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: “whosoever Defames the Government at This rate, wishes it Overturnd.”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
Figure 6.1 The Catholic Gamesters or A Dubble Match of Bowling (1680), BM Sat 1077
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