Intensive Ephemera

The Catholick Gamesters and the Visual Culture of News in Restoration London

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When Roger L'Estrange looked at *The Catholick Gamesters* (Fig. 6.1) – a satirical print published in 1680 – all he saw was sedition:

The device call'd the *Catholique Gamesters*, is a *venemous Libel upon all the Orders of the Government*; and first upon the *King himself*, charging all the Pretened Miscarriages of State, in *Shew*, upon the Papists, but in *Truth* [...] upon his Majesty.¹

L'Estrange – the Tory propagandist-in-chief whose *raison d'être* during the Succession Crisis was to nullify the effects of Whig media on the British public – drew a parallel between the Civil Wars and the attempts to exclude the Catholic James, Duke of York from the throne. During each, visceral anti-Catholicism was used to mask an attack on monarchy. His writings betray a persistent fear of the Restoration's rich media – newspapers, ballads, pamphlets – defrauding and deluding the populace and turning it against the Crown. But even amidst the sheer weight of that media, *The Gamesters*, as visual libel, stood out as particularly dangerous. Designed by the “Protestant joiner” Stephen College, *The Gamesters* was a complex allegory of the Popish Plot as a game of “Nine-pins” (skittles).² Exploring how something so farcical could be understood as seditious is vital in grasping graphic satire's power within news culture. Refuting charges of College's innocence following his execution for High Treason in 1681, L'Estrange collated evidence of his intention to overthrow the Crown. Even amidst trial proceedings, the critical evidence against College was his visual satires: “whosever *Defames* the Government at This rate, wishes it *Overturn'd*”.³

- 1 R. L'Estrange, *Notes upon Stephen College* (1681), p. 29. L'Estrange unpicked how the treasonable allegory accused the Crown, Bishops, Commons, and the courts of popery.
- 2 British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings, Satire 1077 [henceforth BM Sat]. College designed many prints agitating for Exclusion, including BM Sat 1083; BM Sat 1084; BM Sat 1087.
- 3 *The Raree Show* (BM Satires undescribed). See L'Estrange, *Notes*, pp. 9–11; *A Letter Concerning the tryal at Oxford of Stephen College* (1681); *The Speech and carriage of Stephen*

By mocking the Crown, College's "Learned" prints – "charged with the utmost Rudeness, Malice and Scurrility imaginable" – corroded the ties of respect binding society together, thus proving his lust for "designing" (plotting).⁴ Visualisation heightened acidity. But in deeming *The Gamesters* "learned" – referring to its complex political allusions – L'Estrange also demonstrated its indebtedness to satire. It is argued that this was the nub of visual media's power. Effecting behaviour by affecting the emotions, satire's vehement presentation of vice was understood to repel/correct audiences into pursuing virtue – thus in *The Gamesters*, a visceral depiction of popery (vice) acted to inspire Parliament to pursue corrective constitutional reform (virtue) by excluding James from the succession. This capacity to inspire action terrified L'Estrange:

the Treason of [College's] Heart is laid as open in those Cuts [engravings], as his Tongue was at his Trial; with this single Difference, that one was only a wish, and the other an Overt Act, and a declared Resolution.⁵

One man's satire was another's sedition.

Recent studies signal a new interest in seventeenth-century visual media. However, in order to emphasize its importance as an object of study, scholars have characterized it as an aspect of news discourse, more readily accepted by historians as integral to political discourse. The visual is thus important by virtue of integration. For Kevin Sharpe, visual/material cultures were facets of the "image wars" through which authority was debated, essentially another avenue of the politics of contestation.⁶ Helen Pierce similarly emphasized the integration of the visual, placing early seventeenth-century graphic satires within a web of ideological exchange spanning oral and textual cultures, and parasitic upon pamphlets, ballads, and other media for their motifs and images.⁷

College (1681). Satires that College had designed were used as evidence against him at his trial, horrifying the judges and persistently understood as proof that he desired to overthrow the King. See T.B. Howell and T.J. Howell (eds), *Cobbett's Complete collection of state trials*, 34 vols (1809–1828), vol. 8, pp. 549–746.

4 On libel see Alastair Bellany, "A Poem upon the Archbishop's hearse: Puritanism, Libel and Sedition after the Hampton Court Conference," *Journal of British Studies*, 34 (1995), pp. 285–310.

5 L'Estrange, *Notes*, pp. 27–29.

6 Kevin Sharpe, *Image Wars: Promoting Kings and Commonwealths in England, 1603–1660* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

7 Helen Pierce, *Unseemly Pictures: Graphic Satire and Politics in Early Modern England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

Tim Harris integrated the visual as one strand within a torrent of media by which politics in Restoration London travelled out of doors;⁸ and Mark Knights highlighted the increased sophistication with which visual media did so between the Succession Crisis (1678–1682) and the Sacheverell affair (1710). Two aspects of Knight's thesis are notable: (1) the increasingly dialogic nature of the visual (graphic satires began responding to one another); and (2) the playful transmutation of visual content across material culture, with images produced in prints reappearing on playing cards, badges, and tiles to a significant degree.⁹ This heteroglossic media permitted the emergence of emotive visual shorthands to complex polemical concepts, paralleling the rise of slogans as a means of expressing political solidarity/affiliation.¹⁰ Such scholarship extends post-revisionist accounts of popular politics which deem England's population to have been increasingly well-informed – the availability of news of every kind allowed people to engage with political realities and make informed judgements about them.¹¹

Yet deeming visual media a tributary to the main news stream risks underestimating the specificity of its import: of masking, through integration, the pointedness of graphic satires' critique. The longer-term perspective is important. By the mid-eighteenth century, graphic satires had become increasingly referentially endogamous and were marketed by specialist vendors operating within a specific niche of the print marketplace.¹² L'Estrange's comments on College suggest that single-sheet satires performed equally specific roles in the earlier period, and that graphic satire possessed a heightened mocking power, rendering it a form of *action* as much as a vehicle for ideas. Discriminating between news as action and information is important, for satire had long been

8 Tim Harris, *London Crowds in the Reign of Charles II: Propaganda and Politics from the Restoration until the Exclusion Crisis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

9 Mark Knights, "Possessing the Visual: The Materiality of Visual Print Culture in Later Stuart Britain" in James Daybell and Peter Hinds (eds.), *Material Readings of Early Modern Culture: Texts and Social Practices, 1580–1730* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 85–122.

10 This continued into the nineteenth century. See Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 53–54; Marcus Wood, *Radical Satire and Print Culture* (Oxford: Calrendon Press, 1994), pp. 67, 76.

11 Alastair Bellany, *The Politics of Court Scandal in Early Modern England: News Culture and the Overbury Affair, 1603–1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

12 Knights, "Possessing," pp. 88, 96; Diana Donald, *The Age of Caricature: Satirical Prints in the Reign of George III* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996); V.A.C. Gatrell, *City of Laughter: Sex and Satire in Eighteenth-Century London* (London: Atlantic Books, 2006).

defined by its social function. Understood since classical civilization as a visceral discourse with a moralistic intent, an attack on vice to police behaviour and correct or punish transgressors of accepted mores, satire was part art form and part ritual, a practice enacting specific types of virtuous behaviour in its audience (see below). *The Gamesters* was certainly conceived as a vehicle for action, and this chapter suggests that when understood as satires, rather than as another aspect of news, the true force of visual media within the public sphere is understood.

In the seventeenth century – where ‘opinion’ and ‘information’, ‘news’ and ‘commentary’ were not distinct categories – understanding discourse as action is vital to perceiving the impact of news.¹³ Indeed, scholars have interpreted the representations of politics as inseparable from its ideas, showing that rhetoric did not merely project ideologies, but actively shaped them. As representation was indistinguishable from politics, so ideology was indistinguishable from information. Discourse actively persuaded rather than passively informed, widening participation in the public sphere by involving audiences in a form of political commentary.¹⁴ For instance, considerable prior knowledge was required to comprehend broadside ballads. News performed a didactic function not by informing, but by providing (and attempting to persuade the reader/listener to acquiesce to) a “moral gloss or emotional response” upon widely known events.¹⁵

- 13 J.L. Austin, *How To Do Things with Words* (2nd ed.: Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975); John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980). Brendan Dooley and Sabrina A. Baron (eds.), *The Politics of Information in Early Modern Europe* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), introduction, pp. 1–2; Brendan Dooley, “News and doubt in Early Modern culture; or, are we having a public sphere yet?” in *ibid.*, pp. 279–287; Joad Raymond (ed.), *News Networks in Seventeenth Century Britain and Europe* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), introduction, pp. 1–14.
- 14 Kevin Sharpe, “Representations and negotiations: texts, images and authority in early modern England,” *Historical Journal*, 42 (1999), pp. 853–881; *id.*, “Celebrating a cultural turn: political culture and cultural politics in early modern England,” *Journal of Early Modern History*, 1 (1997), pp. 344–368; Kevin Sharpe and Peter Lake (eds.), *Culture and Politics in Early Stuart England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994); Mark Knights, *Representation and Misrepresentation in later Stuart Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).
- 15 Angela McShane Jones, “*The Gazet in Metre; or the Rhiming Newsmonger*, The English Broadside Ballad as Intelligencer. A New Narrative” in Joop W. Koopmans (ed.), *News and Politics in Early Modern Europe (1500–1800)* (Leuven and Paris: Peeters, 2005), pp. 131–150.

The Gamesters similarly told audiences nothing new. It relied upon knowledgeable viewers unravelling its torrent of unexplicated allusions to contemporary political events, in order to grasp the moral force of its condemnation of Charles II.¹⁶ The visual here was not a simplification of ideology formulated elsewhere, but a complex and sophisticated commentary intended for audiences conversant in current political events. In graphic satire moral energy was heightened by two factors: (1) intense topical import within a specific political moment; (2) emulation of classical satires' safeguarding of liberty through the admonishment of tyranny. Its purpose was conditioned by parliamentary debates surrounding the trial of the Catholic peers accused by Titus Oates of coordinating the (fictional) Popish Plot to conquer England, and the impeachment of Thomas Osborne, Earl of Danby, by the Commons, for conspiring to impose Popery and Arbitrary Government. Both plots were utilized by the opposition to enhance the independence of Parliament against the Crown during the Succession Crisis – the promotion of constitutional government triggered by the conversion of Charles's heir, James, Duke of York, to Catholicism.

Attempts to do so during the first Exclusion Parliament of 1679 failed when Charles dissolved Parliament. The King's reluctance to call Parliament in the wake of two general elections in which opposition MPs won a significant majority, stimulated a campaign – of which our print was part – to demonstrate the weight of support for Parliament and to force Charles's hand. The second Exclusion Parliament was finally set to meet in April 1680. This was undoubtedly the event for which our print, issued on 16 March, was intended. The print made seductive allusions to the recent past and the weight of fifteen years of history coalesced into a present instance to exert the urgency of constitutional reform. Following Andrew Marvell's pamphlet, *An Account of the Growth of Popery and Arbitrary Government* (1677), eve-of-Parliament blasts were prevalent in political culture. I suggest that satire accorded them added moral import. This print was an *intensive* form of ephemera, produced for a decisive moment and with a specific intention: to usher Parliament into a corrective course of action that would rid England of its greatest vice-Popery.

Conditioned by Context

The Gamesters was part of the Popish Plot's second wind during the winter of 1679–1680. This was triggered by the Meal Tub Plot – the attempt by the

16 Harold Love, *English Clandestine Satire 1660–1720* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 1–20, 21–65.

Catholic Lady Powis to manufacture evidence of a Protestant plot, in order to undercut the Popish Plot's momentum – in October 1679. That Powis was the wife of one of the Catholic peers accused by Oates meant that the Meal Tub Plot's revelation had a dramatic effect upon public opinion.¹⁷ The plot's flagging momentum was re-energized by fresh evidence of Catholic treachery, and public pressure mounted for Parliament to sit in order to investigate the plot and undertake constitutional reform. Widespread national petitions and the tsunami of news discussion unleashed by the Licensing Act's cessation widened public engagement with politics and attempted to frighten Charles II into calling Parliament. These measures were encapsulated in the huge attendance at the London Pope-burning processions during November.¹⁸ That Parliament had not been allowed to sit since May 1679 made the nature of monarchical power seem a safeguard of, rather than against, Popery. Charles's repeated refusal to receive Parliamentary counsel – he prorogued Parliament in October 1679, January 1680, and April 1680 – smacked of tyranny.¹⁹

The Popish Plot consequently merged with another (popish) plot: the Crown's attempts to override English liberties via Arbitrary Government, evidenced by Danby's Parliamentary management and the pursuit of a pro-French and anti-Dutch foreign policy.²⁰ At the close of the first Exclusion Parliament (April–May 1679), conflict between the two houses concerning the legality of the Commons' impeachment of Danby for treason scuppered prosecution of the Popish Plot peers.²¹ The Commons' exertions against Danby had alarming echoes of Strafford's trial preceding the Civil Wars, and Charles was advised

- 17 *Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Marquis of Ormonde*, [formerly] *Preserved at the Castle, Kilkenny*, new series, Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts, 36 (1902–1920), vol. 5, p. 238. See also Mark Knights, *Politics and Opinion in Crisis, 1678–1681* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 61.
- 18 Knights, *Politics*, chapters 6–9; Peter Hinds, *The Horrid Popish Plot: Roger L'Estrange and the Circulation of Political Discourse in Late Seventeenth-Century London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
- 19 Knights, *Politics*, pp. 193–194, 199–204, 227.
- 20 Tim Harris, *Restoration: Charles II & his Kingdoms 1660–1685* (London: Penguin, 2006), pp. 83–84, 137–138; Steven C.A. Pincus, *Protestantism and Patriotism: Ideologies and the Making of English Foreign Policy, 1650–1668* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
- 21 Andrew Browning, *Thomas Osborne, Earl of Danby and Duke of Leeds, 1632–1712*, 3 vols (Glasgow: Jackson, 1944–1951), vol. 1, pp. 300–341; A. Grey, *Debates of the House of Commons*, 10 vols (London, 1763), vol. 7, pp. 19–30, 57, 153–154, 176–183, 227; Mark Goldie, "Danby, the Bishops and the Whigs" in Mark Goldie, Tim Harris, and Paul Seaward (eds.), *The Politics of Religion in Restoration England* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), pp. 75–105; John Miller, *Charles II* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1991), pp. 291, 308, 315.

that they masked a drive for total sovereignty.²² Faced with dissent and deadlock Charles prorogued Parliament, effectively rendering pursuit of Danby and the plot impossible. Monarchy as the protector of ‘Popery’ was now the issue.²³

The Gamesters deployed memory of these events in a satirical commentary, urging Parliament (expected to sit the following month) to pursue constitutional reform. Combining an allegorical image of recent political history with sixteen hundred words of verse dialogue in which the Pope chastised the Catholic Peers for their failure in routing Parliament, the print collapsed the ‘Crown’ and ‘Popish’ plots together. At the top-left, Charles II sits in Parliament surrounded by “Protestant Peers” and the “Loyal” House of Commons.²⁴ In the opening lies Edmund Godfrey – the magistrate who had taken Oates’s Popish Plot depositions and whose subsequent murder gave their accusations of Catholic perfidy credence – presented as a martyr whose death saved the nation by exposing the plot. Godfrey’s body is viewed by three “Popish Misses,” a reference to William Bedloe’s and Miles Prance’s evidence that his corpse had been ghoulishly displayed for Catholics in Somerset House.²⁵ At the top-centre stand “The Kings Evidence” – prosecution witnesses of varying significance – pointing to the plot against Parliament/Charles (left) as a continuation of the “Catholic” fire of 1666 (right). London is torched by six Jesuits below, one of whom – Sir George Wakeman, the Queen’s physician – had recently been acquitted (the first major blow to the witnesses’ credibility).²⁶ In the lower-right, Pope and devil encourage Catholic peers playing nine-pins. These were the five plot leaders – Belasyse, Stafford, Arundell, Petre, and Powis – accused by Oates, and Lord Aston, whose inclusion (as we shall see) is vital in understanding the print’s context. In a macabre allegory of the plot, the first bowl veers diagonally towards Charles/Parliament and is prevented from striking home by Godfrey’s corpse. It is guided by Danby, indicating Parliament as the target (“Here’s your ground sir”), and alludes to his attempted imposition of Arbitrary Government by undermining Parliament’s constitutional powers.

22 Browning, *Danby*, vol. 2, pp. 82–88; Miller, *Charles*, p. 311.

23 See Charles’s views: HMC Ormonde, NS, vol. 4, p. 495.

24 These “Protestant Peers” had voted in favour of the Commons’ removal of the Bishops from Danby’s trials in the previous Parliament (listed in H. Care, *The History of the Damnable Plot* (London, 1680), pp. 253–254. L’Estrange read this as seditious, accusing the state of being the problem. See L’Estrange, *Notes*, p. 29).

25 *Journals of the House of Lords*, xiii (London, 1771), pp. 29–35, 343, 350–351; R. Palmer, Earl of Castlemaine, *The Compendium, or, a Short View of the Late Tryals* (1679), pp. 14–15; John Pollock, *The Popish Plot* (London: Duckworth, 1903), pp. 384–385.

26 J.P. Kenyon, “The Acquittal of Sir George Wakeman,” *Historical Journal*, 14 (1971), pp. 693–708.

Subtle differences to other Popish Plot satires deal the killing blow. On the surface the anti-Catholic iconography of 1678–1682 relied upon the repetition of commonplace iconographic tropes spanning the seventeenth century. Repetition across media (playing cards, tiles, prints, and Pope-burning processions) created a unified anti-Catholic ‘brand’, which expressed and solidified opposition sentiments. Common scenes or events, many of which occur in *The Gamesters*, were pictured repeatedly: the fire of 1666, Godfrey martyred and displayed in Somerset House, displays of the plot witnesses’ nobility, and the execution of the ‘guilty’ were all part-and-parcel of a visual vocabulary.²⁷ But our print signalled the particularity of its message (attacking the Crown as much as generic Popery) by two delicious deviations from this iconographic norm: (1) picturing Danby for the first time; and (2) indicating Parliament (rather than King) as the plot’s true target. Where much iconography protested loyalty to Charles by stressing Oates’s evidence that attempts had been made on his life, the placing of a diminutive Charles within Parliament and presenting the latter as the target of the plotters’ bowls was a subtle iconographic allusion to the idea that the ‘Crown conspiracy’ was the most significant vehicle for popery in England. In order to understand the satire’s true target, viewers were thus expected to possess a high degree of visual literacy and to be highly familiar with visual culture so as to observe *The Gamesters*’s subtle deviations from it. The verses continued this veiled attack upon the Crown in an equally exacting manner, attacking moves towards Arbitrary Government from the mid-1660s in an opaquely allusive style.²⁸

Such allusive detail made audiences partners in the print’s satirical process, flattering their intelligence and making them ‘read’ events, however briefly, from College’s vantage point (as evidence of a Crown conspiracy). This is important for how we understand the role of graphic satire in news culture. Prints like *The Gamesters* have been analysed as secondary and non-specific forms of propaganda: static, if colourful, tokens of political sentiments formulated in texts in a generically pro or anti Exclusion manner.²⁹ I suggest that graphic satires provided a sophisticated form of political commentary, a primary form of propaganda that developed (rather than simply repeated)

27 See my “Glaring at Antichrist: printed images of the Papacy in England, c. 1530–1685” (PhD thesis, University of York, 2011), chapter 3.

28 References were made to the sale of Dunkirk to the French and the removal of resources to Tangier; the Triple League (1670); James’s conversion (1673); the fire of 1666; the Raid on the Medway (1667); and the hold of the Duchess of Portsmouth of Charles II.

29 Harris, *London Crowds*, pp. 125–128, 136–137, 140–144; Harris, *Restoration*, pp. 249–250.

ideas, and which were created, not as blanket posters of opposition ideology, but in response to particular political moments as events unfolded.

The print's central conceit, a game of nine-pins, responded to the moment's minutiae. Its incongruity – a grave plot depicted as a trifling game of skittles – piqued interest through humorous absurdity. But these nine-pins were also a reference to the evidence of Stephen Dugdale, a key witness against Stafford and Lord Aston (by whom he was previously employed). Much of Stafford's defence rested upon discrediting Dugdale as a witness by painting him as a man of ill repute. Stafford claimed that Dugdale had been dismissed by Aston for embezzlement, and that his indebtedness to Aston motivated his provision of false evidence. The prosecution endeavoured to refute this.³⁰ During January 1680, Dugdale visited the Tower to compare account books with Aston to prove that the Lord was indebted to him and not vice versa, but was unsuccessful. Aston "was not at leisure" to see him because "*he was then going up with the [Catholic] Lords to [play] Nine-Pins*". College – *The Gamesters's* designer – was the key witness to this event, and saw Aston's refusal to compare accounts as a perfidious ploy to prevent prosecution. College promised: "if I can persuade Mr. Dugdale we shall publish the Case, for the Protestant Interest suffered by it". It was that "Protestant interest" which *The Gamesters* (issued in the weeks after this event) intended to protect.³¹

News of the nine-pins snub caused consternation.³² In *Citt and Bumpkin*, L'Estrange satirized the Whig's hyperbolic sense of injustice that the plotters were spending their time on a jolly whilst the plot unfolded and they remained untried.³³ *The Gamesters's* humour rested upon inverting this ire. The Pope was outraged at the peers' trifling at skittles when serious conspiring against Parliament remained to be done:

Now you turn your hand
And howl for Farthings, whilst they firmly stand
Like Rocks together.³⁴

30 *Tryal of William Stafford for high treason* (1681), pp. 187–188; James Corker, *Stafford's Memories, or, A brief and impartial account of the birth and quality, imprisonment, tryal, principles, declaration, comportment, devotion, last speech, and final end of William, late Lord Viscount Stafford* (London, 1682), pp. 42–57. See also Simon Neal, *Historical Collections* (London, 1682), p. 100.

31 *Tryal of Stafford*, pp. 187–188. My italics.

32 *Plain dealing, or, A dialogue between Humphrey and Roger* (1681) – broadside; J. Dean, *The Badger in the Fox-Trap* ([London], 1680), p. 6.

33 R. L'Estrange, *Citt and Bumpkin*, pt 2 (London, 1680), p. 23.

34 BM Sat 1077.

This projection of Protestant/Parliamentary unity was what the print hoped to inspire. The objective was constitutional reform. The Pope subsequently described how he had secured the dissolution of May 1679, thus implying that Charles was a Papal servant who allowed the plot to continue endangering England.³⁵ Without his machinations in the Lords over Danby's impeachment, the peers were done for because their execution was Parliament's only hope of conveying the plot's severity: "that must be done before th' Incredulous Rout | Will ere believe that I am come about". This was a plea to Parliament to lead the charge. The memory of April/May 1679 was employed to urge continued pursuit of Danby and the peers as a lever of constitutional reform. As the Pope exclaimed: "A Parliament comes next, and off go all your Heads".³⁶

The print ushered its audience into angry agreement. It celebrated Parliament's achievements in safeguarding England from plots thus far, and raged at its being hindered from carrying the day at the vital moment. Satirical bite was more cutting for involving viewers in the act of completion. Rather than broadening debate, the density of references that the print employed, and the level of prior knowledge required to unravel them, cultivated an intimacy between College and the audience he called to action. College positioned his course of action as the reasonable one. The print's fictitious imprint – "Printed at the half-way House that stood betwixt Bothwel-Bridge and Holy Rood-House" – referred to the Battle of Bothwell Bridge (22 June 1677) which had ended a severe Presbyterian revolt, and to James, now High Commissioner of Scotland, whose seat was Hollyrood House, Edinburgh. College positioned his print "halfway" between Catholic Succession (tyranny) and seditious Presbyterianism (anarchy) at the place of truth – the truth of pursuing the plot, and with it the constitutional reform necessary to safeguard England against Popery.³⁷

The Momentous Present

The Gamesters, then, was a piece of intensive ephemera: a work exerting pressure and lobbying for action at a vital *instance* of politics. Suggesting that its power was a product of its transience inverts the criteria of eighteenth-century art theory which spawned the neglect of single-sheet satires as objects of study. Topicality was anathema to greatness; 'Great Art' conveyed universal values

35 BM Sat 1077: "What shame is it (ye Gamesters) for to see [...] | Of *Commons-Foes* who're gathered in the Land".

36 BM Sat 1077.

37 Harris, *Restoration*, pp. 169–170, 196–203, 330–333.

which graphic satires, by virtue of their rapid obsolescence, were incapable of achieving.³⁸ The legacy of that prejudice persists in contemporary scholarship. Masters like Hogarth, Rowlandson, and Gillray are still studied disproportionately at the expense of the broad mass of anonymous eighteenth-century engravers, distorting the impression of visual culture as it was experienced by contemporaries.³⁹ I suggest rather that prints affected an audience precisely *because* of their topicality: that by imposing satire's moralizing urge to correct vice on a precise political moment, prints like *The Gamesters* invoked specific political action. As tactical responses to the momentary, visual satires extended the capacity of the regular rhythm of news to inject what C. John Sommerville termed "urgency into the mundane".⁴⁰

That urgency conditioned how contemporary audiences experienced graphic satires. As Daniel Woolf has shown, the news explosion stimulated a change in experience of the 'present' as a discrete period of time distinct from 'past' and 'future'.⁴¹ This concept of the present was markedly different from how contemporaneity was experienced two centuries earlier.⁴² Although there was a remembered past and an expected future during the earlier period, the present did not exist beyond the instant and was consequently rarely understood as a significant historical juncture or conceived as part of ongoing social or national narratives. By 1700 the present was no longer an instant but a *duration*, a discrete period of time understood to have been caused by the past, and capable of steering the future.⁴³ The formalization of news reportage was pivotal to this shift: a European-wide postage network allowed for information exchange between printers, routinized the arrival of news, and shortened the time between an event's occurrence and its reportage. The result, Woolf suggests, was an urgent sense of 'now' as a part of public

38 Donald, *Caricature*, pp. 27–31. Jonathan Richardson, "Of Grace and Greatness" in id., *The Theory of Painting* (London, 1715).

39 Gatrell, *Laughter*. See also Mark Hallet, *The Spectacle of Difference: Graphic Satire in the Age of Hogarth* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999); Mark Hallet and Richard T. Godfrey, *James Gillray: The Art of Caricature* (London: Tate, 2001).

40 C. John Sommerville, *The News Revolution in England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 8.

41 Daniel Woolf, "News, history and the construction of the present in early modern England" in Dooley and Baron (eds.), *Politics of Information*, pp. 80–118. J. Paul Hunter, *Before Novels* (London and New York: W. W. Norton, 1990), pp. 168–172.

42 On the present see Donlad A. Norman, *Learning and Memory* (San Francisco: W.H. Freeman, 1982); G.J. Whitrow, *The Natural Philosophy of Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 74–83.

43 Woolf, "News," pp. 82–88, 94–99, 106–107.

consciousness, and which demanded to be recorded. In this context everything flowed through topicality, and *The Gamesters* rested upon the sense that the momentous occurred in the momentary.

The oral aspect of that empowered present is vital. Scholars have demonstrated that far from sounding its death-knell, the print explosion heightened facets of oral culture.⁴⁴ Written news often originated in rumour, and acted to provoke political chatter upon publication. The experience of the ‘momentous present’ was consequently realized by the capacity of news media to animate conversation in and about politics.⁴⁵ How could one print have an impact against this wall of noise? Crucially, satire created pockets of pointed critique amidst the confusion. Contemporary theorists note that political humour conversationalizes politics through sound-biting – the provision of an acute slogan or conceit which (like the nine-pins) pulls audiences through the confused noise of news, providing a platform on which discussion can focus.⁴⁶ That platform may be fleeting, but it is heated – and therefore has impact – during its moment of existence.

If the momentousness of the present was one crucial factor conditioning *The Gamesters*’s satirical import, the representational was another. Depicting the Popish Plot as a game of nine-pins was mock-heroic, parodying the form of epic painting and poetry with wholly incongruous content.⁴⁷ Mock-heroics often adopted the cadences of pentameter couplet (as do *The Gamesters*’s verses) to mimic the gravity of the classical grand style.⁴⁸ This heroic aspect garnered satire greater moral import. Whilst earlier writers had styled satire as comic (a lowlier, unheroic mode), Dryden deemed it tragic, and therefore, in a sense, heroic. Consequently, if the moral import of the heroic mode was transcendent, then satire, whatever its topicality, must be too.⁴⁹ Fifty years later, Hogarth elevated the particular elements of his engravings to the universal by

44 The literature on this subject is vast, but see for example Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England, 1500–1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

45 See Steve Pincus, “‘Coffee Politicians Does Create’: Coffeehouses and Restoration Political Culture,” *Journal of Modern History*, 67 (1995), pp. 807–834.

46 Marianthi Geogalidou, “‘Stop Caressing the ears of the hooded’: Political humour in times of conflict” in Villy Tsakona and Diana Elena Popa (eds.), *Studies in Political Humour* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamin, 2011), pp. 83–107; Norman Fairclough, *Media Discourse* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 1995).

47 Ritchie Robertson, *Mock Epic Poetry from Pope to Heine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

48 Love, *Clandestine*, pp. 107–116. Andrew Marvell’s *Instructions to a Painter* is exemplary here.

49 John Dryden, *Discourse on Satyr* (London, 1692), pp. 62–84.

reference to the mock-heroic, making compositional allusions to the old masters of history painting to force viewers to read wider resonances into his everyday depictions and consequently making them more acceptable as morally elevating depictions of virtue and vice.⁵⁰ *The Gamesters's* equally self-conscious definition of itself as satire, similarly subverted the ephemeral nature of its medium in order to heighten the moral import of its commentary on Danby's impeachment and the Catholic peers' trial. In combining verse and image, single-sheet satires existed as an aspect of the dialogical relationship between painting and poetry in classical literary theory (*Ut Pictura Poesis*).⁵¹ That relationship proved critical to the elevation of satire to an art form – and therefore an acceptable, rather than scurrilous, form of political discourse – by Augustan satirists, whose verse emulated forms of history painting to garner moral import.⁵² Similarly, Du Fresnoy noted that both mediums strove to produce affecting and heightened representations of virtue and vice to teach their audiences through pleasure.⁵³ One of the obstacles facing painters was capturing the dramatic thrust of a narrative in a static scene. They were required to collapse chronologies and combine incidents from different times in a single conceit.⁵⁴ This was precisely what College achieved. Referring to Godfrey's death in 1666, the 1679 Parliaments, and a fifteen-year conspiracy for Arbitrary Government, he conveyed the notion of the momentous present. By weaving the vicissitudes of the recent past into one conceit, he amplified the sense of England's fate hanging in the balance of Parliament's continued pursuit of Danby and the Catholic Peers.

For contemporaries, such histrionics could be truly affecting. At its best, noted Dryden, painting had an immediate impact which poetry could not match:

[It is] to the advantage of painting, even above tragedy, that what this last represents in the space of many hours, the former shows us in one

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- 50 Ronald Paulson, "The Harlot's Progress and the Tradition of History Painting," *Eighteenth Century Studies*, 1 (1967), pp. 69–92.
 - 51 Richardson, *Theory of Painting*, pp. 20–22, 44–46, 69–71; Horace, *Ars poetica*, 1. 361.
 - 52 Vincent Carretta, *The Snarling Muse: Verbal and Visual Political Satire from Pope to Churchill* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), pp. xiii–xxi, 1–61.
 - 53 C.A. Du Fresnoy, *De Arte Graphica* (London, 1695), p. 1; Rensselaer W. Lee, "Ut Pictura Poesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting," *Art Bulletin*, 22 (1940), pp. 197–269.
 - 54 Le Brun, "Conferences" in M. Henry Jouin, *Conférences de l'Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture* (Paris: A. Quantin, 1883), pp. 62–64; [Anthony Ashley Cooper Shaftesbury], *A Notion of the Historical Draught or Tablature of the Judgement of Hercules* ([London], 1713); Richardson, *Essay*, pp. 56–61; Paulson, "Progress," pp. 71–75.

moment. The action, the passion [...] of so many persons as are contained in a picture are to be discerned at once, in the twinkling of an eye.⁵⁵

Graphic satire was intended to share in that import.

Satire as a Moral Activity

To understand how *The Gamesters's* mock-heroism was experienced by seventeenth-century audiences necessitates grasping the force accorded to satire's morally compelling images of virtue and vice in early modern society. In satire, words could *effect* change.⁵⁶ The satyr – half man, half beast – thrashed vice out of its subject, making it so ridiculous that audiences were inspired to scoff at and resist it.⁵⁷ This punitive aspect often makes modern readers uncomfortable with Restoration satire as a form that desire rejects.⁵⁸ But for seventeenth-century audiences, satire's purpose was social, not aesthetic. Heavily indebted to its ritualistic origins as an efficacious practice that expunged undesirable elements from the social body, satire only became art – and thus the subject of literary analysis – at the point when belief in that efficacy ceased.⁵⁹ Seventeenth-century audiences were consequently unlikely to have evaluated satires from the vantage point of our aesthetic squeamishness.⁶⁰ That which repels modern readers – the satirists' capacity to convey corrosive scorn – was precisely what made satires so compelling as vehicles safeguarding against vice, in the context in which they were conceived.

55 Quoted in Carretta, *Snarling*, p. 12.

56 Michael Seidel, *Satiric Inheritance: Rabelias to Sterne* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979); George Test, *Satire: Spirit and Art* (Tampa: University of South Florida Press, 1991); Steven E. Jones, *Satire and Romanticism* (London: Palgrave, 2000), pp. 1–8, on satire's rhetorical power and social/political functions in the Romantic era.

57 Howard D. Weinbrot, *Eighteenth-Century Satire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 4; Richard Nash, "Satyrs and Satire in Augustan England" in Brian A. Connery and Kirke Combe (eds.), *Theorizing Satire – Essays in Literary Criticism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995), pp. 95–105.

58 F.V. Bogel, "The Difference Satire Makes: Reading Swift's Poems" in Connery and Combe (eds.), *Theorizing Satire*, pp. 43–53; Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).

59 Mary Claire Randolph, "The Medical Concept in English Renaissance Satiric Theory," *Studies in Philology*, 38 (1941), pp. 125–157.

60 Robert C. Elliott, *The Power of Satire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960).

By emulating their classical forbears, seventeenth-century satirists accorded their works didactic and political functions. Wits of the Jacobean Inns of Court styled themselves as civilized public advisors, in order to dissociate their satires from lowly and disruptive forms of humour.⁶¹ Like classical rhetoricians – and unlike lowly satirical invective – the wits counselled the monarch with advice that it was his duty to hear for the commonwealth's health.⁶² Refusal to listen was tyrannous. By the late seventeenth century, the choice of classical satirist emulated – Horace, Persius, or Juvenal – was often a conscious political statement.⁶³ Horace's softer invective was understood to be a product of his status as a conquered poet who was employed by the regime he critiqued. By contrast, Juvenal – removed from the regime – was liberty's true champion, inveighing against corrupt powers in tones as grand as his moral purpose. Emulating Juvenal accorded political resistance a moral credibility.⁶⁴ For Dryden – writing against the 'tyranny' of the post-1688 monarchy – Juvenal's keenness was essential:

His *Thoughts are sharper* [than Horace's], his Indignation against *Vice is more vehement*; [...] he treats Tyranny [...] with the utmost rigour: And consequently, a Noble Soul is better pleas'd with a Zealous Vindicator of *Roman Liberty*; than with a Temporizing Poet [Horace], a well Manner'd Court Slave [...] who is often afraid of Laughing in the right place.⁶⁵

Here satire's political agency – its capacity to reveal tyranny, champion liberty, and enliven audiences into action – was a direct extension of its binary structure: the greater the vice scorned, the greater the virtue inspired. Thus for Dryden the vices lashed must be "Tragical," "the most enormous that can be

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- 61 Michelle O'Callaghan, *The English Wits* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), chapters 1 and 2; J.G. Nicholls, *The Poetry of Ben Jonson* (London: Routledge, 1969), pp. 108–109; Max W. Thomas, "Kemp's *Nine Daies Wonder*: Dancing Carnival into the Market," *PMLA* 107 (1992), pp. 511–523. See William Webbe, *A Discourse of English Poetrie* (London, 1586); George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie* (London, 1589).
 - 62 O'Callaghan, *Wits*, pp. 30–34; Markku Peltonen, *Classical Humanism and Republicanism in English Political Thought, 1570–1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 60–65; Paul Raffield, *Images and Cultures of Law in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 35–49.
 - 63 See Howard D. Weinbrot, "History, Horace and Augustus Caesar: Some Implications for Eighteenth-Century Satire," *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 7 (1974), pp. 391–414.
 - 64 See Howard D. Weinbrot, "The Pattern of Formal Verse Satire in the Restoration and the Eighteenth Century," *PMLA*, 80 (1965), pp. 394–401; Dryden, *Satyr*, pp. 66–69.
 - 65 Dryden, *Satyr*, p. 69.

imagin'd," inspiring audiences to "Elevated [...] Noble [...] sublime and lofty" thoughts.⁶⁶ *The Gamesters* was surely conceived in this vein: what vice was more tyrannous than popery?

For Dryden, effective satire coupled acidity with acuteness. There was a:

vast difference between the slovenly Butchering of a man, and the fineness of a stroke that separates the Head from the Body, and leaves it standing in its place.⁶⁷

This was death by eloquence, a union of literary refinement and devastating moral power. Here, then, the aesthetic form and didactic function were inseparable: the former delighting an audience and making them more willing to submit to the latter's lessons.⁶⁸ The nine-pins conceit – at once simple, mock-heroic, and weaving many strands of news discourse into one condensed attack – exemplified acuteness in action.

The aesthetic import of that acuteness is crucial in understanding the reformatory force *The Gamesters* aspired to in the public sphere. That this was not a dispassionate dissemination of news is self-evident, but contemporary understanding of satire's capacity to inspire action through words and/or images – to effect (moral) change by affecting their audiences – must be stressed. As epideictic forms of writing, satire and panegyric were siblings.⁶⁹ Both employed vehement (written) images of virtues (panegyric) and vice (satire) as emotive vehicles of moral tenors to inspire pursuit of virtue, or assent to a given ethical or political position. I suggest that the graphic aspects of satire in a piece like *The Gamesters* heightened that capacity – that if the loftiness and majesty of images crafted with words inspired moral action, then *picturing* them in allegorical form may have been even more affective. Recent studies stress that graphic satire was a composite medium of cultures high and low, oral and textual.⁷⁰ Placing *The Gamesters* within wider epideictic traditions, we perceive hosts of unspoken resonances about the power of images of virtue

66 Ibid., pp. 62–63.

67 Ibid., p. 71.

68 Delight was a foundation of rhetorical writing rejuvenated at the Renaissance. See Hanna Gray, "Renaissance Humanism: The Pursuit of Eloquence" in Robert Black (ed.), *Renaissance Thought: A Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 60–67.

69 Jon Rowland, "From Cheated Sight to False Light: Analogy in Swift and Churchill" in Connery and Combe (eds.), *Theorizing Satire*, pp. 107–132.

70 See Pierce, *Unseemly Pictures*; Angela McShane and Clare Backhouse, "Top Knots and Lower Sorts: Prints and Promiscuous Consumption in the early 1690s" in Michael Hunter (ed.), *Printed Images in Early Modern Britain* (Aldershot, 2010), pp. 337–357.

and vice to enact, and the satirist's moral duty as counsellor in the public sphere.

Those resonances surely had a keen import when injected into a specific political moment such as the anticipation of the April 1680 Parliament. *The Gamesters's* acidity was neater precisely *because* of its intensive ephemerality.⁷¹ The print urged Parliament into two forms of action concerning the Succession Crisis: (1) pursuing the Catholic Peers' trial scuppered by the previous Parliament's 'Danby moment'; and (2) pursuing constitutional reforms safeguarding against Popery and Arbitrary Government. We will treat these in succession.

Answering their chastisement by the Pope for inaction, the Lords' reply reminded readers of Marvell's evidence of a conspiracy to establish Arbitrary Government; and raised the issue of Oates's reliability:

Before we to the present *Trick* [the plot] did fall;
 [...] w'had done the Devil and all.
 And what that is, your Holiness can guess,
 For wee'l be damn'd ere any on't confess.
 Nor does it matter whether we do or not,
 Since *Heretick-Commons* have so much on't got,
 By him whose name *Oaten-Fipe* [Titus Oates] doth fret
 Our very Guts, as on the Tenters set,
 We curse our Stars he is not ruin'd yet.
 But there's some hopes, by what we hear of late,
 Whose Lives he sav'd, requite him with their hate.
 A good reward! But had he half on't done
 For Mother Church, he had the Popedom won.⁷²

The purpose here is threefold: firstly, to undercut Tory propagandists, like L'Estrange, who had undermined the plot's severity by pointing to inconsistencies in Oates's evidence; secondly, to imply that ruining Oates was part of plot; and thirdly, to remind Parliament how much evidence Oates had provided against the Catholic peers at the point when their trial was about to be re-raised. College closes:

To conclude [...]
England will nere be safe, nor Christendom,
Till all your Necks under the Hatchet come.

71 Jones, *Satire and Romanticism*, pp. 9–12; Connery and Combe (eds.), *Theorizing Satire*, p. 5.

72 BM Sat 1077.

This rallying call challenged Parliament to meet these lustful expectations.

The second call for action was subtle and seditious. In replying to the Pope's claim to have scuppered the Commons' attempts to try Danby in the previous Parliament, the Catholic Peers scoffed at the idea that the pontiff was the power behind enduring Catholic conspiracies in England:

Tell us'twas *He kept Common-Foes from sitting!*
'Tis known he lies: for, did we think it fitting,
We other Reasons for the same could show,
Truth he (perhaps Infallible) doth know.
But let that pass: 'tis done[.]

We teeter here upon the libellous. These "other Reasons" surely refer to Charles II: by implying that he conspired to prevent Parliament from acting against Danby's popery (by delaying its sitting for a year), College makes the Crown the principle threat to English liberties. This is surely why L'Estrange found the print so seditious, calling it:

*a venemous Libel upon all the Orders of the Government; and first upon the King himself, charging all the Pretened Miscarriages of State, in Shew, upon the Papists, but in Truth [...] upon his Majesty.*⁷³

Grasping these calls to action relied heavily upon audience inference. But satire, densely referential and assuming prior knowledge, invited audiences into the act of completion through an imbalance in its opposition of virtue and vice. As the latter was almost always presented more fully than the former, the persuasive effect was one of action through repulsion.⁷⁴ As Mary Randolph has noted, attack outweighed praise:

since, paradoxically, in the very act of presenting the negative or destructive side of human behaviour the satirist is establishing a positive foundation on which he can base his specific recourse to virtue.⁷⁵

73 L'Estrange, *Notes*, p. 29.

74 Mary Clare Randolph, "Thomas Drant's Definition of Satire, 1566," *Notes and Queries*, 180 (1941), pp. 416–418; Alvin Kernan, "Aggression and Satire: Art Considered as a Form of Biological Adaptation" in Frank Brady and John Palmer (eds.), *Literary Theory and Structure: Essays in Honour of William K. Wimsatt* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), pp. 115–129.

75 Mary Clare Randolph, "The Structural Design of the Formal Verse Satire," *Print Quarterly* 21 (1942), p. 373.

That recourse was often implied (as here).⁷⁶ In utilizing visceral presentation of the negative (Catholic perfidy) to inspire positive action (pursuing the plot/constitutional reform), *The Gamesters* towed the line with contemporary literary theory. Persuasion occurred through a unification of author and audience in righteous anger. Thus Dryden admired the infectious ire of Juvenal's "vigorous and masculine wit" which the reader could only share: "His spleen is rais'd, and he raises mine".⁷⁷

Stephen College and Roger L'Estrange – Satire Versus Seditious

I have argued that the place of the visual within news culture rested upon its indebtedness to satire, and its finite and responsive particularity. Constructed for knowing viewers who completed the satirical act by unravelling the print's allusions – and in doing so were (ideally) persuaded to accept its revelation of vice and inspired to move towards its correction – graphic satire's power rested upon the urgent moment of its creation. This was intensive ephemera, created for and conditioned by the topicality of a newly important present. Responses typifying *The Gamesters* as seditious suggest that satirical intensity was understood to be capable of inspiring dangerous actions. Denying its claims to be a legitimate counsel safeguarding England's liberties, responses focussed instead on the print's mockery endangering the realm by corroding the ties of respect that bound society together. For L'Estrange satire certainly possessed agency, but it was the agency to rupture society, rather than to reform it.

This agency established a niche for graphic satire within the print marketplace. Single-sheet satires became increasingly dialogical because responding to mockery in kind contained its impact: mocking the mocker sought to delegitimize the original satirical act. The Succession Crisis occasioned the emergence of the first purely visual polemical exchange.⁷⁸ Scholars commonly understand this to have begun with a complex print by L'Estrange, *The Committee; or Popery in Masquerade* (1680) (see Fig. 6.2).⁷⁹ Here – in a cutting

76 See, *The Works of Alexander Pope*, ed. William Warburton, 9 vols (London, 1751), vol. 3, pp. 229–230, 263; A. Dacier, *Oeuvres d'Horace* (1681–1689), 8, sig. A3; John Dryden, *Essays*, ed. W.P. Ker, 2 vols (Oxford, 1926), vol. 2, pp. 100–104. Weinbrot, *Satire*, pp. 11–20.

77 Dryden, *Discourse*, p. 63.

78 Antony Griffiths, *The Print in Stuart Britain* (London: British Museum, 1998), p. 287; Malcolm Jones, *The Print in Early Modern England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), pp. 165–166. See also Pierce, *Unseemly Pictures*, pp. 171–176.

79 BM Sat 1080.

FIGURE 6.2 The Committee; or Popery in Masquerade (1680), BM Sat 1080
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indictment of the opposition's moves for greater Parliamentary sovereignty – various non-conformist sects form a committee, which receives petitions from a dog and a horse, whilst below, Charles I and other victims of the Civil Wars are led in chains (left) and a Church of England minister is forced to vomit up

established vehicle of political controversy than previously recognized.⁸¹ The chronology fits – *The Gamesters* was issued on 16 March; *The Committee* on 15 April – as does the ideology.⁸² *The Gamesters* accused the Crown of a “popish” conspiracy against English liberties as safeguarded by Parliamentary powers, whilst *The Committee* suggested that attempts to safeguard those powers by altering the Succession was a conspiracy to subvert monarchy, masquerading as a protection of the realm from popery. Moreover, *The Committee*’s design was a riposte to the closing of the Pope’s speech in *The Gamesters*:

down with Pins [...]
 Let each Man fall to Plotting in his Soul [...]
 Cabal together, *Guinnies* will, I’m sure,
 Keep *Argos* Hands, the hundred Eyes secure;
 And ere’t be long some Stratagem contrive,
 Which may your Freedoms and my cause retrieve [...]
 To make all sure, this my Counsel is,
 Which being follow’d, doubtless cannot miss;
 Pursue the Game I’t’h *Meal Tub* was begun,
 And he that dares that bold Adventure run,
 Shall be my Darling, Satan’s eldest Son.
 Follow that close, get *Presbyterian* down,
 The day’s our own, ye cannot miss the Crown.⁸³

The context here was the Meal Tub Plot – a plot invented by Catholics to divert attention away from the Popish Plot by claiming that it was fabricated by dissenters (Presbyterians) to whip up anti-Catholic fervour and manipulate Parliament into overthrowing the Crown, echoing the events of 1640–1642.⁸⁴ The line, “Get Presbyterian down [...] ye cannot miss the Crown,” referred to these attempts to discredit the dissenters – a significant part of the Exclusion lobby – thus leaving England vulnerable to popish assaults. The champion of this popish strategy – “Satan’s eldest son,” who continued “the Game I’t’h Meal Tub begun” – was surely L’Estrange, whose works persistently poked at memories

81 Joseph Monteyne, *The Printed Image in Early Modern London* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), argues persuasively that England’s graphic industry was reaching maturation during the late 1670s.

82 Both copies in the British Museum are annotated and dated in the hand of Narcissus Luttrell.

83 BM Sat 1077.

84 John Kenyon, *The Popish Plot* (London: Phoenix, 2000), pp. 189–190, 199, 221.

of previous attempts at constitutional change by “Presbyterians” (i.e. the Civil Wars), to undermine the plot as a lever of constitutional change.⁸⁵

The Committee responded in a contra-textual manner, mocking the words, images, and ideology of *The Gamesters*, in order to discredit them, and thereby positively establishing its own position. For L'Estrange the “Presbyterians” did not protect the Crown, but endangered it. It was they, not the Court, who “Caball[ed] together” – a pun on the initials of prominent opposition leaders (Clifford, Ashley, Buckingham, Arlington and Lauderdale) – overlooking the committee of Presbyterians who plot for anarchy under two joined hands (top-left). What other purpose do the latter serve if not as a delicious wink to *The Gamesters*’ “Guinnies will [...] keep *Argos* Hands, the hundred Eyes secure | And ere’t be long some Stratagem contrive, Which may your Freedoms and my cause retrieve”? In *The Committee*, dangerous freedoms are “Presbyterian,” not “Popish”; namely parliamentary sovereignty. This would not protect England’s political order (as College urged), but destroy it:

*What could ye look for else? For’tis Dominion,
That you do all contend for, not Opinion.
If you’ll have any Government; then say,
Which Party shall Command, and which Obey.
Power is the thing ye both Affect, and Hate,
Every one would, ye Cannot, All be Great.
This is, in short, the Sum of the Contest;
Still He that’s Up’s an Eye-sore for to the Rest.
Presbytery breeds Worms: This Maggot-Fry
Is but the Spawn of Lawless Liberty.
License, is like a Sea-Breach to your Ground;
Suffer but One Flaw, the whole Country Drowns.*⁸⁶

It speaks volumes of the capacity of the visual that the positions advocated by one graphic satire required refutation with another: College’s corrective virtue had to be restyled as corrosive vice. For L'Estrange the issue was license, of news collapsing into excessive and fractious liberty by passing beyond the dictates of permissible public discourse into matters of state.⁸⁷ Whilst College

85 Harris, *Restoration*, pp. 219–220. On the opposition masking their intentions through ‘popery’ see L'Estrange, *Observer*, i, 58, 1/10/1681, recto; i, 160 24/6/1682 recto; id., *Narrative of the plot*, p. 21; *Brief History of the Times* (1687), i, 5, ii, 89.

86 BM Sat 1080.

87 R. L'Estrange, *A Word concerning Libels and Libellers* (London, 1681); id., *A Short Answer to a Whole Litter of Libels* (London, 1680).

(and later satirists) understood satire as an exercise of counsel safeguarding against tyranny (corrective), L'Estrange saw only mockery destroying the hierarchical bonds holding society together (corrosive). Yet both understood it to possess exceptional import. Whether licentious or revelatory, the force of this news rested upon the combination of satirical agency and intensive ephemerality. Momentous within the moment, that L'Estrange felt compelled to counter *The Gamesters* by charging it with sedition, was a backhanded compliment to graphic satire's power as commentary with a heightened import to inspire action within the public sphere.

Conclusion

Visual media was as much a species of satire as news. Pierce and Sharpe noted that graphic satires were a medley of tropes, high and low, textual and iconographic, and in overlapping with other news media *The Gamesters* was no exception. Yet we must distinguish between graphic satires *responding* to news media, and being *absorbed* into it. Two observations are significant: (1) its increasingly dialogical nature suggests that graphic satire had its own space within the print marketplace; and (2) its allusive opacity suggests that this space existed for a highly politically literate audience. Alive to the plot trials, manuscript satire, and parliamentary debate, *The Gamesters* was a responsive commentary intensely active only in the instant it was issued. That intensity rested upon emulation of classical satirists' provision of political counsel – College's mock-heroic print drew implicit parallels between his protest against Danby/Charles and the classical satirists' defence of liberty against tyranny. Moreover, satire's didactic reform or correction through the vivid presentation of virtue and vice, was heightened by the visual aspect: our print was, after all, an allegorical map of the ongoing political crisis. Demanding and dense, *The Gamesters* teased audiences into engaging with its ideology by inviting them to unlock its allusions. Such audience involvement heightened the print's impact. That satire was understood as a form of action accorded visual media considerable agency in the politics of agitation. Competent readers expected satire to perform moral functions, rallying collective anger around a shared target to urge its expulsion. For others, like L'Estrange, these potentialities possessed subversive import necessitating an extensive retort in kind. If left uncontained, ridicule's corrosiveness had a long half-life: thus in *Absalom and Achitophel*, Dryden thought it necessary to rebuff satires published more than ten years earlier.⁸⁸

88 Love, *Clandestine*, pp. 117–118.

It was Charles, not L'Estrange, who ultimately undercut *The Gamesters*. The Parliament of April 1680 for which it was intended, never sat, prorogued by the king until October.⁸⁹ Nor was the print's resolution ever fulfilled. With the exception of Stafford, none of the peers were tried and the Commons were never revenged upon Danby. But although missing its intended mark, our print undoubtedly had an impact: L'Estrange's response – both immediately in *The Committee* and a year later after College's execution – testifies to its power. But another response is perhaps more revealing. In August 1683, Lord Petre was reportedly “very merry” in the Tower, announcing that he expected to be “cleared about next spring [...] by Parliament”. The context for this declaration? A game of nine-pins on the Tower's green.⁹⁰ That could be read as coincidence. Or, perhaps, it was intended as a stinging rebuff to the opposition as the plot exhausted itself. We might see it as evidence of the precision-power of satirical imagery to cut through the noise of news discourse and to become part of the vocabulary of politics.

89 Miller, *Charles*, pp. 329–331, 334–335.

90 CSP Dom., 1683, p. 308.