

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

1 The communications of the dead

What the dead had no speech for, when living,

They can tell you, being dead: the communication

Of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living

T. S. Eliot, 'Little Gidding' (1942) pt. 1.

This is a history of communication, specifically those communications found in past (imagined) communities which augmented, shaped and renegotiated shared culture. This culture, perceptible during the late Georgian era in public forms such as books, pamphlets, prints, performance, architecture, paintings and a wide range of ephemeral material, positions itself inextricably within the visual imagination. This then is also a history of visual communicative cultures, of the various shapes and forms that occupied the ocular registers of past peoples. Graphic satire was one of these contemporary visual forms and it is therefore a task of this thesis to place this printed single-sheet medium within the lives and cultural perception of late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century Britons; specifically, due to where these satires were published, Londoners. Like all historical sources, graphic satires present specific challenges. They were publicly facing compositions designed to shock and provoke; outwardly packed with sex, titillation, violence and prurient curiosity, framed by lewd, deliciously vicious and bawdy narratives, and set against the dirt and grime of London's streets. Hence satirical prints were as much an aspect of rude culture as visual culture,¹ yet this does not mean they had nothing serious or important to say. Indeed one of the major thematic agendas of graphic satire in this period concerned notions of British liberty. It is therefore the central task of this thesis to unpick how and why this medium represented libertarian values in the way it did.

A brief example should suffice in order to outline the centrality of liberty to public communicative

1 For rude metropolitan culture see V. A. C. Gatrell, *City of laughter: sex and satire in eighteenth-century London* (London, 2006); Tim Hitchcock, *Down and Out in Eighteenth-Century London* (London, 2004).

cultures. In 1793 *French Happiness/English Misery* (1.1), a print designed by the satirical artist Isaac Cruikshank, was published in the trade's West End heartland. Here French revolutionary sans-culottes (left) are characterised as scrawny, ragged and manic; their English counterparts (right) as well fed and contented. The use of contrast is striking. The meal of a single frog contrasts with a large sirloin. A dying French cat struggles to catch a rat, whilst a fat English cat plays with its prey. A French bird dies despite its cage being left open, as an English bird, safely caged, chirps merrily. A cracked jug of water juxtaposes with full, frothing pitchers of ale. The surroundings of these two scenes are equally divergent. Behind the Frenchmen is a printed prosthetic backdrop glorifying regicide, infanticide and death; behind the Englishmen a window into a natural, Arcadian landscape of laden apple branches and agricultural endeavour. Converging onto a wider exploration of liberty the composition contrasts the fortunes of those advocating abstract freedom and equality with those content to defend a system based on experience and kingship. At a time of acute political and philosophical turmoil, Cruikshank refutes radical/French claims of the miseries imposed upon Britons by their constitution.



1.1 Isaac Cruikshank, *French Happiness. English Misery* (S W Fores, 3 January 1793) [BM 8288]. 247 x 397.



1.2 Isaac Cruikshank, *JOHN BULL at the sign, the Case is Altered* (J Aitken 2 March 1801) [BM 9714]. 247 x 351.

This defiant loyalist rhetoric did not however survive the revolutionary wars intact. In *John Bull at the sign, the case is altered* (1.2), published by Aitken 2 Mar 1801 from his premises east of fashionable London, a lean and ragged John Bull (right) contrasts starkly with his jolly, alert and rotund French counterpart. Poised to tackle a large joint of beef the militarised Frenchman states mockingly 'Ah What Monsieur Jack Bull you going to starve me!!!'. Scrolls hanging from their respective tables explain John Bull's dismay, for although Beef, Mutton and Veal cost the Frenchmen mere cents, John is forced to pay significantly higher sums. Thus considering his empty pitcher and a meal of fish and potatoes he states with resignation 'who would have thought it!'. Behind them a copy of an earlier Gillray print reinforces this narrative of changed wartime national fortunes showing John Bull circa 1788 (prior to war and dearth) as confident, well fed and able to afford beer, and his French adversary as affectatious, foppish and nervous (symbolised by his cowering dog).² Cruikshank thus weaves an intertextual conversation between past and present, expertly summarising a perceived

2 This Gillray print, entitled 'Politeness', was in fact first published in January 1780; A1.1.1.

change in Anglo-French prosperity; indeed save for his cockade hat and pointed shoes, our jolly Frenchman could himself pass for John Bull.

Moreover two months prior to the resumption of hostilities with France in May 1803, Cruikshank's *The Phantasmagoria or a Review of Old Times* (1.3), again published in the City area east of Charing Cross, transposed the impact of war and death into peacetime. A magician (centre) conjures up apparitions from times past (left), to whom, and before their modern counterparts (right) near identical from their representations in 1801, the conjurer poses the question 'are you satisfied gentlemen?'. Aghast, the stereotypical John Bull states 'Is that my Grandson Jack? what a skeleton!!!'; the grotesque and foppish French vision, equally shocked at his glimpse into the future, exclaims 'ah mon Cousin, vat you eat de Beef... & Plum Pudding!!!'. Yet it is the modern Frenchman who most aptly summarises this farce and the shift in libertarian rhetoric within satiric visual culture, stating 'Diable my Cousin look like de Frog & John Bull look like de Ox but Grace a Dieu times are changed''.



1.3 Isaac Cruikshank, *A PHANTASMAGORIA_ or a REVIEW of old Times* (T Williamson, 9 March 1803) [BM 9971]. 247 x 351.

These sources foreground the importance of liberty not only to satirical artists, but also, as this thesis will contend, to print publishers and their customers. However to attempt to understand this tripartite relationship (referred to here as the artist/publisher/consumer nexus) through all the surviving prints from this 'Golden Age' of graphic satire would be an error. Numbering at around eight thousand individual pieces, the varying quality of these productions and the array of publishers, artists and print mediums involved in their creation renders any such analysis prone to confusion, contradiction and illogical discontinuity. Not that this thesis only considers cogent historical narratives displaying continuity and fixity of value to scholars. Indeed I warmly embrace the protean character of past (and present) cultures. Nonetheless orientating these discussions of communication, visual culture, print consumption and British libertarian rhetoric through the lens of one artist does provide a vital focus on the factors shaping these discourses. Isaac Cruikshank, a journeyman whose work has been overshadowed in existing scholarship by the artistic majesty of James Gillray, provides a unique example of how the trade worked, being a successful and prolific artist who worked with a geographical spread of metropolitan print publishers and designed compositions for a variety of printed forms. His career then is not necessarily fully representative of the trade, and instead offers a thread with which to negotiate various aspects of visual culture considered under the umbrella of 'Golden Age' graphic satire. And above all, returning to our contrast prints, Cruikshankian satires offer an opportunity to understand, rather than simply assume, some of the reasons why loyalist discourses on liberty were weakening during this period, and to speculate that the battle for hegemony between various iterations of metropolitan public opinions was not necessarily being won by bourgeois gentleman, but that the purchasing power of these non-elites was changing the ideological make-up of satirical prints. In the commercial sphere these prints operated within the artist/publisher/consumer nexus framed their content above all other concerns. Cruikshankian satirical prints then do not trace shifts in British liberty at a broad or 'popular' level; rather changing notions of liberty in satirical prints can help illuminate mutating attitudes to liberty among the commercial classes and indeed shifts in that consumer base.

This thesis approaches these problems in two parts. Section 2, entitled 'Graphic Liberty', presents the methodological approach underpinning this thesis, moves onto an analysis of London, the expert print producers to whom this metropolis was home, and the techniques of production they used, before finally exploring the intertextual relationship between broad discourses on liberty in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries and those found in graphic satire. Section 3, entitled 'Characters and Stereotypes', builds upon the contentions and questions foregrounded in Section 2 and tests them through two case studies. The first of these, entitled 'Scandal' (3.1), problematises the sexual adventures of the royal princes and the discursive tensions between liberty and exclusivity these activities created, exemplified by the Covent Garden Old Price riots of 1809. The second essay (3.2) discusses notions of 'Otherness' through the lens of both known (John Philip Kemble; Henry Dundas) and anonymous (Frenchmen; fops; Scots; Irishmen) stereotypes to explore to what extent those constructed outside of British liberty shaped and informed its imagined boundaries. Throughout these chapters I will employ a variety of graphic satires to make my case, and although the work of the Cruikshank household is the undoubted focus, productions of his peers from both graphic and literary metropolitan spheres are used as vital supporting evidence in order to remind the reader that in the same way Isaac was not isolated from wider Georgian narratives on notions of British liberty, neither is this thesis.