

**Herd Behavior During the Popish Plot of 1678-1681: An Examination of Crowd Hysteria  
and English Anti-Catholicism**

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French sociologist Gustave Le Bon stated that the most significant “renewal[s] of civilizations” have resulted from ideological transformations based upon religious, political, and social beliefs, accompanied by a change in environmental conditions.<sup>1</sup> These factors, when introduced to the masses, encouraged crowd behavior, which caused the most dramatic sociopolitical, historical episodes. One such event, the “Horrid, Hellish Popish Plot”<sup>2</sup> of 1678 to 1681, provides a typical example of crowd behavior and the public’s role in the political development within those years. The Plot began on 11 August with Titus Oates, the protégé of the conspiracy theorist Dr. Israel Tonge, and their “discovery” of a document containing forty-three articles in the wainscot of the virulently anti-Catholic physician<sup>3</sup> Sir Richard Barker’s gallery.<sup>4</sup> These articles described a plot, supervised by the Pope<sup>5</sup> and carried out by Catholics (mostly Jesuits), to assassinate King Charles II. Oates had forged the document. Within two days, however, Tonge held an audience with Charles II on the matter.<sup>6</sup> Despite the unreliable character of the discoverers (as the system of English intelligence provided financial incentives that often encouraged hoaxes)<sup>7</sup> and Charles II’s suspicions about the inconsequentiality of the threat,<sup>8</sup> the King’s need to appear hostile to Catholicism convinced him to allow Oates to proceed with advancing the charges present in the pamphlet.<sup>9</sup> By the morning of the fourteenth,

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<sup>1</sup> Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (New York: Viking Press, 1960), 13-14.

<sup>2</sup> Titus Oates, *Oates’s Letter. For the Right Honourable Sir Leoline Jenkins Knight His Majesties Principal Secretary of State at Whitehall* (London: s.n., 1683), 1.

<sup>3</sup> John Pollock, *The Popish Plot: A Study in the History of the Reign of Charles II* (London: Duckworth & Co., 1903), 10.

<sup>4</sup> Israel Tonge in Douglas Greene (ed.), *Diaries of the Popish Plot: Being the Diaries of Israel Tonge, Sir Robert Southwell, John Joyne, Edmund Warcup, and Thomas Dangerfield: and Including Titus Oates’s A True Narrative of the Horrid Plot* (New York: Scholars’ Facsimiles & Reprints, 1977), 7.

<sup>5</sup> Pope Innocent XI. Henry Care, *The History of the Damnable Popish Plot, in its Various Branches and Progress; Published For the Satisfaction of the Present and Future Ages/By the Authors of the Weekly Pacquet of Advice from Rome* (London: s.n., 1680), 104.

<sup>6</sup> Tonge quoted in Greene, *Diaries*, 8.

<sup>7</sup> Publisher quoted in *ibid*, 2.

<sup>8</sup> Tonge quoted in *ibid*, 10-12.

<sup>9</sup> John Miller, *Popery and Politics in England: 1660-1688* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 163.

“whisperings...of a plott [*sic*]”<sup>10</sup> began to disperse throughout the court, then through the urban and rural areas of the Kingdom. Until 1681, many English viewed Oates as a national hero. With anti-Catholic attitudes almost inherent within the English psyche, the news of a Popish conspiracy elicited strong reactions, particularly in the aftermath of the unsolved murder of the magistrate Sir Edmund-Bury Godfrey. The news of Godfrey’s murder precipitated a mass panic, characterized by collective hallucinations, paranoia, and violence. The subsequent trials, whose judges accepted dubious evidence, resulted in the execution of at least fifteen innocents. The hysteria instigated by Godfrey’s death had the characteristics of an anti-Catholic pogrom, as evidenced by the hostile sentiments towards “popery” that preceded the plot, as well as the cathartic manner in which the sequence of events occurred, directed by the influence of herd mentalities as elucidated by Le Bon.<sup>11</sup>

Long before the outbreak of the Plot, England justified and enforced, religiously and politically, an endemic hostility to “popery.” Religiously, Catholicism seemed to Protestants as a corruption of the true faith, resulting in incredibly strong opinions against the Church and its vaguely “cannibalistic” rituals. Parliamentarian Andrew Marvell once stated that “Popery is such a thing as cannot but for want of a word to express it, be called a religion; nor is it to be mentioned with that civility which is otherwise decent to be used in speaking about the differences in human opinion about divine matters.”<sup>12</sup> The populace especially disliked Jesuits. Taking advantage of the mass-distributive market, provided by the printing press, Protestants

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<sup>10</sup> Order in Council Concerning Recusants, October 27, 1680, Great Britain, H[istorical] M[anuscript] C[omission], *Marquess of Ormonde MSS* 4:118-19.

<sup>11</sup> The particular work by Le Bon, which serves as the premise for the evaluations made in this paper, is his *La psychologie des foules* (1895), translated into English as *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (1896). His ideas on group psychology have since become virtually prototypical in conceptions about herd behavior as they precipitate social action.

<sup>12</sup> Andrew Marvell in John Kenyon, *The Popish Plot* (London: Cox & Wyman Ltd., 1972), 1.

diffused many of their opinions through doggerel poems, literary works, pamphlets, cartoons,<sup>13</sup> and sermons. Sermons became particularly influential in manipulating a largely illiterate population and, during the trials later in the plot, one of these, by Reverend Dr. Lloyd, served as official court testimony.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, several poems captured the violent prejudice latent throughout English society, such as an example written by John Oldman, regarding the Jesuits:

Or let that wholesome statute be reviv'd,  
Which England heretofore from Wolves reliev'd;  
Tax every shire instead of them to bring  
Each year a certain tale of Jesuits in:  
And let their mangled quarters hang the Isle  
To scare all future vermin from the soil.<sup>15</sup>

According to Le Bon, “intolerance and fanaticism are the necessary accompaniments of the religious sentiment.”<sup>16</sup> Therefore, the context of anti-Catholicism within England, prior to the Plot, provided the volatile environment within which an outbreak of crowd hysteria could occur.

The political atmosphere served the Catholics no better. Since the Babylonian Captivity,<sup>17</sup> the English associated the Catholic Church with foreign political influence. King Henry VIII’s break with Rome resulted in the Act in Restraint of Appeals (1533), the Act of Succession (1533), and the Act of Supremacy (1534). Queen Elizabeth I’s reign intensified intolerant attitudes, owing to several Catholic attempts to depose her. Israel Tonge considered King Charles I a Protestant “martyr,” and blamed the monarch’s downfall on Jesuit intrigues.<sup>18</sup> Thus, as a result of Catholic threats to the monarchy, various legislative measures (such as those

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<sup>13</sup> Anonymous, *The Dreadful Apparition; The Pope Haunted with Ghosts. In Relation to Sir Edmundbury-Godfrey’s Murther, and the Vindication of the Late Sainted Traytors, who Suffered for the Romish Cause: The Figure by the Verses at Large Explained* (without Newgate: Printed for J. Jordan, at the Angel in Guiltspur Street, 1680), 1.

<sup>14</sup> Robin Clifton, “The Popular Fear of Catholics During the English Revolution: 1640-1660,” *Past and Present* 52 (1971), 35, 39, 41; [Trueman], *A Second Letter to Mr. Miles Prance in Reply to the Ghost of Sir Edmund-Bury Godfrey* (London: s.n., 1682), 2.

<sup>15</sup> Elain K. Dakers and Jane Lane, *Titus Oates* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1971), 41.

<sup>16</sup> Le Bon, *The Crowd*, 73.

<sup>17</sup> Refers to the Avignon residency.

<sup>18</sup> Tonge quoted in Greene, *Diaries*, 1.

against recusancy) became part of the English legal system. Enforcement of anti-Catholic measures, however, occurred only sporadically (except in times of instability). The excessive severity of laws, such as the Act of 1585, in addition to expensive trial costs and neighborhood solidarity toward Catholic friends and relatives, resulted in widespread inconsistency in their enforcement, except for those relating to Catholic exclusion from public life.<sup>19</sup> Exclusion legislation developed as a result of a perceived political threat, as related by Sir Henry Capel. Capel accused the papacy of developing the notion of standing armies and arbitrary government.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, the existence of a politically threatening association with Catholics created a suggestive atmosphere for the masses.

Contributing to the instability of England's sociopolitical environment, real and imagined, Catholic conspiracies created a precedent for the Popish Plot. Capel, for example, predicted that should England "lay popery flat," arbitrary government would end.<sup>21</sup> Actual Catholic plots had occurred before, including the Ridolfi Plot in 1571 to depose Elizabeth, the scheming of Mary I, the assassination plots of Throckmorton and Babington in the 1580s, the Gunpowder Plot in 1605, and the Irish Rebellion of 1641.<sup>22</sup> Thus, Protestants could readily accept the suggestion that Catholics would organize other treasonable activities. In 1666, as the Great Fire of London blazed through the city, many Protestants immediately suspected the Catholics. The House of Commons stated officially that Catholics had started the conflagration and, upon constructing a monument to commemorate of the fire in 1671, city authorities inscribed an attribution of Catholic guilt on the structure.<sup>23</sup> This association of Catholics with

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<sup>19</sup> Kenyon, *Popish Plot*, 5-7.

<sup>20</sup> Sir Henry Capel quoted in *ibid.*, 2.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Kenyon, *Popish Plot*, 3.

<sup>23</sup> The line regarding the "treachery and malice of the popish faction" remained on the monument until 1830, though it was removed for a period under James III, then restored under William III. *Ibid.*, 3, 10-13.

incendiarism, perhaps recalling the infamous reign of Queen Mary, surfaced again during the Popish Plot.<sup>24</sup> The importance of incendiary rhetoric to the events of 1678 may have emerged from the personal suffering experienced by Tonge, one of the Plot's instigators. The London Fire destroyed his "parsonage and glebe houses."<sup>25</sup> As a result of the crowd's tendency to react irrationally when sufficiently influenced by expectation and the belief that another plot would inevitably occur, Oates' scheme became far more believable to the masses.<sup>26</sup>

Within this context, the ability of Oates, a compulsive liar, and the fanatical Tonge to instigate a mass panic demonstrates the importance of leadership in directing crowds. Hoaxes had occurred before, largely because of the reward system utilized by the English government to encourage informants. A member of the Privy Council remarked that traders, beggars, and unemployed individuals "in tymes of suspition or trouble may by Tales and false Rumours distrate the peoples minds [*sic*]" by reporting on imagined Catholic treasons.<sup>27</sup> Tonge and Oates' scheme followed this pattern, and government officials may have ignored the Plot, but for the atmosphere created by the Exclusion Bill Crisis (which also arose in the years of 1678-1681). In this suspicious and hostile atmosphere, the masses could appreciate the abilities of the Plot's leadership. According to Le Bon, irrationality, impulsiveness, and the lack of the capacity to reason characterize "excessively suggestible" crowds.<sup>28</sup> To achieve the stated goals of a popular movement, a crowd requires skillful cultivation, with emphasis on the affirmation, repetition, and contagion of their basic ideological motivations.<sup>29</sup> Thus, the leadership (with Oates eventually

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Publisher quoted in Greene, *Diaries*, 1.

<sup>26</sup> Le Bon, *The Crowd*, 43.

<sup>27</sup> Clifton, "Popular Fear," 52.

<sup>28</sup> Le Bon, *The Crowd*, 37-39.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 124.

surpassing Tonge in importance) provided the direction necessary to focus the emotions of the crowd during the Popish Plot.<sup>30</sup>

After the destruction of his parish in the London Fire,<sup>31</sup> Israel Tonge had two motivations for instigating the Popish Plot: his virulent anti-Catholicism and his financial difficulties. Although Charles II had made a declaration on behalf of the ministers who suffered in 1666, Tonge received no monetary aid from the King.<sup>32</sup> Thus, the fire left Tonge destitute and furious at the Catholics, especially the Society of Jesus, for having started the inferno.<sup>33</sup> Tonge, suspecting a Popish Plot, claimed to have learned about the Catholic assassination scheme from Richard Greene in 1675.<sup>34</sup> One year later, while under the patronage of Sir Richard Barker, Tonge became associated with Titus Oates, who had business with the physician.<sup>35</sup> This meeting between Tonge and Oates became a pivotal moment in the history of the Plot, because Tonge managed to convince the unemployed Oates to take part in the scheme. Their meetings established the theme (an anti-Jesuit assassination), and form (a treatise) of the Plot, as Tonge showed Oates several essays, regarding the plot, that he had prepared for publication, claiming to have consulted with some very “knowinge [*sic*]” people about the matter.<sup>36</sup> Tonge offered to assist Oates in the composition of additional treatises, so that they might subsist off the revenue gained from their “combat with the Romanists.”<sup>37</sup> Le Bon held that the leader of a crowd often becomes the first person influenced by the ideology he espouses with firm, “deranged”

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>31</sup> Publisher in Greene, *Diaries*, 1.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Kenyon, *Popish Plot*, 46-46.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Publisher in Greene, *Diaries*, 1-2.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

conviction.<sup>38</sup> By convincing Oates to aid him, Tonge personally developed the leadership required for harnessing the energies of English Protestants.

Oates' ability to guide the crowd, despite his many peculiarities and history of dishonesty, reveals the depth of Protestant hatred towards Catholics in the seventeenth century. Many of his contemporaries viewed Oates as an oddity, particularly owing to his unusual appearance. John Warner described Oates as having

... the speech of the gutter, and a strident and sing-song voice, so that he seemed to wail rather than to speak. His brow was low, his eyes small and sunk deep into his head; his face was flat, compressed in the middle so as to look like a dish or discus; on each side were prominent ruddy cheeks, his nose was snub, his mouth in the very centre of his face, for his chin was almost equal in size to the rest of his face. His head scarcely protruded from his body, and was bowed towards his chest.<sup>39</sup>

Oates also had a reputation for deceitfulness, as demonstrated by three incidents in his past. The first of these, the Coat-Tailor Incident,<sup>40</sup> revealed a pattern of elaborate, escalating deception for the purpose of self-gain. As a youth, Oates bought a coat from a tailor and resold it to a secondhand clothes dealer, pocketing the profit. When asked by the tailor for payment, Oates insisted he had already paid. The tailor confronted Oates' tutor, Dr. Thomas, after seeing the coat in the secondhand dealer's shop. Thomas demanded an explanation from Oates, who feigned outrage, asked for a Bible to swear upon, and had his mother lie about sending him money privately (for Thomas managed Oates' expenses) via a carrier, who subsequently denied knowing Oates. Oates' deceitful proclivities also manifested themselves in the Parker Affair.<sup>41</sup> In 1675, Oates accused the schoolmaster William Parker of child molestation, in hopes of

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<sup>38</sup> Le Bon, *The Crowd*, 118.

<sup>39</sup> John Warner quoted in Kenyon, *Popish Plot*, 48.

<sup>40</sup> Dakers and Lane, *Titus Oates*, 23.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 27-29; Anonymous, *The Life of Titus Oates from His Cradle to his First Pilloring for Infamous Perjury with a True Account of Birth and Parentage, Impartially Set Forth for the Satisfaction of All Persons* (London: Printed by E. Mallet, 1685), 2.

assuming Parker's position at the school. Oates then went to the office of the Mayor of Hastings and persuaded him to investigate William Parker Sr. for treasonable and seditious speech. The implausible details, despite the firmness by which Oates lied, eventually led to both Parkers' exonerations. As a result, Oates faced a charge of perjury. The Parker Affair revealed Oates' willingness to lie (and lie elaborately) under oath. Additionally, in a separate case involving an alleged threat of violence toward a churchwarden, Francis Norwood, the mayor decided against Oates and ordered him to appear at the next sessions. Oates, instead, fled to the sea.<sup>42</sup>

Oates also invented numerous fabrications regarding the Jesuits, with whom he had once associated.<sup>43</sup> For example, Oates stated that he had attended a treasonous Jesuit conference in London on 24 April, 1678.<sup>44</sup> In fact, Oates still attended St. Omer's College in France on that date.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, the "conference" (in actuality just a provincial congregation), which Oates mentioned had not occurred at the location he specified.<sup>46</sup> Oates did, however, discuss the event with a schoolfellow named Clavery, while at St. Omer's.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, the pamphlet Oates produced contained the names of many Jesuits (perhaps former colleagues).<sup>48</sup> Oates had quarreled with the Jesuit Order at his college after dismissal from the institution, and had remarked that "he would be revenged of the Jesuits to the full for denying him Entrance into their Order, and for turning him out."<sup>49</sup> Yet, despite these obvious biases, the charged environment allowed the crowd to ignore its leader's rather obvious character flaws and factual inconsistencies. Instead,

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<sup>42</sup> Oates became a chaplain for the English navy. Pollock, *The Popish Plot*, 76.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>44</sup> Lane and Dakers, *Titus Oates*, 67.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Titus Oates, *A True Narrative of the Horrid Plot and Conspiracy of the Popish Party Against the Life of His Sacred Majesty, the Government, and the Protestant Religion: with a List of Such Noblemen, Gentlemen, and Others that Were the Conspirators; and the Head Officers Both Civil and Military, that Were to Effect It* (Edinburgh: Re-printed by the Heir of Andrew Anderson, Printer to His Most Sacred Majesty, 1675), 61.

<sup>49</sup> Anonymous, *Life of Titus Oates*, 3.

many hailed Oates as a champion for Protestant (and, therefore, English) freedom from Rome. One anonymous poem, from 1680, compares “Dr. Titus Oates”<sup>50</sup> to Alexander the Great, Hannibal, and God, while describing Rome as the “Old Great Dragon.”<sup>51</sup> The fear of popery had become so pervasive by the late 1600s that, under ideal circumstances, an individual as unsavoury as Oates could direct the crowd into mass hysterics. Oates only needed a sudden change in environment to achieve the height of his popularity.

The Plot may have remained a minor affair but for Sir Edmund-Bury Godfrey’s unsolved murder, which served as the pivotal moment in creating a paranoid atmosphere. On 6 September, soon after rumors of a popish conspiracy against Charles II emerged, Godfrey took Oates’ affidavit concerning the “felonious” plan of the Catholics to commit regicide and ignite fires in various towns.<sup>52</sup> Thus, the discovery of Godfrey’s corpse in a ditch on Primrose Hill, on 17 October at 6:00 p.m.,<sup>53</sup> immediately aroused Protestant suspicions, owing to his connection with the events of the Popish Plot. Additionally, the murderers had not relieved the body of this prosperous wood and coal dealer and Justice of the Peace<sup>54</sup> of his valuables, only taking his Notes of Examinations (a notebook that contained details of the Plot) with them.<sup>55</sup> Protestants

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<sup>50</sup> The Jesuits actually dismissed Oates from college and so he had no doctoral credentials. *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>51</sup> Anonymous, *A New Year’s Gift: Being a Poem Dedicated to Lasting Memory of that Worthy and Learned Dr. Titus Oates, the First Discoverer of the Popish Plott, To Destroy the Sacred Person of His Majesty, and to Extirpate the Protestant Religion* (London: s.n., 1680), 1.

<sup>52</sup> Tonge quoted in Greene, *Diaries*, 36.

<sup>53</sup> Many suspicious circumstances surrounded Godfrey’s death. First, according to Middlesex Coroner Mr. Cooper, Godfrey’s murderers had strangled him. The initial state of the body matched this description. Upon the return to Primrose Hill after the initial discovery, however, someone ran Godfrey’s body through with his own sword. Secondly, because of the presence of valuables on the body, robbery does not appear to have motivated Godfrey’s killers. Third, the reports of a mother, butcher, and two boys who had searched the area on Monday, Tuesday, and earlier on Thursday for a missing calf produced no body, thus suggesting the murders had moved the corpse. Finally, most individuals discounted possible suicide as the means of death, despite Godfrey’s melancholy personality. Anonymous, *A True and Perfect Narrative of the Late Terrible and Bloody Murther of Sr. Edmundberry Godfrey; Who was Found Murthered on Thursday the 17<sup>th</sup> of this Infant October, in a Field Near Primrose-Hill with a Full Account of the Manner of His Being Murthered, and in What Manner He was Found. Also, The Full Proceedings of the Coroner, Who Sat Upon the Inquest* (s.n.: Printed by N.T., 1678), 4-8; [Trueman], *Second Letter*, 4.

<sup>54</sup> Kenyon, *Popish Plot*, 77.

<sup>55</sup> Anonymous, *Murther of Godfrey*, 6.

immediately seized upon the opportunity to canonize Godfrey as a martyr for Oates' cause.<sup>56</sup> Thus, Godfrey's murder created a "great spirit" amongst the people, and, after the discovery of incriminating letters, dated between 1674 and 1675,<sup>57</sup> in the residence of Edward Coleman (the secretary to the Duchess of York),<sup>58</sup> "made it impossible for the government to 'lay' the Plot."<sup>59</sup>

Le Bon remarked, "crowds do not reason...they accept or reject ideas as a whole."<sup>60</sup> Thus, the public viewed Godfrey's murder in 1678 as proof of the plot in its entirety. Those considering the Plot knew of this assumption. Sergeant Maynard, in his testimony to Commons, explained, "What ground was there for Godfrey's death? Nothing, but in relation to Mr. Oates' information. How many lies and stories were made, to persuade the world about it? But when the murder was discovered, the world was awakened."<sup>61</sup> An anonymous letter to Miles Prance<sup>62</sup> also discussed the how the Plot's proponents managed to "attain their designs."<sup>63</sup>

All the world remembers the great Torrent that carried all before it in favour of the Plot, and the murder of Sir E.B.G by the Papists, without which (as T.O. was heard to say) his plot had failed. I cannot but observe how skillful and industrious these people are, to hide and prevent the truth of that man's Death from clearly appearing and shining forth, as without a doubt it would ...was not the matter now (as formerly) puzeled [*sic*] with Legends, and long stories...?<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Anonymous, *An Elegie on the Right Worshipful Sir Edmund-Bury Godfrey, Knight, One of His Majesties Justices of the Peace: Who was Found Murthered on Thursday the 17<sup>th</sup> of this Infant October, 1678. In a Ditch on the South-Side of Primrose-Hill Near Hampstead* (London: Printed in Sweetings-Rents Near the Royal Exchange, 1678), 1.

<sup>57</sup> Anonymous *Account of the Plot*, HMC *Marquess of Ormonde MSS* 4:108.

<sup>58</sup> "Bl. Edward Coleman," *Catholic Online*, [http://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint\\_id=3052](http://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=3052).

<sup>59</sup> Sergeant Maynard to the House of Commons, quoted in Kenyon, *Popish Plot*, 77.

<sup>60</sup> Le Bon, *The Crowd*, 53.

<sup>61</sup> Maynard to the House of Commons, quoted in Kenyon, *Popish Plot*, 77.

<sup>62</sup> Prance accused Henry Berry, Robert Green, Thomas Godden, and Lawrence Hill of strangling Godfrey. He then committed perjury at the subsequent trial, which resulted in the execution of all but Godden, and accepted reward money for locating the murderers. Alan Marshall, "Miles Prance," in H.C.G. Matthew and Brian Harrison, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* vol. 45, (London: Oxford University Press, 2004), 208-9.

<sup>63</sup> [Trueman], *Second Letter*, 2.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

In an excellent example of the fallacy of composition,<sup>65</sup> many Protestants supposed that since Godfrey's murder established the accuracy of at least one aspect of the plot described by Oates, the entirety of his treatise must also have some basis in fact. For example, one cartoon depicted the Pope addressing the ghost of Godfrey, accepting complete responsibility for his death.<sup>66</sup> With the details of the Plot apparently confirmed, the concerned masses responded quickly. The excessive public reaction to Godfrey's murder and Coleman's letters forced Parliament to act.<sup>67</sup>

Hysteria occurred both within the government and the public sphere. With regards to government, important individuals, when not in Parliament or Council, spent countless hours in committees and sub-committees doing paperwork and taking depositions. Henry Pierrepont, first Marquess of Dorchester, called it "a very wearisome life here, with little satisfaction in it; we either sit morning and afternoon, or the whole day without adjourning for a dining time."<sup>68</sup> The Justices of the Peace worked ceaselessly in their search for those able to provide additional information on the Catholic conspiracy.<sup>69</sup> Although the politics of the Exclusion Bill Crisis gave the official reaction a more manipulative air, panic also dominated the proceedings of the trials. For example, the judge conducting Popish Plot trials accepted rather dubious evidence. "The Coroner's Jury were first of opinion, and accordingly...much Art and Skill was used to procure their verdict to the contrary."<sup>70</sup> Despite Oates' inconsistencies<sup>71</sup> and obvious ulterior motives,

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<sup>65</sup> Composition is a logical fallacy- one draws a conclusion about a whole based on a whole from its parts, despite a lack of justification for such an inference.

<sup>66</sup> Anonymous, *The Dreadful Apparition*, section 4.

<sup>67</sup> Anonymous, *Account of the Plot*, 1.

<sup>68</sup> Kenyon, *Popish Plot*, 100.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> [Trueman], *Second Letter*, 2.

<sup>71</sup> Initially, the King asked Tonge if the Plot involved any persons of importance, to which Tonge replied that he had not heard of any except perhaps Lord Peters. On the treatise about the Plot, however, Oates had implicated numerous prominent individuals. Tonge quoted in Greene, *Diaries*, 13.

the courts found fifteen innocent men, such as William Howard,<sup>72</sup> guilty of treason. Le Bon's studies of parliamentary assemblies may explain some of the government's receptiveness to the panic, as he notes that simplistic thinking, irritability, suggestibility, exaggerated sentiments, and susceptibility to the influence of a few leaders often characterize such legislative bodies.<sup>73</sup> This description recalls individuals such as Anthony Ashley Cooper, first Earl of Shaftesbury, who led the opposition to Charles II in Parliament.

The target of the Plot, himself, proved a notable exception to the heightened anti-Catholic emotionalism. The monarch immediately dismissed the charges of conspiracy, despite the serious threats elucidated in Oates' document:

He and the rest of the Fathers were given to understand that the King was altogether given to his pleasures, and that they had an attempt to stab him at his Court of Whitehall; and if that could not be conveniently done, they would employ one of his Physicians to poison him; for which work they had ten thousand pounds.<sup>74</sup>

King Charles, however, during his meetings with Christopher Kirkby, Tonge, and Oates, remarked on the tediousness of the pamphlet and refused to attend to the matter himself.<sup>75</sup> Tonge recalled that Charles II "expressed himself as not giving any credence to what was pretended either of the Popish or French King seeking his life, alleging that if the Papists attempted anything against him they would be knocked on the head themselves [*sic*]."<sup>76</sup> Yet, despite his dismissals, Charles did little to quash the unrest until 1681, thus, passing on the responsibility for this affair to the Plot's instigators.

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<sup>72</sup> Executed by beheading on Tower Hill on December 29, 1680. Anonymous, *Animadversions on the Last Speech of William Viscount Stafford Who was Beheaded on Tower-Hill for High Treason in Conspiring the Death of the King &c. on Wednesday, December 29<sup>th</sup>. 1680* (London: s.n., 1680), 1.

<sup>73</sup> Le Bon, *The Crowd*, 187.

<sup>74</sup> Oates, *A True Narrative of the Plot*, 5-6.

<sup>75</sup> Tonge quoted in Greene, *Diaries*, 10-12; Kenyon, *Popish Plot*, 52.

<sup>76</sup> Tonge quoted in Greene, *Diaries*, 10-12.

Panic amongst the masses greatly surpassed the concern evinced by officialdom, as the “Plot had filled all mens heads with Fears and Jealousies [*sic*].”<sup>77</sup> The potential threat to the monarch, and the impending rise of popery, frightened individuals throughout the country.<sup>78</sup> Most of the crowd hysteria transpired in urban areas, particularly London, with anti-Catholic activity in cities mostly waning by 1679.<sup>79</sup> The provinces cooled somewhat earlier, in 1678.<sup>80</sup> Many cities and towns took measures to defend themselves. In response to the perceived threats, city officials placed chains across streets at night.<sup>81</sup> On 17 November, 1679,<sup>82</sup> processions featuring effigies of the Pope and representations of Godfrey’s murdered body marched through towns, inflaming the “general aversion” to Catholics.<sup>83</sup> Protestants blamed suspicious fires on Papists and Jesuits.<sup>84</sup> Additionally, many families chose to arm themselves, particularly with commemorative daggers bearing Godfrey’s name.<sup>85</sup> Women often carried these engraved weapons at night, in accordance with Le Bon’s notion that women, in particular, often succumb to crowd behavior.<sup>86</sup> In response to popular fears, the Captain General James Scott, 1<sup>st</sup> Duke of Monmouth, ordered regular garrisons to conduct night patrols.<sup>87</sup> Protestants even recruited armed, pseudo-military units to protect them from Catholic intrigues.

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<sup>77</sup> [Trueman], *Second Letter*, 1.

<sup>78</sup> Evelyn quoted in Charles Richard Nairne Routh, *They Saw it Happen: An Anthology of Eye-Witnesses’ Accounts of Events in British History: 1485-1688* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), 187.

<sup>79</sup> Kenyon, *Popish Plot*, 239; Miller, *Popery and Politics*, 161.

<sup>80</sup> Miller, *Popery and Politics*, 161.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> The source seems unclear as to whether the date of these processions occurred in 1679 or 1680. Since the anti-Catholic activity in the countryside had mostly dissipated by 1678, however, the earlier date appears the most probable one.

<sup>83</sup> Calamy quoted in Routh, *They Saw it Happen*, 188-189.

<sup>84</sup> Miller, *Popery and Politics*, 161.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> Le Bon, *The Crowd*, 46.

<sup>87</sup> Kenyon, *Popish Plot*, 101-102.

Over two thousand men of the Trained Bands held nightly watches with the intent of deterring the “night riders.”<sup>88</sup> The incidents surrounding the night riders serve as an example of collective hallucination, a phenomenon Le Bon attributes to the crowd’s high expectations, triggered by a powerful suggestion, and further exacerbated by the inability of individuals to engage in rational thinking.<sup>89</sup> Multiple instances of night rider sightings occurred throughout the provinces. A sighting took place on 15 November in Yorkshire, with the witness claiming to have heard and seen forty armed horsemen passing through Skelton and Brotton at night. City authorities responded with a twenty-four hour watch on the harbor.<sup>90</sup> Citizens in Wiltshire observed the horsemen riding north, every night between twelve, and two in groups of twenty, as they crossed the bridges of Hannington, Castle Eaton, and Cricklade.<sup>91</sup> The House of Lords heard a report of night riders in Yorkshire. Sir John Ernle, Chancellor of the Exchequer, remarked to the Commons that sightings also occurred in Gloucestershire, leading to a debate as to whether or not Parliament should confiscate Catholic-owned horses.<sup>92</sup> Concerns over a Catholic military coup thus became so prominent in the countryside that the crowd experienced elaborate delusions with reference to the threats they expected. After 1679, however, the hysteria had already peaked, with the end of the Plot coming two years later.

Faithful to the typical pattern of a pogrom (slow beginning, climax, and rapid diffusion), the crowd hysteria waned quickly, with the greatest concentration of crowd hysteria occurring in the first two years. The century-long accumulation of anti-Catholic sentiment seems to have resulted in a rapid cathartic release, triggered by the crucial point in the Popish Plot – Sir Edmund-Bury Godfrey’s murder. Godfrey’s death, and the discovery of Coleman’s letters,

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<sup>88</sup> Calamy quoted in Routh, *They Saw it Happen*, 188-189; Miller, *Popery and Politics*, 161.

<sup>89</sup> Le Bon, *The Crowd*, 43.

<sup>90</sup> Kenyon, *Popish Plot*, 101-102.

<sup>91</sup> Le Bon, *The Crowd*, 187.

<sup>92</sup> Kenyon, *Popish Plot*, 101-102.

became the climax of the Plot because these incidents seemed to prove the validity of Oates' accusations. The subsequent panic instigated by the unfortunate magistrate's demise led to a variety of reactions from the government and the public, such as the increase in anti-Catholic legislation, the execution of "traitors," the exploitation of Trained Bands, and collective hallucinations. Soon after, however, the anti-Catholic outrage in the rural and urban areas quieted, and the courts began to acquit suspected Papists. Oates, exposed as a liar and charged with perjury, received a guilty verdict and a sentence of whipping and annual pillory.<sup>93</sup> The Popish Plot exemplifies the pattern of herd behavior and its role in societal movements. Le Bon's conception of a suggestible crowd, directed under the leadership of a fanatical demagogue, and motivated by prejudicial ideology, describes the fundamental characteristics of the Popish Plot accurately. Additionally, the incident also reflects the contagious nature of crowd hysteria. In this case, the English Protestants became what Le Bon termed a "psychological crowd," typified by a transitory, but clearly defined, collective mentality.<sup>94</sup> Finally, the Plot demonstrates clearly that paranoid, irrational public desires can, under specific conditions, direct national policy.

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<sup>93</sup> Anonymous, *A Full Description of the Manner of Executing the Sentence Upon Titus Oates for Perjury* (London: s.n., 1685), 1.

<sup>94</sup> Le Bon, *The Crowd*, 23-24.

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