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‘That silken Priest’: Catholic disguise and anti-popery on the English Mission (1569-1640)¹

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Abstract

Disguise was essential for gaining access to Roman Catholic sacraments in post-Reformation England. This article considers the role of such non-devotional materials in confessional conflict and Catholic religious life. It discusses how the materiality and language of clothing, accessories, and personal appearance, could be used to emphasise disguise, and its wearers, as a threatening force. It then analyses how anti-papal narratives compared to the reality of Catholic disguise strategies, before demonstrating how those strategies complicated Catholic self-representation. Both in conflict with Protestants and intra-Catholic disputes, the materiality of Catholic appearance could become a political weapon.

The history of the hidden and covert is as essential to our understanding of faith and politics as anything on public show. Disguise was an essential part of Roman Catholic survival in post-Reformation England. Yet how the material, meaning, and use of disguise affected the perception of Catholics, both by outsiders and its own community, has been largely neglected by scholars. Michael Mullet has argued that lying, equivocation and disguise had a pervasive impact on the Catholic mentality, ‘creating a collective, if partly unconscious, self-perception of criminality’ among both clergy and laity.² He takes the ideological impact of disguise seriously, but has little room for the cultural meanings of materiality, or whether anti-papal narratives reflected actual Catholic disguise strategies. This paper takes the concept of disguise and gives it material form, moving from the ideological to the concrete as it examines the

¹ This work was supported by the Arts & Humanities Research Council [grant number AH/L503873/1]. It began as a paper for the Renaissance Society of America (R.S.A.) Conference, in Toronto 2019, for which I benefited from grants from the K.C.L. Graduate and Departmental Funds, as well as the R.S.A. Travel Grant. It was subsequently awarded the I.H.R.’s Sir John Neale prize for 2019. I would like to thank Lucy Wooding, Michael Questier, Eilish Gregory, and those at the R.S.A. panel for their help in developing this piece, and Aislinn Muller for organizing the R.S.A. panel on Catholic material culture.

² Michael A. Mullett, “‘This irreligious art of liing’”: strategies of disguise in post-reformation English catholicism’, *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 20 (2007), 329.

material culture of Catholic resistance in early modern England. While Peter Lake has shown that anti-popery's internal logic, as much as any kind of reality, informed its premises and anti-Catholic action, it is worth exploring that there were some concrete examples of behaviours imputed to Catholics.³ No matter how rare or uncharacteristic, these exemplars could be used to fortify anti-papal claims. By explaining aspects of Catholic identity through material culture, this essay demonstrates that the concrete realities of Catholic resistance packed an ideological, political punch, on both sides of the confessional divide.

Clothing and appearance were key to interpreting social status and character in early modern Europe.⁴ Disguise therefore subverted the belief that, as Shakespeare's Polonius puts it, 'the apparel oft proclaims the man',⁵ and there was a very real sense in which the constant wearer of disguise could be affected by what they wore. Clothes were believed capable of directly effecting their wearers, infecting them with bad health and spiritual ills wherever the object's essential qualities came into conflict with the wearer's.⁶ Many agreed that prideful or luxurious clothing beyond one's station directly affected the mind, encouraging sinful behaviours such as lust, avarice, envy, and generally lax prodigality.⁷ Wearing luxurious attire, or 'pampering

³ Peter Lake, 'Anti-popery: the structure of a prejudice' in *Conflict in early Stuart England: studies in religion and politics 1603-1642*, R. Cust & A. Hughes (eds.) (1989), pp. 72-106.

⁴ Ulrika Rublack, *Dressing Up: Cultural Identity in Renaissance Europe*, (Oxford, 2010); *Fashioning the Early Modern: Dress, Textiles, and Innovation in Europe, 1500-1800*, Evelyn Welch (ed.) Evelyn Welch, (Oxford, 2017); *The Routledge Handbook of Material Culture in Early Modern Europe*, Catherine Richardson, Tara Hamling and David Gaimster (eds.), (Abingdon, 2017), esp. Maria Hayward, 'Clothing'; Ann Rosalind Jones & Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*, pp. 2-6; Susan Vincent, *Dressing the Elite: Clothes in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 5, 162, Chps. 3 & 4; Arthur Dent, *The Plaine Mans Path-way to Heauen* (1607), pp. 39, 43.

⁵ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act 1: Scene 3, line 73.

⁶ Susan Vincent does point out that for individuals such as the monarch, disguise was not perceived to alter their essential being, though it is notable that royalty are among the few who engage in prolonged acts of disguise who are perceived as untainted or unaffected by the negative connotations of disguise. There are other instances amongst the gentry, such as Bulstrode Whitelocke, where there is a voiced concern that disguise might influence the wearer's behaviour, so I am not convinced that disguise was only believed to affect other people's perception but left their essential identities unaffected, as she asserts on p.163. Vincent, pp. 160-3. Jones & Stallybrass, pp. 2-6; Roze Hentschell, *The Culture of Cloth in Early Modern England: Textual Constructions of a National Identity* (Aldershot, 2008), pp. 111-3, 118, 123; Paul Slack, 'The response to plague in early modern England: public policies and their consequences' in John Walter and Roger S. Schofield (eds.), *Famine, Disease and the Social Order in Early Modern Society* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 169, 175.

⁷ See for example: Henry Ainsworth, *An Arrow Against Idolatrie, Taken Out of the Quiver of the Lord of Hosts* (1624), pp. 31-2; James Calphill, *An Aunswere to the Treatise of the Crosse* (1565), p. 164r; Dent, pp. 43-5, 51;

of their bodies' was believed by some to make wearers 'weaker, tenderer, and neshier, then ... if they were used to hardnesse, and more subject to receive any kind of infection or malady'.⁸

In describing priestly disguises, anti-Catholic polemic therefore highlighted their negative qualities, to suggest these priests were either revealing or becoming their true, sinful selves. A proclamation of 18 October 1591 claimed that not only did priests arrive claiming they were gentlemen returning from studies abroad, but that 'generally all, ... as soon as they are crept in are clothed like gentlemen in apparel, and many as gallants, yea, in all colors and rich feathers'.⁹ Early seventeenth-century literature particularly emphasised these luxurious disguises, closely associating them with the Jesuits. The apostate priest Thomas Bell's, *The dovnnefall of poperie...* (1604) made much of Jesuits going around 'richly apparelled',¹⁰ while Protestant George Carleton's, *A thankfull remembrance of Gods mercy...* (1624) describes Babington Plotter John Ballard as 'that *silken Priest*'.¹¹ John Gee's *Foot out of the Snare* (1624), goes even further, describing Jesuits 'masking in their gold & siluer abroad, ... in a gold-laced suit, a cloke lined thorow with veluet,' with a 'good store of coin in his purse, Rings on his fingers,' a £30 'Watch in his pocket,' and 'a Stiletto by his side'.¹² An obvious criticism of the Catholic Church's venality and idolatrous materialism, such luxury clothing was widely associated with several forms of destabilisation.

In economic terms luxury clothing was criticised for destabilising the English cloth industry and encouraging debt.¹³ Gee even described priests as agents of this phenomenon, encouraging

Thomas Becon, *A New Postil Conteynyng Most Godly and Learned Sermons Vpon All the Soday Gospelles, That Be Redde in the Church Thorowout the Yeare* (1566), pp. 164r-v.

⁸ Phillip Stubbes, *The Anatomie of Abuses* (1583) as quoted in Hentschell, p. 122.

⁹ Proclamation 18 Oct 1591, 33 Eliz. I (738) in *Tudor Royal Proclamations Vol. III The Later Tudors (1588-1603)*, Paul Hughes & James Larkin (eds.), 3 (1969), p. 91. William Cecil, pretending to be recently executed priest Richard Leigh, parroted this description of priestly disguise, 'as Ruffians, with fethers and all ornaments of light coloured apparell, like to the fashion of Courtiers,': William Cecil, *The Copie of a Letter Sent Out of England to Don Bernardin Mendoza* (1588), p. 10.

¹⁰ Thomas Bell, *The Downefall of Poperie* (1604), Sig. *.ii.v.

¹¹ George Carleton, *A Thankfull Remembrance of Gods Mercy* (1624), p. 97.

¹² John Gee, *Foot Out of the Snare* (1624), pp. 56-7.

¹³ Hentschell, pp. 103, 105, 116-7, 123; Dent, p. 52.

the charitable laity to impoverish themselves in fulfilling priestly desire for ‘swaggering Sattin.’¹⁴ Such clothing was also perceived as destabilising hierarchical distinctions between rich and poor, master and servant, in a manner which deeply perturbed many early modern thinkers.¹⁵ Bell described Jesuits disguised ‘as if they were Barrons or Earles:’ to highlight the threat they posed to social distinction.¹⁶ Luxury clothing was also perceived as a threat to gender hierarchies, feminising men through softness, or irrational displays of pride and lust, whilst appealing to feminine vanity in ways that undermined patriarchal control and encouraged sexual misconduct.¹⁷ As Gee warned about well-dressed Jesuits, he ‘hath vowed *pouerty*. Feare not to trust him with thy wife: he hath vowed also *chastity*.’¹⁸ A priest’s honesty was not only worth doubting because he wore a disguise, but the disguise itself pointed to loose morals.¹⁹

Part of the appeal of luxury fabrics to vanity and desire was their association with the foreign or exotic. Velvets, satins, and silks were often coded as foreign, and particularly associated with the Catholic nations of Italy, Spain, and France, from which they were widely imported.²⁰ Anti-Catholic polemic describing Catholic disguises as ‘lined thorow with veluet,’ or a ‘crimsin Sattin suit’, or describing priests as ‘silken’, clearly draws on these associations.²¹ Wearing foreign clothing destabilised national identity, subsuming English virtues with those of vice-ridden foreign nations.²² The association of priestly disguise with foreign fabrics therefore encouraged the perception of Catholicism as a foreign import, diametrically opposed to the

¹⁴ Gee, p. 75.

¹⁵ Dent, pp. 48, 52-3, quoted at p. 53; Hentschell, p. 123; Vincent, Chp.4 esp. pp. 125-7.

¹⁶ Bell, Sig. *.ii.v.

¹⁷ Hentschell, pp. 122-3; Frances E. Dolan, *Whores of Babylon: Catholicism, Gender, and Seventeenth-Century Print Culture* (2005), pp. 27-8; Vincent, p. 167; Ainsworth, *An arrovv against idolatrie*, pp.31-2.

¹⁸ Gee, p. 57.

¹⁹ As Lake points out, the entire framework of anti-popery rested on a series of diametric opposites where Catholicism was continuously rendered the inversion of Protestantism/true religion: Lake, pp. 75-87. We can see here that both the fact they are disguised and the disguise itself were used as points of inversion.

²⁰ Hentschell, Chp. 4, esp. pp. 105-6, 117-125.

²¹ Gee, pp. 56, 103; Carleton, p. 97.

²² Hentschell, Chp.4.

loyal English subject.²³ An English Catholic wearing foreign fabrics, was essentially no longer English, twice-over. They had adopted another nation's identity and rejected their natural, God-given place, in an act deemed irreligious, even treasonous, by some.²⁴ This resonated with the characterisation of disguised priests by writers like William Cecil as spies, sent by the pope to gather information and sabotage.²⁵

Indeed, the concept of Catholics and especially priests operating like spies in the shadows, hidden by their clothing, became strongly bound to the widespread metaphorical use of "cloak". To hide 'vnder the cloake of good intent', to 'cloake' one's sins, and the 'cloak of religion',²⁶ used the physicality of the clothing item to not only suggest intentional concealment, but the darkness which lay beneath it. The darkness was sinister, a 'thick cloud and fogge of superstitions and forgeries; wherein they enwrap themselues, and would ensnare vs;' a cover under which Catholics might breach the Protestant country's security.²⁷ Cloaks and darkness were a shorthand for betrayal, that 'treason must haue a cloake' a recognisable adage.²⁸ As early as 1519 figures such as Cloaked Collusion in John Skelton's satirical play, *Magnyfycence* linked clerical copes and cloaks to this sense of intrigue and conspiracy.²⁹ Secrecy and privacy, as gained by disguising one's identity, and cloaking one's actions were understood by contemporaries in largely negative terms, as an inherently suspicious inversion of honesty and

²³ Dolan, pp. 37, 41-2, quoted at p. 42.

²⁴ Hentschell, pp. 113-4, 116-7, 122, 125; Dent, quoted at p. 46.

²⁵ William Cecil, *The Execution of Iustice in England for Maintenaunce of Publique and Christian Peace*, Sigs. E.i.r, E.ii.r, E.iii.r. This retains its ideological potency through to the 1620s, see: Gee, p. 3.

²⁶ William Fulke, *T. Stapleton and Martiall (Two Popish Heretikes) Confuted, and of their Particular Heresies Detected* (1580), pp. 47, 139; Lewis Evans, *The Hatefull Hypocrisie, and Rebellion of the Romishe Prelacie* (1570), Sig. C.iii.v; Calhill, pp. 10v, 53r; Dent, pp. 125, 250; G. B. A. F., *A Discouery of the Great Subtiltie and Wonderful Wisedome of the Italians* (1591), pp. 3, 4, 19, 38; Etienne Pasquier, *The Iesuites Catechisme. Or Examination of their Doctrine*, William Watson (trans.) (1602), pp. 14v, 115r; Thomas Clarke, *The Recantation of Thomas Clarke* (1594), Sig. C.iii.v.

²⁷ Gee, p. 3.

²⁸ Evans, Sig. A.iii.v.

²⁹ John Skelton, *Magnificence*, Paula Neuss (ed.) (Manchester, 1980), lines 596-608, 696-702, 710, 731-737, 748, pp. 103-104, 108-112.

openness.³⁰ Despite its fascination with deception as entertainment in conjuring and plays, early modern society had a deeply ambivalent relationship with those concepts. There were precious few situations in which moral authorities from Augustine, to Calvin, permitted lying, regarding it predominately as an evil to be avoided and disdained. Though more secular areas of life might admit certain contexts in which dissimulation was deployed for “reasons of state”, or personal advancement, it remained fraught with negative connotations no matter one’s religious disposition.³¹

Moreover, the acceptability of such tools of secrecy, particularly disguise, was not only predicated on their necessity, or impermanency, but the individual’s social status. The adoption of a gentlemanly or courtly persona for the purposes of social advancement was not described as a disguise, unless the individual’s attempt at social mobility was rejected. Inviolable royalty, it seems, could don disguise with little fear of being reduced to the nature of their apparel. Meanwhile the privilege of donning alternative personas in masques and entertainments, remained contained within the court, or amongst actors who were increasingly licensed by the nobility. As Susan Vincent points out, ‘Deceit and counterfeit were inherently suspicious, but only in the marginal and socially inferior.’³² Disguise was an exercise of secular power over social hierarchy which the poor, the marginalised, and the clergy, had no inherently legitimate right to wield.

³⁰ Erica Longfellow, ‘Public, Private and the Household in Early Seventeenth-Century England’, *Journal of British Studies*, 45 (2006), esp. 315; Linda Pollock, ‘Living on the Stage of the World: The Concept of Privacy among the Elite of Early Modern England’ in *Rethinking Social History: English Society, 1570–1920, and its Interpretation* Adrian Wilson (ed.), (Manchester, 1993), pp. 89-90.

³¹ Vincent, pp. 156-7, 159-60, 163-6, 180; Matthew Milner, *The Senses and the English Reformation* (Farnham, 2011), pp. 50-1; Mullett, 338; Andrew Hadfield, ‘Lying in early modern culture’, *Textual Practice* (2014), 347-8; Andrew Hadfield, *Lying In Early Modern English Culture: From the Oath of Supremacy to the Oath of Allegiance* (Oxford, 2017), esp. pp. 24-9, 234-7; P. Zagorin, *Ways of Lying: Dissimulation, Persecution and Conformity in Early Modern Europe*, (Cambridge: MA, 1990), pp. 5-8. For an anti-Catholic example of these aspects at work see: Evans, Sig. B.iii.v.

³² Vincent, Chp.5 esp. pp. 160-165, 180, quoted at p. 166.

In addition to being demonised for deploying these tools of lying and deceit, priests were frequently described as disguised ‘in the fashion of Rake-hels & Ruffians’³³, aligning their chosen disguises with disorderliness, dishonour, and aggressive, often violent criminal masculinity. As early as 1581, at the trial of Lord Vaux and others for harbouring Edmund Campion, the Attorney General reportedly described the Jesuit as ‘disguised in a very ruffianlike sorte’.³⁴ Cecil’s anonymously published, *The execution of iustice*, (1583) described Campion and other priests as ‘disguised like a roister’, in other words, ‘A wild or riotous person; a boisterous or noisy reveller;’ often associated with idle young gentlemen and soldiers.³⁵ In 1587 George Whetstone made a connection between the Jesuits’ propensity to disguise themselves in ‘warlike, & ruffianly order,’ for enticing ‘men to violent murther,’ and the fact that their ‘founder *Ignatius Layola* was a spanish souldier,’ seeking to erase past misdeeds with feigned holiness.³⁶ The proclamation of 1591 broadened this beyond the Jesuits, claiming priests in general were dressing as gentleman gallants, ‘soldiers, mariners, or merchants’ to enter the country, and behaving ‘as ruffians,’ within it to avert suspicion.³⁷ Such outward appearances inverted the religious person a priest claimed to be underneath, creating a disturbingly extreme dissonance which rendered their claims to virtue and honour inherently suspicious. This could be elaborated in the re-telling. When Carleton recounted the events of Campion’s arrest in 1624, he listed a multiplicity of disguises which mostly inverted the priests’ claimed inward identities, highlighting the extent of their hypocrisy: ‘Somtimes they went like *ruffians*, somtimes like *ministers*, somtimes like *noble men*, somtimes like *souldiers*, somtimes

³³ Gee, p. 56.

³⁴ *Recusant Documents from the Ellesmere Manuscripts*, ed. Anthony G. Petti, CRS 60 (Oxford, 1968), p. 6.

³⁵ *The Execution of Iustice*, Sigs. C.i.r, E.i.r; *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), ‘roister’ n.1.a, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/166937?isAdvanced=false&result=1&rskey=xEuh8n&> (accessed April 06, 2019), see particularly the uses contemporaneous with this period. See also instances of use for: OED ‘rakehell’ n.B.2, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/157657?rskey=O1fhzo&result=2&isAdvanced=false> (accessed April 06, 2019).

³⁶ George Whetstone, *The Censure of a Loyall Subiect* (1587), Sig. D2.v.

³⁷ Hughes & Larkin, p. 91. This language is also used in: Whetstone, Sig. D2.r.

like *apparitours*'.³⁸ By not only concealing their true identity, but flitting from one identity to another, these priests were accused of destabilising the basic premises upon which authority and social hierarchies operated.

Such anti-papal rhetoric was reflected in and fed by the descriptions of priests circulated by the authorities as evidence and aids to capture. In fulfilling this function, the most easily identifiable aspects of the suspect's clothing were the most useful. Therefore officials recorded details such as 'gold or silver lace,' 'red breeches and yellow stockings' or 'buttons red, cut and laid under with red taffeta,'³⁹ and noted foreign fabrics like 'black silk', 'satin doublets and velvet hose'.⁴⁰ They also mentioned, for sound tactical reasons, weaponry such as the 'rapiers and daggers gilt or silvered' described as being worn by John Gerard and George Blackwell in 1601,⁴¹ and defensive clothing such as 'buff leather', both of which would be typically worn by gentlemen and professional soldiers.⁴² Though compiled for practical reasons, and doubtless partly driven by what priests were actually wearing, these descriptions had the effect of reducing priestly attire to stereotypical bullet points which supported their depiction in anti-Catholic literature. Here were the foreign silks, vain yellow stockings, and ruffian-like weaponry, which any truly religious man should revile.

The observations of these officials were also clearly affected by their own assumptions. A description of Father Vaughan, for example, was corrected by its writer from being like that of a 'ruffian' to that of a 'gentleman', demonstrating the pervasiveness of anti-Catholic tropes as

³⁸ Carleton, p. 57, Carleton also described John Ballard as entering England 'in a *Souldiers habit*, with a feigned name, called *Captaine Foscue*', p.97. 'apparitor,' n.l. could mean many forms of civil and ecclesiastical official including a pursuivant.

³⁹ *Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Most Hon. the Marquis of Salisbury* (hereafter *HMCS*), R. A. Roberts (ed.) 11 (1906), pp. 365; *Unpublished Documents Relating to the English Martyrs, Vol. I 1584-1603*, J. H. Pollen (ed.), CRS 5, (1908), p. 111; *HMCS*, R. A. Roberts (ed.), 7 (1899), p. 484.

⁴⁰ *HMCS*, 11, p. 365.

⁴¹ *HMCS*, 11, p. 365.

⁴² *HMCS*, 11, p. 365.

short-hands for priestly disguise.⁴³ Similarly the description of Blackwell's dagger as 'sanguined', or coloured (probably enamelled) in red, not only emphasises luxurious detailing but through its choice of adjective evokes, perhaps deliberately, the blood it might accrue through use.⁴⁴ Seasoned priest-hunters like Richard Topcliffe might forgo describing outward attire entirely, perhaps on the presumption that priests changed their clothing so often it would be redundant. Topcliffe's description of John Gerard, for example, starts with his height, comparing it to that of Sir Thomas Layton. It then goes on to discuss Gerard's hair curled 'by nature', his nose 'somewhat wide and turning up; blubbered lips turning outwards'. This almost fleshy description paints Gerard's body itself as the classic, priestly deceiver: 'he floarrethe' or flowereth in speech, 'and smiles much'. Topcliffe even describes Gerard's lisp as an almost sinister 'doubling of his tongue'.⁴⁵ For Topcliffe, the priest's material flesh itself embodied the deception and sinfulness others saw conveyed through clothes.

Despite the vitriol in anti-Catholic rhetoric, much of what the state *thought* Catholic priests were wearing in disguise is borne out to some extent by Catholic sources. Disguise was a practical necessity in providing long-term pastoral care and developing Catholic networks across the country. The clerical dress and tonsure worn by Catholics on the continent was too distinctive, and the odds of being imprisoned and executed during the mission were very high.⁴⁶ In organising the mission, William Allen explained to Alfonso Agazzari that it was '*necessary for each man to acquire new, and above all lay clothes, before entering the Island, since their Roman ones were too grave and clerical.*'⁴⁷ Allen reportedly ensured that every priest had six or seven pounds cash '& a new sute of Aparell to weare at his ffirst Arryvall in England';⁴⁸ and

⁴³ TNA, SP 12/169 fo. 31r.

⁴⁴ *HMCS*, 11, p. 365.

⁴⁵ TNA, SP 12/165 fo. 73r.

⁴⁶ Lisa McClain, *Lest We Be Damned: Practical Innovation and Lived Experience Among Catholics in Protestant England, 1559-1642* (Abingdon, 2003), p. 39.

⁴⁷ *Letters of William Allen and Richard Barret, 1572-1598*, P. Renold (ed.), CRS 58, (Oxford, 1967), p. 32.

⁴⁸ *The Ven. Philip Howard Earl of Arundel 1557-1595, English Martyrs Vol. II*, J. H. Pollen and William Macmahon (eds.), CRS 21 (1919), p 72.

John Gerard's autobiography suggests this was to ensure that priests 'should not be a burden... at the start.'⁴⁹ Yet as Captain Loon's report of 'certain young men come from Rome,' in 1597 suggests, a priest could be identified partly by their new, foreign 'fashion'.⁵⁰ Those in England were taking this into account from an early stage. Campion and Robert Persons, for example, were given a change of clothes upon reaching London, before being smuggled out of the city.⁵¹ Meanwhile, a report of 1585 claimed priests entering England on the North-East coast were conveyed to nearby gentry homes, where they 'change there apparrell, and are provided ... for there Journey to London or ells where.'⁵² Though developed to avert suspicion, this tactic only affirmed anti-Catholic rhetoric around the multiplicity of disguises priests assumed during their missions.

Another anti-Catholic trope which bore some truth was that gentlemanly disguises were highly valued. Advice from organisers such as George Gilbert, who set his thoughts down in 1583, suggests that in order for priests to 'appear and mix freely everywhere, both in public and in private,' they should dress 'as a gentleman and with various kinds of dress and disguises so as better to be able to have intercourse with people without arousing suspicion.'⁵³ In addition to the reports of officials and witnesses discussed earlier, priests were, by their own admission, choosing gentlemanly apparel. Indeed, Gerard's autobiography, written many years after the end of his English mission in the seventeenth century, is almost a vindictory manifesto for conducting missionary work in the manner Gilbert described.⁵⁴ He is open about the fact that

⁴⁹ John Gerard, *John Gerard, The Autobiography of an Elizabethan*, Philip Caraman (trans. and ed.), 2nd Edition, (1956), p. 17.

⁵⁰ *HMCS*, 7, p. 484.

⁵¹ TNA, SP 15/27/2 fo. 117r.

⁵² CRS 21, p 72.

⁵³ *Letters and Memorials of Father Robert Persons, S.J., vol.1 (to 1588)*, L. Hicks (ed.), CRS 39 (1942), p. 331.

⁵⁴ This point was greatly informed by a paper given by Michael Questier on John Gerard's Autobiography at the Religious History of Britain Seminar at the Institute of Historical Research. See also, Peter Lake & Michael Questier, *All Hail to the Archpriest: Confessional Conflict, Toleration, and the Politics of Publicity in Post-Reformation England*, (Oxford, 2019), p. 289.

he was always dressed as ‘a gentleman of moderate means’,⁵⁵ partly justifying it by pointing out that, like many priests, this was the social position he had held before ordination. He was not, therefore, challenging social hierarchies, and the disguise had the advantage of putting Gerard ‘more at ease’ than if he ‘had assumed a role that was strange and unfamiliar’.⁵⁶

Appearing as a gentleman also provided a good reason for having a guide or assistant, who could help carry luggage, especially the massing equipment that a priest may need to bring with him on less secure or well-established circuits.⁵⁷ Gerard described how being able to ‘move in public and meet many Protestant gentleman’ facilitated conversion, as well as his own safety, in precisely the way the authorities feared; by giving him ‘greater authority,’ and fostering trust, especially with those who had been trained to regard all priests as potential traitors.⁵⁸ Gentlemanly disguises also avoided awkward situations, such as that which led to Father Ingleby’s unfortunate apprehension and execution in York, when a Catholic of apparently higher status showed ‘greater marks of respect than were fitting towards a common person meanly dressed.’ Jesuit William Weston narrowly survived a similar incident, when a Catholic gentleman treated him in an ‘extremely civil manner’ arousing the suspicions of a nearby pursuivant.⁵⁹ Another benefit was the less suspicious access gentlemanly attire gave to multiple gentry homes, on both a short-term and long-term basis.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Gerard, p. 17.

⁵⁶ Gerard, pp. 17-8.

⁵⁷ Gerard, p. 40.

⁵⁸ Gerard, p. 18. For instances where Gerard’s disguise facilitated conversions by gaining access and trust with non-recusants, see Gerard, pp. 20-1, 165-6, 185-6, 189-90.

⁵⁹ William Warford’s “Relation of Martyrs” in Stonyhurst MSS, *Grene’s Collectanae*, quoted in *Lives of the English Martyrs, Second Series The Martyrs Declared Venerable*, Edwin H. Burton & J. H. Pollen (eds.), 1 (1914), p. 212. Burton and Pollen point out another account differs over the details but still claims Ingleby was apprehended after a gentleman shows undue respect towards him considering the status demonstrated by his clothing, see Burton & Pollen, p. 213; McClain, p. 39; William Weston, *William Weston, The Autobiography of an Elizabethan*, Philip Caraman (trans. & ed.), (1955), p. 52.

⁶⁰ Gerard, p. 18.

As swords were regarded by gentlemen ‘as a badge of our vocation’, it would have been a valuable element of such a disguise,⁶¹ but it is unclear whether every priest disguised as a gentleman was necessarily armed, or whether all armed priests were necessarily dressed as gentlemen. Weston, for example, appeared to have been less well dressed than the high-born gentleman who approached him, but was still ‘carrying arms’. The pursuivant, realising this, and that he had left his own ‘sword behind’ in his room above the street, reportedly returned to get his own weapon giving Weston enough time to escape.⁶² As this incident demonstrated, simply being armed could be enough to dissuade would-be persecutors from approaching without their own weapons. John Geninges (or Gennings’) account of his brother’s martyrdom, however, suggests Catholic priests’ weapons were not entirely for show. Gennings claims that on the occasion of his brother’s arrest ‘the forenamed good Priests with the rest arose from their deuotions, and drawing out their weapons, (as *S. Peter* did to defend our Sauour) were ready at the chamber dore when their enemyes had burst it open, ... not suffering any one of them to enter vntill the Priest had finished his Masse.’⁶³ Needless to say, the lauding of such incidents amongst Catholics, let alone the reality they might speak to, only gave weight to anti-papist depictions of the priesthoods’ ruffian- and war-like character; even if it was an extremely rare occurrence, done in self-defence, and causing no serious harm.⁶⁴

There is also evidence that some priests came into England and Ireland dressed down, confirming, to an extent, Protestant descriptions of ruffian, vagrant-like priests. In January 1635/6, for example, the Mayor of Plymouth reported that two Irish priests forced into harbour

⁶¹ ‘Sir Thomas Tresame (Tresham) to the Archbishop of Canterbury and other Lords of the Privy Council’, March 25, 1590, in *HMC Report on Manuscripts in Various Collections*, 3 (1904), p. 56.

⁶² Weston, p. 52.

⁶³ John Geninges, *The Life and Death of Mr. Edmund Geninges Priest*, (1614) p. 66.

⁶⁴ It is normally laity seen defending priests with weapons, but there is another instance of clerical use when Father Greenlowe (alias Thurstan Hunt) ‘discharged his pistol upon one that struck him,’ during the attempted rescue of Father Middleton in 1600: *HMCS* R. A. Roberts (ed.), 10, (1904), pp. 335-6; *HMCS* 11, p. 166; TNA PC 2/26 fo. 108, SP 12/275 fo. 182v. Middleton had also been apprehended carrying a pistol: TNA, SP 12/275 fo. 132r.

en route to Ireland had posed as beggars ‘in poore ragged Cloathes,’ claiming they had no luggage. It was later revealed that they actually had two trunks, with ‘very good Cloathes’ inside, having clearly intended to switch back to a higher-class persona in Ireland. They had feigned poverty to disassociate themselves from any illicit luggage in the event of a search,⁶⁵ and it almost worked, since the delay in realising this was the case gave O’Reordaen chance to escape.⁶⁶ Once within England perhaps the second most commonly suspected guise was that of a servant or schoolmaster, often in the service of a gentry family. In fact, the first attempt to pass a law against disguised Catholic priests in 1571 was specifically aimed at those in ‘servingmen’s apparel’.⁶⁷ Perhaps because there was little villainy to be read into a servant’s garments, sources describing these suspected priests will often refer to their pretended position and not their attire, but presumably these men dressed the part.⁶⁸ Suspected priest, Edward Sager, for example, was found with blue livery, ‘with Sir John Sothworthe his cognisaunce upon the same.’⁶⁹ Dressing in livery and going about as a servant could also facilitate a priest’s *exit* from England. Gerard, for example, returned to the continent in the retinue of the Spanish ambassador, who helped him ‘dress in the livery of his attendants so that I could pass for one of them and escape.’⁷⁰

It was not just the concealment of priests that the state and anti-Catholic polemicists were worried about, however. Lay Catholics and female religious also used disguise to circumvent the authorities.⁷¹ An intercepted letter between Charles Paget and Mary Queen of Scots from

⁶⁵ TNA, SP 16/311 fo. 98r.

⁶⁶ TNA, SP 16/311 fo. 98r.

⁶⁷ Vincent, p. 161. This was also picked up in anti-Catholic literature: Whetstone, Sig. D2.r.

⁶⁸ A. C. F. Beales, ‘A Biographical Catalogue of Catholic Schoolmasters in England, 1558 to 1700, with an index of places: Part 1 1558-1603’, *Recusant History*, 7 (1964), pp. 268-289; CRS 5, pp. 73, 348; TNA, SP 12/245 fo. 144r, PC 2/12 p. 430.

⁶⁹ CRS 60, pp. 38-41 esp. p. 41; it is highly likely this tutor is the same Edward Sager listed in Beale, p. 281. Though Sager may have been a layman, the family’s massing equipment and Catholic literature was found in his room, and JP Richard Brereton’s suspicion he was a priest comes through clearly in his report.

⁷⁰ Gerard, p. 209.

⁷¹ George Ellyot (Elliot), *A Very True Report of the Apprehension and Taking of That Arche Papist Edmond Campion the Pope His Right Hand with Three Other Lewd Iesuite Priests, and Diuers Other Laie People, Most Seditious Persons of Like Sort* (1581), Sigs. B.4.r-v.

1584, for example, suggested that the only sure way of escape overseas for Mary would need to be facilitated by clothing her ‘in Man’s Apparell’.⁷² Following the Northern Rebellion’s failure the Earl of Westmoreland was reported to have ‘changed his cote of plate and sword w[i]th John of the syde to be the more vnknown’ as they escaped into Scotland.⁷³ Westmoreland’s escape and Mary’s desire to do so were widely communicated, but their actual and proposed use of disguise was little commented on polemically. To some extent this behaviour was expected of elites in such extreme circumstances, and it appears to have added little to these individuals’ already negative public reputations.⁷⁴

When it came to assassination plots, the use of lay Catholic disguise appears to have been recorded as important information which helped verify intelligence and was at times legally useful, yet it was also largely neglected as a source of polemical vitriol in the courtroom and beyond. For example, George Ellyot’s accusations that the Petre family were colluding with William Allen to assassinate the Queen and her closest councillors, make a point that the fifty assailants were to be dressed, not ‘all in a livery, but in sondry sects of apparel’. Such a move would help keep the participants’ intent, and master, unknown, giving them the element of surprise, which certainly added to the plot’s credibility.⁷⁵ When these accusations were trotted out eight years later to paint the Earl of Arundel’s communications with William Allen in a traitorous light, however, this detail disappears. The focus of the trial reporters centred on the armour and weapons which would commit their treason, not their disguise.⁷⁶ The regime also made a point of recording that the Babington plotters attempted to evade capture through

⁷² *A Collection of State Papers, Relating to Affairs in the Reigns of King Henry VIII, King Edward VI, Queen Mary, and Queen Elizabeth, Transcribed from Original letters and Other Authentick Memorials, Left by William Cecill Lord Burghley. Vol. 2: 1571-1596*, William Murdin (ed.), 2 (1759), [305] p. 437.

⁷³ TNA, SP 15/15 fo. 205r.

⁷⁴ Vincent, Chp.5, esp. pp. 161-2, 179. Westmoreland’s escape to Scotland is mentioned, for example, in a ballad by William Elderton, but there is no mention of his disguise there or in any other literature on the rebellion that I could find: William Elderton, *A Ballad Intituled, A Newe Well a Daye/ as Playne Maister Papist, as Donstable Waye*. (1570).

⁷⁵ BL Lansdowne MS 33, fo. 107r.

⁷⁶ CRS 21, pp. 276, 291.

disguise once their conspiracy was revealed in 1586, and that the Queen's would-be assassin John Savage had intended to disguise himself as a courtier.⁷⁷ In the courtroom Savage's disguise remained an important point of evidence, but the disguises used by the others to avoid the authorities was superfluous to their charges and ignored. The prose and verse commenting on the plot in the two years which followed seemed largely uninterested in both, through Savage's disguise was reiterated by Whetstone.⁷⁸

Unusually, however, we do see the Babington plotters' use of disguise being used polemically against them in subsequent retellings of events. Nearly forty years later, Carleton's *A thankfull remembrance...* (1624) elaborated that Babington had 'fled away in the darke', and after changing with Gage and Charnock, fled to St John's Wood. Here he makes a claim unsubstantiated in the examinations that Babington and Charnock 'cut off *Babingtons* hayre, and defaced his natue beautie with rubbing his face over with the greene huskes of Walnuts.' In this narrative the two traitors become subsumed by nature, having renounced their humanity and honour. They are reverting to a savage, irredeemable state which even they cannot suffer for long before seeking out a fellow Catholic, who hid them 'in Barnes,' and clothed them in 'rusticall apparell' reflective of their dishonoured, vagrant, ungentlemanly state.⁷⁹ It seems reasonable to suggest that the use of disguise in rebellion and conspiracy was largely presumed, and that when evidence of it did emerge it only reinforced the generalised connections being

⁷⁷ TNA, SP 53/19 fo. 91, pp. 3, 6, 8, 17, 19, 23 (the folio numbers in this document skip to the next document so I have provided the page numbers internal to the document).

⁷⁸ T. B. Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials and Proceedings for High Treason and Other Crimes and Misdemeanors ... : with Notes and Other Illustrations*, 1 (1816), cols. 1127-1140, esp. cols. 1131-2; Whetstone, Sig. B2v. For examples of literature which ignored their disguises see: Thomas Nelson, *A Short Discourse: Expressing the Substaunce of all the Late Pretended Treasons Against the Queenes Maiestie, and Estates of this Realme, by Sondry Traytors* (1586); William Kempe, *A Dutiful Inuectiue, Against the Moste Haynous Treasons of Ballard and Babington* (1587); Robert Cecil, *The Copie of a Letter to the Right Honourable the Earle of Leycester* (1586), pp. 5, 25-6; *Letter Sent Out of England*, pp. 11-12; Richard Crompton, *A Short Declaration of the Ende of Traytors, and False Conspirators Against the State* (1587), Sigs. C.i.v-C.ii.r.

⁷⁹ Carleton, pp. 107-8.

made in anti-Catholic polemic between them. Thus, the use of disguise in perpetuating Catholic religious life only made it appear more sinister to non-Catholics.

Disguise, however, continued to prove its usefulness. In 1616 for example, a Catholic gentlewoman reportedly ‘put on a poore habite,’ to visit the soon-to-be martyred Father Thomas Maxfield in prison. Her actions strengthened Maxfield’s ties to the outside world, not only facilitating her devotional act and flouting authority, but perpetuating the story of Maxfield’s religio-political defiance, whilst encouraging similar acts of resistance through the incident’s re-telling.⁸⁰ Similarly, the three nuns who disguised themselves as gentlewomen during the search for Edmund Campion were encouraging solidarity just as much as they were attempting to foil attempts to uncover their massing activities. George Ellyot’s public account of this incident actually lets their use of disguise speak for itself. Instead of commenting on their actions, he simply explains the group’s scandalous denial of their true identities in the face of his evidence to the contrary.⁸¹

Though both clerical and lay Catholic concealment and disguise were necessary survival tactics, Catholics were among those early modern people for whom concealment and lies were, predominately, a negative evil. Early in the mission Maurice Chancey, an elder English Carthusian in exile, was complaining to William Allen that seminaries in England ‘goo in fethers’. Tellingly, Allen was compelled to counter his moral concerns by playing down accusations of luxuriousness, insisting he ‘wold not counsell’ them ‘except yt were in great necessitiee, to putt them selves into to much disguised geare, leest by lightnesse of outward attyre there behaviour inward bee made lighter.’ He even tried to reassure Chancey that they were praying and fasting much more often, ‘lest thee needful use of sundry entysments to sinne

⁸⁰ ‘Life and martyrdom of Mr Maxfield, 1616. Portrait and facsimile letter’, J. H. Pollen (ed.) *Miscellanea* 3, CRS 3, pp. 38-9.

⁸¹ Ellyot, Sigs. B.4r-v.

and necessary dissimulation ... bring them to offend God, and ... become reprobate'.⁸² Missionaries understood very well how they would be perceived and, for many of them, engaging in such behaviours must have sat uneasily. Campion, for example, described his disguises to Allen as 'verye ridiculous,'⁸³ clearly at odds with his own sense of self – or what he wanted to project as himself. This was despite the Instructions given to Campion and Persons by the Society's Superior General, Everard Mercurian, which explicitly addressed the problem of lay attire. These insisted that though it was 'of necessity' for the mission, their disguises should 'be of a modest and sober kind,' and 'give no appearance of levity and vanity.'⁸⁴ One can see how enduring normal ambivalent attitudes towards disguise remained among Catholics not only in Allen's defence, Campion's discomfort, and Everard's Instructions, but in Weston's later condemnation of their enemies for disguising 'themselves as Catholics' in order to persecute them.⁸⁵

Even Gerard, whose autobiography often delights in how he fooled Protestants with disguise or triumphantly revealed his true identity to successful converts, expresses anxieties about it which reveal a tacit acceptance that contemporary criticisms of clerical disguise had a point. It is apparent in the hasty insistence that 'I had to act in this way both for safety's sake, and still more to trick the devil'. 'It was the only way', and 'he would have much preferred to' come dressed as a priest.⁸⁶ While the Protestants in Gerard's narrative predictably insist that 'No decent person behaves like that', it is telling that the narrative even depicts sympathetic lay converts airing suspicions about the behaviours such disguises engendered. Everard Digby's wife, for example, protests: 'the man lives like a courtier. Haven't you watched him playing

⁸² Letter XIII. Dr. William Allen to F. Chasee (Chauncy), Prior of the English Carthusians. Cambray, 10 Aug. 1577, from a contemporary copy, in *The Letters and Memorials of William Cardinal Allen (1532-1594)*, Thomas Knox & the Fathers of the Congregation of the London Oratory (eds.), (London, 1882) pp.31-7, quoted at p.36.

⁸³ TNA, SP 15/27/2 fo. 117v.

⁸⁴ CRS 39, p. 319.

⁸⁵ Weston, p. 32.

⁸⁶ Gerard, pp. 21, 165.

cards... the way he plays, he must have been at the game for a long time. And he's been out hunting... talking about hunting and about hawking'⁸⁷. Gerard's insistence that he was always *modestly* dressed, and that he was a gentleman before his ordination,⁸⁸ both worked to counter accusations of sinful lasciviousness and social destabilisation. His palpable relief at finding a majority-Catholic residence where 'it was easier to live the life of a Jesuit, even in the external details of dress and arrangement of time', and his returning to his 'Jesuit gown and cloak' for examinations before the authorities, performs the expected preference for dressing in a more religious manner.⁸⁹

Though priests were expected to prefer their normal vocational attire and revert to it whenever possible, Mercurian's Instructions to the Jesuits are notably alert not only to the danger of being discovered through such dress, but of damaging the reputation of the Society specifically. They insist Jesuits are not to possess their distinctive attire, even 'when they are permanently stationed, ... unless it is evident that they can have them perfectly safely;' and are then only to use them in enacting priestly duties.⁹⁰ This desire to reduce Jesuit visibility chimes with Mercurian's hesitation to initiate Jesuit involvement in the English Mission, and the Society's constant struggle with its reputation as a political meddler,⁹¹ but it also suggests the Jesuit missionaries *should* spend the majority of their time in lay disguise. Once again, perceived necessity provided some truth to back up anti-Catholic, and anti-Jesuit suspicions.

Not only were Catholics part of and susceptible to the wider culture which vilified disguise and lies, those cultural norms were integrated into the Counter-Reformation. Though worn to aid their religious cause, priestly disguise conflicted with the Tridentine ruling that clerics 'wear a

⁸⁷ Gerard, pp. 94, 165.

⁸⁸ Gerard, p. 17.

⁸⁹ Gerard, p. 24, 94.

⁹⁰ CRS 39, p. 319.

⁹¹ Thomas McCoog, 'The English Jesuit Mission and the French Match, 1579-1581', *The Catholic Historical Review*, 87 (2001), 185-213.

dress conformable to their order that by the propriety of their outward apparel they may show forth the inward uprightness of their morals'.⁹² As Frances E. Dolan points out, certain disguises, particularly those of liveried servants, could make it difficult for priests 'to assert difference and authority over servants or the family' in the manner Trent dictated.⁹³ Secular dress also emphasised their sexual characteristics in ways which androgynous cassocks did not,⁹⁴ straining the church's attempts to counter perceptions of clerical sexual deviance. The need to seek papal exemption to wear non-clerical dress, leaning on the precedent of the early church and Augustine's maxim that the only acceptable lie was one which protected someone else's life,⁹⁵ set English priests apart from their colleagues abroad. Priestly sartorial lies undermined 'the integrity of their sacerdotal character,' and left them vulnerable to attack even among fellow Catholics.⁹⁶

During the intra-Catholic disputes between pro- and anti-Jesuit conceptions of the English mission, which reached boiling point during the Appellant Controversy, anti-Jesuit Catholics deployed, and further entrenched, the association of disguise and luxury with Jesuits in particular. Secular priest Christopher Bagshaw may have been the first to claim in print, that a Jesuit did not go anywhere unless 'richly apparelled, ... as if he were a Baron, or an Earle',⁹⁷ in his *A True Relation of the Faction Begun at Wisbich*, (1601). The text appears to build on accusations made in manuscript by fellow appellant Robert Fisher, circulated from Brussels c. 1597, that Jesuits went about adorned in silk with a great many servants.⁹⁸ The assertion was

⁹² H.J. Schroeder (trans.), *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent English Translation* (Rockford, IL, 1978), p. 110, as quoted in Mullett, 329.

⁹³ Dolan, p. 88.

⁹⁴ Mullett, 329.

⁹⁵ Su-kyung Hwang, 'From priests' to actors' wardrobe: controversial, commercial, and costumized vestments', *Studies in Philology* (2016), 284; 'Lying in Early Modern Culture', 347-8.

⁹⁶ Mullett, 336.

⁹⁷ Christopher Bagshaw, *A True Relation of the Faction Begun at Wisbich, by Fa. Edmonds, Alias Weston, a Iesuite, 1595. and Continued Since by Fa. Walley, Alias Garnet, the Prouinciall of the Iesuits in England, and by Fa. Parsons in Rome, with their Adherents:* (1601), p. 70.

⁹⁸ The specific accusation is clear from Garnet's response, see: *The Wisbech Stirs (1595-1598)*, P. Renold (ed.), CRS 51, (1958), pp. 260, 260n70, 292.

repeated by William Clark in 1603, who singled out Jesuit Superior, Jasper Haywood as having carried himself ‘more Baronlike, then priestlike,’ adding that John Gerard’s clothing had ‘beene valued at a higher rate then I will for shame speake of,’ with ‘great excesse of apparell, horses, iewels;’ whilst Edward Oldcorne’s apparel was ‘seldome lesse worth, then 30. or 40 pound.’⁹⁹ Meanwhile William Watson and Humphrey Ely pointed out the predisposition to luxury inherent in the Society’s rules, which ‘imbrace no pouertie’ and did not bind them to wear ‘rough and rude apparell,’ suggesting that even their honest, regular clothing indicated moral laxity.¹⁰⁰ Protestant polemicists used these intra-Catholic attacks to their own advantage, publicising that even seminary priests accused Jesuits of being: ‘great lyers’, and ‘proud men, richly apparelled,’ alongside a slew of other irreligious character traits such as being ‘traitorous’, ‘Machiauels,’ ‘theeues and murderers,’ with ‘a mint of counterfeit miracles’.¹⁰¹

We must be alert to the life of these rhetorical tactics *within* the Catholic community. Appellant authors like Bagshaw and Clark sought to present themselves as part of a benign, more virtuous, group of Catholics, willing to work with and remain loyal to Protestant authorities. They sought to discredit Jesuits in the eyes of fellow Catholics, and convince co-religionists that working with, rather than against, the state would be of greatest benefit to their religio-political cause. In doing so, they reached for similar polemical tools to the anti-Catholic regime to provide evidence for the Jesuits’ manifest unfitness to govern the English Mission, or the spiritual lives of others.¹⁰² Luxury clothing played perfectly to wider accusations of financial waste and selfishness, pride and socio-political over-reaching, among many other fatal flaws.

⁹⁹ William Clark, *A Replie Vnto a Certaine Libell, Latelie Set Foorth by Fa: Parsons, in the Name of Vnited Priests, Intituled, A Manifestation of the Great Folly and Bad Spirit, of Certaine in England, Calling Themselues Seculer Priestes* (1603), pp. 14r-15r.

¹⁰⁰ William Watson, *A decacordon of ten quodlibeticall questions concerning religion and state* (1603), p. 54; Humphrey Ely, *Certaine Briefe Notes Vpon a Briefe Apologie Set Out Vnder the Name of the Priestes Vnited to the Archpriest*, (1602), p. 8r.

¹⁰¹ Bell, Sigs. *.ii.v-A.r.

¹⁰² Thomas M. McCoog, ‘Construing martyrdom in the English Catholic community 1582-1602’ in *Catholics and the ‘Protestant Nation’: Religious Politics and Identity in Early Modern England*, Ethan Shagan (ed.)

The secular clergy, however, were not immune to this rhetoric being turned back against them by the Jesuits. Writers like Bagshaw were keen to point out that though ‘secular Priests themselves do go also Gentlemen-like because of danger;’ they did not do so ‘arrayed in that sumptuous manner, nor guarded with so many attendants, as the Iesuites.’¹⁰³ Yet similar accusations were made against Watson by Garnet in 1602, who claimed he went about ‘in his chain of gold, white satin doublet and hose, and velvet jerkin’. Similarly, William Bishop and Robert Charnock, were forced to defend themselves against Robert Persons’ claims that when they arrived in Rome to lead the first appeal of 1598, their luxurious luggage ‘might seem to serve for any secular prince’. Accusations of luxurious attire and going about adorned in silk, coming from fellow Catholics, was clearly enough of a threat to their clerical reputations to merit direct responses: Charnock gave his in print, Henry Garnet prepared a manuscript rebuttal of Fisher’s Memorial in 1598.¹⁰⁴ By 1600 the types of clothing used in disguise, the extent to which it was used, and in what circumstances, had become part of Catholic political rhetoric within their own religious community, as much as without.

Anti-Catholic rhetoric, like that around luxury, social hierarchies, and idolatry, revolved around anxieties between outward presentation and inward intent, and the overpowering of truth by lies. While disguise and concealment opened up powerful opportunities by eluding authority, Catholics could not escape the negative, irreligious, conceptualisation of their tactics. The unavoidable fact of Catholic deception, and the new context it gave the fabrics and forms of disguise used, made it a strong weapon for Protestantism. It was hard to refute Protestant spin, when some priests really *were* wearing silken doublets to appear the gentleman and, in any

(Manchester, 2005), esp. p. 113; Peter Lake and Michael Questier, *The Antichrist’s Lewd Hat: Protestants, Papists and Players in Post-Reformation England*, (2002) Chp. 8, esp. pp. 286-290, 296.

¹⁰³ Bagshaw, p. 70.

¹⁰⁴ Henry Garnet to Parsons, 13 January 1602, Archivum Britannicum Societatis Jesu, *Stonyhurst Collectanea* P/ii, p. 541; Robert Charnock, *A Replie to a Notorious Libell, Intituled A briefe Apologie or Defence of the Ecclesiasticall Hierarchie, &c*, (1603) p. 328. My thanks to Michael Questier for pointing me to these references.

other circumstance, Catholics shared such negative readings. Disguise fundamentally complicated Catholic claims to innocence and religious intent, muddied their claims to superior theological standing, and aggravated intra-Catholic disputes. Clearly, the acceptability of disguise to Catholics was not just delineated by the perceived intensity of their persecution or righteousness of their cause. The extent to which the disguise itself contradicted the identity underneath was also a concern. To Catholics, a priest wearing modest disguises was one thing, his parading in luxury another. The only difference their opponents recognised between the two, was that the latter provided more evidence of Catholicism as a perniciously destabilising and threatening force.

Recent research on material culture has suggested that it has much to tell us about political allegiance and cultural expectations. As this discussion of Catholic disguise has demonstrated, material culture can also bring a new level of understanding to the history of religious identity and religious conflict, even when we look beyond devotional materials. The ambiguous and ambivalent role of the Catholic priest in post-Reformation England is encapsulated in contemporary perceptions of what it meant to wear the silks and velvets of the gentry, or to go disguised as a servant or a beggar. At a time when disputed or concealed identity could be a matter of life or death, the dress of a Catholic priest might lead him to say like Shakespeare's Hamlet, that despite his outward trappings, 'I have that within which passeth show'¹⁰⁵.

¹⁰⁵ Shakespeare, Act 1: Scene 2, line 85.