes in jestbooks and plays, and to bind communities together against perceived others.⁹²

Relief theories present laughter as a release of pent-up mental and physical tensions. Laughter's reviving properties were widely noted in early modern Europe. In 1553, Wilson claimed that by laughing the mind 'be refreshed, and find some sweete delite'.⁹³ His views were echoed five years later in Nicholas Udall's claim that 'mirth prolongeth life, and causeth health'.⁹⁴ The medicinal nature of laughter was considered most thoroughly in Laurent Joubert's *Traité du ris* (1579), which provided many examples of the physical sensations of laughter as a cure for melancholy and a purgative for the body. These views were shared by other medical commentary on the subject.⁹⁵ That commentary saw laughter as a problematic phenomenon, a contrary expression of joy and misery. Timothy Bright's *Treatise of Melancholy* (1586) considered that contradiction head on in the chapter 'Why and how one weepeth for joy, and laugheth for grief. The answer, Bright explained, lay in nature's fecundity. If the sun's heat can make wax soft but clay hard, why should sorrow not elicit tears and laughter?⁹⁶ For Joubert, because we laugh at what is ugly, laughter must ultimately relate to misery. Medical writing presented the physical effects of laughter as a reflex to tensions caused by the clash of joy and misery, shaking strains out of the mind and body.

Incongruity, superiority and relief are seen as competing theories weighed against each other to find the 'best' explanation of laughter.

⁹⁰ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Oxford, 1996), 91–111; Quentin Skinner, 'Hobbes and the Classical Theory of Laughter', in Tom Sorell and Luc Foisneau, eds, *Leviathan after 350 Years* (Oxford, 2004), 139–66.

⁹¹ Plato, *Philebus*, transl. Justin Gosling (Oxford, 1975), 51; Aristotle, *Poetics*, chs 2 and 3; transl. Stephen Halliwell (Cambridge, MA, 1987), 33 and 36.

⁹² Daniel Derrin, 'Self-Referring Deformities: Humour in Early Modern Sermon Literature', *Literature and Theology* 32 (2018), 255–69.

⁹³ Wilson, *Arte of Rhetorique*, sig. 75.

⁹⁴ Quoted in Rayfield, 'Revisiting Laughter', 80.

⁹⁵ Laurent Joubert, *Traité du ris* (Paris, 1579), 16–17, 33, 125–34, 330–5; Rayfield, 'Rewriting Laughter', 81–4.

⁹⁶ Timothy Bright, *Treatise of Melancholy* (London, 1586), 14.

It is more useful to see them as complementary, with aspects of all three present in each instance of laughter. This rings true for ridicule: we laugh at being surprised by a witty conceit (incongruity) that expresses scorn at what is mocked (superiority), which in turn releases pent-up hostility towards that object (relief). We see this combination in *The Turncoats*. The print's ridiculous image is *incongruous* (conscience worn as lightly as clothes); its mockery was *superior* and directed anger and contempt at hypocrites (who were laughed to scorn); and by providing its viewers with an outlet for those hostile emotions, the laughter it elicited *relieved*. There were plenty of anxieties to relieve during 1709–11, when the pervasiveness of hypocrisy in public life had caused a collapse of trust in politics. *The Turncoats'* uncertain ridicule spoke to those fears, expressing joy that the Tory-high church had triumphed over the Dissenters and low churchmen it mocked, and anguish at the fact that the hypocrisy it exposed continued to threaten the church. That anguish is expressed by the only character in the print who does not jest. Horrified by the hypocrisy they witness in the tailor's shop, the labourer on the far right evokes Sacheverell in the hope he can save them: 'I'll go to St Mary Overy's and pray for the Doctor'.⁹⁷ The Tories had won, but the church was still in danger.

CONCLUSION

That prints like *The Turncoats* were ephemeral does not mean that they were unsophisticated. The satire's witty conceit told old jokes in new ways, using laughter as a weapon at a moment of political change. Its ridicule was both a product of and a response to a defining problem of that moment: hypocrisy. Ridicule appealed because it evoked moral emotions such as anger and contempt, deriding the worth of one group (Dissenters/low church) to assert the superiority of another (high church/Tories). It also unnerved. Exposing hypocrisy ultimately served to highlight its existence as a real and present danger to eighteenth-century society. It has been argued that much lay behind laughter. *The Turncoats* built on older traditions and stereotypes, twisting anti-popery, anti-puritanism and the language of priestcraft to the polemical purposes of the present. Familiarity

⁹⁷ BM Satires, no.1507. St. Mary's was Sacheverell's parish.

ensured that the thrust of the print's anti-Dissenter and pro-Sacheverell mockery was intelligible to even those with only a cursory grasp of politics, while asides to Leslie, Palmer and priestcraft appealed to the more informed, the knowing viewers who could appreciate the closeness of the mockery. Graphic satires did not simplify or reduce debates. They were not secondary sources of politics, synopses of opinion developed elsewhere in political discourse, but sophisticated pieces of political commentary in their own right.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ I have made similar claims about prints made in an earlier period: see Adam Morton, 'Popery, Politics, and Play: Visual Culture in Succession Crisis England', *Seventeenth Century* 31 (2016), 411–49; and idem, 'Intensive Ephemera: *The Catholick Gamesters* and the Visual Culture of News in Restoration London', in Simon Davies and Puck Fletcher, eds, *News in Early Modern Europe: Currents and Connections* (Leiden, 2014), 115–40.