

The Rhetoric of Hypocrisy, Virtuous and Vicious¹

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I CAN'T RESIST BEGINNING with some crude, rude questions. As I look out at you, I see you all appearing as polite, open-minded, virtuous lovers of culture studies, or at least inquirers into what such studies are all about. If you weren't, you wouldn't be here, right?

Please now ask yourself whether there is a sharp difference between the culture-lover I see, looking around at you and the person you feel you really *are*, at this moment—the “I,” the “self,” or, if you prefer, your “core,” your “soul,” as you sit here apparently really listening but no doubt simultaneously worrying about some problem you'll face later in the day or about some goof you committed yesterday.

Secondly, is there a difference between those two selves and the self you projected to others this morning when you were rushing through breakfast or quarreling with your parents or your spouse or friend? Or how about who you were yesterday in a class, pretending to have really read a text you hadn't read, or who you were last time you were interviewed by your bishop or priest?

I shouldn't even have to ask the third question, which overlaps number one: have you in any way this morning dressed up your appearance, as I did mine when I trimmed my beard—in other words, have you “cosmetized” yourself today: put in a denture, or shaved or trimmed your natural beard, or improved your complexion with some makeup, or chosen the right clothes rather than the wrong ones for this so-called intellectual occasion?

Fourth question: I wonder how many of you have, like me, recently concealed your true thoughts when talking with someone you actually

1. A version of this talk was delivered at the Conference on LDS Culture at Utah Valley State College, March 21, 2000. For various reasons, not all of them obvious, I have chosen to maintain the colloquial style wherever relevant.

don't like or you disapprove of—made yourself sound relatively friendly and nice, rather than speaking out frankly? Have you, as various expressions put it, “held your tongue,” “been tactful,” “suppressed your true feelings,” “feigned a bit,” “polished a bit,” “varnished,” or “put on airs”?

Well, am I right in expecting complete agreement that everybody here does some form of the “whitewashing” or “masking” revealed by the four questions? Don't we all hope to present different and better selves for different occasions? Don't we all, to some degree, carefully or carelessly doctor our image, aspire to appear better than we would without the doctoring? Though we do it for many different reasons, some defensible and some not, don't we all “put on the dog,” practice “diplomacy” or “sweet talk,” or mask our image, hoping for some goal that pure, blatant, undoc-tored naturalness or sincerity might destroy?²

Now I must ask for hands. Is there anyone here who disagrees with my generalization, who claims never to put on some kind of mask?

Not a single hand was raised, though perhaps there were some who were tempted to do so, claiming complete “sincerity.”³

That agreement shouldn't surprise any of us. My wife remembers that when she was in elementary school, one of her teachers asked the class, “Is there anyone here who has never told a lie?” and when only two hands went up, the teacher looked sharply at one of the two—not Phyllis—and said, “I know that you're lying right now.” Phyllis confesses that she herself was indeed lying.

After all that agreement, I can be pretty sure of strong disagreement about a fifth question, one that is being widely discussed by teachers in the humanities and social sciences these days: are those different selves or voices that we all present really different persons, different selves? Or are you really the same person now that you were then, before the cleaning up? Are you the same person here as you were there? Is there some unity, some coherent harmonized core, a genuine single identity beneath all the different images that you present in different situations? Here our answers will certainly vary widely.

Many thinkers these days, including some cognitive scientists, are arguing that there is no such thing as a centered self, an identity: we are all multiple selves, not just social selves, created by diverse cultures, but permanently disunified, divided, conflicted selves. At the opposite end many

2. I have a list of about fifty synonyms used for our various forms of masking, or passing, or diplomacy, many of them, like “mealy mouth,” “shyster,” “cheater,” or “two-timer” with strongly negative connotations.

3. In the reception after the talk, one woman told me that she had indeed been tempted to raise her hand. “I never pose about anything.” I couldn't resist looking her in the face and asking, “What about the lipstick you're wearing right now?” She blushed a bit, and said, “Oh, I hadn't really thought about that.”

thinkers, including some psychologists and religious novelists like Saul Bellow, would agree with all devout Mormons and most believers in other religions that there is after all a unified soul underlying and uniting all these different images that we project or experience inside ourselves.⁴

The age-old battle over whether the soul can be unified could make a book in itself. The first major effort I know of to find unity while acknowledging division was Plato's grappling with how the charioteer, Reason, could control the two wild horses, Desire and Passions (like anger). Perhaps the most influential modern quest was Freud's, with his tripartite ego, id, and super-ego. The claims to have found *the* unity and counterclaims that there is no such center are almost matched in number by claims that the problem will always be confusing. Here, for example, is Abraham Heschel, pursuing an elusive unity in a religious hero: "The soul is a realm of confusion. Some intentions are meant for God, others for the ego, and they are nearly always intermingled."⁵

And here is Somerset Maugham describing his divided sexual soul: "You see, I was a quarter normal and three-quarters queer, but I tried to persuade myself it was the other way round."⁶ Most biographies, and almost as many autobiographies, reveal such grapplings with a sense of division among "selves."

At the very least, many would say, our goal in life should be to pursue that unity, and then celebrate it. Some Mormons are deeply disturbed by any claim that the circumstances we encounter, and how we respond to them, can actually change who we really are: we really are, for them, only what we have been for all eternity. Yet even they will claim that the very goal of life is to progress, eternally—thus changing the original identity.

Whether or not we can really unify our various images, internal and external, most of us would have to confess not only to one or another form of masking, as revealed in questions one through five, but to experiencing at least some degree of conflict among various "masks" and our notions of who we really are. And a lot of the contrasts raise questions about honesty and integrity, questions that underlie my inquiry today. Even the most devout religious folks who are certain that they have a distinctive, unique, unified core will often reveal considerable puzzlement about just where their center is to be found. And even the most honest among us—and of course I must insist that I am among the most honest of all—even the most honest will be found to do some doctoring up, some jazzing up, some

4. For an account of Bellow's quest for harmony beneath the signs of a divided self, see his *It All Adds Up* (New York: Viking, 1993), esp. 300 ff.

5. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *A Passion for Truth* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973), 310.

6. Quoted in the book by his nephew, Robin Maugham, *Conversations with Willie: Recollections of W. Somerset Maugham* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978) p. 140.

cleaning up as we present ourselves to the world. Most of us struggle to appear as better than we feel we really are—just as I have been struggling in preparing this talk to sound a lot better-informed and more intelligent than I am. You should have seen me yesterday morning when I discovered that I had locked myself out of my house by forgetting my keys. I would not want a video shown of how I behaved at that moment.

Perhaps the most obvious, and often the most contemptible, examples of masking can be found in politics. A reviewer of a new biography of Vice President Gore, called *Inventing Al Gore*,⁷ says that the book reveals Gore “as a hypocrite, driven by a curious mixture of duty, loyalty, and cold political calculus,” putting on this or that mask in the pursuit of political success.

Last January President Bush, confronted by reporters who said that he had seemed flustered when answering their questions, admitted that he needed to work harder at developing a “poker face.” (Do I need to tell you who are so pious that you’ve never played poker just what a “poker face” is? Well, it’s any appearance you “put on” as a total concealment of your true feelings.) “I’m not sometimes very good about hiding my emotions,” Bush said. “I’m like anybody else. I’ve got moods and feelings”—that is, he has moods and feelings that he doesn’t want the world to see, right?⁸

The Bush who said that, confessing to a weakness—that is, his lack of sufficient skill in putting on a poker face—was that Bush at that moment expressing the one true, authentic, real, honest poker-face-desiring George W. Bush, or was he just putting on another face, the mask of an honest confessor?

FACING THE MORAL ISSUES

That question leads us to the key question today: is any of that kind of hypocrisy morally defensible? Where does this fact of universal masking take us? Who deserves blame and who praise for it? When not just political figures and our bishops and apostles and popes and rabbis and professors, but all of us put on our diverse masks, ranging from Bush’s bland “poker face” to President Clinton’s disastrous maskings and on to my posing before you here and your mild exaggerations of virtue last time you were interviewed for a temple recommend—I ask again should we always blame the masker for doing that?⁹

7. The book is by Bill Turque (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2000). The review by Michiko Kakutani is in *The New York Times* (March 17, 2000): B44.

8. *The New York Times* (Jan. 17, 2000), B3.

9. A favorite example from my pious family background is a story told by one of my favorite aunts. “As a teenager, the only argument I ever had with Father was over me wearing my corsets too tight. He and Manda [her sister] quarreled over high heels, but with me it was corsets. One night when I was going to a dance, he made me go and loosen them up. When I came out, he said “Did you do it?” I said yes—but when I got to the dance I tightened them

Some purists claim that we should: masking is always wicked. Only absolute, open sincerity is moral. It is immoral even to say a cheerful “hello” when one actually feels miserable, or to tell a sick friend, “You’re looking better today” when he’s looking actually worse. My favorite example of such well-meant masking not working came when my professor-hero, Ronald Crane, was in the hospital—almost on his death bed. When I entered, he looked even worse than the last time I’d seen him. I said, hypocritically, “You’re looking some better today, Mr. Crane.” He scowled up at me and wittily snarled, “What’s your evidence?”—one of his standard scholarly slogans.

At the other extreme, some anti-purists, like Machiavelli in his book *The Prince*, say that the very existence of the world depends on skill in lying and that skilful lying is actually a virtue.¹⁰

Where do we come out on that dispute? Resisting the temptation to ask you for more embarrassing examples, let’s move further on the moral question. As my title suggests, such posing, such mask-wearing, such self-dramatization ranges from the obviously defensible, like taking a shower to remove one’s natural stink or being tactful when a friend is acting stupidly, to the obviously questionable or contemptible, like lying to hurt a friend or to win a contest or to get victims to buy into a fake real estate scheme. At the extremes, we have little trouble judging: if I can save a friend’s life by lying, I’ll do it; but I won’t take such helpfulness to the self-serving extreme of the wealthy cosmetic surgeon who finally got caught last year: he didn’t even have an MD degree. On the obviously defensible side, my favorite example is the Catholic priest André Trochmé, who has confessed openly that during the Nazi occupation of France, he consistently and steadily lied to the Gestapo and helped train other Frenchmen to lie in order to protect and preserve Jews. He would lie many times a day—and then pray to God in the evening for forgiveness, knowing that God would have been more offended if he’d told the truth that led to the Jews’ destruction.¹¹

Was he being sinfully hypocritical? I can’t believe that anyone here would accept that word “sinful” for his rescuing hundreds of Jews.¹² And all of us would condemn hypocrites who practice hypocrisy to harm others.

again” (*The Autobiography of Relva Booth Ross* [Provo, Utah: J. Grant Stevenson, 1971], 20). When she told me that story in her dying years, I was not only surprised, but shocked. I had thought I was the only one in the family who cheated like that. And the key question is: was Aunt Relva being really wicked when she put on that “mask”?

10. For one of the best of many discussions of Machiavelli’s arguments as they relate to integrity, see Ruth W. Grant, *Hypocrisy and Integrity: Machiavelli, Rousseau, and the Ethics of Politics* (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1997).

11. See Philip Hallie, *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed: the Story of the Village of Le Chambon, and How Goodness Happened There* (New York: Harper Colophon, 1980).

12. One of the most aggressive defenses of essential lying is Arnold Ludwig’s *The Importance of Lying* (Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas, 1965). Perhaps the best known recent

In using the word “hypocrisy” for both good and bad masking, I’m aware that the term is a bit dangerous, since most people read the word only negatively. Our scriptures use it only to describe a kind of sin: to pretend to virtues we don’t yet have is damnable. As the Lord puts it in D&C 41:5: “He that receiveth my law and doeth it. . . is my disciple; and he that saith he receiveth it and doeth it not, is not my disciple, and shall be cast out from among you.” You might want to have a look at the index to your copy of the New Testament to see how much unqualified attack there is on hypocrisy. And of course that attack is in many ways justified. Any con man like Mark Hofmann with his forgeries of scriptures here in Utah, while pretending to be a devout Mormon in order to seduce other Mormons into investing cash in frauds—*any* such hypocrite should be jailed, even if he doesn’t commit murder as Hofmann did. But in its Greek origins, the word hypocrisy simply referred to “acting out a role,” doing what an actor does on the stage. It lacked its later Tartuffian, Hofmannesque connotations: vicious, harmful faking.

The term itself, meaning “acting out, for good or bad purposes,” may not be rescuable for my case, but I want to argue that we practice far too many bad kinds of hypocrisy when we pretend that playing roles, projecting only half-true selves, is always bad. Too often we talk as if only those far down below us, the wicked, fail to practice total openness, total sincerity, as we claim to do, even as we put on masks every day. Too many of us, including many religious leaders in all denominations, talk as if only absolute, full, honest, open sincerity with nothing hidden is morally defensible—even as we and they violate that “sincerity” every day.

HYPOCRISY IN CREATIVE WRITING

One of the great probings of defensible and indefensible kinds of “total sincerity” is Molière’s *Le Misanthrope*. The hero, Alceste, against the strong rational advice of his friend, Philinte, who is the play’s “raisonneur,” insists on total openness, total frankness, total bluntness in every social situation. At the end, defeated by the realities of society, he flees to the “desert” (the play doesn’t define the word, but suggests that it is anywhere that allows one to avoid all encounters with other people.) Alceste’s self destruction, read in conjunction with the author’s even more famous *Le Tartuffe*, dramatizes wonderfully the ambiguities I am pursuing in this talk.

So my plea today is for all of us to learn how to do a better job of practicing hypocrisy upward and to think harder about what distinguishes

exploration of lying, with a strong bias against it except in the most extremely benign instances, is Sissela Bok’s *Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978). All such books, on all sides of the moral issues, have to grapple with Immanuel Kant’s absolute condemnation of all lies.

hypocrisy upward from indefensible posing and lying. My claim is that the wearing of masks that project a self superior to our many other selves is not only an inescapable practice, but a habit-building practice that is essential to our psychological or spiritual progress.

That is obviously not an easy case to make, especially in a culture in which most preachers most of the time take the opposite position: all deception is wicked. But in some parts of our lives the case for hypocrisy is hard to deny. Perhaps the clearest is the way that all serious authors imply, in their finished works, that they are better, wiser, kinder selves than are revealed when biographers probe into their flesh-and-blood lives and reveal the warts. Poets and novelists in effect wipe out their faults and sins, even as they portray the faults and sins of their created characters. But in doing so, they are often creating wonderful new versions of themselves.

My favorite example of how the best writing exhibits hypocrisy upward occurred one day when I happened on Saul Bellow on 57th Street in Chicago.

"Hi, there, Wayne."

"Oh, hi. What're you up to these days, Saul?"

"Oh, I'm revising a novel—*Herzog*—spending four hours a day at it."

"Just what do you see yourself doing, spending four hours a day revising?"

"Well, I'm just wiping out those parts of myself that I don't like."

The poet Yeats talked a lot about this very process in his own life—what he usually called putting on "masks" or playing roles or taking on alter egos that covered the "real" Yeats. We find in his journals and letters that he often had trouble defining or defending a self behind the masks; his masks sometimes felt to him hypocritical in the bad sense, but sometimes they felt ennobling. His poems imply a Yeats who to me is almost a saint—a fabulous genius honorably probing the depths of life. And Yeats often hints at one of my main points here: as he wears the masks, wiping out those parts of his self that he does not like, as he practices that hypocrisy upward, he gradually begins to emulate, in his daily life, the pretended one. And soon, as he goes on pretending to be better, Yeats actually turns the masks into a new reality.¹³

That process—the achieving of a virtue by practicing it deceptively—is wonderfully illustrated in a novella by Max Beerbohm, called *The Happy Hypocrite*. The protagonist, Lord George Hell, is a viciously sinful man, exploiting everyone around him. When he falls in love with a teenage actress, Jenny Mere, he proposes to her, only to have the shock of her rejecting his wealth and nobility. "I can never be your wife," she says. "I can never be

13. For a splendid account of Yeats's masking, see Richard Ellmann, *Yeats: The Man and the Masks* (New York: Dutton, 1948).

the wife of a man whose face is not saintly. Your face, my Lord, mirrors, it may be, true love for me, but it is even as a mirror long tarnished by the reflection of this world's vanity. It is even as a tarnished mirror . . . That man, whose face is as wonderful as are the faces of the saints, to him I will give my true love."

The crushed villain finally gets the bright idea of going to a skilful professional masker, who covers his villainous face with the mask of a saint. When he proposes again, Miss Mere accepts him, joyfully. They marry, and he practices the sainthood required to justify the mask. But then one of his former mistresses turns up and threatens to unmask him. They quarrel, and finally "like a panther," she attacks him, "claws at his waxen cheek," and tears off the saintly mask. He is terrified, sure that his beloved will now hate him as she sees the old villainous face. But "lo! his face was even as his mask had been. Line for line, feature for feature, it was the same. 'Twas a saint's face."¹⁴ The hypocrisy upward, the practice of sainthood, has marvelously transformed his former appearance, his former self.

HYPOCRISY IN RELIGION

Since hypocrisy upward and downward is practiced in every domain of life, the subject has produced hundreds of books and thousands of articles—often without even using the word hypocrisy; the word "casuistry" has had the same mixed history, with many Catholic theologians defending what some moderns have called "situation ethics": the adjustment of what one says and does to the needs of the cases or circumstances one stumbles upon.¹⁵ If I ever manage to do a book on this subject, I'll have to narrow it down to invaluable hypocrisy upwards that novelists like Saul Bellow and poets like Yeats practice when they create their works: the act of building better selves in writing—of novels, of poems, of autobiographies, and biographies.

But for the rest of our time today, I'll narrow it further to the problems of personal hypocrisy when we find ourselves in a religious culture. Though as we've seen, hypocrisy is found everywhere in the world, I think the temptations toward it—whether upward or downward, defensible or indefensible—are especially strong in religious cultures. When you are finding your "self," or trying to find it, in a culture where everyone aspires to be saved or glorified or sanctified, or at least pretends to, the temptations

14. "The Happy Hypocrite" in *Max Beerbohm: Selected Prose*, Lord David Cecil, ed. (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1970; original, 1897).

15. A good introduction to the history of casuistry can be found in *The Abuse of Casuistry: A History of Moral Reasoning*, by Albert R. Jonsen and Stephen Toulmin (Berkeley, Ca.: The University of California Press, 1988).

to present a righteous image are extremely strong, even when you know, deep down inside, that you sinned just five minutes ago.

Every Mormon who thinks about it will have discovered that this temptation is extremely strong in our church. In my adolescent diaries, written as I was raised in American Fork, I find entry after entry where I presented a self far more righteous or intelligent or learned than memory tells me I actually was. I had been taught that if I kept my nose clean, I would some day become God of another world. But as I wrote my daily or weekly entries, I knew that my nose was often a snotty one. And I did my best to make it look clean.

Every Mormon with whom I've ever had an intimate discussion of masking—including the Wayne Booth who keeps a journal full of confessions—has confessed to a sense of guilt about the masking: a perpetual sense of failing to live up to the projected image. The same guilt is found in my Catholic and Jewish friends. "I feel," one said, "that when I sit through mass, bored, not really praying but just pretending to, I'm being just plain wickedly hypocritical."

Nothing I can say here will diminish that sense of guilt, but on the favorable side it seems to me clear that often, when we put on a mask of a better self, we are learning, just like Beerbohm's cheater, how really to *be* that better self. Surely there is, at least in some kinds of posing, something redemptive. I must repeat that I'm not defending all lying. When a dishonest car salesman spends three hours Sunday morning acting like a saint, knowing that he'll do his best to cheat customers Monday morning, he ought to feel guilty. But does that mean, for certain, that he should stop the hypocrisy? Isn't there a chance that if he pretends to pray devoutly or gives a faked pack of lies in testimony meeting, some of that pretension to be on the good side might sneak in and take over at least part of his life?

Though I think that point applies in every religious culture, it feels to me to fit unusually well into the LDS notion of eternal progress: we are not saved only by some magical moment of bliss, though such moments can be a turning point, but by the daily aspiration to enact *now* virtue after virtue—often virtues that we don't yet have.

By now you can see that my point today is not just the obvious one that some lies are virtuous when they really save others from serious harm. Examples of that are plentiful throughout history, like my André Trochmé example: a devout priest lying to save Jews from torture and death. My claim extends that defense: it is that the genuine effort to appear as better than we know we are, deep down inside, can become a kind of practice of virtue that over time produces genuine virtuous habits. Like Beerbohm's hypocrite, we can change for the better by pretending to be better.

To face honestly the difficulties in that claim, we need to look at some more examples. Once we think about it, we can see that masking takes

place all the way from the bottom to the top. Though some of my Mormon friends and relatives like to deny it, they know that in fact even the church authorities must often engage in role playing if the church is to function at all. Yet our general pretense is that it does not take place.

When I was in high school, I can remember being utterly shocked by the accidental discovery that my ward bishop had been caught in a real estate scam. His misdeed didn't get much publicity, as you might predict. He was quietly replaced without any public acknowledgement of the reason. For the first time, I had to recognize that some of those saints "up there" were not entirely saintly and that at least one of them had lied about it. That shook my faith, badly, in a way that need not have happened if I had been taught that hypocrisy is universal, that the authorities are not perfect, and that the bishop, though to be blamed for his real estate deals, might not be blamable for struggling, on Sunday, to make up for them. It was the claim that all authorities are at all times totally open and sincere—hypocritical denial of hypocrisy—that did me harm.

Second example: when I was mission secretary, the mission president's wife and I would have lots of private talks. She was an absolutely pious, devout Mormon, but she couldn't resist talking about misbehavior by some of the brethren she and her husband had to deal with. Here's a quote from my diary. It may sound to some of you like an attack on church authorities, but I intend it as the reverse: as support for my claim that practicing hypocrisy upward is essential not just to any church but to any form of hopeful human life. As I read this now, ask yourself whether we church members would be better off if the president she reported on had behaved always in public the way he sometimes behaved in private:

Of course I love the authorities, and I know they are men of God, but President Heber J. Grant is a petty, money-minded man, incapable of thinking about anything greater than dollars or his own success. . . . He is small in his daily relationships, often becoming cross and angry after minor things. One day he became very angry because my husband had brought me and our son with him to meet him at the RR station; President Grant wanted the back seat of the car for his golf bags and togs. In fact. . . many of the apostles are positively nasty [in private], but of course I understand that they have many important things on their minds. . . and besides, daily affairs bother them because they are used to being near to God.

Now, then, would you have advised President Grant to reveal that side of himself in a talk in General Conference, say, confessing openly to being sometimes a petty, money-minded man? I would not—even though I'm perhaps violating that statement by telling you about them at this moment. For all we know—and I have a hope that it's true—President Grant was

quite genuine in his aspiration not just to present, but to be a different, better man. He would surely have harmed the church and himself if he'd performed in public the way he performed in private.¹⁶

So my argument is that we all should be more honest with ourselves about how much we depend on being "dishonest," on role playing, and that we should think harder about what forms of masking are harmful and what forms are the kind required if we are really to work at making ourselves and the world better. And we should all talk more openly with one another about the good and the bad of it. We should not act like those politicians who, when they rightly attacked Clinton for lying, talked as if they had never in their lives told a lie.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT UNIVERSAL HYPOCRISY

What does all this imply about how we should behave day by day? I'm sure you've noticed that throughout here there are many implied rude and crude exhortations—maybe even call them commandments or rules, rules that obviously must be considered bendable for all of us in some circumstances:

First, a rule that may apply mostly to academics here: too often I find that in our talk about multiple selves, social selves, culturally constructed selves, we give too little attention to the moral or ethical effects of such self-inventions. While many non-academics seem to attack all hypocrisy as unforgivably immoral, we academics seem not to talk about it at all in our publications or even in the classroom. We need to attend not just to the moral effects on the masker, but the effects on those of us who admire the masker and take those masked selves in as models: we all turn maskers into ideals of how we want to live. We derive our models for living by taking in, absorbing, the masked-selves reported—or invented—by others—especially by the most powerful writers and speakers. Some of those masks are of course destructive, but many are helpful, and some I would even describe as salvational.

For most of us, of course, the actual models we live with—our parents and siblings and friends—have even stronger effects on us than any stories or books we read or view on television or at the theatre. But we can all remember moments, especially when young, when we were "taken in" by

16. None of this is intended to suggest that authorities should never confess their mistakes or sins openly. Elder Boyd K. Packer, not exactly one of my heroes, was heroic on this point when he confessed to the errors he had committed about the status of black Mormons. "Sometimes it is difficult to talk about mistakes. But it is a great blessing in the Church for us to have the privilege of cleansing ourselves. One of the steps of repentance is to make proper confession. . . . Repentance is something like soap." (*The Holy Temple*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980). And he publicly lamented, in a speech at BYU, "All are Alike Unto God," the racist errors he had committed (see *A Symposium on the Book of Mormon*, 1979).

written or told lives. I can remember longing as a teenager to be as smart and heroic as the hero of Alexandre Dumas' *The Count of Monte Cristo*; unconsciously I was also longing to be as clever a writer as Dumas. Not long after, early in college at BYU, I found myself longing to be able to write a sincere autobiography as powerful as the *Confessions* of St. Augustine or poetry as sensitive, brilliant, and deeply religious as Tennyson's "In Memoriam." I'm sure that most of you can remember similar models in novels, autobiographies, biographies, or poems, or church sermons. (For today I'm putting aside our temptations to imitate TV and movie stars)

Meeting those doctored models, those maskings, when they hit us just right, we are won over, often quite uncritically, sometimes quite nobly, into viewing the portrayed life as the way to live. None of those model creators were as good as they looked, but thank God for their model-building.

Sometimes, to repeat, we are "taken in" in the bad sense: we are conned, led into imitations that are destructive. At other times we're rescued: "Oh, that's the sort of person I'd most like to be"—and we then dig in and try to become like that imagined person. Decades later we may find, looking back on it, that the imitation rescued us from the disasters that might have been produced by following other popular models. At yet other times, we look back and wonder how we could ever have been so stupid as to take the author of that crummy, egotistical self-help book or the church authority who gave a moving but destructive sermon as a model. "Why didn't some English teacher or critic or seminary instructor warn me to consider such ethical matters critically, raising important questions all the way?"

In short, we who teach or write criticism should labor now to correct the silly notion that the very phrases "moral criticism" or "ethical criticism" imply a threat of blind, right-wing fundamentalist, thoughtless preaching. At the same time, to those of us academics who actually practice moral criticism, the exhortation is to take into account the immense ambiguities in our moral commandments. Thou shalt not lie? Well, except when? Were my great-grandfather and church leaders wicked when they lied to federal authorities about polygamy?

Second: let's all be more honest about our own maskings. Nobody can talk about hypocrisy upward without confessing to mask wearing, sometimes honorably, sometimes not. The masks of others, as they write and revise their stories and novels and sermons, are among our greatest resources for good living. Our own masks need to be thought about.

I have to *confess*—underlining that word—that to me the worst single kind of hypocrisy we live with today is the implied claim, by too many church leaders like my childhood bishop, in various denominations, that they are perfect, flawless, infallible. Too few of them are ever willing to confess, as Apostle Bruce McConkie finally did about his decades of mistaken racism, or as the pope has recently done about Catholic abominations, that

they have committed serious, sad errors. Every honest human being is aware of human faults and for a leader, or for any of us, to pretend otherwise is bad hypocrisy, not hypocrisy upward. Though it is obviously one of the leader's jobs to provide us with models for living, it should not be the model of pretending to be perfect.

Third: we should all—whether Mormons, Jews, Catholics, Muslims, atheists—do what we can to help build those aspects of our culture that are not hypocritical about the values of hypocrisy upward. We must work to build a critical culture that knows how to distinguish fraud from genuine aspiration to betterment, a culture that stops pretending that some human beings are already perfect. Such a culture will prove far less vulnerable to vicious con artists than religious cultures now prove to be.

Fourth: all of us should start working harder at thinking about our personal hypocrisy upward. Start playing today, in your own writing or conversation with friends, with the practice of constructive hypocrisy upward. Perhaps start a journal, not just a boring daily record of what happened, of the kind I started at age fourteen, but a record of your attempts to practice a better self. Include in that journal honest probings of just which hypocritical acts of that day were contemptibly self-serving or even hurtful, and which were, like Father André Trochmé's, actually ennobling.

One possibility for some of us is to start an autobiography, asking who have I been? Or who am I? Or who do I want to become? Perhaps attempt a biography of your most admired friend or relative or some more distant human model, or even of your worst enemy? Or why not write a story or some poetry that implies your most ideal self-dream? Toughest assignment of all, you might attempt a novel that implies, like Saul Bellow's—not necessarily in the characters portrayed but in the lurking author—a version of yourself superior to the one you exhibit in your daily life. From this list choose the one that seems least threatening, and sit down at your desk every day, or week, or month, and probe for a while, in writing, not just who you have thought you were, but who you really want to be. To me, such efforts are a kind of prayer.

CONCLUSION

Where do such tricky suggestions take us? Whichever of these alternative probings you choose, it will be true that in the time you spend thinking about hypocrisy upward or putting on a hypocritical mask, you will probably create or discover a self superior to the one you were when sitting on the toilet ten minutes before, or the one you were when you rushed to class, or shopped for groceries, or checked your e-mail, or sat listening to some aspiring, aging, would-be scholar like me preaching at you about hypocrisy upward.

Unfortunately, though, you can never know in advance whether that

newly discovered self will really be a better one. You may, by your probing, uncover hitherto hidden qualities that appall you, at least for a while: "Oh, Lord; forgive me. I had forgotten about that time I deliberately hurt my best friend or the time I lied atrociously to my bishop." Or: "Why oh why was I so deceptively rude to my teacher (or students, or boss) yesterday, or thirty years ago?"

I must confess here, as I move toward the end, to a really polemical feeling I have about all this. I feel sickened by how many self-help authors these days identify virtue-progress with financial progress, hypocritically implying that having become wealthy proves that they are ethical models. They suggest that if you're really a saint, you'll make more and more money until you die; if you make more money, you are more of a saint. Too few of the newly wealthy seem to face the moral dilemma produced by the contrast between their wealth, their claims to virtue, and their contribution to the increasing plight of the poor—here in Utah, in the Chicago slums, in Bangladesh. My preachy advice to everyone who is pursuing wealth as the definition of "success" in life is this: read a bit each morning in the New Testament of what Jesus says about the pursuit of wealth and being wealthy, about the hypocrisy of the rich. Then write a journal entry about what motivates your coming day.

Another problem that I suggested earlier is that occasionally the self-quest can even lead to a sense of deep, self-destructive guilt, as you uncover past misdeeds. Sometimes the older, writing self, miserable because of this or that disaster or disappointment or the mere wearing-out that comes with aging, rejects earlier, better selves as mere illusions and ends up feeling worse than ever. But, of course, if you young folks here were in danger of that one, you wouldn't even be here today. Right?

Anyway, despite the dangers, I still claim that if you can drive yourself to sit down and practice the right kind of "hypocrisy upward" in writing, you will achieve—well, how hypocritical will it sound if I claim that it can be the best kind of self-help—better than the practices offered in most of our thousands of crummy self-help manuals? The most successful of these do have some overlap with what I'm suggesting. Steve Covey's *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, for example, actually does recommend keeping a journal. But it never even mentions the fact that in recommending the development of better habits, we must constantly practice—as he of course always does—the pretense of being better than we really are. If I had the lousy job of editing the next edition of Covey's book, the eighth habit of "effectiveness" (lousy word) would be: think harder, daily, about the relation of hypocrisy to integrity and about whether, if you are wealthy, you can claim to be virtuous if all you've done is pay your tithing and then boast to the world by exhibiting how much more money you've won and proclaiming how to win more.

Okay, hypocrite Booth: drop that preachy moralism. Let's conclude. In

spite of the dangers in it, never forget that in creating an imagined life better than the one you manage every day, in putting on the mask of genuine virtue, you can create an implied self more focused, more thoughtful, more creative, than the one in which you are dwelling in the mess of everyday life. Like Bellow, and unlike those political candidates, you'll not be faking, but wiping out those parts of yourself that you genuinely do not like.

And you may actually find, like Beerbohm's hero, that as you practice hypocrisy upward, behind the mask, enacting a better self than you thought you were before, the mask has become not a poker face but your real face.