

**CARICATURE AND THE COMIC IMAGE IN THE  
1830S.**

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### i. The Death of Caricature?

Accounts of the history of the comic image in the 1830s have largely been both elegiac and dismissive, mourning the decline of the caricature tradition represented by James Gillray, Thomas Rowlandson and their contemporaries while simultaneously scorning the widespread production of what David Kunzle memorably called 'graphic bric-a-brac' in its place.<sup>1</sup> Yet even when acknowledging this narrative of a shift in comic visual culture from witty and urbane political commentary to the celebration of the diversionary, the miscellaneous and the trivial as a partial truth, it is hard not to be impressed with the range, vigour and sheer exuberance with which satirical and humorous images, including caricatures, invaded the market place for print in the period between 1820 and 1837. Gratefully accepting the opportunities opened up by the availability of new or re-invented reprographic methods like wood engraving and lithography, the late Regency comic image was colonised by, or, more powerfully, used to structure a wide range of generically innovative print genres and forms which included - in addition to various reformulations of entirely pictorial publication - songbooks, play texts, almanacs, annuals and periodicals.<sup>2</sup> Within this mass of print, the tradition of graphic political satire, while often incorporated into hybridised and generically complex print forms, was able to survive on at least into the early Victorian period, and was given a spectacular new energy by the widespread anxiety over such socio-political changes as those represented by 'the march of intellect' as well as major political events like the Reform Bill of 1832.

The burgeoning market place for illustrated books and periodicals aimed at offering artisans opportunities for self-education offered a particularly rich subject for graphic satire and parody. Magazines like the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge's *Penny Magazine* (1832-1845)

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<sup>1</sup> David Kunzle, *The History of the Comic Strip – The Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Brian Maidment's *Comedy, Caricature and the Social Order 1820-1850* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013) offers an overview of these developments and this essay forms a summary of some of the key arguments made in this volume.

sought to offer the labouring classes an a-political knowledge base, making extensive use of wood engraved illustrations to depict and explain the world. The magazine's many critics, especially progressive and radical commentators, ridiculed what they saw as a confusion between knowledge and information in the *Penny Magazine's* educational programme, arguing that the magazine reduced knowledge to unconnected small units of decontextualized information. The many mocking prints produced on the subject of working class cultural and social aspirations often depicted the perceived absurdity of labouring class ambition alongside the anxiety of the alarmed middle classes.<sup>3</sup> [Fig. 1]

While it is tempting to overestimate the disappearance of caricature, the cultural authority and commercial success of single-plate topical political satire did visibly begin to decline throughout the 1820s and 1830s. Caricature began to be subsumed into the mass of competing manifestations of the comic image that flooded the marketplace in these two decades. The dominant explanation offered for the dwindling cultural presence and loss of prestige undergone by caricature at this time derives from arguments made half a century ago by such important scholars as Dorothy George and Kunzle.<sup>4</sup> Their view was an essentially simple one – that the broadening of the consumer base for comic and satirical graphic images to the urban middling and labouring classes resulted in a coarsening of both the aesthetic ambitions and cultural allusiveness of caricature in pursuit of commercial success. Kunzle wrote of 'a satirical hiatus' in this period during which 'a larger, less well-educated audience' wanted 'diversion rather than enlightenment'. The outcome was 'inchoate miscellanies and whimsical ephemera' that represented 'a metropolitan culture spewing and sprawling itself abroad'.<sup>5</sup> George noted the force of changing reprographic processes in the 1830s and acknowledged the new

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<sup>3</sup> Dorothy George, *Hogarth to Cruikshank: Social Change in Graphic Satire* (London: Allen Lane, 1967), pp. 177-183; Brian Maidment, 'Caricature and Social Change 1820-1840: The March of Intellect Revisited', in *Shaping Belief: Culture, Politics and Religion in Nineteenth-Century Writing*, ed. by Victoria Morgan and Clare Williams (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), pp. 150-70; Brian Maidment 'Subversive Supplements – Satirical Magazine Title Pages in the 1830s' in *Victorian Periodicals Review* Vol 43, No. 2 (Summer 2010) 133-145.

<sup>4</sup> *British Museum Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires*, ed. by F.G. Stephens and M.D. George, 11 vols (London: British Museum, 1870-1954), XI, pp. xiii- xvii; Kunzle, *Comic Strip*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>5</sup> Kunzle, *Comic Strip*, pp. 20-21.

print genres into which they fed, but nonetheless visualised the print shop window as a show of 'degenerate coloured etchings and lithographs' which have 'little to do with comic art'.<sup>6</sup>

Such a conceptualisation of caricature as primarily or exclusively an 'art form' has been more recently challenged by a number of historians of print and social change. In particular Kunzle's conclusion that caricature in the 1830s was 'free to say anything – or nothing in particular'<sup>7</sup> has been contradicted by a number of cultural historians who have sought to write meaning back into the vast, available sources of comic images from the 1830s, many of them newly visible as a result of digitisation. In two entertaining and erudite books, Vic Gatrell has argued that the rapid decline of caricature was intimately related to a loss of the occasions for urban male sociability in the late 1820s and to a widespread loss of oppositional and radical political energy partly derived from a burgeoning optimism about Parliamentary reform.<sup>8</sup> He lists the 'many reasons why satire got tamer in the 1820s', among them 'the rise of new sensibilities and of a new pietism, and by the increasing cultural presence and idealization of women', and 'the final comeuppance of London's extreme radicalism' upon the deaths of the Cato Street conspirators in 1820.<sup>9</sup> John Marriott has similarly tied the failing energy of caricature's critique of contemporary politics to a wider decline in radical politics.<sup>10</sup> In response, 'publishers turned increasingly to these other forms, so carrying into the Victorian era a populist, carnivalesque, anti-establishment culture which found expression in virtually all aspects of urban working class life'.<sup>11</sup> Marc Baer has offered a detailed response to what he sees as 'the limits of mono-causal explanations' in describing 'rather dramatic shifts in what was produced, where it was seen – and by whom'.<sup>12</sup> In his account, the decline of caricature was the outcome of a complex of factors to

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<sup>6</sup> *British Museum Catalogue*, XI, pp. xiii – xvii.

<sup>7</sup> Kunzle, *Comic Strip*, p. 20.

<sup>8</sup> Vic Gatrell, *City of Laughter: Sex and Satire in Eighteenth-Century London* (London: Atlantic Books, 2006); Vic Gatrell, *The First Bohemians: Life and Art in London's Golden Age* (London: Allen Lane, 2013).

<sup>9</sup> Gatrell, *City of Laughter*, p. 575.

<sup>10</sup> *Unknown London: Early Modernist Visions of the Metropolis, 1815-1845*, ed. by John Marriott, 6 vols (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2000), I, p. xxxix.

<sup>11</sup> *Unknown London*, I, p. xxix.

<sup>12</sup> Mark Baer, *The Rise and Fall of Radical Westminster, 1780-1890* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 216 – 47.

do with the loss of the physical presence of print shops, the deaths of a particularly productive generation of caricaturists, the emergence of both new forms and reprographic processes for graphic satire, a movement away from the public viewing of prints towards domestic consumption, and a shift in taste towards a gentler, more whimsical form of humour. Henry Miller, in his book on political portraiture, has recently argued that radicals began to prefer heroic to satirical portraits in a drive towards making their political presence more respectable.<sup>13</sup> While none of these commentaries resolves the vexed question of whether caricature in the 1830s can ever be considered as a major force of oppositional and radical opinion, they do at least try to situate the satirical and comic images produced in the 1830s within a complex of formal characteristics, political cross-currents, and market-driven imperatives.

Of the established caricaturists working in the 1830s, George Cruikshank (1792-1878) stands alone as a celebrated and commercially successful artist who worked across an astonishing range of differing print genres irrespective of their cultural prestige or likely readership.<sup>14</sup> In producing art work for everything from lottery tickets to sophisticated fiction, Cruikshank both defined and transcended the important new role of jobbing draughtsman. In the process he transformed the visual content of print forms as different as the almanac (*The Comic Almanack*), the courtroom sketch (*Mornings at Bow Street*, *More Mornings at Bow Street*), the political pamphlet (*Sunday in London* was a response to the introduction of Sunday regulations), and - together with Robert Cruikshank (1786-1856) - the songbook (*The Universal Songster*) through the introduction of small-scale wood engravings with a linear and tonal sophistication and comic energy that demanded, and were frequently given, a full-page status.<sup>15</sup> Cruikshank's presence in volumes like these was celebrated by the prominent billing of

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<sup>13</sup> Henry Miller, *Politics Personified: Portraiture, Caricature and Visual Culture in Britain, c.1830-1880* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), pp. 90-92.

<sup>14</sup> Of the many studies of Cruikshank, Robert Patten's *George Cruikshank's Life, Times and Art*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 1992 and 1996) offers the most wide-ranging and detailed account of the artist's work. See also Albert M. Cohn, *Cruikshank: A Catalogue Raisonné* (London: The Bookman's Journal, 1924).

<sup>15</sup> *The Comic Almanack*, 19 vols. (London: Charles Tilt, 1835-1853); J. Wight, *Mornings at Bow Street* (London: Charles Baldwin, 1824); J. Wight, *More Mornings at Bow Street* (London: James Robins, 1827); J. Wight,

his name throughout the text, and he invariably signed his work. As a further sign of his status, Cruikshank pioneered the publication of loosely assembled sketches, doodles and small-scale individual visual jokes in gatherings of multi-image oblong folio plates, the titles of which seemed entirely unashamed of their humble aspirations: *Scraps and Sketches*, *My Sketch Book*.<sup>16</sup> These graphic miscellanies, several of them self-published, suggest a major new insight into the potential offered by the market-place for print in the 1830s – the realisation that the autonomous comic image, however humble its aesthetic ambitions, had a cultural presence that was commercially significant and available for exploitation.

In contrast to Cruikshank, other established caricaturists who were active in the 1830s, tended to work in a narrower range of specialist publications. Cruikshank's brother, Robert, worked extensively on providing illustrations for a series of play-texts, for songbooks and for a variety of small scale ephemeral publications. Henry Alken (1785-1851) gained considerable celebrity as a sporting draughtsman producing book and magazine illustrations as well as sequences of prints that emphasised the comic adventures of huntsmen, and other field sports enthusiasts. However, Alken also produced series of multi-image plates that drew on the Regency delight in the humour that could be found in the dissonances between verbal and visual commentaries on the same topic.<sup>17</sup> These short, thematically-linked series of multi-panelled oblong folio plates became an important mode of publication for the caricaturists of the 1830s. Alken also published sheets of images intended to be cut up and used to populate scrapbooks.<sup>18</sup> Other comic draughtsmen like the probably unrelated William Heath (1795-1840) and Henry Heath (dates unknown but working 1825-1840) worked mainly in single-plate forms, often producing traditional political caricatures or etched and engraved plates that offered commentary on contemporary manners or fashions. Yet they also produced gatherings

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*Sunday in London* (London: Effingham Wilson, 1833); *The Universal Songster*, 3 vols (London: John Fairburn, 1825, 1826, 1828).

<sup>16</sup> George Cruikshank, *Scraps and Sketches*, 4 series (London: George Cruikshank, 1828, 1829, 1831, 1832); George Cruikshank, *My Sketch Book* (London: Charles Tilt, 1834).

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, *Symptoms of Being Amused* (London: T. McLean, 1822); *Illustrations to Popular Songs* (London: E. and C. McLean, 1822); *British Proverbs* (London: E. and C. McLean, 1824).

<sup>18</sup> Henry Alken, *Humorous Scraps* (London: Thomas McLean, 1821).

of smaller miscellaneous images that enabled republication of their work in various forms ranging from single multi-panelled plates through to extensive anthologies.<sup>19</sup> [Fig. 2] Both the Heaths also contributed to early attempts at launching caricature magazines.<sup>20</sup> John Doyle (1797-1868), working under the initials HB, sustained a long series of lithographs through the 1830s that commented on political events, although it forms something closer to a character study of politicians than an exploration of key events.<sup>21</sup> Although more obscure, Joe Lisle (dates unknown), Theodore Lane (1800-1828) and J.L. Marks (a publisher of caricatures as well as a considerable draughtsman) were all active and produced work in the 1830s in their own distinctive styles, focussing mainly on social comedy rather than politics. By the end of the 1830s, a new generation of artists began to emerge, more oriented towards book and magazine illustration, and gaining prominence through the expanding importance of the illustrated serial novel and the periodical press in the early 1840s, which saw key developments such as the establishment of *Punch* and the *Illustrated London News*. Of these comic draughtsmen, William Newman (dates unknown but working from the mid 1830s on into the 1860s) bridges the gap between the caricaturists of the 1830s and the cartoonists of *Punch* most obviously, but Thomas Onwhyn (working from the late 1830s), Kenny Meadows (1790-1874), the short-lived Thomas Sibson (1817-1844), and Albert Forrester ('Crowquill' 1804-1872) all began to work in the 1830s along with their better known contemporary John Leech (1817-1864), who became an integral part of the *Punch* generation of Richard Doyle (1824-1883) and John Tenniel (1820-1914).<sup>22</sup> Hablot

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<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Henry Heath, *Heath's Comic Album. Five Hundred Humorous Etchings, Designed and Engraved by Heath* (London: James Reynolds, n.d.) and Henry Heath, *Caricaturist's Scrapbook* (London: Robert Tyas, 1840).

<sup>20</sup> Richard Pound, 'Serial Journalism and the Transformation of English Graphic Satire 1830-1836' (London: unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University College London, 1998), pp. 111-39.

<sup>21</sup> *Peel in Caricature: The 'Political Sketches' of John Doyle*, ed. by Richard A. Gaunt (London: The Peel Society, 2014).

<sup>22</sup> Graham Everitt's *English Caricaturists and Graphic Humourists of the Nineteenth Century* (London: Swann Sonnenschein, 1893) remains the most useful overview of nineteenth-century comic art, but see also Simon Houfe, 'Introduction' to *The Dictionary of British Book Illustrators and Caricaturists, 1800-1914*, revised edn. (Woodbridge: Antique Collectors' Club, 1981).

Knight Browne ('Phiz' 1815-1882) emerged into public consciousness late in the 1830s as the illustrator of several of Charles Dickens's early novels.<sup>23</sup>

## ii. Seymour, Grant and caricature in the 1830s.

Two of the most significant comic artists of the 1830s – Robert Seymour (1798-1836) and Charles Jameson Grant (dates unknown but working c. 1830-1845) - have still not received proper recognition as major figures in the history of British print culture. Seymour has gained something between celebrity and notoriety as the first illustrator of Dickens's *Pickwick Papers* serialised in 1836 and 1837,<sup>24</sup> but he has yet to be acknowledged as a prolific, varied and talented artist and is still living down Simon Houfe's judgement of him as a 'somewhat inadequate draughtsman'.<sup>25</sup> Thwarted in his ambitions to become an artist, Seymour's frequently improvised career was founded on his extended relationship with the publishers John Knight and Henry Lacey, a firm which pioneered niche, cheap periodicals illustrated by wood engravings.<sup>26</sup> Seymour was one of the first comic artists to develop the expressive vocabulary of the vignette wood engraving (his small scale drawings for the *Economist*, for example, have extraordinary power) beyond the functional and the diagrammatic, and his time at Knight and Lacey had also allowed him to develop skills in drawing lithographs. After his relationship with Knight and Lacey terminated in the late 1820s, Seymour was forced to seek work from a wide range of differing publishers and editors. He drew lithographs for Thomas McLean's *Looking Glass* between 1831 and 1836, and wood engravings for William Strange's frequently short-lived political journals including *Figaro in London* (1831-1839), the best known and longest lived politically radical

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<sup>23</sup> Michael Steig, *Dickens and Phiz* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978); Jane Cohen, *Dickens and his Original Illustrators* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1980).

<sup>24</sup> Stephen Jarvis's remarkable novel *Death and Mr Pickwick* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2014) is, despite its fictional elements, an extremely scholarly account of Seymour's life and career.

<sup>25</sup> Houfe, p. 449.

<sup>26</sup> Recent accounts of aspects of Seymour's work can be found in Chapter 5 of Maidment, *Comedy*; Brian Maidment, 'The Draughtsman's Contacts: Robert Seymour and Periodical Illustration in 1832', *Journal of European Periodicals Research* (2016), 37-52 <<https://doaj.org/article/df8ac6fd98f0495baa4fc915afccbc62>> [accessed on 28/04/2018]; and Brian Maidment, 'Beyond Pickwick: Seymour's Sketches and Regency Print Culture', in *Studies in Victorian and Modern Literature: A Tribute to John Sutherland*, ed. by William Baker (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2015), pp. 141-52.



magazine of the 1830s. Seymour also undertook jobbing work for William Kidd, an innovative publisher of illustrated guide books and other cheap publications, who made his name at least a little known to the public. Seymour's illustrations from the 1820s and early 1830s appeared in a variety of publications and ranged from an elaborate wood-engraved title page for *The Terrific Register* (1825), through lithographs for the sensation fiction *The Red Barn – A Tale Founded on Fact* (1828), to a sophisticated, lithographed frontispiece for reprints of the infamous radical journal *Black Book* (1835). He launched a number of ambitious ventures under his own name, including the *Humorous Sketches* (1834-1836) that secured him a reputation as a sporting artist, and the extended series of lithographed *New Readings of Old Authors* (1834-1836), **[Fig. 3]** which, while relatively unsuccessful commercially, offers a richly comic scrutiny of the lives of the middling and poorer classes of London.<sup>27</sup>

Charles Jameson Grant remains a shadowy figure despite the continuing research of print collectors and enthusiasts.<sup>28</sup> Less dependent than Seymour on close relationships with individual publishers and more restlessly entrepreneurial, Grant launched a number of generically complex periodicals and series of comic lithographs and wood engravings throughout the 1830s and early 1840s. The deliberately clumsy linearity of his prints drew on vernacular traditions of graphic display, most obviously broadsides and song sheets, but also playbills and posters. His extended series of over a hundred and thirty wood-engravings that combined considerable verbal elements with gigantic heavily linear images, *The Political Drama*, appeared between 1833 and 1835, and was subsequently re-worked as a series of lithographs.<sup>29</sup> **[Fig. 4]** Less directly confrontational was *Everybody's Album* (1834-1835), a lithographed periodical that built its large scale pages out of numerous images of

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<sup>27</sup> Robert Seymour's *Humorous Sketches* was first published in serial form by Robert Carlisle between 1834 and 1836, and extensively reprinted in a variety of formats that re-arranged, selected and added texts and various paratextual elements to the original sequence of 187 plates. *New Readings of Old Authors*, which eventually extended to twenty-six parts with each part comprising ten small lithographs that re-interpreted lines from Shakespeare as comic illustrations of Regency urban life, was probably initially published between 1834 and 1836 by Effingham Wilson and then by Tilt and re-issued in volume form by Tilt in the early 1840s.

<sup>28</sup> C.J. Grant's *Political Drama – A Radical Satirist Rediscovered*, ed. by Richard Pound (London: University of London, 1998).

<sup>29</sup> C.J. Grant: *The Political Drama* <[john-adcock.blogspot.co.uk/2011/02/c-j-grant-political-drama.html](http://john-adcock.blogspot.co.uk/2011/02/c-j-grant-political-drama.html)> [accessed on 25 June 2017].

differing sizes and varied graphic modes, often combining substantial caricatures with a miscellany of small-scale jokes and scribbings. The distinctive pages of *Everybody's Album* were clearly produced with the market for scraps in mind. Grant also produced a number of single-plate political and social caricatures (mostly as lithographs), notably a series of pastiche title pages satirising the cultural pretensions of the emergent petit bourgeois and artisan classes as well as those progressive institutions, like the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, that sought to encourage what was generally called 'the pursuit of knowledge under difficulties'. More directly topical and political images appeared in *The Penny Satirist* (1837-1846) [Fig. 5] and *Cleave's Penny Gazette of Variety and Amusement* between 1840 and 1842. Images from these publications were issued in undated reprints as *The Political Picture Gallery* and *Cleave's Gallery of Comicalities*. Grant seized vigorously on the commercial potential offered by the success of the *Pickwick Papers* and much of his work from the late 1830s and early 1840s comprised illustrations for various imitations, parodies and travesties of Dickens's work, extending beyond cheap serialised fiction into song-books. He disappears from view by the mid-1840s, and his influence is only slowly being rescued from the scattered scholarly footnotes that have acknowledged his significance.

Grant sustained the grotesque as his dominant graphic vocabulary and experimented fearlessly with scale. His work is so diverse in its character, so post-modern in its disassembly and re-formulation of the very forms and genres that he adopts, so experimental with issues of size and scale, and so ambiguous in its depiction of the urban poor as a carnival of grotesques, that it remains elusively diverse even as it seems to offer the most coherent and deeply felt, progressive and oppositional graphic commentary on England in the 1830s.

### iii. The modes of caricature and graphic comedy in the 1830s

Given that most comic images were published without their draughtsman's signature, it is perhaps more productive to map the mass of prints and illustrations produced in the 1830s through

their generic similarity or illustrative function rather than through the names of specific artists. A listing of the various print genres, modes and forms from the 1830s that engaged closely with the comic image is a testament to the energy, diversity, inventiveness and agility of writers, illustrators, and publishers working in that decade. Underpinning these specific developments were disparate perceptions of the commercial and socio-cultural role that might be taken up by humorous or satirical prints or illustrations.

The primary aim of one strand of the comic images published in the 1830s was driven by the wish to sustain or even develop the tradition of satirical topical political commentary that had, in previous decades, most usually been expressed as caricature. Single-plate etched and engraved caricatures, as well as images reproduced in the newly available medium of lithography, continued to be widely available, but there was an increasingly widespread understanding among publishers and artists that single-plate etchings and engravings in this mode had become too expensive and carried too much cultural capital to appeal to a broad range of consumers. The new potential offered by serial publications, especially magazines, seemed, however, open to exploitation.<sup>30</sup> The outcome in the late 1820s and early 1830s was a series of experiments in finding an appropriate form for a caricature magazine, begun by *The Glasgow Looking Glass* (1825-1826), a hybrid publication produced in lithographic form that combined caricatures with commentary on local events.<sup>31</sup> The use of lithography was an important shift in reprographic mode. The lithograph retained the scale of the etched or engraved single plate caricature while allowing the artist, who drew direct on to the stone more tonal range and linear fluidity. Lithography was, however, an expensive and cumbersome reprographic method compared to the wood engraving. The *Glasgow Looking Glass*, which used a

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<sup>30</sup> For a more detailed account of the shift of caricature into hybridised periodical forms see Craig Howes, 'Comic/Satiric Periodicals' in *The Routledge Handbook to Nineteenth-Century British Periodicals and Newspapers*, ed. by Andrew King, Alexis Easley and John Morton (Abingdon: Routledge 2016), pp. 318-27; Brian Maidment, 'Graphic Satire, Caricature, Comic Illustration and the Radical Press, 1820-1845', in *Journalism and the Periodical Press in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, ed. by Joanne Shattock (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 84-103.

<sup>31</sup> For the *Glasgow Looking Glass* see the excellent Glasgow University Website at <[special.lib.gla.ac.uk/exhibns/month/june2005/html](http://special.lib.gla.ac.uk/exhibns/month/june2005/html)> [accessed on 25 June 2017].

large page to gather together images and text of varied proportions, lasted for only seventeen issues. More sustained and substantial was *Looking Glass* (1830-1836), a lithographed periodical published by Thomas McLean in London and illustrated successively by William Heath, Robert Seymour and Henry Heath.<sup>32</sup> While *Looking Glass* was able to combine large caricatures with smaller socio-cultural graphic commentary within its large pages, the contributing artists were subject to tight control by the publishers, raising issues about the extent to which caricaturists were inhibited by editorial policy in undertaking topical graphic political commentary in the period generally. Despite the relative longevity and success of *Looking Glass*, the possibility of a caricature-led magazine that was primarily visual in its appeal remained out of reach largely due to costs. Wood-engraving was much cheaper to produce and could be easily combined with text. Thus, the survival of topical graphic satire was largely dependent on the reduced scale, vernacular energy, and rapid production process offered by wood-engraving. The early 1830s saw the introduction of a swathe of hybridized magazines that combined small-scale but lively caricatures based on the demotic inheritance of wood-engraving with a range of textual elements that often included theatre reviews, scurrilous gossip or even serialised fiction along with political and polemical commentary.<sup>33</sup> The best known of these magazines was *Figaro in London* (1831-1839), published by William Strange, edited by Gilbert À Beckett and mainly illustrated by Robert Seymour, but there were many others.<sup>34</sup> **[Fig. 6]** Despite the work of Celina Fox, Richard Pound and others, there is not yet anything approaching a full study of the visual content of these magazines.

Other forms of comic images that began to be extensively exploited in the 1830s resisted the temptation to enter into an alliance with textual elements and instead insisted on the primacy of autonomous visual forms of humour. One primary example of a print genre that was based on visual appeal and which relegated text to the role of explanatory captions was the down-market single sheet

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<sup>32</sup> Pound, *Serial Journalism*, pp. 111-39; Maidment, 'Graphic Satire', pp. 88-90.

<sup>33</sup> Pound, *Serial Journalism*, pp. 164-212; Celina Fox, *Graphic Journalism in England during the 1830s and 1840s* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1988), pp. 73-171; Maidment, 'Graphic Satire', pp. 98-103.

<sup>34</sup> Joel Wiener, *A Descriptive Finding List of Unstamped British Periodicals, 1830-1836* (London: The Bibliographical Society, 1970) gives a good sense of the mass of similar magazines, many of them extremely short lived, that were launched in the mid-1830s.

lithographed joke, often garishly coloured and published in extended series by downmarket publishers like Tregear, Hodgson and Spooner. This genre of prints has been largely ignored by subsequent scholars. Often crudely drawn and frequently incorporating jokes that are - to contemporary sensibilities - troublingly racist and sexist, the offensiveness, garishness and lack of aesthetic sophistication of these prints has limited their presence to specialist collections like the British Library, The Lewis Walpole Library at Yale and the Yale Centre for British Art, meaning that we can only glimpse the undoubtedly massive output of comic single plate lithographs. Something of the nature of these prints can be inferred from the title of what seem to have been popular series – ‘Whim Whams’, ‘Freaks of Fancy’, ‘Grant’s Oddities’, ‘Queer Subjects’ or ‘Flowers of Ugliness’. Lithographs of this kind, along with sentimental portraits and genre subjects, were sometimes given away free with periodicals like *The Star* (1838-1839). It might be assumed that these kinds of humorous prints combined their lack of artistic achievement with an appeal to the lowest classes of consumers. Yet there is very little documentary evidence of who bought these prints – were they an appeal to the prejudices of relatively well-off purchasers looking for ways to mock and denigrate the urban poor or were they consumed as a form of knowing self-mockery by the very people that they depicted? In looking, for example, at one of Tregear’s ‘Flowers of Loveliness’, which shows a dustman grinning at his own image in a scene dominated by a huge dust-heap, **[Fig. 7]** how fully would a relatively uneducated viewer pick up the visual allusions to the Narcissus myth? Why would a relatively wealthy consumer buy something that depicted so vulgar a subject? How far does the subtle tonality of the coloured lithograph give the image an aesthetic status that diverts the viewer’s attention away from its content? Or is the contrast between manner and content a further expression of the comic disparity between the dustman’s self-perception and the viewer’s less charitable reading of his attractions? And would the print still be funny without any direct understanding of the field of its visual reference? It is hard to tell. Perhaps the only conclusion to be drawn is that the ephemerality, the lack of artistic ambition, and the extreme use of the grotesque mode to represent the urban poor that has largely buried the single-sheet comic lithograph from widespread view will to some extent be readjusted as

such collections as remain become available in digitised form. It is difficult to know what scholars will make of them.

Quite at the opposite end of the market were the gatherings of oblong folio sheets, usually eight or twelve in number and frequently brought together by a common humorous idea, published in paper covers and which could, if wished, be bound into more permanent form or else separated out for framing or filling out a portfolio.<sup>35</sup> Many of the plates produced in this form were built up from an accumulation of smaller images, a casual and versatile structure that allowed established caricaturists to publish even their most trivial socio-cultural graphic musings with a semblance of artistic credibility and dignity. Some sequences were combined with an explanatory or 'illustrative' text and developed into a more coherent narrative structure. Seymour produced a number of these sequences, including 'Living Made Easy' (1830) which showed various ingeniously fanciful mechanical inventions that perhaps contributed more to the possibility of idleness than to the march of intellect. **[Fig. 8]** However, Seymour's 'The Schoolmaster Abroad' (1834), reaches a different level of both decorative pleasure and social commentary. This depicts in eight detailed, coloured lithographs an imagined trip around Britain undertaken by Lord Brougham in order to find out how far his mass educational programme had succeeded in elevating the minds of the people. Received with everything between condescension, ridicule, and violence, the last plate shows Brougham, sitting in a study reminiscent of Hogarth's depictions of learned men at home, grimly stoking his fireplace with projected but now abandoned contributions to the *Penny Magazine*. 'The Schoolmaster Abroad', a sophisticated publication aimed at the library tables of a leisured elite, is a sustained achievement that stands out from Seymour's many individual prints that mocked the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge and the educational programmes of Lord Brougham.

One advantage for the artists and publishers of publishing their work as short gatherings of oblong folio multi-image plates was the chance of developing the small sequences of plates, if

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<sup>35</sup> For an account of this print genre see Brian Maidment, 'Henry Heath's "The Caricaturist's Scrapbook" (1840)' in *Victorian Review* (Fall 2012), 38, pp. 13-18.

produced in a consistent format, into quite extensive volumes. The plates could, if required, be folded to fit into a reasonably compact volume such as Henry Heath's *Tit-Bits* which comprised 'five hundred humorous etchings' and cost the considerable sum of 12s and 6d.<sup>36</sup> Such publications showed little sense of shame and celebrated the miscellaneous and casual nature of these images. While all these publications represent exactly the kind of 'graphic bric-a-brac' that Kunzle so deplored, they also suggest how firmly comic artists had begun to understand the commercial potential of even the most sketchy and trivial of their drawings, which could be marketed as single sheets, small sequences or - as a final way of wringing profit out of previously published work - consolidated volumes.

To these attempts to re-invent and sustain graphic comedy as an autonomous print category should be added the many single sheets from the 1830s that were designed for re-use in scrapbooks and albums.<sup>37</sup> [Fig. 9] Again, middle class women were among the target consumers. In the 1830s the production of scraps centred on the kinds of small-scale metal or wood-engraved images that populated the oblong folio multi-panel series and formed the precursors to the European-wide market in brightly coloured lithographed scraps, many produced in Germany, that developed in the 1840s and 1850s.<sup>38</sup> The market in scraps, however, largely abandoned the comic as it began to expand in the early Victorian period.

#### iv. Seriality.

Seriality was a major driving force in the expansion of the market place for graphic humour in the 1830s. And central to the concept of seriality was the magazine. The crucial developments that created a dynamic relationship between magazines and graphic humour and satire occurred in the years between 1827 and 1830 and derive from two distinct sources. One strand of innovation, described above, originated in the continuing wish to sustain the caricature tradition by reformulating the traditional etched or engraved single-plate form. A second strand, recognising the

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<sup>36</sup> Henry Heath, *Tit-Bits Selected by Henry Heath* (London: J.Reynolds, n.d.).

<sup>37</sup> Brian Maidment, 'Scraps and Sketches: Miscellaneity, Commodity Culture and Comic Prints 1820-1850' in *19 – An Interdisciplinary Journal of Victorian Culture*, 5 (2007), 1-25  
<<https://www.19.bbk.ac.uk/articles/10.16995/ntn.462/>>.

<sup>38</sup> Alistair Allen and Joan Hoverstadt, *The History of Printed Scraps* (London: New Cavendish Books, 1983).

ways in which the wood engraving, especially given the small size of the box-wood block, could be easily and cheaply situated within a type-set page, came from a recognition of the decorative and diversionary potential of the visual joke within a primarily text-based publication

While attempts to find forms that supported the publication of comic images as independent and autonomous visual works preoccupied many publishers of mass appeal print in the 1830s, there was also a widespread recognition that comic images might be of most commercial use as a form of illustration for text-based publications by adding a new visual interest and appeal to established literary forms. The ability of the wood-engraving to be printed within the typeset page gave a particular impetus to the development of print genres that either imported humorous illustrations from available sources by buying in or borrowing wood blocks or by commissioning new illustrations from those jobbing artists who supplied the rapidly expanding wood-engraving businesses with their drawings. There is insufficient space here to describe the full range of print forms that began to use comic illustration to enhance their appeal to the public. Extended series of play-texts used wood-engravings, usually described as ‘taken from an actual performance’, as both a frontispiece and as a vignette set within the title page. Many of these illustrations, despite the claims to their authenticity as eye witness representations of performances, contained elements of caricature or comedy. Song books, again most usually published in extended serial form, began to import comic wood-engraved vignettes on to the title page of each issue in ways that both gave an indication of the laughter contained within the following pages and that gave a distinctive brand identity to the publication.<sup>39</sup> However, from the late 1820s on, periodicals formed the most extensive and ambitious site for the development of comic illustration.

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<sup>39</sup> Little work has been done on the texts of popular songbooks, and even less on their illustration – see *Cheap Print and Popular Song in the Nineteenth Century: A Cultural History of the Songster*, ed. by Paul Watt, Derek B. Scott and Patrick Spedding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Maidment, *Comedy*, pp. 62-72.



In 1827, *Bell's Life in London*, primarily a sporting and theatrical magazine that brought together the interests of the leisured classes and the more rakish elements of the urban middling and lower classes, introduced a feature called 'The Gallery of Comicalities' that situated a small wood-engraved comic illustration into its massed columns of print.<sup>40</sup> 'The Gallery of Comicalities' represented an important moment of innovation in introducing comic illustrations to a multi-columned print-based magazine primarily interested in sporting topics and urban leisure pursuits. As noticed above, in the early 1830s a rash of unstamped magazines like *Figaro in London*, many using satirical wood-engraved vignettes as a key method of appealing to their readers, congregated around such political events as the extended controversies brought on by the 1832 Reform Bill. Also launched in 1832, Gilbert & Beckett's *Comic Magazine* (1832-1833) [Fig. 10] sought to build a successful monthly humorous periodical that had small-scale but full-page wood engravings as its main visual content. The first two volumes were extensively illustrated by Seymour, who provided a range of drawings that offered variations on the visual/verbal puns that were central to Regency concepts of humour. The *Comic Magazine* was avowedly diversionary in intent, avoiding all forms of political and socio-cultural commentary in pursuit of good-humoured fun. It was extensively imitated in the early 1830s, although it was not until the emergence of *Punch* in the early 1840s that such unambitiously amusing images became an integral part of the graphic repertoire used by the magazine alongside the 'big cuts' (political cartoons) and socio-cultural visual commentary that became its specialty.

Another significant way through which the comic image began to emerge widely into print culture in the 1830s depended on an opportunist graphic colonisation of well-established and commercially successful literary forms. Such a playful yet subversive incursion of comic visuality into a print genre that had not previously engaged with graphic humour, using the disorientating

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<sup>40</sup> David Kunzle, 'Between Broadsheet Caricature and *Punch*: Cheap Newspaper Cuts for the Lower Classes in the 1830s', *Art Journal* (Winter 1983), pp. 339-46; Brian Maidment, 'The Gallery of Comicalities: Graphic Humour, the Wood Engraving and the Development of the Comic Magazine, 1820-1841', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 50 (Spring 2017), 214-27.

potentiality of the travesty as its mode of entry, can be vividly suggested by considering the history of the almanac in the 1830s. During this decade the predictive almanac, frequently comprising an anthology of the improbable, the miraculous, and the superstitious, and illustrated in both broadsheet and pamphlet forms by crude woodcuts, had come under sustained attack from the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Literature, under the guidance of Lord Brougham and his publisher Charles Knight.<sup>41</sup> The Society had launched its own sternly utilitarian and unillustrated *British Almanac* in 1829 and continued to issue a range of forbiddingly 'useful' publications. Despite its disingenuous claim to neutrality in its presentation of information, it was immediately apparent to the many critics of the SDUK's cultural programme that the *British Almanac* formed part of an acutely ideological project. For a wide number of publishers, readers, and writers, print forms that sought authority and used information as a form of potentially coercive social management were to be treated with suspicion or disdain. One response, driven both by an intellectual resistance to the blandishments of establishment print and by a sense of commercial opportunism, was to offer a version of the almanac that was both playful and subversive, using available modes of cultural appropriation such as parody, travesty, and pastiche to undermine the authority of words, figures, and charts. In reformulating the typographical structures that had traditionally presented information in almanac form, a number of comic almanacs began in the early 1830s to utilise the power of the satirical image to deconstruct the cultural power of information.

The most famous and successful comic almanac was the long-lived *Comic Almanack* which ran from 1835 until 1853.<sup>42</sup> [Fig. 11] The *Comic Almanack* gathered together a group of radical/bohemian young jobbing writers several of whom - Horace Mayhew, Gilbert À Beckett, and William Makepeace

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<sup>41</sup> Fox, *Richard Pound*, pp. 137–73; Patricia Anderson, *The Printed Image and the Transformation of Popular Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 50–83; Brian Maidment, 'Beyond Ephemerality and Usefulness: The Discursive Almanac, 1828–1860', in *British Literature and Print Culture*, ed. by Sandro Jung (London: Boydell and Brewer, 2014), pp. 158–94; Valerie Gray, *Charles Knight: Editor, Publisher, Writer* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 47–53.

<sup>42</sup> For a more detailed account of *The Comic Almanack* see Brian Maidment, 'Larks in Season: *The Comic Almanack*, 1835–1854', in *Cahiers Victoriens et Edouardiens* (2016) <<https://cve.revues.org/2881>> [accessed 26 June 2017].

Thackeray – went on to work for *Punch* in the 1840s. Its first editor was George Cruikshank who was also the main illustrator, producing both full-page etchings and (in collaboration with jobbing artists like H.G.Hine) the tiny wood-engravings that were scattered throughout the text.<sup>43</sup> Each annual issue, usually comprising sixty-four pages, cost 2s 6d, suggesting a largely affluent middle-class readership. In its later years, the *Comic Almanack* struggled against the increasing popularity of *Punch* and, despite price cuts and fewer pages, lost the middle-class patronage on which it had depended. Cruikshank and his team superimposed a range of playful, visually arresting and often subversive visual elements, many of them, like silhouettes, drawn from elsewhere in popular print culture onto the instantly recognizable typographical and graphic conventions of the almanac page. Such formal hybridity and inventiveness gave the almanac a new visual energy and diversity which offered a sustained critique of the almanac's traditional significance. In making this critique, the *Comic Almanack* exemplified a form of radicalism found more widely in 1830s print culture, which operated more through satirical pastiche and the witty and mischievous travesty of establishment values than through direct ideological confrontation.<sup>44</sup>

Several other subversive reinventions of the almanac form as a comic graphic commodity appeared in the mid-1830s. Grant surpassed even the inventiveness of *The Comic Almanac* with a version of an almanac print designed to be worn inside a hat.<sup>45</sup> The team that produced the radical bohemian periodical *Figaro in London* reworked Seymour's wood-engraved vignette caricatures into a *Figaro in London Almanac* (William Strange, 1836), a broadside single sheet that surrounded a conventional calendar with Seymour's images, thus finding an ingenious way of reusing the original blocks for commercial purposes. Seymour also provided the wood-engraved illustrations for *The Political Almanac for 1836*, which was issued by Effingham Wilson, a publisher well known for his

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<sup>43</sup> Patten, *Cruikshank*, II, pp. 197-99; Richard A. Vogler, *Graphic Works of George Cruikshank* (New York: Dover Publications, 1979), p. 153.

<sup>44</sup> Fox, *Richard Pound*, pp. 79-113.

<sup>45</sup> Pound, *Political Drama*, pp. 66-67.

progressive sympathies.<sup>46</sup> While *The Political Almanac* promised (and delivered) what its title page described as ‘The Natural Phenomena, Festivals, Holidays, etc.; with a large quantity of political and commercial information’, its distinctiveness lay in ‘Thirteen Humorous Engravings from Designs by Robert Seymour with Poetical Contributions from Popular Pens’. Seymour’s wood-engravings were scaled-down political caricatures drawn using the graphic vocabulary and emblematic gestures of late eighteenth-century visual satire and accompanied satirical verses on contemporary public events. *The Political Almanac* was aimed at a readership schooled in the sophisticated discourses of Regency political debate. It incorporated complex visual elements not traditionally associated with the almanac into its form while still retaining something of the almanac’s traditional structure and content. But it also offered a satirical commentary on the almanac’s stuffier elements and brought a new visual pleasure to the consumption of information.

The incursion of comic and satirical images into the established market for annuals and gift books was perhaps a less subversive and more playful shift in generic status than had been the case with the comic almanac. **[Fig. 12]** Using the pocket size that was becoming increasingly popular across the market and heavily dependent on small-scale wood-engraved jokes to bind the miscellaneous sketches, short narratives, poems, and anecdotes that formed the printed content together, the comic annual enjoyed a brief popularity in the 1830s. Annuals had become a successful literary genre in the 1820s, with Faxon’s standard bibliography firmly stating that the ‘*Forget-me-not*, published in England in 1823 was undoubtedly the first “literary annual”’.<sup>47</sup> The genre remained popular for thirty years, and, characterised by their gilt decorative bindings and tissue-guarded steel engravings, annuals became closely identified with the tastes of genteel women readers.<sup>48</sup> In order to offer a travesty version of such self-consciously refined publications, a comic annual needed to have a distinct and

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<sup>46</sup> Maidment, ‘Beyond Usefulness’, pp. 173-79.

<sup>47</sup> Frederick W. Faxon, *Literary Annuals and Gift Books: A Bibliography, 1823-1903* (Pinner: Private Libraries Association, 1973), p. xi.

<sup>48</sup> For a good recent overview of the annual and gift book, see Barbara Onslow, ‘Gendered Production: Annuals and Gift Books’ in *Journalism and the Periodical Press in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Joanne Shattock (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 66-83.

potentially coarsened visual content that replaced the silvery tones of the steel engraving with the robust linearity of wood-engravings, and abandoned gold-embossed or moire-silk bindings for the eye-catching graphics of printed paper boards which could carry a wood-engraved image. In addition to such changes in its physical form, the comic annual also needed to stress the parodic distance between the sentimental poetry and narratives of the traditional annuals and the wood-engraved puns, jokes and crudely realized humorous verse of the parodic alternative annuals. Yet, as is often the case with travesty, the comic annuals that emerged in the 1830s retained much of the gentrified feel of the established gift book at the same time that they sought to distance themselves from it. They were certainly aimed at sophisticated readers despite their enthusiasm for the linear simplicities and sometimes clumsy visual jokiness of comic wood-engraving.

As with the almanac, there was one publication that managed to sustain the genre throughout the 1830s and beyond - *Hood's Comic Annual, or, Anniversary of Literary Fun*, which was published by Charles Tilt between 1830 and 1839 with another volume in 1842.<sup>49</sup> *Hood's Annual* was able to draw on its editor's unique ability to formulate Regency humour into both literary and visual forms. Both Hood's verse and his illustrations drew on the macabre and the grotesque, although he also made widespread use of less confrontational visual/verbal puns. Thus *Hood's Annual* provided a combination of full-page visual jokes rendered as simple linear wood-engravings and energetic comic verse that became a blueprint for imitators. Although producing only one issue, the *New Comic Annual*<sup>50</sup> seems to have competed successfully with Hood's publication. The *New Comic Annual* deferred to *Hood's Comic Annual* in its pocket size, its use of inventive full-page wood engravings, and its decorative binding. At the same time, it offered the option of gilt-ornamented publisher's cloth as well as the quarter-leather paper boards that characterised *Hood's Comic Annual*, suggesting that the publishers had opted for durability rather than showiness. Published by a relatively up-market firm

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<sup>49</sup> Sara Lodge, *Thomas Hood and Nineteenth-Century Poetry: Work, Play and Politics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

<sup>50</sup> Also known as *Falstaff's Annual*, *The New Comic Annual* was published by Hurst, Chance & Co. in 1832.

and costing twelve shillings, it was an expensive volume even allowing for the generous ration of William Brown's 'one hundred humorous cuts'. W.H. Harrison's *The Humourist, A Companion for the Christmas Fireside*, another 1832 publication by a highly regarded publisher (in this case Rudolph Ackermann), offered a similar abundance of illustrations by including eighty engravings by W.H. Brooke. *Seymour's Comic Album* (1832), while describing itself as a 'perennial of fun', nonetheless showed all the characteristics of the comic annual.<sup>51</sup> In all of these comic annuals, the draughtsman and the engravers were given full billing in the lists of contents, suggesting the extent to which relatively crudely drawn wood-engraved 'jokes' had by 1832 become acceptable to sophisticated and quite wealthy book-buyers at least when enclosed within the relatively anodyne covers of the Christmas annual.

Of particular interest in the context of this essay are the five volumes of *Comic Offering*, a comic annual published by Smith Elder between 1831 and 1835. *Comic Offering* was edited by a woman, Louisa Henrietta Sheridan, and addressed to women readers. Tamara Hunt notes that, 'not only was it the first comic annual to be directed to "the Ladies", but it was the first British humour publication to be written, edited and illustrated by a woman'.<sup>52</sup> *Comic Offering* sought to challenge the widespread contemporary view that comedy, especially visual comedy, was an offence against propriety and therefore belonged exclusively to male discourses and social occasions. Sheridan thus walked a tightrope between introducing women readers to forms of printed humour that had previously been produced on the assumption of a male readership and finding content for her publication that, in Hunt's words, combined the 'ludicrous' and the 'benign', without offending against notions of decency. The address of Sheridan's publication to women in recognition of their traditional interest in the annual form was underlined by the publication's format. The volumes were issued in the pocket size that had become associated with wood-engraved illustrations, using a rather fragile,

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<sup>51</sup> *Seymour's Comic Album; or, Museum of Entertainment* (London: W.Kidd n.d. [1832]). Seymour also produced *The Squib Annual of Poetry, Politics, and Personalities* (London: Chapman and Hall 1836).

<sup>52</sup> Tamara L. Hunt, 'Louisa Henrietta Sheridan's *Comic Offering* and the Critics: Gender and Humour in the Early Victorian Era,' *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 29.2 (1996), 95-115 (p. 95).

embossed leather binding and the gilt edges that were often used to emphasise the claims of the annual form to gentility. If Hunt's assertion that Sheridan illustrated *Comic Offering* is true, her ideas and sketches were translated onto blocks by established comic artists, most notably by Seymour. Seymour was also responsible for some of the elaborate frontispieces and title page vignettes.

Such an explicit address to women to become consumers of graphic humour, as well as the acknowledgement that the humour might have to be 'relatively mild and innocuous' is an important element in explaining the expansion of the marketplace for graphic humour that occurred in the 1830s.<sup>53</sup> While it is hard to assess the implied consumer of much comic visual culture from the 1830s, there is little doubt that the market for scraps was largely driven by their popularity with leisured women interested in compiling scrapbooks and albums drawn from a range of available printed sources.<sup>54</sup> In looking across the interest in violent street confrontations, the frequent depictions of domestic distress, and the persistently grotesque bodies everywhere visible in the comic visual culture produced in the 1830s, it is nonetheless important to recognise the drift towards a warm-hearted whimsy and 'benign' comedy that may to some extent be the outcome of a wish to include women among the available consumers of humorous print culture.

## v. Conclusion

The dominant narrative account of the history of the comic image in Britain in the 1830s has identified the decade as a fallow ground between the death of the caricature tradition and the emergence of the serialised novel and the fiction-bearing illustrated magazine in the years immediately following the publication of *Pickwick* in 1837. Such a narrative argues that a generational shift left George Cruikshank alone in the 1830s to maintain the force of graphic political satire, and Cruikshank himself was turning more towards book and periodical illustration rather than caricature. Still to come was the widespread cultural presence of the kinds of black and white illustration that

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<sup>53</sup> Hunt, p. 95.

<sup>54</sup> See Maidment, 'Scraps and Sketches'.

were beginning to be utilised by Dickens in publishing his work as both serialised novels and magazine contributions from the late 1830s on. The frenzied productivity, generic volatility and often low artistic ambition of the mass of comic images produced in the 1830s has generally been read as, at best, a false start that produced little of value either for emergent Victorian graphic practices or for modern cultural historians. Remember Kunzle's phrase that much of the comic production of the 1830s means 'nothing in particular'. More recent and more charitable accounts than Kunzle's have centred on documenting a modal shift in graphic comedy between 1800 and 1840 that suggest a drift away from wit, satire, and complex allusiveness towards more 'bourgeois' kinds of humour that were gentler and more whimsical and concerned centrally with manners and social behaviour rather than politics. For many critics this was a shift that involved a significant loss of oppositional political and graphic energy, and led to the capture of the comic image as an aspect of bourgeois respectability exemplified by the readership of the *Illustrated London News* and, after a few years of flirtation with radicalism, *Punch*. It is this narrative, too, that documents the trajectory of the comic image away from forms of autonomous visuality and graphic self-possession towards functioning, in collusion with various textual elements, primarily as *illustration*.

This essay has suggested that much of the comic art produced in the 1830s attempted to resist this transition towards textual dependency with considerable resourcefulness. Even in the many locales where text and image became complicit in the production of new print forms, elements of contest between the visual and the verbal were involved which often resulted in generically hybrid forms that offered the image more authority than the secondary role suggested by the term *illustration*. Artists, publishers and editors remained interested in the ways the comic image offered the potential for such varied purposes as radical or progressive political satire, mocking travesties of established and often genteel literary forms, or expressing exuberant and high-spirited coarseness in the graphic simplicities and garish colours of coarsely drawn lithographs. They were reluctant to cede the commercial potential of the comic image as an autonomous commodity to the beguiling attractions of text. As suggested above, several of the major achievements of print culture in the 1830s



– Grant's *Political Drama*, McLean's *Looking Glass*, Seymour's *Humorous Sketches* and *New Readings of Old Authors* - were expressed as sequences of images with only a bare minimum of 'illustrative' textual accompaniment.

The likes of *Pickwick*, *Punch* and the *Illustrated London News* combined to assert the interdependence of the printed word and the comic image just as the full potentiality of the image to construct autonomous print forms largely independent of verbal commentary was being imagined. Elsewhere, in France, the Netherlands and the United States of America, this potentiality was being explored within the comic strip and the cartoon. In Britain, the comic image had invaded the printed text in a range of interesting and inventive ways in the 1830s, but by the 1840s it had largely become the servant of the printed word. However impressive the achievements of the illustrators of Victorian serialised fiction and magazines may have been, it is important to see their work in relationship to the feverish inventiveness, generic instability and commercial energy of the comic artists of the 1830s.

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