

Two Complaints Against Poets, Players, and the Theater

These excerpts from Stephen Gosson's *The School of Abuse* and Philip Stubbes' *The Anatomy of Abuse* are fairly typical of the many puritan complaints against the theater. Concerned that the playhouses were fostering idleness, vanity, and prostitution, the puritan pamphleteers set out to warn playgoers that they were endangering their souls and destroying the ancient virtues of their society which, these writers believed, was sinking into decadence through singing, dancing, and acting. Gosson's approach to the subject is somewhat different from Stubbes', relying on "prophane writers" rather than scripture to prove that theaters were destroying English civilization. Gosson explains that poetry and music have proper uses—to instruct good men in the ways of virtue and to give soldiers their cues in battle—but he complains that contemporary musicians have invented "newfangled" instrumentation and rules and that plays present bad examples in characters such as are found in the comedies of Plautus or the tragedies of Seneca. Further, Gosson contrasts the old virtues of Englishmen with the vices of the present, which include prostitution in the theaters, which he sees as a "generall market of bawdrie" (7), idleness and vanity. Like Stubbes, he does inject a religious element: "the Deuill standes at our elbowe when we see not" (8). Writing several years after Gosson, Philip Stubbes rages against plays that make a "mocking stock" of God and abuse his "Maiesty," warning the players that God will "destroy you in his wrath" (9). Stubbes relies on religious authorities from Augustine to Chrysostome to support his claim that theaters should be banished from Christian civilization, and he attempts to refute the idea that good lessons may be learned from plays by claiming that plays are the Devil's means for distracting us from the word of God, that plays nourish idleness and vice, especially "whordome and unclennes," as well as sexual looseness even to playing "ye Sodomits, or worse" (11).

The poets, of course, were not idle in responding to charges such as these. The most famous defense of poetry was that argued by Sir Philip Sidney, an apology still readily available to students. Further, an excerpt from Thomas Lodge's reply to Gosson's attack may be found on this Shakespeare Project homepage. The great playwrights, however, did not respond to these complaints other than in the satirical portraits of self-important puritans found in their plays. Marlowe, of course, played the devil with his playgoers via his portrait of Faustus, but his *Tamburlaine* seems to take enormous delight in a barrage of blasphemies derived from Roman, Muslim, and Judeo-Christian sources. Ben Jonson's savage portraits of Tribulation Wholesome and his hot-tempered deacon Ananias (in *The Alchemist*) and of the dull-witted Zeal-of-the-Land Busy (in *Bartholomew Fair*), and Shakespeare's self-righteous Malvolio (*Twelfth Night*) and his vicious hypocrite, Angelo (*Measure for Measure*), expose the depravities and hypocrisies of those critical of playhouse ethics.

Against Poets and Pipers: *from The School of Abuse (1579)*

by Stephen Gosson

Poetrie and pyping, haue allwaies bene so vnited together, that til the time of *Melanippides*, Pipers were Poets hyerlings. But marke I pray you, how they are now both abused.

The right vse of auncient Poetrie was too haue the notable exploiters of woorthy Captaines, the wholesome counsels of good fathers, and vertuous liues of predecessors set downe in numbers, and song to the Instrument at solemne feastes, that the sound of the one might draw the hearers from kissing the cupp too often; the sense of the other put them in minde of things past, and chaulk out the way to do the like. After this maner were the *Boeotians* trained from rudenesse to ciuilitie, The *Lacedaemonians* instructed by *Tyrteous* verse, The *Argives* by the melody of *Telesilla*, And the *Lesbians* by *Alcaeus* Odes.

To this end are instruments vsed in battaile, not to tickle the eare, but too teach every souldier when to strike and when to stay, when to flye, and when to followe. *Chiron* by singing to his instrument quencheth *Achilles* furye; *Terpandrus* with his notes, layeth the tempest, and pacifies the tumult at *Lacedaemon*: *Homer* with his Musicke cured the sick Souldiers in the *Grecians* campe, and purged every mans Tent of the Plague. Thinke you that those miracles coulde bee wrought with playing of Daunces, Dumpes, Pauins, Galiardes, Measures Fancies, or new streynes? They never came wher this grewe, nor knew what it meant.

Pythagoras bequeathes them a Clookebagge, and condemnes them for fooles, that iudge Musicke by sounde and eare. If you will bee good Scholars, and profite well in the Arte of Musicke, shutte your Fidels in their cases, and looke vp to heauen: the order of the Spheres, the vnfallible motion of the Planets, the iuste course of the yeere, and varietie of seasons, the concorde of the Elementes and their qualyties, Fyre, Water, Ayre, Earth, Heate, Colde, Moysture and Drought concurring together to the constitution of earthly bodies and sustenance of euery creature.

The politike Lawes in well gouerned common wealthes, that treade downe the prowde, and vpholde the meeke, the loue of the King and his subiectes, the Father and his childe, the Lord and his Slaue, the Maister and his Man, The *Trophees* and *Triumphes* of our auncestours, which pursued vertue at the harde heeles, and shunned vyce as a rocke for feare of shipwracke, are excellent maisters to shewe you that this is right Musicke, this perfecte harmony. *Chiron* when hee appeased the wrath of *Achilles*, tolde him the duetie of a good souldier, repeated the vertues of his father *Peleus*, and sung the famous enterprises of noble men. *Terpandrus* when he ended the brabbles of *Lacedaemon*, neyther pyped *Rogero* nor *Turkelony*, but reckoning vp the commodities of friendship, and frutes of debate, putting them in mind of *LYcurgus* lawes, taught them too treade a better measure. When *Homers* Musicke droue the pestilence from the *Grecians* camp, there was no such vertue in his penne, nor in his pipe, but if I might bee vmpier, in the sweet harmony of diuerse natures and wonderful concord of sundry medicines. For *Appoloes* cunning extendeth it self aswel to Phisicke, as musick or Poetrie. And *Plutarch*

reporteth that as *Chiron* was a wise man, a learned Poet, a skilful Musition, so was hee also a teacher of iustice, by shewing what Princes ought to doe, and a Reader of Phisicke, by opening the natures of manie simples. If you enquire howe manie suche Poetes and Pipers wee haue in our Age, I am perswaded that euerie one of them may creepe through a ring, or daunce the wilde Morice in a Needles eye. We haue infinite Poets, and Pipers, and suche peeuishe cattel among vs in Englande, that liue by merrie begging, mainteyned by almes, and priuily encroch vppon euerie mans purse. But if they that are in authoritie, and haue the sworde in their handes to cut off abuses, should call an accompt to see how many *Chirons*, *Terpandri*, and *Homers* are heere, they might cast the summe without a pen, or counters, and sit downe with *Racha*, to weepe for her Children, because they were not. He that compareth our instruments, with those that were vsed in ancient times, shall see them agree like Dogges and Cattes, and meete as iump as Germans lippes. *Terpandrus* and *Olimpus* vsed instruments of 7. strings. And *Plutarch* is of opinion that the instrumentes of 3. strings, which were vsed before their time, passed al that haue followed since. It was an old law and long kept that no man should according to his owne humor, adde or diminish, in matters concerning that Art, but walk in the pathes of their predecessors. But when newfangled *Phyrnis* becam a fidler, being somewhat curious in carping, and searching for moats with a pair of blearde eies, thought to amend his maisters, and marred al. *Timotheus* a bird of the same broode, and a right hound of the same Hare, toke the 7. stringed harp, that was altogether vsed in *Terpandrus* time, and increaced the number of the strings at his owne pleasure. The *Argiues* appointed by their lawes great punishments for such as placed above 7. strings vpon any instrument. *Pythagoras* commaunded that no Musition should go beyond his *Diapason*. Were the *Argiues* and *Pythagoras* nowe aliue, and saw how many frets, how many stringes, how many stops, how many keyes, how many cliffes, howe many moodes, how many flats, how many sharps, how many rules, how many spaces, how many noates, how many restes, how many querks, how many corners, what chopping, what changing, what tossing, what turning, what wresting and wringing is among our Musitions, I beleue verily, that they would cry out with the countryman: *Heu quod tam pingui macer est mihi taurus in aruo*. Alas here is fat feeding, and leane beasts: or as one said at the shearing of hogs, great cry and little wool, much adoe, and smal help. To shew ye abuses of these vnthrifty scholers that despise ye good rules of the ancient masters and run to the shop of their owne devises, defacing olde stampes, forging new Printes, and coining strange precepts, *Phaerecrates* a Comicall Poet, bringeth in Musicke and Iustice vpon the stage: Musicke with her clothes tottered, her fleshe torne, her face deformed, her whole bodie mangled and dsimembred: Iustice, viewing her well, and pitying her case, questioneth with her howe shee came in that plight: to whom Musick replyes, that *Melanippides*, *Phyrnis*, *Timotheus*, and such fantasticall heades, haue so disfigured her lookes, defaced her beautie, so hacked her, and hewed her, and with manye stringes, geuen her so many woundes, that she is striken to death, in daunger to peryshe, and present in place to the least part of her selfe. When the *Sicilians*, and *Dores* forsooke the playnsong that they had learned of their auncestours in the Mountaynes, and practiced long among their heardes, they founde out such descant in *Sybaris* instrumentes, that by

daunsing and skipping they fel into lewdnesse of life. Neither staid these abuses in the compasse of that country: but like vnto yll weedes in time spread so far, that they choked the good grayne in every place.

For as Poetrie and Piping are Cosen germans: so piping, and playing are of great affinity, and all three chayned in linkes of abuse.

Plutarch complaineth, that ignorant men, not knowing the maiestice of auncient musick, abuse both the eares of the people, and the Arte itself: with bringing sweet confortes into Theaters, which rather effeminate the minde, as price vnto vice, then procure amendement of manners, as spurres to veture. *Ouid* the high martial of *Venus* field planteth his maine battell in publique assemblies, sending out his souctes too Theaters to descry the enemie, and in steede of vaunte Curriers, with instrumentes of musicke, playing, singing, and dauncing, geues the first charge. *Maximus Tyrius* holdeth it a Maxime that the bringing of instruments to Theaters and plaies, was the first cup that poisoned the common wealth. They that are borne in *Seriphos*, and cockered continually in those Islandes, whre they see nothing but Foxes and Hares, wil neuer be persuaded that there are huger beastes: They that neuer went out of the champions in *Brabant*, will hardly conceiue what rockes are in Germany. And they that neuer goe out of their houses, for regard of their credit, nor steppe from the vniuersitye for loue of knowledge, seeing but slender offences and small abuses within their owne walles, wil neuer beleeeue yat such rockes are abroad, nor such horrible monsters in playing places. But as (I speake the one to my comforte, the other to my shame, and remember both with a sorrowfull hart) I was first instructed in the vniuersity, after drawne like a nouice to these abuses: so will I shew you what I see, and informe you what I reade of such affaires. *Ouid* sayth, that *Romulus* builte his Theater as a horse faire for hores, made Triumphes, and set out playes to gather the fayre women together, that euey one of his souldiers might take where he liked, a snatch for his share: wherupon the Amorous Scholemaister bursteth out in these words:

Romule, militibus solus dare praemia nosti:
Haec mihi si dederis commoda, miles ero.

Thou *Romulus* alone knowest how thy souldiers to rewarde:
Grant me the like, my selfe will be attendant on thy garde.

It should seeme that the abuse of such places was so great, that for any chaste liuer to haunt them was a black swan, and a white crowe. *Dion* so straightly forbiddeth the ancient families of Rome and gentlewomen that tender their name and honor, to come to Theaters, and rebuks them so sharply, when he takes them napping, that if they be but once seene there, hee iudgeth it sufficient cause to speak il of them and thinke worse. The shadowe of a knaue hurts an honest man: the sent of the stewes a sober matron: and the shew of Theaters a simple gafter. *Clitomachus* the wrestler geuen altogether to manly exercise, if hee had hearde any talk of loue, in llwhat company soever he had bin, would forsake the seat, and bid them adue.

Lacon when he sawe the *Athenians* studie so much to set out Playes, sayde they were madde. If men for good exercise, and women for theyr credite, be shut from Theaters, whom shall we suffer to goe thither? Little children? *Plutarch* with a great caueat keepeth them out, not so much as admitting the litle crackhalter that carrieth his maisters pantouffles, to set foote within those doores: And alledgeth this reason, that those wanton spectacles of lyght huswives, drawing gods from the heauens, and young men from them selues to shipwracke of honestie, will hurte them more, then if at the Epicures table, they had nigh burst their guts with ouer feeding. For if the body bee ouercharged, it may bee holpe; but the surfitte of the soule is hardly cured. **[Obiection].** Here I doubt not but some Archplayer or other that hath read a litle, or stumbled by chance vpon *Plautus* comedies, will cast me a bone or ii. to pick, saying, yat whatsoever these ancient writers haue spoken aginst plaies is to bee applied too the abuses in olde Comedies, where Gods are broughte in, as Prisoners too beautie, rauishers of Virgins, and seruantes by loue, too earthly creatures. But the Comedies that are exercised in oure daies are better sifted. They shewe no such branne: The first smelte of *Plautus*, these tast of *Menander*; the lewdeness of Gods, is altered and chaunged to the loue of young men; force, to friendshipp; rapes, too mariage; wooing allowed by assurance of wedding; priuie meetinges of bachelours and maidens on the stage, not as murderers that deuour the good name ech of other in their mindes, but as those that desire to bee made one in hearte. Nowe are the abuses of the worlde reuealed, every man in a play may see his owne faultes, and learne by this glasse, to amende his manners. *Curculio* may chatte til his heart ake, ere any be offended with his gyrdes. Deformities are checked in ieast, and mated in earnest. The sweetnesse of musicke, and pleasure of sportes, temper the bitternesse of every taunt according to this

Omne vaser vitium ridenti Flaccus amico
Narrat, ed admissus circum precordia ludit.

Flaccus among his friends, with fanning Muse
Doth nip him neere, that fostreth foule abuse.

Therefore they are either so blinde, that they cannot, or so blunt, that will not see why this exercise should not be suffered as profitable recreation. **[Answer.]** For my parte I am neither so fonde a Phisition, nor so bad a Cooke, but I can allowe my patient a cup of wine to meales, although it be hotte; and pleasaunt sauces to driue downe his meate, if his stomake bee queasie. Notwithstanding, if people will bee instructed, (God be thanked) wee have Diuines enough to discharge that, and moe by a great many, then are well hearkened to: Yet sith these abuses are growne too head, and sinne so rype, the number is lesse then I would it were.

Euripides holdes not him onely a foole, that beeing well at home, wil gad abroad, that hath a Conduite within doore, and fetcheth water without: but all suche beside, as haue sufficient in them selues, to make them selues merry with pleasaunte talke, tending too good, and mixed with the *Grecians* glee, yet will they seeke when they neede not, to bee sported abroad at playes and Pageauntes. *Plutarch* likeneth the

recreation that is gotte by conference, too a pleasaunt banquet; the sweet pappe of the one sustaineth the ody, the sauery doctrine of the other doth nourish the minde: and as in banquetting, the wayter standes ready too fill the Cuppe: So in all our recreations we should haue an instructor at our elbowes to feede the soule. If wee gather Grapes among thistles, or seeke for this foode at Theaters, wee shall haue a hard pyttaunce, and come to shorte commons. I cannot thinke that Cittie to be safe, that strikes downe her Percollices, rammes vp her gates, and suffereth the enimie to enter the posterne. Neyther will I be perswaded, that he is in any way likely to conquer affection, which breaketh his instrumentes, burneth all his Poets, abandons his haunt, muffleth his eyes as he passeth the streate, and resortes too Theaters to bee assaulted. Cookes did neuer shewe more crafte in their iunckets to vanquish the taste, nor Painters in shadows to allure the eye, then Poets in Theaters to wounde the conscience.

There set they abroche straunge confortes of melody, to tickle the eare; costly apparel, to flatter the sight; effeminate gesture, to rauish the sence; and wanton speache, to whet desire too inordinate lust. Therefore of both barrelles, I iudge Cookes and Painters the better hearing, for the one extendeth his arte no farther then to the tongue, palate, and nose, the other to the eye; and both are ended in outwarde sense, which is common too vs with brute beasts. But these by priuie entries of the eare, slip downe into the hart, and with gunshotte of affection gaule the minde, where reason and vertue should rule the roste. These people in *Rome* were as pleasant as *Nectar* at the first beginning, and cast out for lees, where their abuses were knowen. They whome *Caesar* vpheld, were driuen out by *Octavian*: whom *Caligula* reclaimed, were cast of by *Nero*: whom *Nerua* exalted, were throwne downe by *Traian*: whom *Anthony* admitted, were expelled againe, pestred in Gallies and sent into *Hellespont* by *Marcus Aurelius*. But when the whole rabble of Poets, Pipers, Players, Iugglers, Iesters, and dauncers were receiued againe, *Rome* was reported to bee fuller of fooles then of wise men. *Domitian* suffered playing and dauncing so long in Theatres, that *Paris* led the shaking of sheetes with *Domitia* and *Mnester* the Trenchmour with *Messalina*. *Caligula* made so much of Players and Dauncers, that hee suffered them openly to kysse his lypes, when the Senators might scarce haue a lick at his feete: He gaue Dauncers great stipends for selling their hoppes: and placed *Apelles* the player by his own sweete side: Besides that you may see what excellent graue men were euer about him, he loued *Prasinus* the Cochman so wel, that for good wil to the master, he bid his horse to supper, gave him wine to drink in cups of estate, set barley graines of golde before him to eate, and swore by no bugs, that hee would make him a Consul: which thing (saith *Dion*) had bin performed, had hee not bin preuented by suddain death. For as his life as abominable, so was his end miserable: Comming from dancing and playing, he was slaine by *Chaerea*, a iust rewarde, and a fit *Catastrophe*. I have heard some Players vaunt of the credit they had in *Rome*, but they are as foolish in that, as *Vibius Rufus* which bosted himself to be an Emperor because hee had sit in *Caesars* chaire, and a perfect Orator, because hee was marryed to *Tullies* widowe. Better might they say them selues to be murderers, because they haue represented the persons of *Thyestes* and *Atreus*, *Achilles* and *Hector*: or perfect Limme lifters, for teaching the trickes of euery Strumpet. Such are the abuses that I reade

of in *Rome*: such are the Caterpillers that have deuoured and blasted the fruite of *AEgypt*: Such are the Dragons that are hurtful in *Affricke*: Such are the Adders that sting with pleasure, and kil with paine: and such are the *Basiliskes* of the world, that poyson, as well with the beame of their sighte, as with the breath of their mouthe.

Consider with thy selfe (gentle Reader) the olde discipline of Englande, mark what we were before, and what we are now: Leaue *Rome* a while, and cast thine eye backe to thy Predecessors, and tell mee howe wonderfully wee haue beene changed, since wee were schooled with these abuses. *Dion* sayth, that english men could suffer watching and labor, hunger and thirst, and beare of al stormes with hed and shoulders, they vsed slender weapons, went naked, and were good soldiours, they fed vppon rootes and barkes of trees, they would stand vp to the chin many dayes in marishes without victualles: and they had a kind of sustenance in time of neede, of which if they had taken but the quantitie of a beane, or the weight of a pase, they did neyther grape after meate, nor long for the cuppe, a great while after. The men in valure not yeelding to the *Scitha*, the women in courage, passing the *Amazons*. The exercise of both was shootyng and darting, running and wrestling, and trying such maisteries, sa eyther consisted in swiftnesse of feete, agilitie of body, strength of armes, or Martiall discipline. But the exercise that is nowe among vs, is banqueting, playing, pipyng, and dauncing, and all suche delichtes as may win vs to pleasure, or rocke us a sleepe.

Oh what a woonderful change is this? Our wreastling at armes, is turned to wallowyng in Ladies laps, our courage, to cowardice, our running to ryot, our Bowes into Bolles, and our Dartes to Dishes. We have robbed *Greece* of Gluttonie, *Italy* of wantonnesse, *Spaine* of Pride, *Fraunce* of deceite, and *Dutchland* of quaffing. Compare *London* to *Rome*, and *England* to *Italy*, you shall finde the Theaters of the one, the abuses of the other, to be rife among vs. *Experto crede*, I haue seene somewhat, and therefore I thinke may say the more. In *Rome* when Plaies or Pageants are showne: *Ouid* chargeth his Pilgrims, to crepe close to the Saintes, whom they serue, and shew their double diligence to lifte the Gentlewomens roabes from the grounde, for soyling in the duste; to sweepe Moates from the Kittles, to keepe their fingers in vre; to lay their hands at their backes for an easie stay; to look vppon those, whome they beholde; to prayse that, which they commende; to lyke euerye thing, that pleaseth them; to present them Pomegranates, to picke as they syt; and when all is done, to waite on them mannerly too their houses. In our assemblies at playes in *London*, you shall see suche heauing, and shooving, suche ytching and shouldring, too sitte by women; Such care for their garments, that they bee not trode on: Such eyes to their lappes, that no chippes light in them: Such pillows to ther backes, that they take no hurte: Such masking in their eares, I knowe not what: Such giuing them Pippins to passe the time: Suche playing at soote Saunt without Cardes: Such ticking, such toying, such smiling, such winking, and such manning them home, when the sportes are ended, that it is a right Comedie, to marke their behaiour, to wathe their conceites, as the Catte for the Mouse, and as good as a course at the game it selfe, to dogge them a little, or followe aloofe by the print of their feete, and so discover by slotte where the Deare taketh soyle. If this were as well noted, as ill seene: or as openly punished, as secretly practised: I haue no doubt but the cause would be feared to

dry vp the effect, and these prettie Rabbets very cunningly ferretted from their borrowes. For they that lack Customers al the weeke, either because their haunte is vnknownen, or the Constables and Officers of their Parishe, watch them so narrowly, that they dare not queatche; To celebrate a Sabboth, flock to Theaters, and there keepe a generall Market of Bawdrie: Not that any filthynesse in deede, is committed within the compasse of that ground, as was doone in *Rome* but that euery wanton and his Paramour, euery man and his Mistresse, euery John and his Joan, euery knaue and his queane, are there first acquainted and cheapen the Merchandise in that place, which they pay for elsewhere as they can agree. These wormes when they dare not nestle in the Pescod at home, finde refuge abrode and are hidde in the eares of other mens Come. Euery Vawter in one blinde Tauerne or other, is Tenant at will, to which shee tolleth resorte, and playes the stale to vtter their victuals, and helpe them to emptie their mustie caskes. There is she so intreated with wordes, and receiued with custesie, that euery back roome in the house is at her commaundement. Some that haue neither land to maintaine them, nor good occupation to get their breade, desires to strowt it with the beste, yet disdayning too liue by the sweate of their browes, haue found out this cast of Ledgerdemayne, to play fast and loose among their neighbours. If any parte of Musick haue suffred shipwrack, and ariued by fortune at their fingers endes, with shewe of gentilitie they take vp faire houses, receive lusty laffes at a price for boorders, and pipe from morning to euening for wood and coale. By the brothers, cosens, vncles, great grand sires and such like acquaintance of their ghestes, they drink of the best, they sit rente free, they haue their owne Table spreade to their handes, without wearing the strings of the pursse, or any thing else, but householde and honestie. When resorte so increaseth that they grow in suspition, and the pottes which are sent so often too the Tauerne, gette such a knock before they come home, that they returne their Mayster a crack to his credite: Though hee bee called in question of his life, hee hath shifte inoughe to auoyde the blanke. If their houses bee searched, some instrumente of Musick is layde in sighte to dazell the eyes of euery Officer, and all that are lodged in the house by night, or frequente it by day, come thither as pupilles to be well schoolde. Other there are which beeing so knowen that they are the bywoorde of euery mans mouth, and pointed at commonly as they passe the streetes, either couch them selues in Allyes, or blind Lanes, or take sanctuary in fryeries, or liue a mile from the Cittie like *Venus* nunnes in a Cloyster at *Newington*, *Ratliffe*, *Islington*, *Hogsdon* or some such place, where like penitents, they deny the worlde, and spende theyr dayes in double deuotion. And when they are weery of contemplation to comfort themselves, and renue their acquaintance, they visit Theaters, where they make full account of a pray before they departe. *Solon* made no lawe for Parricides, because he feared that hee shoulde rather put men in minde to commit such offences, then by any straunge punishment, giue them a bitte to keepe them vnder. And I intend not to shewe you al that I see, nor halfe that I heare of these abuses, lest you iudge me more wilfull to teach them, then willing to forbid them.

I looke still when Players shoulde cast me their Gauntlets, and challenge a combate for entring so far into their possessions, as though I made them Lords of this misrule, or the very scholmaisters of these abuses: though the best Clarkes bee of that opinion, they heare not me say so. There are more houses then Parishe Churches, more

maydes then Maulkin, more wayes to the woode then one, and more cauess in nature then Efficients. The Carpenter rayseth not his frame without tooles, nor the Deuill his woork without instrumentes: were not Players the meane, to make these assemblyes, such multitudes wold hardly be drawne in so narowe roome. They seeke not to hurte, but desire too please: they haue purged their Comedyes of wanton speaches, yet the Corne which they sell, is full of Cockle: and the drinke that they drawe, ouercharged with dregges. There is more in them then we perceiue, the Deuill standes at our elbowe when we see not, speaks when we heare him not, strikes when wee feele not, and woundeth sore when he raseth no skinne, nor rentes the fleshe. In those things, that we least mistrust, the greatest daunger dooth often lurke. The Countreyman is more affrayde of the Serpente that is hid in the grasse, then the wilde beaste that openly feeds vpon the mountains: The Marriner is more indaungered by priuie shelues, then knowen Rockes; The Souldier is sooner killed with a little Bullet, then a longe Swoorde; There is more perill in close Fistoloes, then outwarde sores; in secret ambushe, then maine battels; in vndermining, then plaine assaulting; in friends then foes; in ciuill discorde, then forraine warres. Small are the abuses, and sleight are the faultes, that nowe in Theaters escape the Poets pen: But tal Cedars, from little graynes shoote high: great Okes, from slender rootes spread wide: Large streames, from narrow springes runne farre: One little sparke, fyers a whole Citie: One dramme of *Eleborus* ransackes euery vaine: The Fish *Remora* hath a small body, and great force too stay shippes against winde and tide: *Ichneumon* a little worme, ouercomes the Elephant: The Viper stayes the Bul: The Weesell the Cockatrice: And the weakest Waspe, stingeth the stoutest manne of warre. The height of Heauen, is taken by the staffe: The bottome of the Sea, sounded with lead: The farthest cost, discovered by Compasse: the secretes of nature, searched by witte: the Anatomy of man, set out by experience: But the abuses of plaies cannot be shoven, because they passe the degrees of the instrument, reach of the Plummet, sight of the minde, and for trial are neuer brought to the touchstone. Therefore he that will auoyde the open shame of pryuy sinne, the common plague of priuate offences, the greate wracks of little Rocks: the sure disease of vncertaine causes: must set hande to the sterne, and eye to his steppes, to shunne the occasion as neere as he can: neither running to bushes for renting his clothes, nor rent his clothes for imparing his thrift, nor walke vpon Yse, for taking a fall, nor take a fall for brusing him selfe, nor goe too Theaters for being allured, nor once bee allured for feare of abuse. . . .

Marcus Aurelius sayeth, That players falling from iuste labour to vniuste idlenesse, doe make more trewandes, and ill husbands, then if open Schooles of vnthrifts and Vagabonds were kept. Whosoeuer readeth his Epistle too *Lambert* the gouernor of *Hellespont*, when Players were banished, shall find more against them in plainer tearmes, then I will vtter.

This haue I set downe of the abuses of Poets, Pypers, and Players which bringe vs too pleasure, slouth, sleepe, sinne, and without repentaunce to death and the Deuill: which I haue not confirmed by authoritie of the Scriptures, because they are not able to stand vppe in the sighte of God: and sithens they dare not abide the field, where the word of God dooth bidde them battayle, but runne to Antiquities (though nothing be more ancient then holy Scriptures) I haue given them a volley of prophane writers to beginne

the skirmishe, and doone my indeuour to beate them from their holdes with their owne weapons. The Patient that will be cured, of his owne accorde, must seeke the meane: if euery man desire to saue one, and drawe his owne feete from Theaters, it shall preuayle as much against these abuses, as *Homers Moly* against Witchcraft, or *PLynies Peristerion* against the byting of Dogges. . . .

Let vs but shut vppe our eares to Poets, Pypers and Players, pull our feete back from resort to Theaters, and turne away our eyes from beholding of vanitie, the greatest storme of abuse will be ouerblowen, and a fayre path troden to amendment of life. Were not we so foolish to taste euery drugge, and buy euery trifle, Players would shut in their shoppes, and carry their trashe to some other Countrie.

Of Stage-playes and Enterluds, with their wickednes (1583)

by Philip Stubbes

Philo. All Stage-playes, Enterluds, and Comedies are either of diuine, or prophane matter: if they be of diuine matter, then are they most intollerable, or rather sacrilegious, for that the blessed word of GOD, is to be handled, reverently, gravely, and sagely, with veneration to the glorious Maiestie of God, which shineth therin, and not scoffingly, flowtingly, and iyvingly [jivingly], as it is upon stages in playes and enterluds, without any reverence, worship, or veneration to the ye same: the word of our Salvation, the price of Christ his blood, and the merits of his passion, were not given, to be derided, and iested at as they be in these filthie playes and enterluds on stages and scaffolds, or to be mixt and interlaced with bawdry, wanton shewes and uncomely gestures, as is used (every man knoweth) in these playes and enterluds. In the ***** of Ihon [John] we are taught, that the word is GOD, and God is the word. Wherefore, who so ever abuseth this word of our God on stages in playes and enterluds, abuseth the Maiesty of GOD in the same, maketh a mocking stock of him, & purchaseth to himselfe, eternal damnation. And no marveil, for the sacred word of GOD, and God himself, is never to be thought of, or once named, but with great feare, reverence and obedience to the same. Al the holy companie of Heaven, Angels, Archangels, Cherubins, Seraphins, and all other powers whatsoever, yea the Devills thsmelves, (as Iames saith) do tremble and quake, at the naming of God, and at the presence of his wrath, and do these mockers and flowters of his Maiesty, these dissembling Hipocrites, and flattering Gnatoes, think to escape unpunished? Beware therefore you masking Players, you painted sepulchres, you doble dealing ambodexters, be warned betymes, and lik good computistes cast your accompts before what wit be the reward therof in the end, least God destroy you in his wrath: abuse God no more, corrupt his people no longer with your dregges, and intermingle not his blessed word with such prophane vanities. For, at no hand, it is not lawfull to mixt scurrilitie with divinitie, nor divinitie with scurrilitie.

Theopompus, mingled Moyses [Moses] law with his writinges, and therfore the LORD stroke him madd. Theodictes began the same practice, but the Lorde stroke him

blinde for it. With many others who attempting the like devyses, were al overthrowne, and died miserably: besids, what is the iudgement in the other World the Lord onely knoweth. Upon the other side, if their playes be of prophane matters, that tend they to ye dishonor of God and nothing of vice, both wich are damnable. So that whither they be the one or the other, they are quite contrarie to the Word of grace, and sucked out of the Deuills teates, to nourish us in ydolatrie hethenrie, and sinne.

And therefore, they caryng the note, or brand of GOD his curse upon their backs, which may foever they goe, are to be hissed out of all Christian kingdomes if they wil have Christ to dwell amongst them.

Spud. Are you able to shewe, that ever any good men from the beginning, have resisted playes and enterluds?

Philo. Not onely the word of GOD doth overthrow them, addiudging them, and the maintainers of them, to Hell, but also all holie counsels, and sinodes, both generall, nationall and provincially, together, with all Writers both divyne and prophane, ever since ye beginning have disallowed them, and writ (almost) whole volumes against them.

The learned father Tertullian in his booke of *Speculo*, saith, that playes, were consecrat to that false ydoll Bacchus, for that he is said to have found out, and invented strong drinke.

Augustinus de civit. Dei, saith, that plaies were ordeined by the Deuill, and consecrat to heathen Gods, to draw us from Christianitie to ydolatrie, and gentilisme. And in an other place: *Pecunias, Histrionibus dare, vitium est innane, non virtus*. To give money to players, is a greevous sin.

Christostome, calleth those playes, *festa Sathani*, feasts of the Devill. Lactantius, an ancient learned father, saith, *Histrionum, impudissimi gestus, nihil aliud nisi Libidinem movent*: The shamelesse gestures of plaiers, serve to nothing so much, as to move the **** to lust, and unclennesee. And therefore, in the. 30. Counsell of Carthage, the Synode of Laodicea, it was decreed, that no Christen man, or woman, should resort to playes and enterludes, where is nothing but blasphemie, scurrilitie, and whordome maintained. Scipio, seing the Romaines bente to erect Theaters, and places for plaies, ***** them from it, with most prudent reasons and forcible arguments. Valerius Maximus saith, playes were never brought up, sine regna rubore, without shame to the country.

Arist, debarreth youth accesse to playes and enterluds, least they seeking to quench the thirst of Venus, do quench it with a pottle of fire. Augustus, banished Ovid, for making Bookes of love, enterluds and such other amorous trumperie.

Constantius, ordeined that no player shold be admitted to the table of the Lord. Then seeing, that playes were first invented by the Deuill, practised by the heathen gentiles, and dedicat to their false ydols, Goddes and Goddesses: as the house, stage and apparell, to Venus: the musicke, to Appollo: the penning, to Minerva, and the Muses: the action and pronuntiation to Mercurie and ye rest, it is more than manifest, that they are no fit exercyses for a Christen man to follow. But if there were no evill in them, save this, namely, that the arguments of tragedies, is anger, wrath, immunitie, crueltie, iniurie,

incest, murther and such like: the persons of actors are Goddes, Goddesses, Furies, Fyends, Haggis, Kings, Queenes, or Potentates. Of Commedies, the matter and ground is love, bawdrie, cozenage, flattery, whordome, adulterie: the persons, sons or agents, whores, queanes, bawdes, scullions, knaves, curtezans, lecherous old men, amorous yong men, with such like of infinit harletrie: If I say there were nothing els, but this, it were sufficient to withdraw a good christen from the using of them. For so often, as they goe to those howses where players frequent, thei goe to Venus palace and Sathans synagogue to worship devils, and betray Christ Jesus.

Spud. But notwithstanding, I have hard some hold opinion that they be as good as sermons, and that many a good example may be learned out of them?

Philo. Ah blasphemie intollerable: are filthie playes and bawdy enterluds comparable to the word of God, ye foode of life, and life it selfe? It is all one, as if they had said, bawdrie, hethenrie, paganrie, scurrilitie, and devilrie it self, is equall with the word of God. Or that the Deuill, is equivalent with the Lord.

The Lord our God hath ordeined his blessed word, and made it the ordenarie mean of our Salvation, the Deuill hath inferred the other, as, the ordenarie mean of our destruction, and will they yet compare the one with ye other? If he be accursed, ye calleth light darknes, and darknes light, truth, falsehood, and falshood truth, sweet, sowre, and sowr sweete, than *a fortiori* is to be accursed that faith that playes and enterluds be equivalent with sermons. Besids this, there is no mischief which these plaiers maintain not. For, do they not norish ydlenes; and *otia dant vitia*, ydlenes is the father of vice. Do they not draw the people from hering the word of God, from godly lectures, and sermons? For you shall have them flocke thither thick and threefould, when ye church of God shal be bare and emptie. And those ye will never come at sermons will flow thither apace. The reason is, for that the number of Christ his elect is but few, and the number of the reprobats is many, the way ye leadeth to life is narow, and few tread ye path, ye way that leadeth to death, is brod, and many find it. This the ****, they are not of God, who refuse to here his word (for he that is of God, hereth God his word saith our saviour Christ) but of the Devill, whose exercyses they go to visite. Do they not maintaine bawdrie, insinuat folery, and renue ye remembrance of hethen ydolatrie? Do they not induce whordome and unclennes? Nay, tare they not rather plaine devourers of maydenly virginitie and chastitie? For prooffe wherof, but marke the flocking and runing to theaters and curtens, daylie and hourelly, night and daye, tyme and tyde to see playes and enterludes, where such wanton gestures, such bawdie speaches, such laughing and fleering, such kissing and bussing, such clipping and culling, such winckinge and glancinge of wanton eyes, and the like is used, as is wonderfull to behold. Then these goodly pageants being done, every mate sorts to his mate, every one bringes another homeward of their way verve francly, and in their secret conclaves (covertly) they play ye Sodomits, or worse. And these be the fruits of playes and enterluds, for the most part. And whereas, you say, there are good examples to be learned in them:

Trulie, so there are: if you will learne falshood, if you will learn cosenage; if you will earn to deceive; if you will earn to play the Hipocrit: to cogge, lye and falsifie; if

you will learn to iest, laugh and fleer, to grin, to nodd, and mow; if you will learn to play the vice, to swear, tear, and blaspheme, both Heaven and Earth; if you will learn to become a bawde, uncleane, and to devertinat mayds, to deflour honest wyves; if you will learne to murther, salie, kill, picke, steal, robbe and rove; if you will learn to rebel against princes, to comit treasons, to consume treasurs, to practice ydlenes, to sing and talke of bawdrie, love and venery; if you will lerne to deride, scoffe, mock and flowt, to flatter and smooth; if you will learn to play the whore-maister, the glutton, drunkard, or incestuous person: if you will learn to become proude, hawtie and arrogant; and finally, if you will learne to contemne GOD and al his lawes, to care neither for heaven nor hel, and to commit al kinde of sinne and mischief you need to goe to no other schoole, for all these good examples, may you see painted before your eyes in enterludes and playes; wherefore, that man who giveth money for the maintenance of them, must needs incurre the damage of *premunire*, that is, eternall damnation except they repent. For the Apostle biddeth us beware, least wee communicat with other mens sinnes, and this their dooing, is not only to communicat with other mens sinnes, and maintain evil, to the destruction of them selves and many others, but also a maintaining of the great sorte of idle lubbers and buzzing drontes to suck up and devoure the good bonie, whereupon the poor bees should live.

Therefore I beseech all players and founders of plaies and enterludes, in the bowels of Jesus Christe, as they tender the salvation of their soules, and others, to leave of that cursed kind of life, and give them selves to such honest exercises, and godly misteries, as God hath commaunded them in his word to get their livings withall; for who will call him a wiseman that plaieth the part of a foole and a vice? Who can call him a Christian, who playeth a part of a devil, the sworne enemie of Christe? Who can call him a iust man, that playeth the part of a dissembling hipocrite? And to be brief, who can call him a straight deling man, who playeth a cosoners trick? And so of all ye rest. Always therefore with this so infamous an art, for goe they never to brave, yet are they counted and taken but for beggers. And is it not true? Live they not upon begging of every one that comes? Are they not taken by the lawes of the realm, for roagues and vagabonds? I speak of such as travaile the cuntries, with playes and enterludes, making an occupation of it, and ought so to be punished, if they had their deserts. But hoping that they will be warned now at the last, I will say no more ofthem, beseeching them to consider what a fearful thing it is to fall into the hands of God, and to provoke his wrath and heavie displeasure against them selves and others, which the Lord of his mercie turn from us.

