Jesting culture and religious politics in seventeenth-century England*

Tim Somers
Newcastle University, United Kingdom

Abstract

This article argues that jestbooks performed important functions within seventeenth-century religious politics. These functions were distinct from the 'biting' polemic and satire that more often catches the eyes of scholars. The article identifies ubiquitous 'popular jests' and discusses how jesting opened up space to engage playfully with controversial topics. In doing so, it challenges the historiographical dominance of the 'superiority theory' of laughter and the othering of dissenters and Catholics. The second section discusses jesting in relation to tension in the 1630s, while the final section discusses royalism, humorous manuscript chronicling and the way jesting shaped the memory of the civil wars.

When it comes to ideological conflict, public opinion and religious tension in early modern England, there are certain genres of text especially valued by historians and literary scholars. These include manuscript libels and pamphlets from the Jacobean period; printed newsbooks and propaganda from the civil wars; and partisan periodicals, dialogues and graphic satires published in the wake of the succession crisis and the Glorious Revolution.[1] Within all these genres humour was a powerful tool. Humour could expose the errors and vices of one's opponent; it could establish audiences for political arguments by adopting a 'joco-serious' style; and it could transmit stereotypes that fed into anti-puritan and anti-Catholic sentiment.[2] One widespread genre that rarely features in these discussions, though, is the jestbook: print and manuscript compilations of jokes, merry tales, witty sayings and repartees. Both didactic and recreational, jestbooks enhanced the conversation, rhetoric and mirth of their readers and hearers.[3]

The omission of jestbooks from histories of religious politics is certainly understandable. These publications, as a genre, were not especially 'polemical'. Jestbook content was usually miscellaneous, covering a range of topics: from cuckolds and scolds to drunks and country bumpkins. Sometimes their humour derived from incongruities of status

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[1] P. Croft, 'Libels, popular literacy and public opinion in early modern England', *Historical Research*, lxviii (1995), 266–85; N. Millstone, *Manuscript Circulation and the Invention of Politics in Early Stuart England* (Cambridge, 2016); J. Peacey, *Print and Public Politics in the English Revolution* (Cambridge, 2013); and M. Knights, *Representation and Misrepresentation in Later Stuart Britain: Partisanship and Political Culture* (Oxford, 2005).

[2] M. Knights and A. Morton, 'Introduction: laughter and satire in early modern Britain, 1500–1800', in *The Power of Laughter and Satire in Early Modern Britain*, ed. M. Knights and A. Morton (Woodbridge, 2017), pp. 1–26.

[3] For exceptions, see A. McRae, 'Farting in the House of Commons: popular humour and political discourse in early modern England', in Knights and Morton, *Power of Laughter*, ch. 3; and T. Harris, 'Hibernophobia and Francophobia in Restoration England', *Restoration: Studies in English Literary. Culture, 1660–1700*, xli (2017), 5–32.

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and behaviour, sometimes from the multiple significations of a word or phrase. Often the precise meaning of a jest was ambiguous and open to interpretation.[4] Cultural historians have nevertheless valued humour for providing insights into the unstated assumptions and 'anxieties' of past societies, drawing upon jestbooks to discuss mentalities of gender, the body, civility and nationality, among other things.[5] Jesting has also featured in recent reappraisals of humour's significance to post-Reformation thought and practice.[6] Indeed, 'religious jests', broadly defined, make up a significant proportion of jestbook content. *A Banquet of Ieasts* (1630), for example, devoted around 21 per cent of its content to religious themes, practices, groups, wordplay and so on.[7] This article draws upon a survey of all available English jestbooks, from the earliest – *A. C. Mery Talys* (1526) – through to the 1750s, with a focus on the seventeenth century, to argue that jesting culture performed important functions within religio-political culture. These functions were related to, but distinct from, more overtly polemical and satirical genres such as pamphlets and libels. The discussion of these functions is based upon three key themes: the frequent recycling of 'popular jests' dealing with religious controversy, whose ubiquity has not been discussed before; the ideal of jesting as 'harmless mirth', opening up conversational space for playful engagement with religious tension; and, finally, the role that joke-telling played in shaping collective memory, especially after the civil wars.

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As part of an expanding print culture, the jestbook became an increasingly widespread genre during the seventeenth century. Focusing on 'collections of detached jests' alone, around thirty titles were first published in this century.[8] Many of these were commercial successes, such as *A Banquet of Ieasts*, which was both an intensely popular 'fast-seller' and a long-lasting 'bestseller'. This title went into five editions in the space of just three years, and into ten editions by the end of the century.[9] Initially, jesting was associated with elite humanist circles and literature: from Poggio Bracciolini's (1380–1459) and other

[4] For useful overviews, see A. Smyth, '"Divines into dry Vines": forms of jesting in Renaissance England', in *Formal Matters: Reading the Materials of English Renaissance Literature*, ed. A. K. Deutermann and A. Kiséry (Manchester, 2013), pp. 55–76; D. Brewer, 'Prose jest-books mainly in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries in England', in *A Cultural History of Humour: From Antiquity to the Present Day*, ed. J. N. Bremmer and H. Roodenburg (Cambridge, Mass., 1997), pp. 90–111; and I. Munro, 'Shakespeare's jestbook: wit, print, performance', *ELH*, lxxi (2004), 89–113.

[5] K. Thomas, 'The place of laughter in Tudor and Stuart England', *Times Literary Supplement*, 21 Jan. 1977, pp. 77–81; J. Wiltenburg, 'Soundings of laughter in early modern England: women, men, and everyday uses of humor', *Early Modern Women*, x (2016), 22–41; T. Reinke-Williams, 'Misogyny, jest-books and male youth culture in seventeenth-century England', *Gender & History*, xxi (2009), 324–39; L. Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth-Century England* (London, 2003); and D. Haydon, 'From barbarian to burlesque: English images of the Irish *c.*1660–1750', *Irish Economic and Social History*, xv (1988), 5–31.

[6] D. Derrin, 'Self-referring deformities: humour in early modern sermon literature', *Literature & Theology*, xxxii (2018), 225–69; L. Stelling, *Faith in Jest: Humour and the Literature of the English Reformation*, forthcoming (2021–2); and Thomas, 'Place of laughter', p. 79.

[7] Around 41 jests out of 196 in total. Around 26% (159 out of 609) of jests compiled into a manuscript jestbook by Nicholas L'Estrange (*c.*1630–55) are 'religious jests' (British Library, Harley MS. 6395, reproduced in *'Merry Passages and Jeasts': a Manuscript Jestbook of Sir Nicholas Le Strange*, ed. H. F. Lippincott (Salzburg, 1974; hereafter 'L'Estrange MS.')). This definition excludes figures of speech (e.g., 'going to the Devil') in non-religious contexts and repartees, and sometimes jests that make passing references to titles (e.g., archbishop) in otherwise non-religious contexts, e.g., *A Banquet of Ieasts* (1630; hereafter *B.J.*), no. 117.

[8] Building upon the early bibliography in F. P. Wilson, 'The English jestbooks of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, ii (1939), 148–54.

[9] I. Green, *Print and Protestantism in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2000), p. 173; A. Kesson and E. Smith, 'Introduction: towards a definition of print popularity', in *The Elizabethan Top Ten: Defining Print Popularity in Early Modern England*, ed. A. Kesson and E. Smith (Farnham, 2013), pp. 1–15, at p. 10; *A Banquet of Jests* […] *the Second Part* (1633; hereafter *B.J.2*); and Smyth, '"Divines into dry Vines"', p. 56.

papal secretaries' amusing stories shared in their private 'Bugiale' to humanist manuals on rhetoric and courtesy.[10] Their imagined readers were, usually, elite and male.[11] Yet jesting was not an exclusively elite-male activity, and by 1636 it was remarked that 'every illiterat sott vents them by hundreds'.[12] John Cannon, son of a Somerset smallholder, thus memorialized his 'unlearned' grandfather (*c.*1602–87) as 'merry, facetious & pleasant in his deportment, whose jests and sayings' were 'current still among' his neighbours, family and workmen, 'being rendered proverbial in those parts', providing evidence of their oral popularity among the illiterate.[13] Notable jestbook compilers of humble status included John Taylor (1578–1653), dubbed the Water Poet, and the Oxford tapster William Hickes (act. 1670s), of 'poor and dissolute Parents'.[14] Most surviving titles were certainly not 'cheap', costing one shilling. Some titles, though, were printed and sold by 'popular' ballad publishers as one- or two-pence chapbooks suitable for 'divert[ing] the young Men and Maids when they come to the Bake-house, Forge or Mill'.[15] Much of their content overlapped with that of pricier titles, exemplifying the often blurred boundaries between elite and popular culture.[16] Sometimes jestbooks and popular ballads even told the same merry tales.[17] Jesting therefore provided an abundant and varied source of religio-political humour available to most sections of society. Indeed, taken together, the thirty or so seventeenth-century titles roughly amount to over 6,800 jests. This is not to mention edition numbers, reprints of sixteenth-century titles, 'jest-biographies' centred upon specific individuals and other genres (such as 'how-to' miscellanies) that fall under the more inclusive term *jesting culture*.[18]

How to navigate this abundant and diverse material? One approach is to focus upon jests that were evidently successful enough with consumers to be used over and over again in different jestbook titles. A characteristic feature of jestbooks was their self-conscious

[10] C. Holcomb, *Mirth Making: the Rhetorical Discourse on Jesting in Early Modern England* (Columbia, S.C., 2001); and *The Facetiae, or Jocose Tales of Poggio* (2 vols., Paris, 1879; hereafter *Poggio*), ii. 230–2.

[11] For debates about elite and popular audiences, see L. Woodbridge, 'Jest books, the literature of roguery, and the vagrant poor in Renaissance England', *English Literary Renaissance*, xxxiii (2003), 201–10; P. A. Brown, *Better a Shrew Than a Sheep: Women, Drama, and the Culture of Jest in Early Modern England* (London, 2003); and Reinke-Williams, 'Misogyny', p. 328.

[12] Robert Chamberlain, 'To the discerning reader', in *The Booke of Bulls* (1636; hereafter *B.B.*).

[13] *The Chronicles of John Cannon, Excise Officer and Writing Master*, ed. J. Money (2 vols., Oxford, 2010), i. 10.

[14] John Taylor, *Wit and Mirth* (1628; hereafter *W.M.*); John Taylor, *Bull, Beare, and Horse* (1638; hereafter *B.B.H.*); John Taylor, *Taylor's Feast* (1638); William Hickes, *Oxford Jests* (1671; hereafter *O.J.*); and William Hickes, *Coffee-House Jests* (hereafter *C.H.J.*; 1677). On Hickes, see A. Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses* (2 vols., Oxford, 1691–2), ii. 157.

[15] *Canterbury Tales* (1687; hereafter *C.T.*), Preface. These titles further included *The Merry Tales of the Mad-Men of Gotam* (1690); *Pasquils Jests* (1629); *Ornatissimus joculator: or, The Compleat Jester* (1703; hereafter *C.J.*); *Merrie Conceited Iests of George Peel* (1627); *Scogin's Jests* (*c.*1695; hereafter *S.J.*); and chapbook titles: *Mirth in Abundance* (1659; hereafter *M.A.*); *The Sack-Full of Newes* (1557, repr. 1673; hereafter *S.N.*); and *The Delectable History of Poor Robin* (*c.*1680). See also Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, i. 62.

[16] At least eight out of the ten jests in the chapbook *Youth's Treasury* (1688) were printed in more expensive titles; in *M.A.* around eleven out of twenty-two; and in *C.T.* six out of sixteen.

[17] See e.g., 1. *The Jealous Weaver* (English Broadside Ballad Archive (hereafter E.B.B.A.), 33769) and its jestbook versions in 'The fourth Booke', 'Chap. 8. Of knightes', in T. Twyne, *The Schoolemaster, or Teacher of Table Philosophie* (1576); *C.H.J.* (1677), no. 69; and *England's Witty and Ingenious Jester* (1718; hereafter *E.W.*), no. 105; 2. *The Wanton Virgins Frighted* (E.B.B.A., 34092) and its jestbook version in *England's Merry Jester* (1693; hereafter *M.J.*), no. 48; and 3. *A Most Excellent Ballad, of an Old Man and His Wife* (E.B.B.A., 20028) and its jestbook versions in 'Of the olde manne that putte hym selfe in his sonnes handes', in *Mery Tales and Quicke Answeres* (1532; hereafter *M.T.*); and 'Of the old man of Monmouth', in *Pasquils Jests* (1604).

[18] On jesting culture, see I. Munro and A. L. Prescott, 'Jest books', in *The Oxford Handbook of English Prose, 1500–1640*, ed. A. Hadfield (Oxford, 2013). For a bestselling miscellany containing jests, see *A Helpe to Discourse* (1619; hereafter *H.D.*).

combination of 'old' and 'new' material. Recent studies have emphasized the importance of recycled motifs in graphic satire and the innovation-averse consumers of ballads, who were happy to see or hear their 'old favourite' woodcuts and tunes.[19] Compilers of jestbooks often had similar consumption practices in mind, justifying the inclusion of old jests because their readers would 'be glad to find them here again, just as we are pleased to hear a fine Tune over and over, provided it be well Sung'.[20] This kind of 'nimble Theft' was 'fashionable', provided outdated 'rough' language was 'refined' and any 'Jejune and Trifling' material was discarded.[21] By the 1700s there was some attempt to distinguish between the witty sayings and anecdotes of polite society and 'those execreable things, our Books of common Jests'.[22] Yet in practice such material was quickly incorporated into 'common' jestbooks alongside the old recycled material. Even as late as 1751, for example, at least 24 per cent of the jests in *The Nut-Cracker* had circulated in pre-1700 jestbooks, some as far back as Poggio's *Facetiae* (1470) or *A. C. Mery Talys*.[23] In order to better understand both the changes and the continuities within jesting culture, then, this article will discuss the context of 'new' material as well as the significance of recycled old favourites. Doing so should mitigate any accusations, sometimes levelled at cultural history, of selecting or suppressing 'texts' without weighing up their relative significance.[24]

Appropriately enough, out of all these texts, the second most recycled was a religiously themed anecdote. This unassuming yet ubiquitous jest helps to introduce some of the functions of jesting culture within 'religious politics', which here refers to the way religious diversity in a confessional state was a source of conflict and debate on both national and local levels ('the hottest of all political potatoes').[25] First printed in 1630, the jest describes how a doctor of divinity, or a 'charitable Divine', was constructing a highway for his local community's benefit. The humour derives from the doctor's quick-witted response to a busybody neighbour, who questions the spiritual rewards of his donation (observing that it is not the 'highway to heaven'):

> The answer of a Doctor. / A Worthy Doctor of Cambridge amongst many other charitable deedes done in his life time, at his owne charge made a faire causey or high way some mile in length, to the great benefit of the Countrey; and being one day there in person to visit the labourers … it hapned that a Nobleman riding that way by chance, and knowing him, gave him a kinde salutation; but withall thinking to breake a jest on him, Master Doctor saith hee,

[19] H. Pierce, *Unseemly Pictures: Graphic Satire and Politics in Early Modern England* (New Haven, Conn., 2008); and C. Marsh, 'Best-selling ballads and their pictures in seventeenth-century England', *Past & Present*, ccxxxiii (2016), 53–99, at p. 79.

[20] *The Wise and Ingenious Companion* (1700; hereafter *W.I.*); and *Poor Robin Jest*s (1667; hereafter *P.R.*), Preface.

[21] 'The epistle', in *The Complaisant Companion* (1674; hereafter *C.C.*); and 'To the reader', in *C.J.* (1703).

[22] Tom Brown, *Laconics: or, New Maxims of State and Conversation* (1701). Much of Brown's material was, ironically, lifted into *Pinkethmans Jests* (1721; hereafter *P.J.*). This was copied by the 18-th century's bestselling jestbook, *Joe Miller's Jests* (1739; hereafter *J.M.*), alongside copied material from *Polly Peachum's Jests* (1728; hereafter *P.P.*). For an 18th-century jestbook that has little overlap with pre-1700 titles, see *England's Genius* (1734; hereafter *E.G.*).

[23] This amounted to 82 jests out of 341 in total. For these especially ancient jests, see *The Nut-Cracker* (1751; hereafter *N.C.*), pp. 27, 32–3, 36, 38, 51, 61, 68. For the earlier versions, matched with the numbers above, see *Poggio*, i, LXVI (p. 27); ii, CLIII (pp. 32–3); *A. C. Mery Talys* (1526; hereafter *A.C.*), no. 62 (p. 36), reproduced in *'A Womans Answer Is Neuer to Seke': Early Modern Jestbooks, 1526–1635*, ed. I. Munro (Abingdon, 2007); B. C. Bowen, 'Renaissance collections of facetiae, 1344–1490', *Renaissance Quarterly*, xxxix (1986), pp. 1–15, at p. 15 (p. 38); *A.C.* (1526), no. 32 (p. 51); and *Poggio*, ii, CLLXXI (p. 61), CCXXX (p. 68).

[24] H. Mah, 'Suppressing the text: the metaphysics of ethnographic history in Darnton's Great Cat Massacre', *History Workshop Journal*, xxxi (1991), 1–20; and D. Wahrman, 'Change and the corporeal in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century gender history: or, can cultural history be rigorous?', *Gender & History*, xx (2008), 584–602.

[25] P. Collinson, 'The politics of religion and the religion of politics in Elizabethan England', *Historical Research*, lxxxii (2009), 74–92, quotation at p. 92.

for all your great charge and paines, yet *I beleeve not* saith hee *that this is the high way to Heaven*. I am of your minde in that my Lord, replyed the Doctor, for if it were, *I should have wondred to have met your Lordship here*.[26]

There is usually more than one way to appreciate a good joke, and this case is no exception. For historians this often comes down to humanist rhetoric. The doctor's urbane reply to the nobleman attempting to 'breake a jest on him' ('I should have wondred to have met your Lordship here') illustrates to the reader how to win a verbal contest of wit. As Thomas Wilson advised in *The Art of Rhetoric* (1553), a 'merry answere' that turned an opponent's words against them would 'abolishe a righte worthy man, & make him at his wittes ende'.[27] However, the central pun and metaphor, the 'highway to heaven', is equally significant. It recalls well-known works of godly practical divinity such as Thomas Tuke's *The Highway to Heaven* (1609) and Arthur Dent's *The Plaine-Mans Pathway to Heaven* (1601). The preacher, Robert Bolton, used the same metaphor to console the godly in 1626, stating that if they had been abandoned by their 'good-fellow companions' for being 'too precise', then they too were 'in the highway to heaven'.[28] The jest therefore provides an insight into the rising tensions of the 1630s, described below, as well as the long-term dialectical division between 'godliness' and 'good fellowship', the former involving a disassociation from 'popish' and 'profane' piety and customs, and the latter more aligned with popular recreations, 'traditional' religion and 'Prayer Book Protestantism'.[29] The godly (predestinarian) nobleman rejects good works, while the doctor represents the stereotypical peacemaking parson who, rather than preach damnation, provides charitably for the community; the type of parson who, in Christopher Haigh's words, would have 'joined his people for "good fellowship" on the ale bench'.[30]

Despite these underlying tensions, it is hard to imagine these two figures divided by civil war in just over a decade's time. The 'highway to heaven' and many other 'popular jests' represent a form of mild, inoffensive humour, far less eye-catching than scurrilous polemic, but arguably just as prominent within everyday life. One reason this humour has flown under the radar is that 'superiority theory', based upon the teachings of Aristotle and Thomas Hobbes, has up till now provided the dominant explanatory model for historians studying early modern humour. This theory understands laughter in terms of scornful ridicule and a cruel feeling of 'Sudden Glory' caused by the apprehension of 'some deformed thing in another'.[31] Superiority theory has complemented discussions of religious politics that emphasize the hateful mockery and 'othering' of 'out-groups' such

[26] *B.J.* (1630), no. 184 (my emphasis); *A Choice Banquet of Witty Jests, Rare Fancies, and Pleasant Novels* (1660; hereafter *C.B.*), no. 354; *O.J.* (1671), no. 323; *C.C.* (1674), p. 20; *Versatile ingenium, the Wittie Companion* (1679; hereafter *V.I.*), nos. 275, 341; *London Jests* (1684; hereafter *L.J.*), no. 37; *England's Jests* (1687; hereafter *E.J.*), no. 32; *M.J.* (1693), no. 39; *The Universal Jester* (1718; hereafter *U.J.*), no. 297; *P.J.* (1721), p. 89; *J.M.* (1739), no. 192; *N.C.* (1751), p. 27; Beinecke Library, Yale University (hereafter 'Beinecke Library'), Osborn b430 (no pagination); and Brit. Libr., Sloane MS. 1757, fos. 6r–v. See below for the specific individuals initially attached to this jest.

[27] A. Morton, 'Laughter as a polemical act in late seventeenth-century England', in Knights and Morton, *Power of Laughter*, pp. 107–32, at p. 124; and Holcomb, *Mirth Making*, p. 35.

[28] C. Haigh, *The Plain Man's Pathways to Heaven: Kinds of Christianity in Post-Reformation England, 1570–1640* (Oxford, 2007), p. 103.

[29] For summaries, see A. Walsham, 'The godly and popular culture', in *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, ed. J. Coffey and P. C. H. Lim (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 277–93, at pp. 278–9; and A. Ryrie, 'Reformations', in *A Social History of England, 1500–1750*, ed. K. Wrightson (Cambridge, 2018), pp. 107–28, at p. 118.

[30] C. Haigh, 'The Church of England, the Catholics and the people', in *The Reign of Elizabeth I*, ed. C. Haigh (Basingstoke, 1984), pp. 195–220, at p. 219.

[31] For an influential example, see S. Dickie, *Cruelty and Laughter: Forgotten Comic Literature and the Unsentimental Eighteenth Century* (Chicago, 2011), pp. 17–18.

as puritans and Catholics through the transmission of stereotypes in playhouses, literary and graphic satires, and libels.[32] A growing body of work, however, has challenged the supremacy of superiority theory in analyses of this period, emphasizing the prevalence of less corrosive forms of humour that had 'community-building' functions.[33] Lieke Stelling has discussed how a 'self-consciously *gentle*' polemic that adopted the persona of the renowned jester Richard Tarlton (d.1588) helped to defuse tension during the Martin Marprelate controversy of the 1590s.[34] Laughter had a healing quality, both physically through the balance of the body's 'humours' and, as Anne Prescott points out, in a macrocosmic sense as a way of rebalancing the 'body politic'.[35] In terms of 'othering' out-groups, Lena Liapi has argued that criminals in rogue literature were not always othered but instead represented as morally ambivalent tricksters who possessed the admired traits of wit and good fellowship.[36] Into the eighteenth century, Simon Jarrett has explored how the jokes and slang mocking country bumpkins newly arrived to London – much of which circulated in earlier jestbooks too – was an 'affectionate, or at least relatively harmless' form of ridicule. Far from being divisive, such humour fostered a sense of identity among the diverse inhabitants of the metropolis.[37]

This article largely complements these discussions. Popular jests such as the 'highway to heaven' exemplified the idealized definition of 'moderate' jesting culture as inoffensive, 'harmless mirth'. Whereas seditious libels circulated outside the control of the authorities and 'corroded' social ties, those who jested, advised conduct literature, should avoid causing offence through 'plaine rayling' or laughing at inappropriate topics.[38] The correct response to disability or poverty, for example, was 'pity' not mockery, while truly 'heinous offenders' deserved corporal punishment.[39] Often in popular jests we find the inappropriate ridiculer becomes the ridiculed.[40] Satire could be 'biting', while jesting

[32] A. Walsham, *Charitable Hatred: Tolerance and Intolerance in England, 1500–1700* (Manchester, 2006), ch. 3; P. Collinson, 'Ecclesiastical vitriol: religious satire in the 1590s and the invention of puritanism', in *The Reign of Elizabeth I: Court and Culture in the Last Decade*, ed. J. Guy (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 150–70; P. Lake, 'Anti-puritanism: the structure of a prejudice', in *Religious Politics in Post-Reformation England: Essays in Honour of Nicholas Tyacke*, ed. K. Fincham and P. Lake (Woodbridge, 2006), pp. 80–97; and T. Harris, '"A sainct in shewe, a Devill in deede": moral panics and anti-puritanism in seventeenth-century England', in *Moral Panics, the Media and the Law in Early Modern England*, ed. D. Lemmings and C. Walker (Basingstoke, 2009), pp. 97–116. On 'out-groups', see M. Knights, 'Historical stereotypes and histories of stereotypes', in *Psychology and History: Interdisciplinary Explorations*, ed. C. Tileagă and J. Byford (Cambridge, 2014), pp. 242–67, at p. 246.

[33] L. Rayfield, 'Rewriting laughter in early modern Europe', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Humour, History, and Methodology*, ed. D. Derrin and H. Burrows (London, 2021), pp. 71–92, at pp. 77–8; Knights and Morton, 'Introduction', pp. 4–6; and Derrin, 'Self-referring deformities', p. 261.

[34] L. Stelling, '"Leaving their humours to the word mongers of mallice": mocking polemic in Tarlton's Newes out of Purgatorie (1590) and two contemporary responses', *Shakespeare Jahrbuch*, cliv (2018), 140–54 at p. 153.

[35] A. L. Prescott, 'The ambivalent heart: Thomas More's Merry Tales', *Criticism*, xlv (2003), 417–33.

[36] L. Liapi, *Roguery in Print: Crime and Culture in Early Modern London* (Woodbridge, 2019), Chapter 2.

[37] S. Jarrett, '"A Welshman coming to London and seeing a jackanapes …": how jokes and slang differentiated eighteenth-century Londoners from the rest of Britain', *London Journal*, xliii (2018), 120–36. For the earlier circulation of this 'harmless' humour, see e.g., the rustic who supposes that St. Paul's Cathedral cost 'vorty shillings' to construct (*S.J.* (1626), no. 46).

[38] T. Fuller, *The Holy State* (1642), p. 155; Morton, 'Laughter as a polemical act', p. 110; and J. Richards, 'Health, intoxication, and civil conversation in Renaissance England', *Past & Present*, Supp. 9 (2014), 168–86.

[39] Holcomb, *Mirth Making*, pp. 117–18; and Prescott, 'Ambivalent heart', pp. 418–19.

[40] A. Korhonen, 'Disability humour in English jestbooks of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries', *Cultural History*, iii (2014), pp. 27–53, at p. 41. For example, a popular jest involved a gentleman attempting to trick a 'deafe hostesse' by toasting to her and 'the Baudes and Whores in Turneball street', only for the hostess to reply 'innocently', 'I know you remember your Mother, your Aunt, and those good Gentlewomen your sisters' (*B.J.* (1630), no. 64; *Booke of Mistakes* (1637; hereafter *B.M.*), no. 162; *C.B.* (1660), no. 372; *C.J.* (1703), no. 17; *E.W.* (1718), p. 16; and L'Estrange MS., nos. 5, 554).

culture often defined itself precisely as lacking in *bite*. Thomas Fuller thus criticized those who 'think their conceits, like mustard, [are] not good except they bite'.[41] This metaphor was commonplace in jestbook prefatory material. If jokes 'bite or offend', explained one compiler, 'they are no longer [j]est[s], but affronts'. And because this toothless content was so 'milde and gentle', concluded *A Banquet of Ieasts*, these publications could be enjoyed 'freely, and safely'.[42] Although the boundaries between 'modes' and genres were fluid, commentators such as Walter Charleton distinguished between libellous 'Malignant Wit' and harmless 'Jesting'. The former was '*void of Humanity*' and based upon corrosive rumours and cynicism. Jesting, on the other hand, was based upon 'Honesty', 'good Manners' and a 'Tranquillity' of spirit. This 'Festivity of Wit' was a means 'whereby a Man modestly and gently touches upon the Errours, Indecencies, or Infirmities of another, without any suspicion of hate or contempt of his Person, pleasantly representing them as only ridiculous, not odious'.[43]

There are of course contradictions within this rosy view of jesting. For one thing, jestbooks did contain humour that provoked a (mild) form of 'superiority' laughter or adopted a satirical 'mode'. The concept of 'wit' invoked by jestbooks, moreover, was an intellectual virtue not always conducive to 'moderate' humour. Wit gained currency among the tavern societies of the early 1600s, where educated elite men partook in sanctioned intoxication and verbal sparring ('vying wits together'), and into the eighteenth century 'intimate' homosocial gatherings still allowed for moments of risky humour, providing escape from dominant codes of civility.[44] Even outside such boisterous settings, the boundaries of 'moderate' jesting were never fixed but always subject to changing contexts and audiences. One person's jest was another's raillery. A common refrain in defamation cases was that an insulting remark had been made innocently 'in jest'.[45] Samuel Pepys used the same excuse after he violently 'pulled' Elizabeth Pepys 'by the nose'.[46] There is nevertheless enough distinction in conduct literature and, as discussed below, the style of jesting culture to differentiate it from other forms of scornful ridicule or polemic. Indeed, such exceptions to the rule suggest that the majority of day-to-day conversational jesting was uncontroversial and left unrecorded.

This socially acceptable face to 'harmless mirth' is, arguably, a key reason why jesting should be incorporated into our understandings of religious politics. Jesting culture was not just, or even primarily, a 'print' genre. Instead it was an integral part of oral culture and sociability.[47] Not only were jestbook compilers poachers of previous compilations, but they also claimed that much of their material had originated within sociable spaces: taverns, alehouses, ordinaries, highways, coffee houses and so on. Jests in print were 'such as most usually are delivered in Company, to garnish out Discourse, and keep up

[41] Fuller, *Holy State*, p. 156.

[42] *B.B.* (1636), Preface; and *B.J.* (1630), Preface. See also 'To the reader', in *B.M.* (1637); 'To the reader', in T. Dekker, *Iests to Make You Merie* (1607); *Jocabella, or a Cabinet of Conceits* (1640; hereafter *Joc.*); *M.A.*; and 'To the reader', in *Delight and Pastime* (1697; hereafter *D.P.*).

[43] W. Charleton, *Two Discourses* (1669), pp. 112–18, 133–4.

[44] *B.J.2* (1633), pp. 45–6; P. Withington, 'Intoxicants and society in early modern England', *Historical Journal*, liv (2011), 631–57, at pp. 651–5; M. O'Callaghan, *The English Wits: Literature and Sociability in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2007), ch. 3; and K. Davison, 'Occasional politeness and gentlemen's laughter in 18th c. England', *Historical Journal*, lvii (2014), 921–45.

[45] F. Bound, '"An angry and malicious mind"? Narratives of slander at the church courts of York, *c.*1660–*c.*1760', *History Workshop Journal*, lvi (2003), 59–77, at pp. 70–2, 74; and Wiltenburg, 'Soundings of laughter', pp. 30–1.

[46] *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, ed. R. Latham and W. Matthews (11 vols., London, 1971–83; hereafter '*Pepys Diary*'), v. 113.

[47] A. Fox, *Oral and Literature Culture in England 1500–1700* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 9, 30, 39–40.

Good-Humour'.[48] This was the case for Pepys, who, after eating oysters in company, recalled an orally circulating jest about a foolish servant tricked while procuring shellfish for his employer: 'Captain Sparling told us the best Story that ever I heard; about a gentleman that persuaded a country fellow to let him gut his oysters or else they would stink'.[49] Printed jestbooks could be read aloud in company or in private, refreshing the mind after hard study, providing companionship and purging 'malignant humours' on a cold winter's night.[50] The focus of seventeenth-century jestbooks, though, was to furnish examples of wit and mirth that could be adapted and retold by the reader. Educated readers entered jests, read or heard, into commonplace books, miscellanies and manuscript jestbooks to memorize and 'conveniently' intermix into conversation later on.[51] Surviving jestbooks (typically in portable duodecimo and octavo sizes) show signs of such study, with individual jests marked up and others crossed out ('One Hour a Day in reading' could set you 'up for a Wit'), and commonplace books show readers methodically going through specific titles and picking out jests that suited their tastes.[52] These consumers then entered into 'company', as Phil Withington has discussed, for a variety of recreational, transactional, institutionalized and voluntary reasons that were often occasions for 'making merry'. Far from lacking 'social utility' and 'just being funny', then, jestbooks provided tools to navigate the politics of 'social participation'.[53] With the influx of newcomers to London – a young student at the Inns of Court, for example – people needed ways to ingratiate themselves into company. These 'outsiders', in turn, provided 'a new audience or butt for the good old jokes'.[54] Notwithstanding outbreaks of incivility among tavern wits, most of the time raillery was to be avoided so as to not disrupt the sociable, community-building function of jesting within company.

As a result, a final characteristic of jesting culture was its playful ambiguity. Punning and innuendo was one way to produce ambiguity, described by a table talk manual as 'figurativelye shadowed speach covered cleanly with mirth & civility, sounding one thing,

[48] 'The preface', in *M.J.* (1693).

[49] *Pepys Diary*, i. 167 (2 June 1660); *C.H.J.* (1677), no. 107; *V.I.* (1679), no. 170; and *C.J.* (1703), no. 188. Another example involves 'a good story' told at dinner about a condemned prisoner throwing a stone at Judge Richardson, which circulated orally throughout the seventeenth century (*Pepys Diary*, vii. 428–9 [8 Sept. 1667]; and L'Estrange MS., no. 394). For others, see K. Loveman, 'Pepys's jests', *Notes & Queries*, cclxviii (2003), 188–9. For the reverse case of 'feedback', see a jest told by 'Lady Spring' in the 1640s and its printed precedent solely (except reprints) from 1526 (L'Estrange MS., no. 431; and *A.C.* (1526), no. 60 (on a husband curing his wife's speechlessness)).

[50] Chamberlain, 'To the discerning reader'; and 'To the reader', in *L.J.* (1684). For cases of reading aloud, see Smyth, '"Divines into dry Vines"', p. 65; Dickie, *Cruelty and Laughter*, pp. 32–8, esp. the frontispieces (p. 34); and *U.J.* (1718). It is difficult to judge how widespread reading jestbooks aloud was, given that a reliance upon 'printed wit' was mocked in this period (although still suggestive of social practice). See Munro, 'Shakespeare's jestbook', pp. 91–2. Compared to the communal scenes on 18th-century frontispieces, earlier titles represent solitary scholars/jesters (e.g., *V.I.* (1679); and *C.B.* (1660)).

[51] 'The epistle'; and *H.D.* (1619) For commonplace books and miscellanies with jests intermixed, see Brit. Libr., Sloane MS. 1489 (*c.*1627); Sloane MS. 1925 (*c.*1630s); Cambridge University Library, MS. Dd.xi.73, fos. 147r–160v; and Cumbria Archive Service, Kendal (hereafter C.A.S.), WDRY/4/1/2, fos. 1–20, D. Fleming, 'Miscellanea' (*c.*1650). For MS. jestbooks, see Brit. Libr., Sloane MS. 384 (*c.*1670s); Sloane MS. 1757 (late 17th century); Folger Shakespeare Library, V.a.302 (*c.*1675); and Beinecke Library, Osborn b430 (*c.*1640s). See also Smyth, '"Divines into dry Vines"', p. 68; and *Pepys Diary*, i. 261; iv. 346 (24 Oct. 1663), on recording 'merry' stories heard in conversation into a 'book of tales'.

[52] 'To the author', in *M.J.* (1693). The compiler of Brit. Libr., Sloane MS. 1952 copied the first fifteen jests out of twenty-six (fos. 68–74) from *B.J.* (1630) in order of appearance in print.

[53] P. Withington, 'Company and sociability in early modern England', *Social History*, xxxii (2007), 291–307, at p. 301. For a literary perspective on the lessened utility of jesting as it separated from classical rhetoric, see Smyth, '"Divines into dry Vines"', p. 63; see also Dickie, *Cruelty and Laughter*, p. 44.

[54] D. Noyes, *Humble Theory: Folklore's Grasp on Social Life* (Bloomington, Ind., 2016), p. 25.

& covertly meaning another, but not proceeding to expresse bitternesse'.[55] But in terms of content too, jesting provided sanctioned opportunities to engage with controversial topics. Jesting culture was playful, insofar as 'play' is a ritual that creates a temporary 'arena', 'frame' or 'stance' with its 'own rules' that is 'dedicated to the performance of an act apart' from the 'ordinary world'.[56] Theorists have discussed how humour puts us into a 'play mode', disengaged from 'conceptual and practical concerns'; and what makes something humorous often involves the 'benign violation' of a social 'norm' in a non-threatening manner.[57] The technique of 'inversion' and its conservative role in reinforcing these norms, 'turning an upside down world right side up again', provides a prominent historical example of this theory working in practice.[58] In similar terms, Anu Korhonen has described how negative representations of women within jestbooks 'created a homosocial arena where the limits and possibilities of authority could be displayed and discussed'.[59] The next section will draw upon these themes to highlight the significance of popular jests within the religio-political context of the 1630s, providing an 'arena' in which division (up to a limit) could be displayed and safely engaged with.

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A number of jests that engaged with religious politics, first circulated in the 1630s, became long-lasting recycled favourites. They originated in a decade of rising tension, as the 'Calvinist consensus' was strained by the rise of Arminianism and the anti-predestinarian policies of Charles I's regime and William Laud.[60] A royal Proclamation (1626) and Declaration (1628) banned the discussion of predestination doctrine; censorship ensured that only the voices of the 'extreme' puritan opposition were heard, while Laudian apologists claimed the 'moderate' middle ground; and in 1633 the *Book of Sports* was reissued, permitting 'honest mirth or recreation' on holy days.[61] Whereas Jacobean reformers had attempted to regulate alehouse sociability (where 'good fellowship' was practised), ban 'popish' festivities and enforce Sabbath observance, the 1630s allowed for more favourable attitudes towards 'popular religion' to be expressed.[62] In this context, popular jests such as the 'highway to heaven' discussed above were not only displaying tension between the 'godly' and the 'good-fellow' but were, potentially, offering one way in which these tensions could be defused (or 'released') through communal laughter.[63]

[55] Twyne, 'The fourth Booke', 'Chap 1. Of pleasaunt quippes, and tauntes', in *The Schoolemaster* (edited: u for v, i for y).

[56] J. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: a Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (London, 1949), p. 10; and A. K. Nardo, *The Ludic Self in Seventeenth-Century English Literature* (New York, 1991), p. 10.

[57] J. Morreall, *Comic Relief: a Comprehensive Philosophy of Humor* (Chichester, 2009), p. 50; D. Derrin, 'Comic character and counter-violation: critiquing benign violation theory', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Humour, History, and Methodology*, ed. D. Derrin and H. Burrows (London, 2021), pp. 133–50.

[58] S. D. Amussen, 'Cuckold's haven: gender and inversion in popular culture', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Age of Shakespeare*, ed. M. Smuts (Oxford, 2016), pp. 528–42, at p. 542.

[59] A. Korhonen, 'Laughter, sex, and violence: constructing gender in early modern English jestbooks', in *Laughter, Humor, and the (Un)Making of Gender: Historical and Cultural Perspectives*, ed. A. Foka and J. Liliequist (New York, 2015), pp. 133–49, at p. 134.

[60] A. Hughes, 'A moderate puritan preacher negotiates religious change', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, lxv (2014), 761–79; and N. Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists: the Rise of English Arminianism, c. 1590–1640* (Oxford, 1987).

[61] A. Milton, 'Licensing, censorship, and religious orthodoxy in early Stuart England', *Historical Journal*, xli (1998), 625–51.

[62] A. Hunt, *The Art of Hearing: English Preachers and Their Audiences, 1590–1640* (Cambridge, 2010), ch. 5; and L. S. Marcus, *The Politics of Mirth* (London, 1986), ch. 4.

[63] For 'relief theory', see Morreall, *Comic Relief*, pp. 15–23; and Rayfield, 'Rewriting laughter', pp. 80–4.

One of these, 'Cards spiritualized' (first printed 1630), is a long-form jest (a 'merry tale') that sets up conflict between a 'plaine honest' country parson and an envious 'Puritane Justice'.[64] The former is brought before an ecclesiastical court, charged with 'prophane Card-playing, not fitting his Calling'. In the face of adversity, the parson displays a 'smiling urbanity' and explains ingeniously that his deck of playing cards is in fact a spiritual aid.[65] The deuce, for example, reminds him of 'the love which should bee betwixt Neighbours'; the king reminds him of 'the alleageance due to my Prince'; and, for the punchline, the knave puts him 'in minde either of you Master Justice, or you Master Officiall, or of some other of my good friends'. Perhaps the jest, suitable to be told during card games, parodied puritan material culture, such as the deck of fifty-two playing cards displaying spiritual aphorisms created by the godly gentleman John Bruen of Chester (1560–1625).[66] In any case, it certainly sided with good fellowship ('puritan' was a derogatory label) and was later retold in the context of ballad singing and alehouse sociability, where a company took turns to 'either tell a Tale, or sing a Song'.[67] Harmless mirth was, of course, not entirely harmless, but the ideal remains significant. Most discussions of anti-puritanism emphasize the moral panic and hatred towards this group based upon stereotypes of 'sedition' and 'hypocrisy'. These stereotypes rarely appeared in pre-civil war jests and, in such cases, they did not become recycled favourites.[68] Popular jesting instead preferred to target busybodies who caused conflict by seeking to control others or who 'spurned the company of the reprobate'.[69] The emphasis, moreover, was upon conflict resolution through communal laughter. In this case, the authority figures 'applauded and excused' the parson 'for his jest['s] sake'. The jest was updated after the civil wars (discussed below) and continued to be adapted and printed in cheap chapbooks and half-sheets into the 1800s.[70]

The 'Sermon upon malt' also sought to laugh off the tension between the godly and the goodfellow. A group of townsmen 'returning from a merry meeting at an Alehouse' happen upon a 'Sober Divine' who has recently made 'a Bitter Sermon against Drunkards', calling them 'malt worms', whereupon the townsmen take the preacher 'by violence', place him in a tub or hollow tree, and compel him to preach upon a text of their choosing: 'malt'. The preacher subsequently expounds upon malt's various divisions from his 'unworthy Pulpit', from the allegorical to the 'Literal Sense': 'Much Ale Little Thrift'.[71] This parodic sermon circulated widely in manuscript around the 1620s and orally in the 1630s, as evidenced by court cases in which drunken priests in alehouses or parishioners at Christmas climbed into barrels and made the same sermon 'to the great laughter of those

[64] *B.J.* (1630), no. 150. In other versions the protagonist is the gamester servant of a 'Precise Gentleman' (*C.B.* (1660), no. 382; *P.R.* (1667), pp. 140–2; *V.I.* (1679), no. 40; *The Delectable History of Poor Robin*; and *E.W.* (1718), pp. 67–9).

[65] On urbanity, or *eutrapelia*, see Prescott, 'Ambivalent heart', p. 417.

[66] Hunt, *Art of Hearing*, p. 176.

[67] *The Delectable History of Poor Robin*, Chapter 14, 'A tale of a pack of cards'.

[68] E.g., *W.M.* (1628), no. 85: 'One hearing a clock strike three when he thought it was not two, said, this Clocke is like an hypocriticall Puritane, for though he will not sweare, yet hee will lye abominably.' On the hypocritical puritan, see Collinson, 'Ecclesiastical vitriol'; and Harris, '"A sainct in shewe, a Devill in deede"'.

[69] Walsham, *Charitable Hatred*, pp. 277–8.

[70] *New Game at Cards* (1750?); *Cards Spiritualized; or the Soldier's Almanack, Bible and Prayer Book* (York, 1827), Bodleian Library, Douce Adds. 137 (74). Numerous versions from regional presses are listed in the *English Short Title Catalogue* (hereafter *E.S.T.C.*).

[71] Brit. Libr., Egerton MS. 2877 (miscellany containing sermon notes, *c.*1591–1620s), fo. 77; and *A Short Sermon Preach'd at a Short Warning Upon a Short Subject, (Viz.) Malt* (1672).

present'.[72] Afterwards it became a long-lasting favourite in print, appearing in newsbooks, jestbooks, half-sheets and pamphlets right up to the 1800s, sometimes alongside 'Cards spiritualized'.[73] Perhaps its popularity stemmed from the multiple ways it could be enjoyed. On the one hand, the light-hearted treatment of drunkenness corresponded with the intoxicated landscape of the 1620s and 1630s, in which the ratio of alehouses to inhabitants and the consumption of alcohol was up and pro-drink literature was produced to counter puritan sermons admonishing such activity. In this sense, the parodic sermon allowed the profane to scoff at the godly preacher and his extempore sermonizing.[74] Yet, in other cases, the townsmen and not the preacher were the likelier targets. Some versions were headed 'A sermon made to Theeves & Drunkards' or a 'Caution to Good Fellows' and concluded with the 'Character of a Drunkard' as a monstrous '*Trouble of Civility*'.[75] Such ambiguity was certainly a feature of drink literature, where moderation was vaguely advised yet evident pleasure was taken in retelling humorous drinking anecdotes (some appearing in jestbooks).[76] But, as Jennifer Richards notes, rather than legitimize anti-civility, such anecdotes could be discussed by consumers seeking to figure out their own limits and maintain the norm of 'mild intoxication'.[77] In any case, the preacher is not represented in the jest as 'odious' but 'ridiculous', in Charleton's terms, and rather than relying upon a scornful laughter of 'superiority', much of the humour derived from his witty wordplay and conceit: expounding incongruously upon an impious topic.[78]

The sanctioned playfulness of popular jests meant that, at times, the godly were even represented in a positive (or at least ambiguous) manner as admirably witty neighbours rather than marginalized 'others'. One example, first printed in 1636, concerns the conscientious objection of the godly towards loyal toasts on the grounds of their profanity.[79] A 'Puritan Alderman' is coerced by a major into kneeling (a particularly divisive gesture) and toasting to the king's health. The alderman kneels upon both knees and, notwithstanding the derogatory labelling, provides a witty reply on the matter:

> A Certaine Major at his table beganne the Kings health on his knee, on purpose to fetch a Puritan Alderman downe on his. The Puritan, contrary to all mens expectation pledg'd it on both knees, and the Major demanding the reason why he kneeled on both knees, he answered, that *he kneeled on one in honour of the King, and on the other to aske God forgivenesse for so doing*.[80]

[72] At least six MS. versions are extant. See M. Jones, 'The parodic sermon in medieval and early modern England', *Medium Aevum*, lxvi (1997), 94–114, at p. 113 n. 30; Brit. Libr., Lansdowne MS. 674, fo. 11v (1618–30); Egerton MS. 2877, fo. 77; Leeds University Library, BC MS. Lt 31, fo. 74r (*c.*1650–70); and Haigh, *Plain Man's Pathways to Heaven*, pp. 166–7.

[73] *An Exact Relation of the Defeat Given to a Party of the Enemies Horse Neer Cambden* (20 March 1643); *Nugæ venales, or, Complaisant Companion* (1675), pp. 324–7; *V.I.* (1679), pp. 207–9; *C.H.J.* (1686), pp. 202–4; *U.J.* , (1718), no. 421. For half-sheets and pamphlets, see above, n. 71; *An Extempore Sermon Preached at the Request of Two Scholars (by a Lover of Ale) out of a Hollow Tree* (1680); and various later versions in the *E.S.T.C.*, some identifying the godly preacher with John Dod (*c.*1549–1645), including *The Cards Spiritualized* […] *to Which Is Added, Mr. Dodd's Sermon on Malt* (Stirling, 1800).

[74] M. Hailwood, *Alehouses and Good Fellowship in Early Modern England* (Woodbridge, 2014), pp. 3, 119–20; Withington, 'Intoxicants and society', pp. 640, 655; and Haigh, *Plain Man's Pathways to Heaven*, Chapter 9.

[75] Brit. Libr., Egerton MS. 2877; and *An Extempore Sermon, Preached Upon Malt* (Edinburgh, 1691).

[76] O'Callaghan, *The English Wits*, p. 64. For two anecdotes shared by jestbooks and drink literature, compare T. Heywood, *Philocothonista, or, The Drunkard* (1635), pp. 69–70, with Dekker, *Iests*, no. 14; *M.A.* (1659), no. 1; and Heywood, *Philocothonista*, pp. 70–1 with *S.N.* (1673; 1557), no. 6.

[77] Richards, 'Health, intoxication, and civil conversation', p. 180.

[78] The compiler of Brit. Libr., Lansdowne MS. 674, focuses on wordplay and omits context, while parody of form is an evident appeal, given that Egerton MS. 2877 also contains godly sermon notes.

[79] A. McShane, 'Material culture and "political drinking" in seventeenth-century England', *Past & Present*, Supp. 9 (2014), 247–76.

[80] *B.B.* (1636), pp. 69–70 (my emphasis); *C.H.J.* (1677), no. 227; *L.J.* (1684), no. 21; *E.J.* (1687), no. 4; and *C.J.* (1703), no. 95.

As with the card-carrying parson above, the puritan displays a 'smiling urbanity' in the face of authority. A similar response to coercion is found in the period's most recycled jest about recusancy. This describes a gentlewoman, 'suspected to be a Romish-Catholike', brought before 'a busie Justice in the country'. The J.P. 'would not accept of her oath, unlesse she would publikely call the Pope knave'. Her response turns the words back against the J.P. in a rhetorically astute fashion:

> Sr, if it please your worship, it were great folly and indiscretion in me, to call any man knave whom I never either saw, or knew, but I protest sir, (saith she) *If I had seene him so often, or knowne him so well as I doe your good worship, I think I might, and with a safe conscience too, call him knave*, and knave againe, and with this answere I pray you rest satisfied.[81]

The admirable wit of the puritan alderman and the Catholic gentlewoman, along with other examples of ingenious Brownists and later Quakers, opened up a space where these marginalized groups could be included within an 'imagined community' of wit.[82] Catholics in particular were, for some, nostalgically associated with a 'mirthful' pre-Reformation past.[83] Such jests resonated with local contexts in which the statutory persecution of dissent and recusancy by 'intrusive officials' was resisted for the sake of harmony and neighbourliness.[84] Even doctrinal differences (idolatry) were navigated with 'courtesie' and verbal contests of wit between 'neighbours' in popular jests, such as 'A Papist & a Puritane' (1630). In this case, the puritan asks why the Catholic puts 'off his hat' to 'a wooden Crosse' and not to a passing tree 'being both one wood'. The Catholic, turning these words back, asks why the puritan kisses his wife's lips 'and not her taile seeing they are both made of one flesh'.[85] As Anthony Milton observes, 'othering' and 'papophobic' discourse coexisted with more conciliatory attitudes, with the former projected onto an 'unseen' foreign force.[86] Likewise, jestbooks *did* contain content that ridiculed popery, but mostly within foreign settings or a pre-Reformation past. Common themes included confession, illiteracy, the worship of saints in times of extremity, and the 'pleasant and merry' stories of lusty friars and their 'old, friarish pranks'.[87] Often,

[81] *B.J.* (1630), no. 20 (my emphasis); *W.M.* (1628), no. 49; *O.J.* (1671), no. 353; *L.J.* (1684), no. 111; *C.J.* (1703), no. 131; Brit. Libr., Sloane MS. 1925, fo. 68 (early 17th century); and Brit. Libr., Sloane MS. 1757, fo. 2 (late 17th century).

[82] Liapi, *Roguery in Print*, p. 87.

[83] Haigh, *Plain Man's Pathways to Heaven*, p. 204.

[84] For witty Quakers avoiding unreasonable tythes, see *M.J.* (1693), app. no. 13; and *E.J.* (1687), no. 57; cf. *P.J.* (1721), p. 31. On sympathy towards this issue and recusancy, see Walsham, *Charitable Hatred*, pp. 273–4; for an example of a quick-witted Brownist, see *B.J.2* (1633), p. 128; and for another witty recusant, see *P.R.* (1667), p. 150.

[85] *B.J.* (1630), no. 13; *C.C.* (1674), p. 36; *Cambridge Jests* (1674; hereafter *Camb.*), no. 289; *V.I.* (1679), no. 397; Brit. Libr., Sloane MS. 384 (*c.*1670s), no. 49; Brit. Libr., Sloane MS. 1757, fos. 11v–12; and C.A.S., WDRY/4/1/2, fo. 3.

[86] A. Milton, 'A qualified intolerance: the limits and ambiguities of early Stuart anti-Catholicism', in *Catholicism and Anti-Catholicism in Early Modern English Texts*, ed. A. F. Marotti (London, 1999), pp. 85–115, at p. 105; and B. Capp, *The World of John Taylor the Water-Poet, 1578–1653* (Oxford, 1994), p. 125. The recycling of these jests into the Restoration also connects them to '*anti*-anti-popery' (S. Sowerby, 'Opposition to anti-popery in Restoration England', *Journal of British Studies*, li (2012), 26–49).

[87] *The Autobiography of Thomas Whythorne*, ed. J. M. Osborn (London, 1962), p. 109. For lusty friars, see 'Of an Hermit by Paris', in *Pasquils Jests* (1604); *B.J.2* (1633), pp. 49, 51–2; and *L.J.* (1684), no. 64; and pre-Reformation jests, see *M.T.* (1532), no. 99, adapted from *Poggio*, ii, CCXXXII. For a popular jest in which an illiterate person explains that he can 'read no more than the Pope', see *B.J.* (1630), no. 17; *P.R.* (1667), pp. 138–9; *O.J.* (1671), no. 351; *C.J.* (1703), no. 120; *U.J.* (1718), no. 436; and C.A.S., WDRY/4/1/2, fo. 1v. For another popular jest upon the intercession of Saints, see *B.J.2* (1633), pp. 116–17; *B.B.* (1636), p. 135; *The New Help to Discourse* (1680), p. 172; *L.J.* (1684), no. 149; *M.J.* (1693), p. 160; and *Poggio*, ii, CCVII.

however, these 'foreign' popery jests were separated within print and manuscript compilations into discrete subsections.[88] The evidence from domestic jests, by contrast, displays a more affectionate and benign form of humour, based upon admirable wit, sociable laughter and neighbourliness. Such relatively uncontroversial humour no doubt helped jesting persons maintain ideals of 'harmless mirth' within company. Popular jests can therefore be understood partly as products of a religious culture that was 'flexible and accommodating' and concerned with the 'preservation of social harmony', albeit one under pressure in the 1630s.[89] At the very least, they represent what Alexandra Walsham describes as the 'contradictory impulses towards concord and conflict' that 'coexisted both within individuals and within communities as a whole'.[90]

Not only was this ubiquitous humour relatively benign, but the content and appeal of jesting culture was not confined to tavern wits or goodfellows. Even the godly divine William Perkins permitted jesting around the banquet table, so long as it did not burlesque scripture and was a 'moderate and sparing mirth, in the use of things indifferent, in season convenient, without the least scandall of any man, and with profite to the hearers'.[91] This combination of edification ('profite') and entertainment was a feature of early jestbooks that were influenced by medieval exempla: amusing anecdotes used by priests to impart moral lessons within their sermons. The compiler of *A. C. Mery Talys*, for example, concluded jests with a moral lesson ('By this tale ye may learn').[92] Explicit moral postscripts were dropped by seventeenth-century jestbooks, although aphorisms and morals were sometimes intermixed into compilations.[93] Still, moralizing continued in other ways: engraved playing cards that illustrated jests and morals, godly diaries that reflected upon humorous incidents, and preachers who used jests rhetorically in sermons to prompt 'levels of self-criticism' in their audiences.[94] In terms of jestbook content, moreover, most religious jests were not concerned with confessional difference.[95] Instead jokes about division were part of a wider backdrop in which religion was part of everyday

[88] *C.C.* (1674) was divided into 'Domestick' and 'Forreign jests', the latter containing its anti-popery jests. The compiler of Brit. Libr., Sloane MS. 1757 (late 17th century) incorporated jests on domestic recusancy (see above, n. 79) among miscellaneous material, whereas anti-popery anecdotes were organized into a separate section (fos. 111–80), sometimes drawn from polemical pamphlets, e.g. *The Black Box of Roome* (1640), p. 17 (fo. 142v). Other titles that hierarchically ordered material into subsections, such as *Wits Fittes and Fancies* (1595) and *D.P.* (1697), grouped anti-popery jests together: 'Of Roman Priests, Jesuits, and Monks; with Passages upon their Preaching, and the Auricular Confession.'

[89] C. Marsh, 'Piety and persuasion in Elizabethan England: the Church of England meets the Family of Love', in *England's Long Reformation, 1500–1800*, ed. N. Tyacke (London, 1998), pp. 141–65, at p. 161.

[90] Walsham, *Charitable Hatred*, p. 280.

[91] W. Perkins, *A Direction for the Government of the Tongue According to Gods Word* (1593), pp. 46–7.

[92] Holcomb, *Mirth Making*, p. 50; and Smyth, '"Divines into dry Vines"', pp. 65–7.

[93] *Camb.* (1674), no. 327; *L.J.* (1684), no. 27; *C.H.J.* (1686), no. 222; and the many aphorisms in *B.M.* (1637) (e.g. 'Things that trouble a family') or *B.B.H.* (1638) ('Either shame, or hunger').

[94] *Morals, Precepts, Fancies, Tales* (1692, repr. 1715), British Museum no. 1896,0501.934.1-49; and M. Jones, 'Lively representing the proverbs', in *The Proverbial 'Pied Piper'*, ed. K. J. McKenna (New York, 2009), pp. 5–30. On the godly diarist Roger Lowe, see Wiltenburg, 'Soundings of laughter', pp. 34–5; and on jesting preachers, see Derrin, 'Self-referring deformities', p. 264; and Hunt, *Art of Hearing*, pp. 267–8. This may explain why the nonconformist minister Stephen Charnock (1628–80) kept a copy of *Oxford Jests* in his library (D. Pearson, 'Patterns of book ownership in late seventeenth-century England', *The Library*, xi (2010), 139–66, at p. 156).

[95] Jests with themes explicitly related to puritanism, popery or religious politics account for around 15 out of 196 jests (7.7%) in *B.J.* (1630); 2 out of 291 (0.7%) in *Conceits, Clinches, Flashes, and Whimzies* (1639; hereafter *C.C.F.*); 5 out of 112 (4.5%) in *W.M.* (1628); and 39 out of 609 (6.4%) in L'Estrange MS.; jests with other religious themes in these titles number 26 (13.3%), 8 (2.7%), 6 (5.4%) and 120 (19.7%), respectively.

life and incongruous displays of piety and impiety were inevitable.[96] Many religious jests, including several popular ones, were in fact closer in form to *godly* 'complaint literature' than biting satire: anecdotes of ignorant rural and uneducated parishioners presented in sermons and moralizing titles such as Dent's *Plaine-Mans Pathway to Heaven*.[97] Sometimes the characters from complaint literature, such as the religiously lukewarm 'ignorant man' from Dent's dialogue, are indistinguishable from those in jests:

> If a man say his Lords praier, his Ten Commandements, and his Beliefe, and keepe them … no doubt he shall be saved, without all this running to Sermons, and pratling of the Scripture.[98]
> A simple Country Fellow, being rebukt, for his often neglecting to goe to Church: Why sayes He, I stay at home and keepe the Tenne Commandments, and by my Troth, I thinke God likes that as well.[99]

Other overlapping topics of jest and godly complaint involved resistance to ministers' attempts to catechize the ignorant and the disruption to services caused by hung-over parishioners. One popular jest describes an elderly man bringing a child for catechism who cannot himself answer the simple question of 'who made him' and retorts that it is no wonder because 'fourescore [eighty] yeeres' have 'past since I was made'.[100] In another a sleeping woman disrupts a church service, mumbling to herself, 'Oh pray give the Cup to my Gossip there, for I cannot drink one drop more'.[101] Besides complaint literature, such situations resonated with actual cases of insubordination and disruptive laughter in ecclesiastical court records, as well as more benign and fondly remembered merry passages in life writing.[102] John Cannon recalled how as a child in 1689 he was catechized and asked 'who made' him, to which he replied with a jest in oral circulation decades beforehand, that he was made by 'God but my father & mother found the stuff'. The parson, in response, 'laughed & was told of it long after'.[103] Jestbook publishers expected print consumers to respond to similar material, presented as a miscellaneous 'Mess of Innocent Mirth', in ways that suited their differing contexts and tastes.[104] Such consumers were an eclectic sort, drawn to both godly and profane themes and comfortable seeing the spiritually edifying and comic juxtaposed in other genres.[105] Jests upon the ignorant could therefore function not just as forms of amusement but, like the 'Sermon upon malt', as examples against which consumers defined themselves, reminding them to regulate their own behaviour (even the godly sometimes slept in church like the gossip above).[106]

Despite the mildness and wide appeal of popular jests, however, the sociable spaces in which jesting was predominately performed – alehouses, taverns and the 'worldly'

[96] E. Shagan, 'Jokes about piety in early modern England' (unpublished conference paper, Faith in Jest workshop, Utrecht University, 2021).

[97] On complaint literature, see Hunt, *Art of Hearing*, pp. 234–7; and R. Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 124–34.

[98] Haigh, *Plain Man's Pathways to Heaven*, p. 79.

[99] L'Estrange MS., no. 523; for anecdotes about ignorant parishioners (and simple parsons and churchwardens), see nos. 116, 194, 259, 269, 286, 313, 319, 392, 440, 441, 460, 482, 531, 532, 562, 575. Cf. similar pre-Reformation jests about misbehaving parishioners (*Merry Tales of the Mad-Men of Gotam*, pp. 16–17).

[100] *B.B.* (1636), p. 11; *C.H.J.* (1686), no. 184; *E.J.* (1687), nos. 72–3, 117; *C.J.* (1703), no. 124; *J.M.* (1739), no. 30; and C.A.S., WDRY/4/1/2, fos. 7v–8. cf. *B.J.*, no. 45.

[101] *Camb.* (1674), no. 11; and *L.J.* (1684), no. 60.

[102] Haigh, *Plain Man's Pathways to Heaven*, pp. 27–8, 90.

[103] *Chronicles of John* Cannon, i. 22; for the same reply from 'a good rude ignorant Boy', see L'Estrange MS., no. 392.

[104] 'To the reader', in *L.J.* (1684); and Smyth, '"Divines into dry Vines"', p. 60.

[105] P. Lake, 'Religion and cheap print', in *The Oxford History of Popular Print Culture*, i: *Cheap Print in Britain and Ireland to 1660*, ed. J. Raymond (Oxford, 2011), pp. 217–41, at pp. 228–31; and Capp, *World of John Taylor*, pp. 134–5.

[106] Hunt, *Art of Hearing*, pp. 71–2.

company that met there – confound any identification of this humour with a consensual mainstream religious culture. After all, even mild jests perpetuated the dialectical division between godliness and good fellowship, a 'binary opposition' that, as Peter Lake and Isaac Stephens conclude for the 'torrid zone' of Northamptonshire in the 1620s and 1630s, was not just a 'polemical construct' but one that shaped social life.[107] Godly instruction for children in cheap bestselling 'penny godlinesses' advised not to read 'any idle foolish jesting Book' that may nourish 'Vice' and distract from Bible reading and 'Godly Books'; moderate preachers warned that 'the joviall good-fellow-mirth of carnall men' was detrimental to 'spirituall mirth';[108] and, in line with such advice, the godly diarist Robert Woodford (1606–54) was anxious about losing himself within the company of profane men with 'a great faculty in merry tales and jests'.[109] Codes of civility compelled individuals not to take open offence from jests, yet, conflictingly, the godly were encouraged to call out sin lest they 'vex the conscience' and 'to maintaine talke of religion'.[110] Consequently, in some cases, 'community-building' jests might produce scenes of outward harmony that left some godly participants feeling an inward sense of separateness and, if swept up by the festivities, a spiritual hangover the morning after.[111]

Such power dynamics between joke tellers and audiences always complicate generalizations about laughter's capacity to build community.[112] So too does the conservative role of inversion in early modern humour. A common motif in popular jests was to represent liminal figures (fools, children or madmen) and those of low social standing (carmen or bawdy housekeepers, for example) outwitting figures who possessed elite status, authority and learning (scholars or judges).[113] For some, then, the humour of puritan aldermen or recusant gentlewomen discussed above may have derived from their 'incongruous' displays of wit. These were temporary inversions of the norm, given that expectations (if not practice itself) marginalized the godly and women within the jesting contexts of popular sociability and humanist wit, respectively.[114]

Finally, in the increasingly polarized atmosphere of the 1630s, jesting had a more divisive impact on religious culture than its mildness might initially suggest. The 'moderate' presentation of good fellowship as normative and puritan censure as ridiculous no doubt added to the strains put upon the Calvinist consensus, particularly at a time when Laudian polemicists were defining themselves against 'puritan deviance' and monopolizing the 'respectable and orthodox middle ground' in print.[115] The values of communal mirth making, neighbourliness and 'harmless mirth' found in jesting culture were themselves

[107] P. Lake and I. Stephens, *Scandal and Religious Identity in Early Stuart England: a Northamptonshire Maid's Tragedy* (Woodbridge, 2015), p. 363.

[108] J. Hart, *The School of Grace* (19th edn., 1688); R. Bolton, *Instructions for a Right Comforting Afflicted Consciences* (1631), pp. 12, 285; Lake and Stephens, *Scandal*, pp. 108–9; and Morton, 'Laughter as a polemical act', p. 116.

[109] Lake and Stephens, *Scandal*, p. 210.

[110] A. Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility: Changing Codes of Conduct in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1998), p. 239; Lake and Stephens, *Scandal*, p. 129; and Perkins, *Direction for the Government of the Tongue*, p. 45.

[111] Lake and Stephens, *Scandal*, p. 254.

[112] Wiltenburg, 'Soundings of laughter', p. 25.

[113] It was a proverb that 'children and fools tell the truth'. For one popular jest about a bawdy houseowner wittily replying to a judge, see *B.J.* (1630), no. 175; *O.J.* (1671), no. 474; *L.J.* (1684), no. 20; *E.W.* (1718), p. 23; *C.B.* (1660), no. 355; *C.J.* (1703), no. 75; *E.J.* (1687), no. 98; and *M.J.* (1693), no. 83.

[114] Holcomb, *Mirth Making*, pp. 119, 130; Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility*, p. 270; Wiltenburg, 'Soundings of laughter', pp. 24–5; and *The Virgins A.B.C.* (E.B.B.A., 20236). Conversely, for the case that 'jesting literature could furnish scripts and cues' for 'a counterhegemonic discourse', see Brown, *Better a Shrew Than a Sheep*, pp. 16, 149.

[115] P. Lake, 'The Laudian style', in *The Early Stuart Church*, ed. K. Fincham (1993), pp. 161–85, at p. 180; Lake and Stephens, *Scandal*, ch. 2; and Milton, 'Licensing, censorship, and religious orthodoxy', p. 650. See also E. Shagan, *The Rule of Moderation* (Cambridge, 2013).

propagated by pastoral poetry that defended the Caroline regime's support for popular festivities in the face of godly objection.[116] One orally circulating jest from this period even identified the dean of Gloucester – either Laud or a supporter – with a form of irenic good fellowship, presenting a situation in which doctrinal differences in a book collection are symbolically reconciled using 'a quarte of Sacke':

> The Deane of Glocester having some merry Divines at dinner with him one day, and amongst other discourses, they talking of reconciling the Fathers in some points, he told them he would shew them the best way in the world to reconcile them in all points of difference; so after dinner he carryed them into his study, and shew them all the Fathers classically ordered with a quarte of Sacke betwixt each of them, and told them that he ever found that the best way of reconciling them.[117]

Turning to figures involved in the production and transmission of popular jests makes clear their affection for the established church and aversion to puritan separatism.[118] Manuscript versions of the anti-predestinarian 'highway to heaven' jest identify its original Cambridge-based protagonists as the court physician Dr. William Harvey ('esteemed much for his witt and style') and the Calvinist (and future parliamentarian) Lord Dudley North (1602–77).[119] The publisher Richard Royston, whose *Banquet of Ieasts* gathered this jest and those above 'from the mouthes of others', as well as the jestbook compilers John Taylor and Robert Chamberlain, would all go on to support the royalist cause during the civil wars.[120] Royston in particular took 'a leading role in establishing and maintaining the royalist propaganda effort'.[121] This is not to argue that jesting culture was a mouthpiece for the Caroline regime. Indeed, as tensions became too intense to 'release' with playfulness in the late 1630s, humour became more vitriolic, including towards controversial Arminian figures: Laud, Richard Montagu and Matthew Wren. In orally circulating jests, unaffected by press censorship, allusions were made to their 'church-papist' opinions (Montagu privately declaring that Henry VIII dwelled in hell alongside Judas) and their unpopularity: 'When the new Oath, Canons and Articles were so violently urged by the Clergie, and as much slighted and spurnd at by most'.[122] By 1638 even the royal jester, Archee Armstrong, was dismissed from court for exceeding the boundaries of mirth to rail at Laud for being 'a monk, a rogue and a traitor'.[123] Nonetheless, the popular jests discussed here, although not partisan in tone, can be understood as subtly contributing towards the reshaping of the mainstream in the 1630s, a process that expelled puritanism to the extremes.

[116] P. Strallybrass, '"Wee feaste in our Defense": patrician carnival in early modern England and Robert Herrick's "Hesperides"', *English Literary Renaissance*, xvi (1986), pp. 234–52, at pp. 237–9, 242–3, 249; and Nardo, *Ludic Self*, p. 43. For points of overlap, see Hunt, *Art of Hearing*, pp. 260–1.

[117] L'Estrange MS., no. 36. Laud was dean of Gloucester from 1616 to 1621. A candidate with a better chronological fit is a benefactor of Laud, Accepted Frewen, who held the position from 1631 to 1643.

[118] Capp, *World of John Taylor*, pp. 132–40.

[119] Brit. Libr., Sloane MS. 1757, fos. 6r–v; Beinecke Library, Osborn b430; J. Aubrey, *'Brief Lives'* (2 vols., Oxford, 1898), i. 299; and D. B. J. Randall, *Gentle Flame: the Life and Verse of Dudley, Fourth Lord North* (Durham, N.C., 1983), p. 186. On the divisions at Cambridge, see Lake and Stephens, *Scandal*, p. 53.

[120] Capp, *World of John Taylor*, ch. 8; [R. Chamberlain], *Balaams asse cudgeld* (1661); and compiler of *C.F.F.* (1639) *Joc.* (1640).

[121] J. McElligott, *Royalism, Print and Censorship in Revolutionary England* (Woodbridge, 2007), pp. 129, 144–7.

[122] L'Estrange MS., no. 406; see also nos. 298, 390, 395, 398. For jests featuring court Catholics (Sir Tobie Matthew (1577–1655) and the crypto-Catholic libertine Robert Dormer (1610–43)), see nos. 227–8. The compiler of *B.J.* alluded to restrictive censorship: 'Had not the Licence curbed my libertie, … the Ieasts … [would be] greater in number.'

[123] Pierce, *Unseemly Pictures*, pp. 123–4; and *Archy's Dream, Sometimes Iester to His Maiestie, but Exiled the Court by Canterburies Malice* (1641).

With the outbreak of civil war in 1642, printed jestbook production stopped. While an exceptional title such as *Mercurius Jocosus* (1654) was essentially a short jestbook with news tacked on, humour was now being channelled into 'joco-serious' newsbooks, both parliamentarian and royalist.[124] At Oxford there was a 'deepe Excise put upon all Braines that pretend in the least wise to Wit', filling the pages of the royalist *Mercurius Aulicus* (printed between January 1643 and September 1645), with 'all Jests … happening within the limits of the Camp, Court, or the Taverns'.[125] After 1647, with Charles imprisoned, royalist newsbooks became 'less playful and more biting', railing against figureheads such as Oliver Cromwell and Hugh Peters.[126] These newsbooks, and the celebrations following the Rump's dissolution in 1660, tapped into popular conservative sentiment and emotion through reference to social inversion, scatology, sexual libel and the dehumanizing language of monstrosity and diabolism.[127] The rest of this article will discuss the legacy of this scornful period upon the jestbook genre after the Restoration and, in particular, how jesting culture shaped the collective memory of the civil wars.[128]

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Jests were often little different from historical 'anecdotes', providing illustrative snapshots of figures and events from the past. Some typical opening lines from seventeenth-century jests set their scenes in the pre-Reformation past, the continental wars of religion, or the rise and fall of the puritan Commonwealth: 'About the time of the Reformation'; 'After that horrid Massacre in France on St. Bartholomew's day'; 'in the Rebellious Times of *Oliver*'; and 'Upon the happy Return of King Charles II'.[129] Some jestbooks explicitly lifted their content from antiquarian chronicles: 'The Learned Cambden in his Remaines p. 254. tells you of a Fryar'; 'One of our late Chronologers that succeeded old Mr John Stow'; 'In bookes of histories I finde it written'.[130] This crossover occurred partly because of jesting's place within oral culture. Telling and hearing jests complemented the way in which historical knowledge was passed on not only through books but also in lively conversation and debate. Often anecdotes about the past, 'amusing rather than grave', were transmitted orally before entering the written record, or they were lifted from the page 'to be recounted again and again, the way jokes and urban folk-tales circulate today'.[131] London-based readers who preferred their humour to be more topical and local could turn to Restoration genres, as represented by the satirical periodical *Poor*

[124] E. Taylor, *Newspapers, Comment Serials and the Circulation of Political Opinion in Early Modern Britain, 1641–1730*, forthcoming (Woodbridge; many thanks to the author for sharing their work before publication); and J. Raymond, *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering in Early Modern Britain* (Cambridge, 2003), ch. 5–6.

[125] *Recantation of Mercurius Aulicus* (1644), quoted in Taylor, *Newspapers*, ch. 4.

[126] L. L. Knoppers, '"Sing old Noll the Brewer": royalist satire and social inversion, 1648–64', *The Seventeenth Century*, xv (2000), 32–52, at p. 35.

[127] J. McElligott, 'The politics of sexual libel: royalist propaganda in the 1640s', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, lxvii (2004), 75–99; M. Jenner, 'The roasting of the Rump: scatology and the body politic in Restoration England', *Past & Present*, clxxvii (2002), 84–120; and F. McCall, 'Continuing civil war by other means: loyalist mockery of the interregnum church', in Knights and Morton, *Power of Laughter*, pp. 84–106.

[128] McElligott, 'Politics of sexual libel', p. 98.

[129] *L.J.* (1684), no. 101; 'Forreign jests', in *C.C.* (1674), p. 21; *Camb.* (1674), no. 2; and *E.W.* (1718), p. 51.

[130] *L.J.* (1684), no. 64; *B.J.* (1630), no. 49; and Twyne, 'The fourth Booke', 'Chap. 7', in *The Schoolemaster*. On humorous anecdotes within Holinshed's *Chronicles*, see A. Patterson, 'Foul, his wife, the mayor, and Foul's mare: the power of anecdote in Tudor historiography', in *The Historical Imagination in Early Modern Britain: History, Rhetoric, and Fiction, 1500–1800*, ed. D. R. Kelley and D. H. Sacks (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 159–78.

[131] D. Woolf, 'Speaking of history: conversations about the past in Restoration and eighteenth-century England', in *The Spoken Word: Oral Culture in Britain, 1500–1850*, ed. A. Fox and D. Woolf (Manchester, 2002), pp. 119–37, at p. 127; L. Gossman, 'Anecdote and history', *History & Theory*, xlii (2003), 143–68, at p. 149; and Brit. Libr., Sloane MS. 1757, esp. fos. 20r–v.

Robin's Intelligence (printed between March 1676 and November 1677).[132] Jestbooks, by contrast, transmitted stories from classical and modern history, providing the 'cultural forms available for use by people to construct their relations to the past'.[133] A burgeoning literature has discussed how contested memories of the civil wars were played out within historiography and commemorations on a national level, as well as customs and 'seditious memories' on a local and individual level. These memories fed into puritan–Whig and royalist–Tory ideology and opinion.[134] Printed jestbooks, manuscript circulation and the oral sharing of jokes are relevant to these discussions because they too involved the transmission of contested memories on both a collective and a local level.

In many ways, jestbooks picked up where they had left off after the Restoration. People laughed at similar types of incongruous behaviour, wit and wordplay – much of it recycled from earlier compilations.[135] *A Choice Banquet* (1660), a reorganized and expanded version of *Conceits, Clinches, Flashes, and Whimzies* (1639), suggested a return to business as usual. However, by the 1670s the differences between pre- and post-war jestbooks were becoming more noticeable. Restoration jestbooks introduced a significant amount of 'new' material, much of it less benign than in earlier periods.[136] Admittedly, this humour was mild compared to polemic and satire, and prefaces still paid service (albeit less frequently) to the ideals of 'Innocent Mirth' by claiming not to contain material 'that may reasonably give Offence'.[137] Consumers were nevertheless likelier to find jests themed upon religious politics in Restoration titles or to read old material presented with a more partisan tone (discussed below).[138] Royalist jests in particular became a staple of printed and manuscript jestbooks. For example, out of 328 jests in the 1686 edition of William Hickes's bestselling *Coffee-House Jests* (first published in 1677), 42 transmitted royalist representations of the recent troublesome times, a higher proportion than those of standard material on cuckolds (17) or drunks (20) combined.[139] Even the pre-war reprint *A Choice Banquet* – comprising pithy, uncontroversial puns and

[132] D. M. Turner, 'The world of *Poor Robin's Intelligence*: comedy and communication in late Stuart London', in *The Extraordinary and the Everyday in Early Modern England*, ed. A. McShane and G. Walker (Basingstoke, 2010), pp. 86–104.

[133] B. A. Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering* (Maidenhead, 2003), p. 12.

[134] On national print culture, see M. Neufeld, *The Civil Wars After 1660: Public Remembering in Late Stuart England* (Woodbridge, 2013); E. Peters, *Commemoration and Oblivion in Royalist Print Culture, 1658–1667* (Basingstoke, 2017); M. Knights, 'The Tory interpretation of history in the rage of parties', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, lxviii (2005), 353–73; and A. Walsham, 'Phanaticus: Hugh Peter, antipuritanism and the afterlife of the English Revolution', *Parergon*, xxxii (2015), 65–97. On local and individual memories and practices, see E. Legon, *Remembering Revolution: Seditious Memories After the British Civil Wars* (Manchester, 2019); M. Stoyle, 'Remembering the English Civil War', in *The Memory of Catastrophe*, ed. P. Gray and K. Oliver (Manchester, 2004), pp. 19–30; and I. Atherton, 'Commemorating the English Revolution: local deliverance and thanksgiving', in *Remembering Early Modern Revolutions: England, North America, France and Haiti*, ed. E. Vallance (Abingdon, 2019), pp. 27–43.

[135] On continuity and change in jestbooks, see McRae, 'Farting in the House of Commons', pp. 73–4.

[136] By my count, only around 9.7% of the jests in *Camb.* (1674), 17% of those in *C.H.J.* (1677) and 23% of those in *E.J.* (1687) were published in pre-war jestbooks.

[137] *E.J.* (1687); 'The preface', in *M.J.* (1693); 'To the reader', in *Mercurius Jocosus* (1654); and *D.P.* (1697).

[138] Jests with themes explicitly related to puritanism, popery or religious politics account for around 77 jests out of 392 total (12%) in *L.J.* (1684); 31 out of 344 (9%) in *P.R.* (1667); 33 out of 392 (8.5%) in *C.H.J.* (1677); and 38 out of 398 (9.5%) in *C.C.* (1674). For the latter, though, if counting only the 'Forreign jests' section, this changes to 31 out of 104 (30%). Compare these numbers with pre-war jestbooks in n. 95, which range from 0.7% to 7.7%.

[139] The proportion of jests in other compilations includes: *C.B.* (1660): 8 out of 384; *P.R.* (1667): 8 out of 344; *C.C.* (1674): 8 out of 398; *Camb.* (1674): 10 out of 349; *E.J.* (1687): 5 out of 212; *C.J.* (1703): 4 out of 382; *E.W.* (1718): 3 out of 146; *U.J.* (1718): 16 out of 464; *P.J.* (1721): 5 out of 426; *P.P.* (1728): 2 out of 100; *J.M.* (1739): 2 out of 246; L'Estrange MS: 18 out of 609; Brit. Libr., Sloane MS. 384: 11 out of 198; and Brit. Libr., Sloane MS 1757: 3.

conceits – responded to this new political context, adding long-form jests critical of parliamentary excises and arrears of army payments.[140]

Royalist jests drew upon partisan themes and figures similar to those found in mid-century polemical newsbooks and ballads.[141] The Protector Oliver Cromwell, Colonels John Hewson and Thomas Pride, and the radical preacher Hugh Peter were all regicides who featured prominently.[142] Their (exaggerated) 'mechanical' origins, symbolic of an inverted social order within mid-century royalism – Hewson a cobbler, Pride a drayman and Cromwell a brewer – were mocked in popular jests:

> Pride the Dray-man, and Huson the Cobler, being made Lords by Noll Cromwell the Brewer. Pride thinking to give Huson a Jeer, told him there was a peece of Coblers wax stuck on his scarlet Cloake; to whom Huson presently replyed, no matter for that, a handfull of Brewers grains will wipe it out at any time.[143]

Whether in marital relations or the body politic, inversion (the world upside down) as a conservative form of humour promised a return to normality:

> A merry Gentleman, in the beginning of the late Civil Wars, being ask'd, if he should dye, how he would be buried? Answered, With his Face downwards: For, says he, in a little time England will be turn'd up side down, and then I shall lie right.[144]

Other themes influenced by mid-century royalism included the ejection of ministers and scholars, tub-preaching by uneducated mechanics, imprisoned Cavaliers, coded drinking rituals, 'trickster' royalists who called for parliamentarians to be hanged before melting 'away among the Crowd', the scatological mishaps of Roundheads, subversive farting of low-status individuals at parliamentary authority figures, and resistance to the puritan Commonwealth's attempted ban of popular festivities. The latter policy contrasted with a royalist culture that withdrew from politics during the Interregnum to celebrate good fellowship and traditional customs:

> When the Rump-Parliament had voted down the keeping of Christmas; A fellow said, it was high time for them so to do, since most of their printed acts began to be put under Christmas pies.[145]

While benign pre-war jests were critical of puritan extremes, the boundaries of acceptable moderate jesting, of 'harmless mirth', had evidently moved. It is noteworthy that the bestselling *Banquet of Ieasts* made no uncivil references to bodily fluids or scatology, whereas royalist publications such as *Coffee-House Jests* revelled in this material. If there was a 'growing inhibition' of gross 'popular' humour in jesting, it seems the influence of scurrilous newsbooks disrupted this process.[146] In terms of communities of wit, only in rare cases were parliamentarians the ambiguous source of wit too – such as the regicide who quipped 'that he might be hang'd after the new way as Oliver was, three or four years after

[140] *C.B.* (1660), nos. 327, 378.

[141] E.g., Brit. Libr., Sloane MS. 384, no. 129, derived from J. Tatham, *The Rump, or, The Mirrour of the Late Times: a New Comedy* (1660), p. 30.

[142] Knoppers, '"Sing old Noll the Brewer"'; McElligott, 'Politics of sexual libel'; and Walsham, 'Phanaticus'.

[143] Brit. Libr., Sloane MS. 384, no. 183; *C.H.J.* (1686), no. 9; *C.J.* (1703), no. 148; *P.R.* (1667), p. 88; and *V.I.* (1679), no. 25.

[144] *E.J.* (1687), no. 180; *Camb.* (1674), no. 32; and *V.I.* (1679), no. 94.

[145] *V.I.* (1679), no. 53. See also ejected ministers (*O.J.* (1671), no. 185), mechanick preachers (*P.R.* (1667), p. 21; *C.C.* (1674), p. 74; and Brit. Libr., Sloane MS. 1757, fo. 15v), a trickster royalist (e.g., *V.I.* (1679), no. 159), coded toasting (*C.H.J.* (1686), no. 261), scatology (*C.H.J.* (1686), nos. 224–5) and farting at authority (Brit. Libr., Sloane MS. 384, no. 129; and *C.B.* (1660), no. 327). On royalism, 'cultural conservatism' and popular culture, see J. McElligott, 'John Crouch: a royalist journalist in Cromwellian England', *Media History*, x (2004), 139–55, at p. 146; and D. Underdown, *Revel, Riot, and Rebellion: Popular Politics and Culture in England, 1603–1660* (Oxford, 1985), p. 176.

[146] K. Thomas, 'Bodily control and social unease: the fart in seventeenth-century England', in McShane and Walker, *The Extraordinary and the Everyday*, pp. 9–30, at p. 22.

he was dead'.[147] The wit of these parliamentarians was not meant to be admired, however, as the fate of the preacher Hugh Peters demonstrates. Jestbooks dedicated to Peters's 'Pulpit Jests' and exploits were published in 1660, irreverently entering him into 'the Catalogue of Wits' alongside profane jesters such as John Scoggin.[148] Peters was portrayed as a ridiculous extempore preacher, a self-serving trickster and Cromwell's personal jester. One popular jest originating from these jestbooks mocked the Protector's 'plain' style in speech and dress: during a downpour, Peters refuses the offer of Cromwell's coat, replying, 'I would not be in your Coat for a thousand pounds.'[149] Wit or no wit, though, Peters was a regicide, and the jestbook therefore concluded with his trial and execution and a cautionary lesson that '*though vengeance treads slowly, it comes surely*'. Viewed as a whole, these amusing figures and anecdotes played a significant role in supporting the 'official' post-1660 Anglican-royalist version of the past, which marginalized nonconformist and republican memories. They focused on a set of 'malevolent individuals' rather than underlying causality, associated the return of monarchy and episcopacy with the revival of more mirthful times, and made the fragile post-Restoration settlement appear more secure than it was.[150]

Aside from these jests, newly circulated or adapted from royalist genres, some Restoration jestbooks took on a less benign tone by updating pre-war 'old favourites' for more partisan contexts. 'Cards spiritualized', for example, was retold in 1660 as an anecdote upon the sufferings of loyalist clergy:

> In these late Wars there was an Information brought in to the Committee for Ejecting of Scandalous and Ignorant Ministers, by a certain Phanatique, against a Countrey Minister, for being a common Ale-house-h[a]unter, and a notorious Card-player.[151]

The jest's content was open to more partisan readings too, with its discussion of the king and knave cards reminding the parson of his allegiance to the 'Royal Sovereign' and the godly 'Informer', respectively. Such references recalled royalist ballads that compared the civil wars to a game of cards in which 'The Knave o'th'Clubs hath won the King', but in happier times '*The King hath overcome the Knave*'.[152] Another popular jest appropriated for more partisan contexts was the repartee of the puritan alderman. By 1677 this alderman was now a 'Fanatick' and a 'crafty man' being asked by the mayor (a former 'Cavalier') to toast 'when the King was restored'. These additions reduced the jest's ambiguity, suggesting that the alderman (who kneels 'with seeming zeal on both his knees') was a disloyal dissembler rather than a moderate Calvinist balancing conformity and conscience.[153] Other adaptations simply inserted civil war settings and persons into pre-existing anecdotes, thereby associating the Commonwealth with these earlier targets of ridicule: corruption in the case of a bribe-taking clerk transplanted into '*Oliver's* days',[154] and puritan extempore wordplay in the case of parliamentary preachers

[147] *E.J.* (1687), no. 11; and *O.J.* (1671), no. 574. And another on the regicide Henry Martin's trial (*P.R.* (1667), p. 121; and *C.H.J.* (1686), no. 309).

[148] *The Tales and Jests of Mr. Hugh Peters* (1660; hereafter *H.P.*); and a shorter chapbook version (*Hugh Peters Figaries* (1660; hereafter *H.P.F.*)).

[149] *H.P.* (1660), no. 40; *H.P.F.* (1660), no. 16; *P.R.* (1667), pp. 87–8; *V.I.* (1679), no. 24; *C.H.J.* (1686), no. 10; *C.J.* (1703), no. 157; *E.W.* (1718), p. 48; and L. L. Knoppers, 'The politics of portraiture: Oliver Cromwell and the plain style', *Renaissance Quarterly*, li (1998), 1282–319, at pp. 1289–95.

[150] Knights, 'Tory interpretation of history', p. 358; Neufeld, *Civil Wars After 1660*, p. 133; and McCall, 'Continuing civil war by other means', pp. 105–6.

[151] *C.B.* (1660), no. 382.

[152] *A New Game at Cards* (E.B.B.A., 31796); and *Win at First, Lose at Last* (E.B.B.A., 20818).

[153] *C.H.J.* (1686), no. 195.

[154] *C.H.J.* (1677), no. 214 (original in *B.B.* (1636), p. 39).

bemoaning how 'Paradise is become a pair of dice, and all houses turn Alehouses; but 'twas not so in the dayes of Noah, ah no'.[155] Exemplary of such adaptations was *The Tales and Jests of Mr. Hugh Peters* (1660), in which the radical preacher was dropped into various profane jesting scenarios copied from Taylor's *Wit and Mirth* (1628).[156]

Despite the dominance of royalist humour, the jestbook genre remained diverse in content and appeal (as it was in the pre-war period). *London Jests* (1684, 3rd edn., 1690) published no royalist anecdotes whatsoever, instead adopting a benign tone towards the godly in recycled material and offering plenty of jokes expressing anti-popery sentiment.[157] Its nonconformist publisher, Dorman Newman, who had recently traded in narratives of 'hellish' popish plots during the succession crisis, was, it seems, catering to his 'moderate' Whig clientele.[158] Likewise, *England's Jests* (1687; 3rd edn., 1702), whose publisher, John Harris, offered for the most part godly works, had proportionally less religio-political material and more in the style of godly complaint in comparison to other jestbooks, claiming to 'not interfere with Religion, or good Manners'.[159] There was nevertheless strong consumer demand for royalist jests, most successfully met by Hickes's *Coffee-House Jests* (1677; 5th edn., 1688), several of which transmitted the stereotype of puritan hypocrisy.[160] 'Captain' Hickes, who had engaged in some royalist skirmishes, was particularly skilled at 'correcting' older jests with updated partisan contexts or reworking familiar motifs, sometimes adding the term 'probatum est' ('it is tried, tested or proved').[161] An anecdote in the style of godly complaint about catechizing the ignorant, for example, became in Hickes's hands the tale of a 'Simple Rumpish Minister' outwitted by a 'Boy at Plough in the Fields'.[162] This partisan appropriation of popular jests continued even more explicitly into the first age of party. One case involves a Whig chapbook ridiculing the high church preacher Henry Sacheverell's processions throughout Corporation towns after his high-profile trial of 1710. Sacheverell's 'Raree-Show' for the mob and the 'Monkeys in their Formalities' was compared to a reproduced merry tale, first printed in 1628, in which a travelling ape-showman tricked a town into attending his show with a counterfeit warrant to attend upon the 'Queen's Ape'. Sacheverell was not, the chapbook explained, 'the first that has been waited on by a Corporation in their Robes'.[163]

[155] *Camb.* (1674), no. 256 (original in *B.J.* (1630), no. 133); see also *E.G.* (1734), p. 52; and Beinecke Library, Osborn b430. Other examples include Colonel Hewson inserted into a pre-war jest about one-eyed shooters (*C.C.F.* (1639), no. 119; *Joc.* (1640), no. 312; and *C.B.* (1660), no. 169).

[156] Fifteen out of fifty-nine jests (nos. 8, 9, 10, 14, 16, 17, 19, 20, 23, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30) are from *W.M.* (1628). The remainder are new or drawn from civil war prints.

[157] Compare the less partisan tone of the godly alderman's loyal toast jest in *L.J.* (1684), no. 21, with the version in *C.H.J.* (1677), discussed above. By contrast, for an extreme, scatological anti-popery jest, see no. 63.

[158] E. L. Furdell, '"At the King's Arms in the Poultrey": the Bookshop Emporium of Dorman Newman 1670–1694', *London Journal*, xxiii (1998), pp. 1–20, at pp. 6–7.

[159] Jests with themes explicitly related to puritanism, popery or religious politics account for around 6 out of 212 in total (2.6%), principally upon popery and quakerism. For examples of complaint jests, see *E.J.* (1687), nos. 47, 74–5, 92–3, 119, 195. Such titles may have complemented humorous children's literature produced by nonconformists after the Restoration. See C. J. Sommerville, 'Puritan humor, or entertainment, for children', *Albion*, xxi (1989), 227–47, at pp. 230, 237, 241, 246–7.

[160] *C.H.J.* (1686), nos. 20, 79, 83, 96; *C.H.J.* (1677), no. 77; and *O.J.* (1671), no. 245.

[161] See above, n. 14. The phrase is usually found in recipe and medical manuscripts to denote a satisfactory item. See P. Beal, *A Dictionary of English Manuscript Terminology, 1450–2000* (Oxford, 2008); for another royalist reader doing the same, see Jenner, 'Roasting of the Rump', p. 100 n. 69.

[162] *C.H.J.* (1686), no. 317.

[163] *The Banb===y Apes: or, The Monkeys Chattering to the Magpye* (1710), p. 5; *W.M.* (1628), no. 101; Brit. Libr., Sloane MS. 384, no. 157; *P.R.* (1667), p. 143; *O.J.* (1671), no. 126; and *Delightful Fables in Prose and Verse* (1691), pp. 169–72.

While Restoration jestbooks drew upon the themes of post-1647 royalist newsbooks within a national print culture, more local forms of 'royalist' jesting based upon anecdotes of the recent past had also circulated during the early 1640s. Nicholas L'Estrange's manuscript compilation of 609 jests ('Merry passages and jeasts', *c.*1630–55), recording the original tellers of its content ('My Mother', 'My Brother Spring', 'Doctor Garnons' and so on), provides a rich source of humour from this period. L'Estrange was from a gentry family in Norfolk; in 1643 he fought alongside his father and two brothers in the failed defence of King's Lynn from parliamentary forces and, as a result, the family's estate was sequestrated.[164] After the Restoration one of these brothers, Roger L'Estrange (1616–1704), became an infamous Tory polemicist and press licenser. Anecdotal history, with its focus on detached, often private incidents, has led this form of writing, from as early as the Tudor period, to be viewed as *resisting* dominant narratives of 'official' historiography.[165] As we have seen, though, Restoration printed jestbooks supported dominant Anglican-royalist versions of the past. The L'Estrange manuscript, however, can be understood as a form of 'resistance' (or at least 'relief'), insofar as it laughed at the follies of parliamentary authority figures and recorded pro-royalist sentiment at a time of family misfortune and political defeat:

> At the Close of somthing Read by a Ballett-monger in the streete, he cryed, God save the King and Parliament; Sayes a Merry Fellow that went by, God save the King; the Parliament will looke well Enough to save Themselves.[166]

Nicholas's compilation differs from other manuscript jestbooks due to its focus on recording local events. The crossover with printed jestbooks is relatively limited: at least seventeen (2.8 per cent) of the jests can be found in printed sources from before 1641, and another seventeen appear in titles published after this date.[167] Nicholas's compilation is more accurately described as a humorous chronicle. Its remit included the witty sayings of acquaintances and mishaps of local incumbents ('Sergeant Reeve usd to say'), local cases of theft and litigation ('One stole diverse Sheepe out of Mr Suttertons Grounds by Norwich'; 'Thetford Assizes: March: 13: 1637'), and family anecdotes ('My Daughter writing to a new Taylor at London').[168] Even jests with printed precedents were recorded as *actual* events featuring family members.[169] The royalist jests were similarly local, such as the disputed Norfolk elections against the upstart 'Tobias Fryar, a pretended Zelote, but true Ringleader and Head of all factious and Schismaticall spiritts in the Country', or the botched reading of the Long Parliament's Protestation oaths of loyalty (1641–2) by 'a minister in Norwich'.[170] Topics shared with polemic and biting satire included popular preachers (an 'Arch-Conventicling Mechanicke'), hypocritical puritans (adulterous attendees at 'a private Conventicle') and extempore prayer upon current affairs 'in the nature of a corranto' (a 'Blasphemous Separatist' praying 'Little dost thou know O Lord,

[164] C. Wilkins-Jones, '"My rude and imperfect manuscript": Sir Hamon L'Estrange's "Observations" on Thomas Browne's *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*', *Studies in Philology*, cxiv (2017), 768–851, at p. 774.

[165] Patterson, 'Foul, his wife, the mayor, and Foul's mare', p. 164; Gossman, 'Anecdote and history', *passim*; Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering*, p. 20; and M. Douglas, *Implicit Meanings: Selected Essays in Anthropology* (London, 1999), p. 152.

[166] L'Estrange MS., no. 455.

[167] Cf. Brit. Libr., Sloane MS. 384 (*c.*1670), in which 19% of the jests can be traced to pre-1670 jestbooks and another 13.5% were printed post-1670.

[168] L'Estrange MS., nos. 230, 356, 402, 542.

[169] L'Estrange MS., no. 5; see above, n. 39.

[170] L'Estrange MS., nos. 463, 553.

the miseries our poore Brethren in Ireland').[171] However, there were also 'moderate' jests from the early 1640s that were optimistic that the world would return to normality, with both sides becoming 'good Friends againe' after just one 'Civill Bout':

> Upon the first Breach betwixt the King and Parliament 1642. (the Prerogative having beene Straind too high) One deploring the Fatall change like to Ensue; ay says the other, THE KING and the SUBJECT must eene have one Civill Bout, (as we say) and then we shall All be very good Friends againe.[172]

L'Estrange's humorous chronicling, produced in the face of defeat, thus served a community-building function on a local level. The commitment to documenting for posterity these anecdotes no doubt offered a source of 'passive strength', a sense of optimism and 'control' over the course of events. Doing so consolidated a shared episcopalian-royalist identity, even before royalism's retreat from political life into mirth and heavy drinking during the Interregnum.[173]

What both local and national jesting culture demonstrate is that, as religious politics became explicitly divided into factions (parliamentarian and royalist) and parties (Whig and Tory), it became more difficult to maintain ideals of 'harmless mirth' when discussing controversial topics in company. All manner of violent behaviour in supposedly rational and sober coffee houses comes to mind.[174] For the diarist and high church Tory Edmund Bohun (1645–99), partisan humour was even self-reported as socially acceptable. Attending to business in town and entering conversation, Bohun imitated a radical republican's desire to murder Charles II ('We will destroy him as we before killed his father') yet failed to crack a laugh, causing instead what he deemed his 'gross and stupid' company to take offence.[175] Jokes require a measure of 'intimacy' and trust between teller and audience, a shared set of understandings that were becoming more difficult to assume – a problem mitigated by party-specific coffee houses.[176] Jestbooks catered for this shift in religio-political mentalities by becoming proportionally less benign in content and by recycling popular jests in a confrontational tone. Such developments in the genre corresponded with other confrontational features of late seventeenth-century print and sociability. Within coffee houses a new emphasis on combative 'bantering', 'shamming' and 'ludic lying' thrived (albeit one adapted from pre-war jestbooks); among socially competitive elites, the fashionable stereotype of the anti-civil 'libertine' made 'raillery' a more commonplace 'mode of conversation'; and for Restoration polemicists, wit offered new stylistic possibilities, other than logical argument, for laughing at one's opponents, sometimes conflating the terms 'jesting' and 'raillery'.[177] Jestbooks were, of course, still relatively benign and slow to adopt the partisan labels 'Whig' and 'Tory'

[171] L'Estrange MS., nos. 436, 442, 540; cf. above, n. 145. On the latter theme, see Lake and Stephens, *Scandal*, p. 105.

[172] L'Estrange MS., no. 503. Cf. Capp, *World of John Taylor*, p. 170.

[173] McElligott, 'John Crouch', p. 146; Walsham, *Charitable Hatred*, p. 24; and J. Waterlow, *It's Only a Joke, Comrade! Humour, Trust and Everyday Life Under Stalin* (Oxford, 2018), Chapter 5.

[174] B. Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee: the Emergence of the British Coffeehouse* (New Haven, Conn., 2005), p. 228.

[175] *The Diary and Autobiography of Edmund Bohun, Esq.*, ed. S. Wilton (1853), p. 42 (28 May 1678); see also the contemporary compilation of partisan witticisms in Brit. Libr., Additional MS. 28532.

[176] Waterlow, *It's Only a Joke, Comrade!*, ch. 6; and Cowan, *Social Life of Coffee*, p. 170.

[177] K. Loveman, *Reading Fictions, 1660–1740* (Aldershot, 2008), pp. 64, 69; and Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility*, p. 238. For continuities in wit's facilitation of anti-civility, see above, n. 44. See also J. Spurr, 'Style, wit and religion in Restoration England', in *The Nature of the English Revolution Revisited*, ed. S. Taylor and G. Tapsell (Woodbridge, 2013), pp. 233–66, esp. n. 101; and Knights, *Representation and Misrepresentation*, pp. 248–56.

into their staple content (not doing so until the 1720s).[178] Yet the polemical function of jesting is strongly suggested by Hickes's *Coffee-House Jests*, which omitted any prefatory claims to lacking 'bite' and was evidently subject to censorship in James II's reign. There is a disparity in content between the 1677 and 1686 editions, the latter published at a time when the regime was controlling press output in order to make James's toleration policies for Catholicism palatable. As a result, all thirteen jests ridiculing popery from the 1677 version were removed, only to be restored after the Glorious Revolution.

With the decline of religio-political conflict during the eighteenth century, there was, again, subtle shifts in jestbook content and style. Compared to their Restoration forbears, these jestbooks were less concerned with confessional difference.[179] While eighteenth-century satires upon the hypocrisy of 'impolite' nonconformists and Catholic 'others' were abundant, jestbooks offered relatively little anti-puritan and anti-popery material.[180] Controversy was still a topic of mirth: material on high-profile politicians, blanked names, Jacobites and controversial authors was published alongside conventional scenarios of misbehaving parishioners. But instead of hypocrisy, new jests often engaged with anxieties over rising levels of profanity (gamblers' inability to remember the Lord's Prayer or a drunk pawning his wife's Bible), as well as corruption within the Church of England (sinecures and the worldliness of the clergy).[181] Despite changing contexts, then, jestbooks continued to provide ways to engage with religious politics and the 'anxious aspiration' of Protestant nationalism, all while maintaining 'Mirth and good Humour' within company met not just in taverns and coffee houses but in 'polite' drawing-rooms, at assemblies and at balls.[182]

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With their ambiguous meanings, miscellaneous and overabundant content, confusing mixture of 'new' and 'old' material, and lack of polemical or satirical 'bite', jestbooks have been omitted from most discussions of seventeenth-century religious politics. To remedy that omission, this article has, firstly, introduced a methodological approach that pays attention to both the context of new material and the significance of 'popular jests' that were successful enough to be recycled over and over again. The distinctive functions of jesting have, secondly, been foregrounded. Jesting's roots were in elite humanist culture, but this culture was becoming increasingly widespread during the 1600s, helping individuals to navigate the politics of 'social participation' within company. Jesting culture, exemplified by popular jests, placed a premium upon the ideal

[178] See e.g., *P.P.* (1728), no. 81; and *J.M.* (1739), no. 131. *E.W.* (1718) featured no party-specific jests, but did append bipartisan, pro-Hanoverian succession songs such as 'The loyal Englishman: or, A health to all honest men'.

[179] Jests with themes explicitly related to puritanism, popery or religious politics account for around 19 out of 426 in total (4.5%) in *P.J.* (1721); 17 out of 246 (7%) in *J.M.* (1739); and 14 out of 341 (4%) in *N.C.* (1751). Compare to Restoration jestbooks (see above, n. 138), which range from 8.5% to 12%. For one popular jest upon a 'Dissenting Rabby' and a sermon-gadder, see *P.J.* (1721), p. 26, later recycled without explicit mention of nonconformity (*P.P.* (1728), p. 41; *J.M.* (1739), no. 118; and *N.C.* (1751), p. 43).

[180] C. Brown, 'Politeness, hypocrisy and Protestant dissent in England after the Toleration Act, *c.*1689–*c.*1750', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, xli (2018), 61–80; and T. Claydon and I. McBride, 'The trials of the chosen peoples', in *Protestantism and National Identity: Britain and Ireland, c.1650–c.1850*, ed. Claydon and McBride (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 3–29, at p. 11.

[181] For jests on the Church of England, see e.g., *J.M.* (1739), nos. 14, 111, 217, 245–6. For a popular jest on 'Two Gentlemen disputing about Religion' who cannot correctly recite the Lord's Prayer, see *P.P.* (1728), p. 25; *E.G.* (1734), pp. 1–2; *J.M.* (1739), no. 82; *N.C.* (1751), p. 58; and *The Complete London Jester* (1777), p. 86. For concerns over profanity rather than hypocrisy, see Brown, 'Politeness, hypocrisy and Protestant dissent', pp. 69–70.

[182] Claydon and McBride, 'Trials of the chosen peoples', p. 27; 'The introduction', in *N.C.* (1751); and *E.G.* (1734).

of 'harmless mirth', often adopting a playful ambiguity to discuss controversial issues without causing offence or falling into 'raillery'. Whereas seditious libel circulated without restraint and 'corroded' social ties, jesting within company represented a form of ubiquitous and socially acceptable humour, transmitting historical anecdotes and shaping collective memory.

The case studies of the 1630s and the Restoration show that, of course, in practice harmless mirth was not so harmless. Although jesting had a wide appeal due to the prevalence of material in the style of complaint literature and the emphasis upon consensus within popular jests – neighbourliness, harmony and communal laughter – such humour usually sided with the goodfellow and marginalized the intrusive reforming impulses of the godly. In the context of Laudianism, jesting thus played a part in breaking the 'Calvinist consensus'. Moreover, in the Restoration period, with the influence of biting civil war newsbooks, jesting transmitted a divisive, royalist version of the recent past that made the genre less benign as a whole and put a further strain upon the ideal of harmless mirth. Popular jests nevertheless did not rely upon a form of laughter based upon 'superiority theory' or 'othering' stereotypes alone. Instead they presented a more benign and sometimes affectionate form of humour that could potentially diffuse tensions and represent recusants and dissenters positively within a community of wit.

All this puts the jestbook in an awkward position within the historiography of religious politics and the 'public sphere'. In terms of media, jestbooks were circulated in print, manuscript and oral culture (whereas print is generally privileged as a key driving force for conflict and change from the 1640s onwards); in terms of affect, they promoted both 'conflict' and 'consensus', not explicitly appealing to notions of 'religious truth' or the 'public good' but still shaping confessional identities; and in terms of intensifying modes of communication, they thrived in both the 'post-Reformation public sphere' (1530s–1630s), when political discussion was a 'necessary evil', and the 'post-Revolutionary' one (after 1688), when discussion became 'normatively desirable'.[183] Jesting and physical laughter, as modes of communication, differed from 'rational' Habermasian discussion, insofar as they involved the creative delivery of jokes, 'somatic response' and audience feedback, 'allowing difficult social issues to be broached'.[184] Beyond this public-sphere framework, then, it is useful to think of long-lasting popular jests as proverbial favourites, their playful ambiguity helping contemporaries navigate the tensions surrounding toleration and the competing impulses towards harmony and conflict. Alexandra Walsham has suggested that individuals who tolerated dissent and recusancy on a day-to-day level engaged with hostile polemic to 'ease the inner discomfort' caused by a disparity between belief and practice.[185] Perhaps popular jests, told in company with their mixture of mild humour and controversy, appealed because they provided a middle ground between these impulses. However, this appeal did not extend to periods of severe polarization such as the civil wars, in which jestbook production stopped and 'othering' and scornful ridicule took priority. Indeed, future research could take into account the 'episodic' nature of ephemeral jests that, though not subject to recycling, addressed specific moments of crisis.[186] It could also explore the

[183] P. Lake and S. Pincus, 'Rethinking the public sphere in early modern England', *Journal of British Studies*, xlv (2006), 270–92.

[184] Noyes, *Humble Theory*, pp. 147–8; and Dickie, *Cruelty and Laughter*, p. 33.

[185] Walsham, *Charitable Hatred*, p. 279.

[186] Lake, 'Religion and cheap print', p. 238; and Spur, 'Style, wit and religion', p. 239.

complex afterlives of popular jests. For some, the political context may have become less significant than the 'form' (or wordplay) of an old joke.[187] But long-running jests such as 'Cards spiritualized' or the 'Sermon upon malt', which circulated into the 1800s, may still tell us something about the nation's 'long Reformation'.[188]

[187] Smyth, '"Divines into dry Vines"', p. 71.

[188] J. Gregory, 'The making of a Protestant nation: "success" and "failure" in England's Long Reformation', in Tyacke, *England's Long Reformation*, pp. 307–33, at pp. 319–21.