The OP war, libertarian communication, and graphic reportage in Georgian London

Between 18 September 1809 and January 1810 metropolitan theatregoers raged over the changes to 'The House That Jack Built' [Plate 1].[1] Destroyed by fire nearly a year earlier, the new Covent Garden theatre, built over the preceding nine months, boasted three thousand seats and twenty-six lavish private boxes, an architectural restyling orchestrated by the theatre's manager, part-owner and lead actor, John Philip Kemble. In order to fund these improvements, the size of the one shilling upper gallery was reduced and a modest increase in admission prices was implemented. Standard boxes were now charged at 7s. as opposed 6s., and the pit at 4s. as opposed to 3s. 6d. Given that Drury Lane theatre, the other half of London's patent theatre duopoly, had been closed since 24 February 1809 (another victim of fire), Kemble *et al* had reason to expect that they would open the reinvigorated theatric space to widespread acclaim.[2] Instead they faced an enormous public backlash.

The riots that followed were not simply a response to change, but to the perceived illegitimacy of the new conditions imposed on this public space. A return to 'Old Prices' (hence the acronyms 'O.P.' and 'OP') quickly became a rallying cry of a broader struggle over the removal of private boxes (which hid the immorality of the fashionable and leisured from the public gaze), authoritarian rule (symbolised by the actor-manager John Philip Kemble), foreign influence (on the management, on the stage and in the pit), the right to legitimate protest (checked repeatedly by Bow Street magistrates) and the answerability of public bodies to custom (Covent Garden was a patent, hence public, theatre). From the fudged committee report on the theatre's finances produced between 23 September and 4 October (during which time Covent Garden theatre closed), the management's attempted conciliation of 11 November, to the bitter legal dispute

1 Isaac [and George] Cruikshank, 'This is the House that Jack Built' (29 September 1809, S W Fores) [BM 11416].

2 Though of course, as argued in Jane Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre in London, 1770-1840* (Cambridge, 2000), Londoners also had the option of watching performances in one of the metropolis' burgeoning illegitimate theatres.

between Henry Clifford (a barrister and OP) and James Brandon (long time door-keeper of Covent Garden theatre), the OP War dominated multiple arenas and mediums of public communication. At stake became not merely customarily legitimated access to public space, but the universality of British law and British liberty under threat, OPs (as the supports of Old Prices became known) argued, from arbitrary (aristocratic) power.

Rather than probe debates over the meaning of the riots themselves,[3] this essay will explore the differences between metropolitan newspaper reportage, specifically that found in *The Times*, the newspaper which held the most ambiguous and ambivalent position with respect to the justification for OP protests, and the reportage of graphic satirists. In sum, I will argue that newspaper reportage of events in Covent Garden theatre can be signified as acting in 'real' time, whilst the reportage of graphic satirists on those same events was 'virtual'. From this methodological position, which also problematises the orthodoxy that graphic satires were aimed at 'the public' in its widest sense, I will move on to analyse two ways in which these differences were manifested, before detailing the specific mode with which the graphic satirist acted as a reporter on 'real' events during the OP war. Finally I will propose that the OP war represents a moment where satirical artist-engravers such as Isaac Cruikshank, William Dent, Thomas Rowlandson, and (to a lesser extent) James Gillray escaped their 'virtual' realm of representation and became, through their work, active agents in OP protest.[4]

Processes of Georgian reportage

3 For detailed analyses of the riots, see Marc Baer, *Theatre and Disorder in late Georgian London* (Oxford, 19 92).Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre*, 62-9, offers a revision of Baer's focus on high political narratives, and places OP instead within a growing reaction against theatric monopolies.

4 A contention which has implications for historians wider understanding of this so-called 'Golden Age' of graphic satire, as it unpacks the myth of their 'popular' focus and 'universal language' of communication. For criticism of accounts of satirical prints which tend towards a 'popular' focus see Eirwen E. C. Nicholson, 'Consumers and Spectators: The Public of the Political Print in Eighteenth-Century England', *History* (January, 1990), 5-21.

Obvious differences are evident in the methods of communication used by the newspaper press and graphic satirists in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Most fundamentally, whilst the former used text (almost exclusively) to invoke in their readership an imaginative visual experience, the latter presented consumers with both factually reductive and elaborate ocular vistas. But beyond these aesthetic divergences in communicating representations of events, the OP war highlights two crucial registers of difference between newspapers and graphic satire.

The first is volume. Metropolitan newspapers were printed with regularity, whether daily, tri-weekly or bi-weekly. Daily newspapers in particular set aside column inches for reports on events at Covent Garden theatre in every edition during our period of enquiry, generating a huge (and diffuse) body of debate and information for contemporaries to digest. By contrast, graphic satires were published more erratically and at a much slower pace. Unlike modern newspaper cartoons, the immediacy of Georgian satirical prints was constrained by the laborious processes of etching, engraving and printing required of artists and publishers. Moreover as the production of each single sheet satire required significant capital investment and risk from both artist and publisher, the business models of satirical printers and newspaper proprietors were significantly different. Thus, whilst newspapers were rivalled in volume (both in terms of unique items and the number of those items prints) only by books and ephemeral materials such as pamphlets, broadsides and ballads, publishers of satirical prints had more in common with the niche and semi-luxurious map trade.[5] The outcome of this is that although surviving satirical prints from the latter third of 1809 may be dominated by responses to OP, those responses total little over thirty in number.

The second associated register of difference between newspapers and graphic satire is temporal. *The Times* for example reported upon disturbances of the previous evening at Covent Garden theatre six days a week (events from Saturday appearing in Monday's editions). This was

5 For the London map trade, see Mary Pedley (ed.), *The Map trade in the late eighteenth century: letters to the London mapsellers Jeffreys and Faden* (Oxford, 2000).

augmented by OP related correspondence from the Bow-Street magistrates office and the Middlesex Quarter-sessions, letters to the editor, playbills, occasional correspondence from the Covent Garden theatre management, advertisements for OP medals, books, prints and other associated ephemera, and details of a subscription list raised to relieve OPs prosecuted by the Covent Garden theatre management. Thus newspapers represented not only a vast repository of detailed factual information,[6] but an intricate network of communication distinguished by its capacity for reflexivity. And that communication was not confined to the letterpress. When on 2 November 1809 OPs chose to conclude their nightly performance outside Covent Garden theatre, the targets of their ire were not the residences of the management but the premises of London's newspapers. On that night *The Times* writes that the OPs, 'processing two by two', gave 'three loud cheers at the *Morning Chronicle* office, and three ditto groans at the *Morning Post* office'.[7] Thus the reflexive quality newspapers brought to the conflict is explicitly identified by the OPs in a display of knowledge of the preferences and biases held by the press.[8]

Graphic satires on the other hand may have possessed immediate ocular visuality, but the accessibility of this medium in Georgian society should not be overstated. As Roy Porter writes 'it was never words for the literate and pictures for the unlettered', and thus:

> To see pictures as a sort of baby-food mode of communication, pap for those whose minds could not digest real words, would be to misread the function of the visual image in emergent commercial culture.[9]

Indeed the 'visual image' presented by satirical designs was encoded with symbols, allegory and encrypted meaning due to, in part, the differing reactive function of graphic satire compared to newspapers. Whilst newspapers reported narratives of events (though hardly with universal

6 Typically delivered with precision. Though on occasion *The Times* reportage does appear distinctly vague, see 29 November where it was reported: 'At the conclusion of the performance, three cheers were eked out for something, and three groans for another thing'.

7 *The Times*, 3 November 1809, 2.

8 A position maintained in Heather McPherson, 'Theatrical riots and cultural politics in eighteenth-century London', *Eighteenth Century: theory and interpretation*, 43:3 (Fall 2002), 236-53.

9 Roy Porter, 'Review Article: Seeing the Past', *Past & Present*, 118 (February, 1988), 189.

objectivity), graphic satires reacted from a perspective of temporal and chronological distance from those events. As a result the reactive representations of events found in graphic satire tended towards broad summarising positions and, as we shall see, mythical and counter-factual narratives.

What this discussions suggests then is that rather than existing as unproblematically dissimilar modes of reportage, the differences between newspapers and graphic satires were fundamental to their coexistence as modes of communication, and thus the meaning and impact of their numerical and temporal idiosyncrasies require exploration. Moreover it is clear that these modes of communication require nomenclature - newspapers operated in 'real' time; graphic satire on a 'virtual', spectatorial plane.

To test this hypothesis of 'real' and 'virtual' reportage, two aspects of reportage in graphic satires responding to the OP war will be analysed. First, this paper will discuss the placards raised by the 'virtual' OPs within these designs, to see how they correspond to patterns found in 'real' *The Times* reportage. Second, this paper will investigate how far retrospective ideological narratives impacted upon the presentation of actual events in graphic satire. Combined this analysis may appear to exclude notions of the graphic satirist as an active agent in the OP conflict. However it is argued that in these two respects artist-engravers followed the established patterns of their trade in deference to the artist/publisher/consumer nexus prints were produced within.[10] It is only by outlining first how and where satirical graphic designs retained their established virtuality, that those moments of direct intervention and agency on the part of Rowlandson, Cruikshank *et al* with the OP war emerge.

Placards

10 For the artist/publisher/consumer nexus as a methodological framework, see James Baker, 'Isaac Cruikshank and the notion of British liberty' (University of Kent PhD thesis, 2010).

The anonymous reporter(s) working for *The Times* during the OP war took (for the most part) great care to describe the placards on display in Covent Garden theatre. Their appearance was first noted on 21 September, where it was reported that during the previous evening (the third night of the conflict) large placards inscribed “Old Prices for ever: never submit to the new ones”, “Native Talent” and “No CATALANI” were exhibited in the front boxes to 'unbounded applause'.[11] Henceforth placards became a near daily part of the both the protest and *The Times*'s reportage.

These reports highlight first the creative character of OP placards.[12] Although focused on the key issues (prices, arbitrary management, private boxes, foreign influence) they quickly diversified to tackle associated complaints, often through witty verse. On 9 October appeared “The Drama's laws the Drama's patrons give | For they who live to please, must please to live”;[13] on 1 November “The Devil is black | And so is Jack.”;[14] and on 8 November “J.K. shall see | That the O.P. | Ever will be. | From New Prices Free”.[15] A second marked feature reported upon is the reactivity of these placards. Reporting on the events of 11 October, five days after Kemble introduced hired boxers to suppress the OPs to the effect that the pit 'appeared a second Babel' with 'Jews, Turks, Hibernians, Bow-Street Officers, pugilists, pickpockets, all jumbled together',[16] *The Times* noted the OPs in the pit carrying 'the following, affixed to long poles':

> “John Bull, be firm, defy the ruffian throng,
>
> “Thy rattles safe – they cannot touch thy tongue.”
>
> “Oppose Shylock, | And the whole tribe of Israel”
>
> “Fair play and fair prices.”

11 *The Times*, 21 September 1809, 3.
12 It is worth noting that no placards are reported to have appeared in support of the management. The reason for this, we can speculate, is because such an action would only have given credence to the riotous counter-spectacle.
13 *The Times*, 10 October 1809, 3.
14 *The Times*, 2 November 1809, 2.
15 *The Times*, 9 November 1809, 2.
16 *The Times*, 10 October 1809, 3.

"Who support the Managers? Profligate Jews, hired ruffians."[17]

The next evening appeared "BISH for ever! | MENDOZA never!",[18] a response to a letter from Thomas Bish (the well-known lottery proprietor) in support of the OPs published in *The Times* the same morning.[19] Similarly ephemeral were placards raised prior to the Royal Jubilee celebrations of 25 October 1809. One placard visible on 23 October read:

"Lads in the pit,

"D'ye think it is fit

"That our KING's Jubilee

"Should be King JOHN's?

"Be Britons on the 25th,

"And rally on the 26th"[20]

And again on 22 November OPs hoisted a placard reading "Persons with colds are requested not to cough or sneeze aloud: they will otherwise be taken to Bow-street", a response to the arrest the previous night of one John Robson, a shipowner, for, according to *The Times* report of 22 November, 'artificial sneezing and coughing'.[21]

Of course not all placards raised are known. *The Times* keenly recognised this fact, remarking often on placards 'we noticed',[22] that were 'recognized',[23] on occasions when they were 'very numerous, but too long for transcription',[24] or when 'there was more than one to the following effect'.[25] On 15 November *The Times* reported that 'we noticed the following new placards among the many old ones',[26] and again on 21 November *The Times* wrote that 'a few old placards were sported' before

17 *The Times*, 12 October 1809, 3.
18 *The Times*, 13 October 1809, 2.
19 *The Times*, 12 October 1809, 3.
20 *The Times*, 24 October 1809, 3.
21 *The Times*, 22 November 1809, 2.
22 *The Times*, 12 October 1809, 3.
23 *The Times*, 2 November 1809, 2.
24 *The Times*, 7 November 1809, 3. Nov 7. See also *The Times*, 13 November 1809, 3.
25 *The Times*, 8 November 1809, 3.
26 *The Times*, 15 November 1809, 2.

going on to list them.[27]

A further reason for why we are unable to know of all placards displayed is that their creation and use was extremely fluid. Indeed on 23 September *The Times* noted that new placards were displayed immediately after John Philip Kemble had appeared before the audience to announce the establishment of a committee to investigate the finances of Covent Garden theatre and the necessity (or otherwise) for the new prices.[28] Whilst no doubt the majority of placards were made outside the house,[29] indeed on 23 September one was 'ushered into the house by the sound of a rattle from one of the front boxes',[30] reports from 13 October indicate once more that placards were not only taken into Covent Garden theatre but created within it. When one placard reading "The public voice will not be silenced by foul means" was destroyed, a second promptly appeared stating "A Long pull, a strong pull, and a pull altogether".[31] The creation, destruction (by 'the friends of the Theatre'[32]) and recreation of placards were thus a significant aspect of the events occurring within this public space. As Berkeley Craven of Newmarket wrote in a letter to *The Times* published 17 October:

> If one man has a right to erect a placard to create a disturbance, another man has a right to pull it down, to prevent the wished-for disturbance being created.[33]

And that the NPs (supporters of 'New Prices') did, taking, a report from 28 November suggests, weapons into the theatre for the very purpose of destroying placards:

> The placards were not held up very long; and one or two of them were knocked to pieces with

27 *The Times*, 21 November 1809, 2.
28 *The Times*, 23 September 1809, 3.
29 The OPs advertised through a placard on 2 November that "A new edition of placards, with considerable improvements, is in preparation, and will speedily be produced"; *The Times*, 3 November 1809, 2. On 28 November it was noted that a placard making a pun between 'Don Juan' and 'Don John' was 'well printed in large characters'; *The Times*, 28 November 1809, 3.
30 *The Times*, 23 September 1809, 3.
31 *The Times*, 14 October 1809, 2.
32 *The Times*, 20 November 1809, 3.
33 *The Times*, 17 October 1809, 3.

> the sticks of the anti-O.P.'s to the certain occasionment of a scuffle.[34]

These placards then were more than merely messages but a central component of this physical and visual spectacle, and a significant enough feature of the reportage to render their absence a novelty.[35]

By contrast, representations in graphic satire of events at Covent Garden theatre attach very different meanings to the placards displayed by OPs. Comparing these 'virtual' placards to the reportage found in *The Times* one is struck by their detachment from 'real' events.[36] In *ACTING MAGISTRATES committing themselves being their first appearance on this stage as performed at the National Theatre Covent Garden Sept 18 1809* [Plate 2] Isaac and George Cruikshank present an erroneous representation of the opening night's events at the new theatre.[37] Not only were the rattles, horns, bells and placards of the Cruikshanks design not evident in the reportage of actual events, but one placard central to the design, which contains the amateur accounting of the OPs and thus accuses the management of increasing prices for personal fiscal gain, illustrates that artist and publisher were consciously conflating events. This addition essentially dates the print to after 22 September when Kemble announced the theatre's closure to investigate its finances, or even 4 October when the committee's fudged report was published and the theatre reopened. The reality of the graphic reportage unravels around this small detail, thus asserting the mythical quality of the design and the artificiality of its presentation of events at Covent Garden theatre.

Stating that graphic satirists drew upon myth, exaggeration and embellishment in their designs is

34 *The Times*, 28 November 1809, 3.

35 *The Times*, 22 November 1809, 2.

36 A notable exception being the three surviving imitation bank notes published during the conflict, one of which, published circa December 1809 by Luffman (and later copied by Fores) taking umbrage at restrictions of the good humour of the English theatre crowd, focusing specifically at the aforementioned arrests for sneezing by writing: 'When Justasses take bail for f-rt-nng! | Tis time this Land & I were parting'; [Imitation Bank Note] (c. Dec 1809, Luffman) [BM 11431]. These prints are however primarily textual and therefore, despite being printed by a publisher of graphic satires such as Fores, are not strictly graphic satires.

37 [Isaac and George Cruikshank], *ACTING MAGISTRATES committing themselves being their first appearance on this stage as performed at the National Theatre Covent Garden Sept 18 1809* (September 1809) [BM 11418].

hardly revelatory. What it should do however is force us to ponder why satirists might present a clearly counter-factual account of a known public event. Again placards are a useful way into this problem. The placards in *ACTING MAGISTRATES* display largely simple messages such as “OLD PRICES” (seven times), “No Catalani” (five times), “Harris will but Kemble won't”, “John Bull against John Kemble”, “No Foreign Sofas”, “£6000 for Caterwauling”, and “No Italian Private Boxes”. At the beginning of the conflict it is indeed likely that such messages were most prominent, yet despite placards becoming increasingly sophisticated the Cruikshank's *KILLING no MURDER. as Performing at the Grand National Theatre* [Plate 3], published during November 1809,[38] retains the simplistic motifs of 'OLD PRICES', 'NO PRIVATE BOXES' (twice), 'NO PIGEON HOLES', and 'NO HIRED RUFFIANS'. Thus whilst theatregoers and *The Times* readers in early November experienced direct ephemeral placards such as “Terms of Peace – Old Prices – No Private Boxes, and BRANDON discharged”,[39] and witty verse such as “Be silent without; | Be noisy within; | And then, without doubt, | John Bull will win”,[40] consumers of graphic satire were presented with far more generic placards. And although on 28 November *The Times* recorded a number of 'less exceptional placards' these remained more 'exceptional' than though found in satirical graphic designs.

What this divergence between reportage of placards tells us is that graphic satirists were keen to present a generic picture of the conflict at Covent Garden theatre in order to avoid seeming out of step with events. This may seem perverse given that graphic satirists also willingly conflated events into a counter-factual narrative, but I would argue that the overarching *raison d'être* of graphic designs representing the OP War was never to present 'reality'. Instead they functioned on a 'virtual' plane where fact and time were open to reinterpretation in order to raise a mythical picture of the OP conflict presented through graphic satire. The prints sold at West End and City printshops at prices above those of 'popular' or folk prints, were testaments to the multiplicity of

38 [Isaac and George] Cruikshank, *KILLING no MURDER. as Performing at the Grand National Theatre* (November 1809, Thomas Tegg) [BM 11425].

39 *The Times*, 7 November 1809, 3.

40 *The Times*, 8 November 1809, 3.

events middling OPs had witnessed during the conflict.

Retrospective Narration

On Saturday 7 October 1809 *The Times* first noted the 'pugilistic contests' in the pit of Covent Garden theatre. 'On the dropping of the curtain', *The Times* continued, 'the audience in the Pit did not sit down, as usual, to rest, but, by way of variety, cuffed each other until it rose again'.[41] The following Monday in a letter to the editor of *The Times* a correspondent writing under the pseudonym 'A FRIEND OF THE NEW PRICES' described how on 6 October 'he entered [the pit] with an intention of supporting the Manager' but 'was surprised to find four or five of the preceding benches [from the centre] covered with Jews of the lowest description'. He sat himself by 'this motley groupe [*sic*] […] without a thought of danger', but once the OPs commenced their protest events took a sinister turn. He writes:

> The duty of the Jews then developed itself, and I discovered from their agitation, that they were arranging a plan of grand attack […] At length, by a signal from a box over the stage door, about 20 of them, supported in the rear by several notorious bruisers, made a dreadful rush, prostrating and trampling upon the peaceable possessors of three or four intervening seats, among whom were several delicate and interesting females, and converting the whole pit into a scene of destructive riot and confusion […] With such partisans, who could support the Manager?[42]

In this polarised atmosphere the OPs were synonymous with a libertarian British public standing against the arbitrary greed of the NPs, epitomised by the management and box holders. From early October 1809 with the management receiving vigorous criticism for their association with Jewish

41 *The Times*, 7 October 1809, 2.
42 *The Times*, 9 October 1809, 2.

pugilists, tacitly supported it seemed by the legal establishment,[43] this battle also became between Christians and Jews. And this transferred itself effortlessly onto John Philip Kemble,[44] the public face of Covent Garden's management who now, it was written, relied on the 'support of his brutal and unchristian colleagues'.[45]

Thus alongside placards proclaiming "Christians! turn out the Jews!",[46] and appeals to biblical stereotypes such as "Shall a Christian people be subdued by the wanderers of Jerusalem? Forbid it. Heaven!",[47] were more pointed attacks on Kemble's now supposedly Jewish characteristics:

> "Whilst KEMBLE gains by Jew's applause
>
> "And Iannels insult our laws.
>
> "We'll bring to mind the Holy Land,
>
> "And shew that Christians will command."[48]

Similarly on 16 October a handbill was distributed entitled 'Mr. JEW KEMBLE', most likely the same mock handbill noted in greater detail by the *Caledonian Mercury* on 21 October.[49] 'The uproar' on that night was, the *Mercury* writes, 'greater than we ever remember to have heard it'. Half price entrants contributed to the swell of discontent heightened by a moment of theatric misfortune. Appearing in the fifth act of *Richard III* as Richmond, Kemble 'was met with the accustomed disapprobation'. His choice of character within the context of the OP war was no doubt conscious - Richmond's entry being a triumphant assumption of the role of protagonist. However Richmond's overthrowing of the King, the denouement of the play, did not go to plan:

> In the contest with *Richard*, at the conclusion of the play, his foot slipped, and he fell upon his

43 In addition to numerous letter of complaint with respect to arrests of OPs and bail levels set by the Bow Street magistrates printed in the *The Times*, a law report from the Court of King's Bench (*The Times*, 21 November 1809, 3) makes the association abundantly clear. Government support for the management is also alluded to in [Isaac and George] Cruikshank, *King John and John Bull* (October 1809, John Fairburn) [BM 11419], *OLD PRICE and SPANGLE JACK* [BM 11420].

44 Peter Thomson, 'Kemble, John Philip (1757–1823)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

45 *The Times*, 9 October 1809, 3.

46 *The Times*, 13 October 1809, 2.

47 *The Times*, 14 October 1809, 3.

48 *The Times*, 14 October 1809, 3.

49 *Caledonian Mercury* (Edinburgh, Scotland), 21 October 1809.

face on the stage. This afforded great triumph.

In this atmosphere of jubilation and ridicule the aforementioned mock hand-bill was distributed stating 'This Evening will be presented, for the Last Time, an Operatic Farce, in One Act, called | IMPOSITION'. The failure of Kemble (identified here with the Catholic traits of 'Avarice, Pride, Affectation and Insolence') to assume his role of King with dignity could not be more comic. The text continues in the usual vein, placing Kemble in opposition to John Bull and ridiculing 'his celebrated address of “WHAT DO YOU WANT?”', before the mock programme details the conclusion of the evenings entertainment:

> Afterwards will be performed, for the last time, the first Act of a Grand unfinished Tragic Ballet of Acrion, called JOHN OX; or
>
> The cruel attempt to Despoil John Bull of his
>
> Nobel Parts.
>
> The whole being arranged under the Management of
>
> Mr JEW KEMBLE

In sum, *The Times* and the *Caledonian Mercury* reported on events which played upon both the supposed Jewishness of Kemble's actions and his association with Jewish people to demarcate him as Jewish. This behaviour was not atypical. Race was a notoriously slippery category in the long-eighteenth century.[50] Isaac Land notes 'the “Jew” label was applied indiscriminately to non-Jews who exhibited allegedly Jewish behaviours […] Such a person must “be” a Jew'.[51] Kemble's Catholicism was seemingly little barrier to this labelling, as arbitrary crypto-Catholicism merged with the flexible 'Jew' motif to create a composite characterisation, 'Othered' by virtue of his absurd typographical complexity. And this satiric strategy was replicated in graphic satire. In Isaac and George Cruikshank's *KINGS PLACE & CHANDOS STREET in an UPROAR or a SENTIMENTAL*

50 See Roxann Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race: Catagories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture* (Philadelphia, 2000).

51 Isaac Land, 'Jewishness and Britishness in the Eighteenth Century', *History Compass* 3 (2005), 4.

OPPOSITION. [Plate 4] Kemble is shown as Sancho Pança, tossed by bawds for his misdemeanours, with a cross around his neck symbolising his Catholic faith.[52] However anti-Jewish rhetoric within the print is aimed at the stage – 'smite the Jews. out with the ruffians'; 'Turn out the Jews turn 'em out'; 'up with the Vagrants' – thus explicitly granting unto Kemble a Jewish identity also present in the similarity of profiles granted to Kemble and the Jewish boxer (extreme right) sneaking up behind John Bull.

Where graphic satire and newspaper reportage differ however is in the narrativisation of these events. Whilst *The Times* clearly identifies the moment Jewish boxers entered the OP war, by identifying Kemble as Jewish graphic satires subtly retold events to suggest that a Jewishness was *always* present in the behaviour of the management. This anachronistic virtual narrative is evident in the retrospective *Strollers Progress* published in six parts by Thomas Tegg in November 1809.[53] Explicitly, the *Progress* charts Kemble's rise from a child born into a chaotic Punch and Judy show to a tyrannical crypto-Catholic agent of the devil. Yet narrative undercurrents link Kemble with stereotypical Jewish traits. In the third plate [Plate 5] a dishevelled Kemble raises a flail to a washerwomen.[54] Behind him a pamphlet reads 'Beaux Strategem' and 'The Cheats of Scapin' - the former referring to George Farquhar's *The Beaux's Strategem* (1707), a tale of entrapment and avarice; the latter to Moliere's *Les Fourberies de Scapin* (1671), which dramatises the life of Scapin, an Italian stock or zanni character typically depicted as a rakish, thieving and cowardly conman with a hooked nose. By themselves these hints to typologically Jewish traits are not sufficient to link the *Progress* with an exploration of Kemble's Jewishness. The preceding plate [Plate 6]

52 [Isaac and George] Cruikshank, *KINGS PLACE & CHANDOS STREET in an UPROAR or a SENTIMENTAL OPPOSITION*. (20 October 1809, S W Fores) [BM 11421].

53 Tegg's support of the OP cause is evinced by his name appearing as a receiver for the 'SUBSCRIPTIONS for the assistance of PERSONS considered UNJUSTLY PROSECUTED by the PROPRIETORS and MANAGERS of COVENT GARDEN THEATRE'; *The Times*, 28 October 1809, 2.

54 [Isaac and George] Cruikshank, *The Strollers Progress Pt3* (November 1809, Thomas Tegg) [BM 11427].

however offers more obvious cues.[55] Here Kemble, resplendent with cross and rosary, holds his hat out to a group of travelling actors, his ragged beggarly nature recalling the classic stereotypical descriptions of the 'Wandering Jew'.[56] He may hide his hooked nose from his benefactors, but this concoction of physical and behavioural characteristics locate Kemble squarely within typologies of Jewishness. Thus in the *Progress* real narratives of Jewish entry into the OP war collapse and are replaced by a virtual narrative where Kemble was 'a Jew' before not only the rebuilding of Covent Garden theatre, the ensuring OP riots and the pugilistic contests of 6 October, but *before* his entry into the London theatric scene.

As the discussion of placards revealed, this practice of creating anachronistic narratives was seemingly commonplace in graphic reportage of the OP war. And this blurring of truth and myth allowed various counter-factual elements to creep into graphic reportage. In the aforementioned *KILLING no MURDER* OPs in the pit are subjected to a brutal assault from a group of Jew pugilists. On the extreme right one OP wimpers 'Murder', whilst his colleague, straddled by a subhuman bone wielding attacker, lies unconscious on a pit bench. In the centre a bleeding OP is robbed of his pocket watch as assailants claw at his clothing, attack him with canes, cudgels, and spiked bats, and kick him to his knees. His Jewish opponents, demarcated as such by both their physiognomically distinctive silhouette and the insignia '31' (a reference to Jeremiah 31, a testament of Jewish survival), recall the savage mania attributed to French revolutionary armies by English graphic artists in the 1790s,[57] itself a satiric trope with a long communicative heritage. To the right of this scene, a fourth OP, crying 'murder' in horror, is pinned down by the knee of a well dressed pugilist, the latter's profile distinctively similar to that of Kemble. However his speech identifies him as the noted contemporary Jewish boxer Dan Mendoza, reading: 'Down down to

55 [Isaac and George] Cruikshank, *The Strollers Progress Pt2* (November 1809, Thomas Tegg) [BM 11426].

56 See Felsenstein, Frank, *Anti-Semitic Stereotypes: A Paradigm of Otherness in English Popular Culture, 1660-1830* (Baltimore, 1995).

57 See for example Isaac Cruikshank, *Galic Perfidy, or the National Troops Attachment to their General after their Defeat at Tournay* (12 May 1792, S W Fores) [BM 8085].

H__l with all OPs & say t'was Dan that sent the there'. Thus Kemble is blurred by the Cruikshanks with the Jewish assailants suppressing the OPs under his instruction.[58]

Aside from offering a caricature of events, little of this narrative obviously deviates from the events observable in *The Times* reportage between 9 October and 20 October, after which anti-Jewish sentiment remained evident in placards and letters but not in reports of events in the theatre. Yet the print appeared in November, after the phase of the riots most closely associated with Jewish pugilists and contemporary with Kemble's failed letter of conciliation (*The Times*, 11 November) apologising for setting 'some improper examples' and for the 'severity' of the management; coded references to the hiring of (Jewish) pugilists.[59] This problematises the subtitle of the print, *as Performing at the Grand National Theatre*, alerting us once more the aforementioned mythical picture presented in graphic representations of the OP war. Indeed although suspected of rounding up Jewish pugilists for Kemble outside of Covent Garden,[60] Mendoza's presence in the pit was more myth than reality; certainly *The Times* never reported his presence.

It must be reiterated that this counter-factual strategy of graphic reportage is hardly surprising. The function of graphic satire was to please consumers and to comment on events, not to factually inform. Yet these prints should not be dismissed as anti-reportage of little use to the historian. By contrast, the capital investment required to produce graphic satire demanded that the five-hundred to one-thousand copies that could be made before a copper-plate engraving was too warn to use be sold. Publishers therefore pitched the ideological content of their productions not at a 'mass' or 'public' market but at the metropolitan gentleman or bourgeois consumer.[61] What this business model, which I have hitherto referred to as the 'artist/publisher/consumer nexus',

58 Links between Kemble and Mendoza first noted in *The Times*, 11 Oct 1809, 3.

59 *The Times*, 11 November 1809, 2.

60 See letters from Bish to *The Times*, 12 October 1809, 3, and 20 October 1809, 2; and reports in *The Times*, 14 October 1809, 3.

61 For a model highlighting the importance of a broad metropolitan gentleman class, see William Stafford, 'Representations of Social Order in The Gentleman's Magazine, 1785-1815', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 33:2 (Spring, 2009), 64-91.

suggests to us is that the content of prints created by artist and publisher was sensitive to the ideologies of the expected consumers. OP prints therefore contained virtual narratives which paid but loose attention to fact and time not only because publishers were keen for their prints to offer a universal representation of the Covent Garden theatre experience (so as not to become obsolete), but also, as evinced by the continued association of the management with Jewish identity in placards and letters after 20 October, because consumers demanded such virtual narratives. And a key element of the virtual narratives present in satires revolving around enduring Jewish influence was, as already hinted at, the stereotype. It is to this timeless mode of reportage to which we shall now turn.

Stereotypical time – the graphic satirist as reporter

The invocation of Jewishness within the narration of the OP War in graphic satire highlights the trade's reliance upon the stereotype. The stereotype offered (and continues to offer) the satiric artist a readily available means of conveying a broad and flexible set of ideas, prejudices and characteristics.[62] In *KILLING no MURDER* stereotypes of Jewish and bourgeois metropolitan identities reduce the OP war to a simple 'then and us' dichotomy. Whilst the OPs, the quintessential gentleman Briton propped up by freedom loving, beer swilling John Bull,[63] are polite and express their grievances (even in the face of physical violence) through means authorised by Albionic custom, their Jewish opponents (in the characteristic rather than religious/national sense) are, as Dana Rabin writes of Jewish characterisation during the Jew Bill controversy of 1753, portrayed:

> As money grubbing, dishonest, cunning interlopers and [the prints and pamphlets] played on

62 See Ernst Gombrich, 'The Cartoonist's Armoury' in Ernst Gombrich, *Meditations on a hobby horse: and other essays on the theory of art* (London, 1971); V. A. C. Gatrell, *City of laughter: sex and satire in eighteenth-century London* (London, 2006); Martin Myrone (ed.), *Rude Britannia: British Comic Art* (London, 2010).

63 *THE SET-TOO between OLD PRICE and SPANGLE JACK the SHEWMAN* (October 1809, E Walker) [BM 11420].

> stereotypes of Jews as blasphemous, clannish, ambitious, and traitorous.[64]

It is these normative behavioural (rather than racial) labels,[65] associated with the Jew Pedlar, the Wandering Jew and the Jew-Sissy,[66] constituting a people seen by John Corry as 'notorious sharpers',[67] which form the antithetical Other against which OPs were pitched. And as the OPs themselves are depicted as embodiments of a natural English character, the narration of events here embedded itself within a timeless struggle between warring parties, stereotypical antipodes. Similarly the aforementioned *Progress* invokes stereotypes of Jewishness through 'Wandering Jew' narratives as counterpoints to Englishness, offering to the viewer a physiognomic caricature of Jewish appearance, a socially constructed caricature of Jewish character, and a cue to instinctive (and perhaps even neurological) compartmentalisations of British and Jewish types in order to shape and animate the discursive sphere of the OP conflict.[68]

It is from this perspective of stereotypical time that the graphic satirist becomes reporter; where his reportage ceases to be merely virtual. Thus far I have detailed the distinctions between reportage of the OP war in *The Times* and graphic satire. I have argued that whilst *The Times* offered a real narrative of events as they happened, graphic satire sought willingly to collapse time and create a virtual, mythical reportage of the conflict. However both these modes of reportage reported on a world fuelled by stereotypes, cradled by caricature if you will. More precisely they

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64 Dana Rabin, 'The Jew Bill of 1753: Masculinity, Virility, and the Nation', *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 39:2 (2006), 158.

65 Wheeler, *Race*, 2-11, 32-3, passim.

66 For the 'Jew-Sissy' see Matthew Biberman, *Masculinity, Anti-Semitism and Early Modern English Literature: From the Satanic to the Effeminate Jew* (Ashgate, 2004)

67 John Corry, *A Satirical View of London; or, a descriptive sketch of the English metropolis: with strictures on men and manners* (3rd edition. London, 1804), 50. The assumption that Jews were light-fingered appears in a dialogue between the Court and Uriah Cosset at the trial for theft of Lyon Abrahams (*Old Bailing Proceedings* (t18030420-93)): "Q. There was not a throng of business just at the moment? - A. No, there was not; they draw the beer in the bar; as soon as the prisoner was gone, the prosecutor asked Mrs. King whether she had the parcel, and she said, no; he said he was certain that the Jew must have got it'. Abrahams was found not guilty.

68 For the human instinct of physiognomic caricature in social life, see 'On Physiognomic Perception' in Ernst Gombrich, *Meditations*. For socially constructed caricatures of type, ergo stereotypes, see Walter Lippman, *Public Opinion* (New York, 1922). For postulations on the neurological apparatus potentially underpinning these actions, see Semir Zeki, *Inner Vision: An Exploration of Art and the Brain* (Oxford University Press, 2000).

both reported upon the metropolitan Britons relationship with those stereotypes, yet it was the graphic artist who came closest to reporting on this relationship. For whilst *The Times* reported upon, for example, the continuation of anti-Jewish sentiment after 20 October through details of the placards raised in Covent Garden theatre and publication of letters reflecting on the conflict, graphic satires escaped the confines of their self-imposed narrative and factual virtuality by offering reports upon the belief systems, mentalities and sentiments circulating the events at Covent Garden theatre. Detached enough to carefully negotiate immediate events through the lens of existing tropes, graphic satires operated most vitally at this level of stereotypical time, weaving narratives framed but not bound by both real and virtual reportage.

Once again the use of placards in graphic satire offers a useful case in point. Rowlandson's *THIS IS THE HOUSE THAT JACK BUILT* [Plate 7],[69] the earliest dated graphic response to the OP war, offers a variety of detailed placards and banners, including:

> "Dickons for ever No Catalani"
> "No Annual Boxes or Italian Singers"
> "None of Jesuitical tricks you Black Monk"
> "Be silent Mr Kemble's head aitches"
> "No Theatrical Taxation No intriguing Shop"
> "Kemble remember the Dublin Tin man"
> "No Annual Boxes no Italian Singers"
> "John Bull advises, To save your fame and sink your Prices"

However this design is a singular exception, with graphic representations of the crowd thereafter, such as the Cruikshanks *ACTNG MAGISTRATES*, foregrounding the broad motifs of the conflict. The logical extension of this discourse is Rowlandson's *THE BOXES* [Plate 8] which, save one plaque reading 'FROM N TO O JACK YOU MUST GO', eschews text entirely, choosing instead to rework these textual motifs into graphic forms.[70] The cry of "NO PIGEON HOLES" is replicated in the avian occupants of the upper tier; those of "No Foreign Sofas" and "No Italian Private Boxes" visualised

69 Thomas Rowlandson, *THIS IS THE HOUSE THAT JACK BUILT* (27 Sept 1809, Thomas Tegg) [BM 11414].
70 Thomas Rowlandson, *THE BOXES* (12 December 1809, Thomas Rowlandson) [BM 11433].

not only through the conduct of Rowlandson's box holders, but the subversive emblems upon which that tier rests - cupid and a key,[71] cuckold horns, a hare and cock, and women fighting a satyr (the traditional symbol of perverted sexuality).

As argued above, these generalisations and shorthands ensured prints avoided the appearance of being obsolete (perhaps explaining also the omission of precise dates from many prints). However this generality also functioned as a reportage on broad sentiments surrounding the conflict. Indeed in spite of the ephemeral, reactive and reflexive nature of *The Times* as a medium, their reportage also displayed formulaic elements. The tumult was typically described first with reference to the level of noise and activity of the previous night, after which the writer would move on to detail speeches, arrests and notable placards. The increase in riotous behaviour at half-price admission was then noted, followed by, in conclusion, a description of the behaviour of the audience upon their departure. It is hardly surprising then that *The Times* reported 16 November:

> The same thing. The history of one night's uproar is that of another; and we can make no variation in our record of what presents no difference of aspect.[72]

Thus one of perspective upon the riots was that of continual, repetitious, and uniform conflict. Indeed the stubbornness of OP rhetoric - “Be staunch to your cause”;[73] 'It being the 50th night since Covent Garden Theatre reopened, the O.P.'s were determined to celebrate their Jubilee by a general muster of their forces';[74] “Victory or death | The first 50 nights, or Jubilee of the O.P.'s | Three more this season”[75] - suggests that this perception of the conflict was widespread. Graphic satires therefore reported on this sentiment of perpetual war by distancing themselves from specific details of the conflict and focusing on broad themes and motifs. And as we have seen these themes were typically negotiated through the lens of existing stereotypical tropes, the

71 The key was the slang name for a brothel on Chandos Street. See *KINGS PLACE & CHANDOS STREET in an UPROAR or a SENTIMENTAL OPPOSITION*. [Plate 4].
72 *The Times*, 16 November 1809, 2.
73 *The Times*, 15 November 1809, 2.
74 *The Times*, 27 November 1809, 2.
75 *The Times*, 28 November 1809, 3.

eternal conflict between Jew and Protestant being the most notable, allowing graphic satires to present a convincing and consumable picture of events at Covent Garden theatre which drew upon but was not constrained by the conventions of real and virtual reportage. By commenting first on generic perceptions of the OP war and second on how the OP war fitted within narratives of apparent perpetual relevance to metropolitan Britons, graphic satirists were reporters.

Fragments – towards the graphic satirist as agent

I have argued above that graphic satirists were more than merely aloof satirical observers upon the OP conflict, cashing in on the relevance of the events at Covent Garden theatre to metropolitan Britons. Instead graphic satirists, within the logistical confines imposed by their medium, used strategies which made them reporters upon the mentalities surrounding the OP war. By way of a conclusion, I want to extend this argument one step further, and argue that graphic satirists and graphic satires were not only part of the reportage on the OP war, but that the fleeting mentions and allusions to the medium in the documentation that arose from the conflict suggests that we could also conceive graphic satirists and graphic satire as agents in the OP war.

Certainly, to take a crude barometer of impact, *The Times* made more regular mention of graphic satire during the OP conflict than is typically found in newspapers between 1780 and 1820. One letter to *The Times* published 15 October attributes unto graphic satire a role rarely articulated in this period, it writing:

> And here, Sir, allow me to express my indignation at the scurrility of some of your contemporary prints. They give a false account of the observations that are made in the Theatre; they fail in argument to convince the public of the justness of the cause they espouse,

> and supply its place with invectives the most unmanly, and falsehoods the most palpable.[76]

Such scurrilous influence is observable in a subscription list 'for the assistance of PERSONS considered UNJUSTLY PROSECUTED by the PROPRIETORS and MANAGERS of COVENT GARDEN THEATRE', details of which were published in *The Times* on nine occasions between 28 October and 23 November. Contained within these notices, ostensibly advertisements requesting further funds, were details of amounts pledged by various individuals. Intriguingly, individuals not only gave anonymously, but almost universally gave a comic or parodic name when donating. These names ranged from offering pointed criticisms ('An Enemy to the pride and insolence of modern Players', 3 November) to ephemeral absurdities ('The Chubby Tax Orator, R.T.', 1 November), yet across the duration of the advertisements they also repeated generic motifs less common on the placards displayed in Covent Garden theatre but *more* common in graphic designs and pamphlet literature. Therefore alongside those more inventive entries are found 'An Enemy to Hired Ruffians' (28 October), 'An Enemy of the introduction of Hired Boxers', 'The KEY to the Private Boxes', 'No hired Ruffians' (30 October), 'Old Price' (1 & 6 November), and 'A peep through the pigeon-holes' (3 November); generic statements used regularly, as argued above, in the virtual reportage of graphic satire.

Moreover 'caricature', in its theatrical form, was part of the process of protest.[77] On 1 November hats bearing medals inscribed “O.P.” are noted by *The Times* as first appearing in the pit. A day later, *The Times* reported:

> The O.P. Hats were very numerous; and several small metal ornaments with O.P. surmounted

76 *The Times*, 14 October 1809, 3.

77 The most extraordinary late-Georgian manifestation of this connection between graphic satire, caricature, the stage, and public theatricality can be seen in *A Lecture on Heads*, written and performed in London by George Alexander Stevens from 1767 until his death in 1783 (and Ireland, Scotland and the United States in his honour for many years after); see Gerald Kahan, George Alexander Stevens and The Lecture on heads (Athens, Georgia, 1984). For recent scholarly reflections on broader significance of the these links see: Heather McPherson, 'Painting, Politics and the Stage in the Age of Caricature', in Robyn Asleson (ed.), *Notorious Muse: The Actress in British Art and Culture 1776 – 1812* (Yale, 2003); Diana Donald, *The Age of Caricature: Satirical Prints in the Reign of George III* (Yale, 1996), esp. 93-108; Edward J. Nygren, 'Playing to the House: Cruikshank and the Theater', in Edward J. Nygren (ed.), *Isaac Cruikshank and the Politics of Parody: Watercolors in the Huntington Collection* (San Marino, 1994).

> by a Crown, were also worn. Some hats were inscribed with the words “Old Prices” at length […] The tumult acquired strength as the evening advanced, and the audience left the Theatre with their insignia in their hats.[78]

Scuffles, disputes, parades, speeches and dances often centred around the display of OP insignia. On 31 October, 18 November, and 27 November men were ordered by find bail by the Bow Street magistrates for merely wearing the insignia “O.P.” in their hats.[79] And extraordinarily John Glassington, promoter of Covent Garden theatre, declared Monday 20 November at the Court of King's Bench before Sir Vicary Gibbs, the Attorney General, that:

> He believed a conspiracy had been formed by those persons who bore the letters O.P. in their hats (which the deponent considered as the signal by which they knew each other) in order to compel the Proprietors to restore the old prices of admission to their theatre.[80]

Amidst this physical theatricality, artistic 'caricature' designs also appeared. On 14 November *The Times* reported that a:

> Prize placard was displayed in the huge shape of a painting of Mr. KEMBLE in the pillory, a good likeness, as large as life, with a key hanging round his neck, superscribed “To guilty minds a terrible example.” - SHAKESPEARE. and superscribed - “For keeping a house of ill fame.” On the reverse of this was written, “A wretched tumbrel was the actor's stage: | We make improvements in the present age.” This continued to be most conspicuously displayed almost the whole evening.[81]

On 18 November two graphic 'caricatures' were displayed in the pit.[82] The first an 'old caricature which was brought out when seven shilling-pieces were first introduced; and, at the bottom,

78 *The Times*, 2 November 1809, 2.

79 *The Times*, 1 November 1809, 2; *The Times*, 20 November 1809, 3; *The Times*, 28 November 1809, 3. The charge may seem absurd, but as Katrina Navickas writes: 'prominent role of vestimentary symbols in France made English opponents of the Revolution acutely sensitive to the wearing of political emblems, even if such items were well established or seemingly benign'; Katrina Navickas, '“That sash will hang you”: Political Clothing and Adornment in England, 1780 – 1840', *Journal of British Studies* 49 (July 2010), 542.

80 *The Times*, 21 November 1809, 2.

81 *The Times*, 14 November 1809, 2.

82 *The Times*, 20 November 1809, 3.

"dedicated to the visitors of the private boxes."'.[83] The reverse of a second placard showed:

> A figure of Mr. KEMBLE, exclaiming "What do you want?" at the same time that a bull, with O.P. round his neck, was tossing him in the air. The bull was also kicking a police officer in the rear.

These fragmentary sources suggest that graphic satires, and hence their publishers and designers, were not merely reporters on mentalities surrounding the OP conflict but also agents in the events themselves – graphic satires were decried by NPs; their most common motifs appropriated into the physical and literary activity of OPs; and, on occasion, taken into the pit for display. This is not to say that graphic satire was a centrally important component of the OP war, indeed the nature of newspaper reportage clearly made it a much more vital agent in the process of protest. Nonetheless I argue that graphic satire existed as a medium of reportage which aided in the process of holding the motifs and disputes of OP together. When gentleman Londoners went to Thomas Tegg's premises to donate in support of OPs, it was the prints which resembled every rather than any specific night at Covent Garden theatre which they saw displayed. It is this accessible relevance which ensured that during this period of libertarian protest, which as *The Times* feared threatened to spill into wider disturbances over perceived divisions of law and liberty,[84] graphic satires rather than hanging onto the coat-tails of events and opinion used instead the apparent disadvantage of their distance from events and their virtuality of representation to enter themselves into the process of reportage.

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83 The Times reporter continued: 'This had the instantaneous effect of scaring all the women from the private boxes, and many from the dress public boxes. We are sorry to say, that this indecent measure was received with the greatest applause by the men in the Theatre'

84 *The Times* was initially so concerned by the potential impact of the riots on wider lawlessness that it asked Londoners to 'abstain from frequenting the Theatre' in protest; *The Times*, 5 October 1809, 3. Once this advice had passed unheeded, *The Times* choose instead to support calls for not turning the OP war into a general tumult; see *The Times*, 8 November 1809, 3.