Philip Stubbes (c. 1555–1610), pamphleteer and moral controversialist. Educated at Cambridge, Stubbes left without taking his degree, and by the 1590s he was acknowledged as one of London’s most energetic pamphleteers. Best known then and now for his extended exposé of the vices of Elizabethan society, *The Anatomy of Abuses* (1583), Stubbes also published in a number of other genres, including prayers, pious ballads, cautionary tales, and a best-selling biography of his wife Katherine, *A Crystal Glass for Christian Women* (1591; 28 editions by 1664).

*The Anatomy of Abuses* was enormously popular, receiving four editions before 1595, and spurring a sequel entitled *The Display of Corruptions*. While *Anatomy* focuses on condemning the vices of fashion and fun (i.e., leisure activities, such as sports, May day celebrations, dancing, theatre-going, etc.), its sequel focuses on the sins that attend particular professions and ranks in life; the latter, however, is just as morally censorious as the former, and gained Stubbes a reputation as a sour Puritan who saw no difference between humanity’s innocent pleasures and its serious vices. *The Anatomy of Abuses* presents Stubbes’ critique of his society in the form of a dialogue between Philoponus and Spudeus, and the chapter entitled “Of Stage-Plays and Interludes, with Their Wickedness” repeats a conviction common to many of the book’s chapters: *Otia dant vitia* or “Leisure leads to vice.” In Stubbes’ opinion, the world of the theatre, however, is a particularly dangerous one, because of the kinds of vices it encourages: from treason to adultery to sodomy to general sexual incontinence.

**Editions:**


**From The Anatomy of Abuses (1583)**

**Of Stage-Plays, and Interludes, with Their Wickedness**

Philoponus.¹

All stage-plays, interludes, and comedies are either of divine or profane matter. If they be of divine matter, then are they most intolerable, or rather sacrilegious, for that the blessed word of God is to be handled reverently, gravely, and sagely, with veneration to the glorious majesty of God, which shineth therein, and not scoffingly, floutingly,² and jibingly,³ as it is upon stages in plays and interludes, without any reverence, worship, or veneration at all done to the same. For it is most certain, the word of our salvation, the

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¹ Philoponus Greek, ‘lover of labour.’
² floutingly jeeringly.
³ jibingly insultingly, contemptuously.
price of Christ his blood,\(^4\) and the merits of his Passion, were not given to be derided and jested at, as they be in these filthy plays and interludes, or to be mixed and interlaced with bawdry, wanton shows, and uncomely gestures, as is used (every man knoweth) in these plays and interludes upon stages and scaffolds\(^5\) made for that purpose. In the first of John we are taught that the word is God, and God is the word.\(^6\) Wherefore, whosoever abuseth this word of our God on stages in plays and interludes abuses the majesty of God in the same, maketh a mocking stock of him, and purchasest to himself eternal damnation. And no marvel, for the sacred word of God, and God himself, is never to be thought of, or once named, but with great fear, reverence, and obedience to the same. All the holy company of heaven—angels, archangels, cherubims, seraphims, and all other seraphical\(^7\) powers whatsoever, yea, the devils themselves (as St. James sayeth)—do tremble and quake at the naming of God,\(^8\) and at the presence of his wrath; and do these mockers and flouters of his majesty, these dissembling hypocrites and flattering gnatoes,\(^9\) think to escape unpunished? Beware, therefore, you masking players,\(^10\) you painted sepulchres,\(^11\) you double-dealing ambidexters,\(^12\) be warned betimes,\(^13\) and, like good computistes,\(^14\) cast your accompts\(^15\) before, what will be the reward thereof in the end, lest God destroy you in his wrath. Abuse God no more; corrupt his people no longer with your dregs,\(^16\) and intermingle not his blessed Word with such profane vanities. For at no hand it is not lawful to mix scurrility with divinity, nor divinity with scurrility.

Theopompus mingled Moses’ law with his writings, and therefore the Lord struck him mad. Theodectes began the same practice, but the Lord struck him blind for it;\(^17\) with many others, who, attempting the like devices, were all overthrown, and died miserably; besides, what is their judgment in the other world, the Lord only knoweth. Upon the other side, if their plays be of profane matters, then tend they to the dishonor of God, and

\(^4\) Christ his blood i.e., Christ’s blood.
\(^5\) scaffolds temporary stages set up in tavern yards or other public places.
\(^6\) John 1.1: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”
\(^7\) cherubims and seraphims two of the highest orders or ranks of angels. seraphical angelic.
\(^8\) yea, the devils ... God James 2.19: “You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder.”
\(^9\) gnatoes from the Latin, ‘gnatho,-onis. m., a parasite.’
\(^10\) players actors.
\(^11\) painted sepulchres See Matthew 23.27 for Jesus’ condemnation of the authority of the Pharisees and scribes, 1st c. Judaism’s most important spiritual authorities: “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness.”
\(^12\) ambidexter Although the OED suggests that the term means largely ‘double-dealer,’ and although Williams lacks an entry for this word, given the context the term perhaps hints at ‘doubleness of sex or gender, hermaphroditism.’
\(^13\) betimes in good time.
\(^14\) computistes accountants.
\(^15\) accompts accounts.
\(^16\) dregs grounds, lees; thus, disgusting remnants or leavings.
\(^17\) Theopompus ... blind ... for it Theopompus (b. c. 380 BCE), Greek historian, of whose works only fragments remain. In a list of scholars afflicted by God for treating Scripture profanely, the humanist writer Agrippa notes that when Theopompus “began to translate some things out of the Divine law into the Greek tongue [he] was presently troubled in mind and spirit, whence afterward earnestly desiring God wherefore this had happened to him, received an answer in a dream, because he had basely polluted Divine Things setting them forth in public” (Three Books of Occult Philosophy, trans. 1651, p. 348). Theodectes (c. 380-340 BCE), Greek orator, poet, and playwright (Agrippa repeats the same story, p. 348).
nourishing of vice, both which are damnable. So that whether they be the one or the other, they are quite contrary to the word of grace, and sucked out of the Devil’s teats\(^{18}\) to nourish us in idolatry, heathenry, and sin. And therefore they, carrying the note or brand of God, his curse upon their backs, which way soever they go, are to be hissed out of all Christian kingdoms, if they will have Christ to dwell amongst them.

**SPUDEUS.**

Are you able to show that ever any good men, from the beginning, have resisted plays and interludes?

**PHILOPONUS.**

Not only the word of God does overthrow them, adjudging them, and, the maintainers of them to Hell, but also all holy counsels and synods,\(^{19}\) both general, national, and provincial, together with all writers, both divine and profane, ever since the beginning, have disallowed them, and wrote (almost) whole volumes against them.

The learned Father Tertullian, in his book *De Speculo*, sayeth that plays were consecrate to that false idol Bacchus,\(^{20}\) for that he is said to have found out and invented strong drink.\(^{21}\)

Augustinus’ *De Civitate Dei* sayeth that plays were ordained by the Devil, and consecrate to heathen gods, to draw us from Christianity to idolatry and gentilism.\(^{22}\) And in another place, *pecunias histrionibus dare, vitium est immane, non virtus*, ‘to give money to players is a grievous sin and no virtue;’\(^{23}\)

Chrisostom calleth those plays *festa Sathani*, ‘feasts of the Devil.’\(^{24}\) Lactantius, an ancient learned father, sayeth, *histrionum, impudissimi gestus, nihil aliiud nisi libidinem movent*: ‘The shameless gestures of players serve to nothing so much as to move the flesh to lust and uncleanness.’\(^{25}\) And therefore in the 30 Council of Carthage and Synod of Laodicea,\(^{26}\) it was decreed that no Christian man or woman should resort to plays and

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\(^{18}\) *teats* breasts, nipples, udders. Witches were believed to grow a devil’s teat on their bodies, from which their familiars (devils in the form of an animal, perhaps a toad or a cat) would feed.

\(^{19}\) *synod* a clerical assembly, convened for discussing and settling local, regional, and national ecclesiastical affairs.

\(^{20}\) *Bacchus* the classical god of wine and revelry, also known as Dionysus.

\(^{21}\) *The learned father Tertullian ... De Speculo ... drink* The early Church leader and author Tertullian condemned Christian attendance at Rome’s various public entertainments (e.g., plays, gladiatorial games, and horse races) in *De Spectaculis* (On the Games or On Public Shows) [composed, c. 197-202 CE]. For these comments, see *De Spectaculis*, sect. 10-12.

\(^{22}\) *Augustinus’ De Civitate Dei ... gentilism* The most famous work of the early Church father Augustine (354-430 CE), *City of God* condemns the theatre on these and other bases; see Book II, chapters 8-13.

\(^{23}\) *And ... virtue.* Although attributed to Augustine in other anti-theatrical tracts (such as John Northbrooke’s *A Treatise wherein Dicing, Dancing ... Plays or Interludes ... Are Reproofed* [1577], p. 58), this comment has not been traced.

\(^{24}\) *Chrisostom ... Devil’* John Chrysostom (349-407 CE), archbishop of Constantinople, eloquent preacher, and author of many works of theology. For these comments and others, see R. Miles, “Unmasking the Self: Church and Theatre in the Homilies of John Chrysostom,” *Attitudes to the Theatre from Plato to Milton*, ed. E. Theodorakopoulos (Bari, 2003), pp. 103-115.

\(^{25}\) *Lactantius ... uncleanness* Firmianus Lactantius (c. 240-c. 320 CE), early Christian author, teacher, and rhetorician. These comments are probably contained in his seven book *Divine Institutes*, a work that refutes at length paganism and pagan critics of Christianity.

\(^{26}\) *Council of Carthage* In 419 CE, this council confirmed that no Christian should be forced to attend places of public entertainment, such as the theatre or circus; that public entertainments (like plays) should not happen on holy days (Canon 61); and that those who attended theatre rather than church should be excommunicated. The Council also decreed that actors could not receive the sacraments. *Synod of Laodicea* In 364 CE, this synod outlawed
interludes, where is nothing but blasphemy, scurrility, and whoredom maintained. Scipio, seeing the Romans bent to erect theatres and places for plays, dehorted them from it with most prudent reasons and forcible arguments. Scipio, seeing the Romans bent to erect theatres and places for plays, dehorted them from it with most prudent reasons and forcible arguments.  

Valerius Maximus sayeth, plays were never brought up sine regni rubore, ‘without shame to the country.’ Aristotle debareth youth access to plays and interludes, lest they, seeking to quench the thirst of Venus, do quench it with a pottle of fire. Augustus banished Ovid for making books of love, interludes, and such other amorous trumpery.  

Constantius ordained that no player should be admitted to the table of the Lord.  

Then, seeing that plays were first invented by the Devil, practiced by the heathen gentiles, and dedicate to their false idols, gods and goddesses—as the house, stage and apparel to Venus; the music to Apollo; the penning to Minerva and the Muses; the action and pronunciation to Mercury and the rest—it is more than manifest that they are no fit exercises for Christian men to follow. But if there were no evil in them save this, namely, that the arguments of tragedies is anger, wrath, immunity, cruelty, injury, incest, murder, and such like; the persons or actors are gods, goddesses, furies, fiends, hags, kings, queens, or potentates. Of comedies, the matter and ground is love, bawdry, cozenage, flattery, whoredom, adultery; the persons or agents, whores, queans, bawds, scullions, knaves, courtesans, lecherous old men, amorous young men, with such like of infinite variety. If, I say, there were nothing else but this, it were sufficient to withdraw a good Christian from the using of them; for so often as they go to those houses where players frequent, they go to Venus’ palace, and Satan’s synagogue to worship devils, and betray Christ Jesus.
SPUDEUS.

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

PHILOPONUS.

Oh, blasphemy intolerable! Are filthy plays and bawdy interludes comparable to the word of God, the food of life, and life itself? It is all one, as if they had said, bawdry, heathenry, pagantry, scurrility, and devilry itself is equal with the word of God, or that the Devil is equivalent with the Lord!

The Lord our God has ordained his blessed Word, and made it the ordinary means of our salvation; the Devil has inferred the other as the ordinary means of our destruction; and will they yet compare the one with the other? If he be accursed that calls light darkness and darkness light, truth falsehood, and falsehood truth, sweet sour, and sour sweet, then, a fortiori,40 is he accursed that sayeth that plays and interludes be equivalent with sermons. Besides this, there is no mischief41 which these plays maintain not. For do they not nourish idleness? and otia dant vitia,42 ‘idleness is the mother of vice.’ Do they not draw the people from hearing the word of God, from godly lectures and sermons? For you shall have them flock thither, thick and threefold, when the church of God shall be bare and empty, and those that will never come at sermons will flow thither apace.43 The reason is, for that the number of Christ his elect is but few, and the number of the reprobate is many; the way that leadeth to life is narrow, and few tread that path; the way that leadeth to death is broad, and many find it.44 This showeth they are not of God who refuse to hear his Word (for he that is of God heareth God his Word, sayeth our savior Christ), but of the Devil, whose exercises they go to visit. Do they not maintain bawdry, insinuate foolery, and renew the remembrance of heathen idolatry? Do they not induce whoredom and uncleanness? Nay, are they not rather plain devourers of maidenly virginity and chastity? For proof whereof, but mark the flocking and running to theatres and curtains,45 daily and hourly, night and day, time and tide,46 to see plays and interludes; where such wanton gestures, such bawdy speeches, such laughing and fleering,47 such kissing and bussing,48 such clipping and culling,49 such winking and glancing of wanton eyes, and the like, is used, as is wonderful50 to behold. Then, these goodly pageants being done, every mate sorts to his mate, everyone brings another homeward of their way very friendly, and in their secret conclaves (covertly) they play the sodomites, or worse. And these be the fruits of plays and interludes for the most part. And whereas you say there are good examples to be learned in them, truly so there are: if you will learn falsehood; if you will learn cozenage; if you will learn to deceive; if you

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40 a fortiori Latin, ‘By a stronger reason; all the more.’
41 mischief serious evil, wickedness.
42 otia dant vitia a stricter translation of the Latin would be, ‘Leisure leads to vice.’
43 apace swiftly.
44 the way that leadeth to life ... many find it Matthew 7.13-14.
45 theatres and curtains The early London theatre simply called The Theatre was built c. 1576, and its counterpart The Curtain, c. 1579.
46 time and tide proverbial, referring here to the inexorable nature of these forces.
47 fleering grinning, grimacing, leering.
48 bussing kissing (sometimes with connotations of doing so loudly or excessively).
49 clipping and culling embracing and fondling.
50 wonderful astonishing.
will learn to play the hypocrite, to cog, lie, and falsify; if you will learn to jest, laugh, and fleer, to grin, to nod, 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 bawd, unclean, and to devirginate maids, to deflower honest wives; if you will learn to murder, slay, kill, pick, steal, rob, and rove; if you will learn to rebel against princes, to commit treasons, to consume treasures, to practice idleness, to sing and talk of bawdry, love and venery; if you will learn to play the whore-master, the glutton, drunkard, or incestuous person; if you will learn to become proud, haughty, and arrogant; and, finally, if you will learn to contemn God and all his laws, to care neither for heaven nor hell, and to commit all kind[s] of sin and mischief—you need to go to no other school, for all these good examples may you see painted before your eyes in interludes and plays. Wherefore, that man who giveth money for the maintenance of them must needs incur the damage of praemunire, that is, eternal damnation, except they repent. For the Apostle biddeth us beware, lest we communicate with other men’s sins; and this their doing is not only to communicate with other men’s sins, and to maintain evil to the destruction of themselves and many others, but also a supporting of a great sort of idle lubbers, and buzzing dronets, to suck up and devour the good honey, whereupon the poor bees should live.

Therefore, I beseech all players, founders, and maintainers of plays and interludes, in the bowels of Jesus Christ, as they tender the salvation of their souls, and others, to leave off that cursed kind of life, and give themselves to such honest exercises and godly mysteries as God hath commanded them in his Word to get their livings withal; for who will call him a wise man that playeth the part of a fool and a vice? Who can call him a Christian who playeth the part of a devil, the sworn enemy of Christ? Who can call him a just man that playeth the part of a dissembling hypocrite? And, to be brief, who can call him a straight-dealing man who playeth a cozener’s trick? And so of all the rest. Away, therefore, with this so infamous an art! For go they never so brave, yet are they counted and taken but for beggars. And is it not true? Live they not upon begging of every one that comes? Are they not taken by the laws of the realm for rogues and vagabonds? I speak of such as travel the countries with plays and interludes, making an occupation of it, and ought so to be punished, if they had their deserts. But hoping that

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51 cog  hoodwink, cheat.
52 mow  jeer, make a contemptuous gesture with one’s mouth.
53 to play the Vice ... earth  In English morality plays, the allegorical figure of Vice often engaged in ‘over-the-top’ displays of villainy.
54 devirginate  deprive of virginity.
55 pick  thieve (be a pickpocket).
56 venery  sexual desire and activity.
57 contemn  despise.
58 praemunire  an offense that involved attempting to circumvent the authority of English common law courts by resorting to the ecclesiastical courts, or by trying to get an English case tried abroad in a foreign court; either attempt was seen as questioning the supremacy of the English Crown over state and ecclesiastical matters.
59 the Apostle ... sins  The Apostle is St. Paul. See 1 Timothy 5.22.
60 lubbers  idle, stupid louts.
61 drones  drones.
62 brave  finely and fashionably dressed and accoutered.
63 Are ... vagabonds  See “A Royal Proclamation against Vagabonds and Unlawful Assemblies” issued in September of 1598.
they will be warned now at the last, I will say no more of them, beseeching them to consider what a fearful thing it is to fall into the hands of God, and to provoke his wrath and heavy displeasure against themselves and others; which the Lord of his mercy turn from us!

[...]