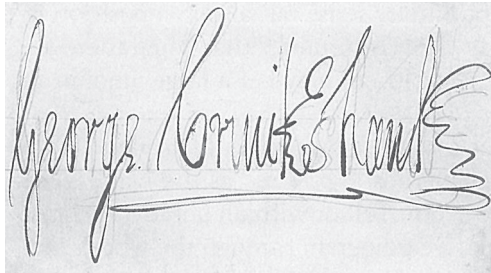


## What's in a Name?

Like Hogarth and Dickens and Disney, [Cruikshank] attained the highest recognition of all: his name became an adjective. To be Cruikshankian is to quiver and squirm with life; to cajole and twinkle, thunder perhaps with unintended comic effect; to hood-wink and get away with it; to be irrepressible.

William Feaver<sup>1</sup>

At his baptism, Cruikshank was given only one Christian name. His older brother, Isaac Robert, had two, the first after his father, and the second, by which he became known during his professional life, meaning “famous in counsel,” according to an entry in his



Large signature (courtesy of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., gift of Dr. Clements C. Fry.

mother's *Commonplace Book*.<sup>2</sup> Where Isaac and Mary got "George" is uncertain. They may have been recalling a putative Scots ancestor, an eighteenth-century customs officer named George Cruikshank.<sup>3</sup> They may have chosen it in honor of the Hanoverian monarchs.<sup>4</sup> Or it might have been selected with reference to the patron saint of England and to the parish, St. George, Bloomsbury, where the future artist was baptized.<sup>5</sup> As an adult, George disliked the honorific "Mr." and insisted that his friends call him by his first name instead. "Unless they did that they were not within his circle of friends," Cruikshank's physician recalled, "but woe to strangers who approached him in such a familiar method."<sup>6</sup> To intimates such as William Hone and Charles Dickens he sometimes signed himself "Georgius."<sup>7</sup> Others coupled his Christian name with endearing adjectives—"genial George" or "good old George."<sup>8</sup> Teetotalers fought under "St. George." And years before Dickens's name was associated with the adjective, journals referred to Cruikshank as "the inimitable George."<sup>9</sup>

His professional name always was simply "George Cruikshank," and after his father's death, often just "Cruikshank." Of this patronymic he was exceedingly proud. Believing that he had established a claim to its exclusive use, he guarded it, his nephew complained, "like the apples of Hesperides ... with a dragon's fury."<sup>10</sup> During one of these family quarrels, a friend commented that there ought to be copyright of identity as well as design.<sup>11</sup> Cruikshank heartily agreed. Late in life he drafted a letter entitled "What's in a Name?" to the newspapers, proposing that Parliament pass a law protecting names. "It is a well-known fact," he wrote, that "some authors or some artists after working hard in their profession make for themselves what is termed a NAME and which name, when made, is of great value to them; not only in a pecuniary sense but also as a position in society." "It is also a well-known fact," he continued, "that when there are two professional men of the same name [there may be] a large amount of confusion and unpleasantness."<sup>12</sup>

Moreover, he perfected a characteristic signature, bold, spiky, like a caricature itself, and "full of a rough, fantastic power," as the *Daily News* said at his death.<sup>13</sup> It began either with the full or with an abbreviated first name, "Geoe.," and zigzagged on like a cardiogram through the whorls and peaks of his surname to conclude with an elaborately flourished k that some took to be another rendering of his own bony profile.<sup>14</sup> The resulting squiggle was well known yet

hard to forge—as “inimitable” as its author.<sup>15</sup> “When I began life,” Cruikshank told T. R. Lamont in 1860,

I used to receive letters from persons whose names I could not make out—they were so *badly* written, & so it has gone on and continues, but I then *determined* that *I* would write *my name* so plainly that he who “*ran* might read”—and so commenced in this style [elaborate signature]. But this of course took up too much time and has now degenerated in to the scribble as on the other page [hand pointing to left edge of paper]—and just think of my mortification when Charles Kean told me the other day that when he recd. my first letter to him— he could not make out who it had come from!!!, oh oh—oh o o—.<sup>16</sup>

The family believed, as Cruikshank penciled beside a sketch of himself in Persian dress, that the “origin of the name” was “crooked shanks—.”<sup>17</sup> Percy Cruikshank, Robert’s son, tells in his unpublished memoir of his uncle more about the legend, which associated the family with the Stuarts:

That “guy” Lothario, James of Scotland, known as the “gaberlunzie or beggar man”—which dress he assumed when indulging in his romantic adventures— was credited with the paternity of a male child, a miller’s daughter being the mother. Observing that it had bandy, or crooked legs, the Royal joker named it “Crooked-shanks” which in time became “Crookshanks.” Robert, who was an “exquisite” in fashion, surveying his well made legs “in hessian boots” and pantaloons, [and] considering it as a personal injustice, altered the orthography to “Cruikshank.”<sup>18</sup>

George conned this old story by heart. In *Hard Times*, a caricature print that he executed in 1814, he marches on scrawny legs in a procession of the unemployed. Carrying a palette, brushes, a portfolio, and a banner reading “Mr West’s Speech on the Gloomy State of the Arts,” he treads on a paper inscribed “Poor Shank’s fec[i]t” (Poor Shanks made it; that is, the print).<sup>19</sup> On another occasion he directed the authorities to take his “crooked shanks” out of the list of prospective members of the Metropolitan Club; and he once closed a

letter to his friend Laman Blanchard by a self-portrait in the form of a question mark with bandy legs.<sup>20</sup>

Not all genealogists accept this legendary derivation. An authority on British surnames maintains that "Cruikshank" derives from the Old Norse *kroker*, "hook, something bent," and the Old English *sceanca*, "shank, leg."<sup>21</sup> But George Fraser Black, who compiled a dictionary of *The Surnames of Scotland*, writes that "with the possible exception of the first record of this name, which may point to a nickname, I do not think this surname has any connection with bowleggedness or 'crooked shanks.'"<sup>22</sup> Instead, it probably derives from the topography of Kincardine, where the river Cruick rises in the parish of Fearn. "Shank" in toponymy means "projection point of a hill joining it to the plain," so the first Cruick-shank may well have been resident near a spot where the river Cruick rounds the base, or shank, of a hill. The name is old, going back at least to 1296, and pops up from time to time in the records of Kincardine and Aberdeen, where in 1408 one Cruikshank was a burgess. At George's death Cruikshanks were still a numerous sept in Aberdeenshire.<sup>23</sup>

Nor was Robert responsible for changing the orthography. Various spelled "Cruckshank," "Crukshank," "Cruickshank," or "Cruikshank," to which a final s might be added, it altered in the mid-eighteenth century to "Crookshanks," the surname of George's grandfather. When Isaac married, the parish clerk entered "Cruckshanks," also the spelling on the parish record of his burial.<sup>24</sup> At their baptisms, Isaac Robert and George were "Cruikshanks"; but their younger sister was denominated "Cruckshank."<sup>25</sup> It was not unusual for surnames to be inscribed in different ways: Isaac spelled "his name in almost as many ways as Shakespeare," notes M. Dorothy George, cataloguer of the caricature prints in the British Museum.<sup>26</sup> As literacy and record-keeping advanced, however, spellings were standardized. For a caricaturist, whose name became a kind of hallmark, regularity of spelling assumed more importance than it might have for other trades.<sup>27</sup> Gradually Isaac's variations narrowed to "Cruickshank" or "Cruikshank"; by 1801 he evidently preferred the latter form.

These orthographical tribulations are instructive because Cruikshank had such a struggle to fix one version and claim it for his own. Until he reached middle age, Sala observes,

the world troubled itself very little about his individuality, and, while laughingly applauding his work from the very outset of his career, allowed him to turn the corner of forty years without evincing the slightest curiosity to know what manner of man he was. Indeed, I cannot help thinking that in many quarters there existed a vague *pococurante* notion that “Crookshanks”—into which George’s surname was constantly corrupted—was as much a myth as a man, and was a level of generic qualification which any anonymous caricaturist was warranted in assuming.<sup>28</sup>

In an earlier essay Sala had protested against the habitual insertion of a second c, a mistake the magisterial *Blackwood’s* committed and that is prevalent even in modern criticism.<sup>29</sup>

For George, however, “C r u i k s h a n k is the way I *spells* my name,” and so it appeared as the initial letters of an 1842 “Literary Acrostic.”<sup>30</sup> Though he was a man and not a myth, he was connected through his patronymic to a family legend. Percy’s story is not the only version of the Cruikshank past that seeks to ally their ancestors to the Stuarts, and if that connection was potent enough to have been mythologized, then the derivation of “George” from the Hanoverians would seem unlikely. Further, both Robert and George were proud of their physiques. Crooked shanks might be prestigious if they indicated randy royal forefathers, or pathetic if they testified to artistic rickets, but they were undignified if they merely referred to an unsightly genetic strain. “Your bandy shanks, your wadd’ling gait, *I* Would well become baboon or ape,” runs the text of a comic valentine to an old fop that George illustrated.<sup>31</sup>

Cruikshank’s first published prints were too insignificant to be signed, or else his contribution was so minor that a signature was unwarranted. An 1809 print contains the initials “G Ck,” but they may have been added later.<sup>32</sup> Many of his early efforts were collaborative and bore the signature “Cruikshanks,” either to indicate plural responsibility or simply because the spelling had not yet been stabilized.<sup>33</sup> Other variations appear in the first decade of the nineteenth century; in one of the earliest elaborate caricatures that he executed independent of his father and brother he signed himself “G. Cruickshank.”<sup>34</sup> No code is discernible in the alternations between

initials and full name: plates to which he had devoted a lot of effort might go unsigned or barely acknowledged by a "GCK," while others, thrown off quickly, might bear the full name. In the years when he collaborated with his brother, their joint production was often signed "Cruikshank," without a first initial or name. This cavalier attitude caused, and still causes, trouble for collectors and cataloguers; in his old age George tried to distinguish his work from his brother's and father's for G. W. Reid, Keeper of Prints and Drawings at the British Museum, and for several collectors, but half a century after the fact even George could not always recall who did what, "particularly when my drawings, made on wood blocks for common purposes, were hastily executed (according to price) by the engraver."<sup>35</sup>

Toward the close of the Napoleonic wars, however, he had settled down to "G. Cruikshank" or "G Ck" and evidently felt confident enough about the public's ability to recognize his name that he could play around with it: hence, "Poor Shank's." Observing the oddity of the configuration of his full name spelled out backwards on the plate, he decided in 1818 to simplify matters by etching it frontways, so that when printed it became "Knahskiurcegroeg."<sup>36</sup> On another occasion, in keeping with the "olde Englyshhe" spelling of a title, he signed himself "Georgge Cruikeddeshanks," yet another allusion to his Stuart forebear.<sup>37</sup> Eventually, as he told one correspondent, "all works done by me have in the Corner the Initials G C or G Ck or the name in full."<sup>38</sup>

If others tried to capitalize on his name by association, Cruikshank took umbrage. Sometimes caricaturists employed pseudonyms or fake initials to avoid libel suits; at other times they adopted a cognomen similar to that of an especially popular artist. When Robert Seymour, the first illustrator of Dickens's *Pickwick Papers*, began signing his plates "Shortshanks" in the summer of 1827, the allusion may have escaped Cruikshank's notice. But as Seymour continued the practice during the succeeding two years, word got round. Outraged, Cruikshank demanded that his Islington neighbor forbear; Seymour, not always a tractable artist, in this instance complied, discontinuing the pseudonym after 1829.<sup>39</sup> Another artist signed 1824 prints "Straitshanks," "Straightshanks," and "Streightshank," while a third latched onto the celebrity of Cruikshank and Seymour by using "S. Stoutshanks" in 1829.<sup>40</sup> Jokes about George's patronym persisted; his oldest friend William Henry Merle in 1840 sent his "kind remembrances to Mrs. Straitshank (for such I suppose to be the name

of *your better half*).<sup>41</sup> A quarter century later, the Reverend Edward Bradley, writing in the *London Figaro*, promulgated “Shookshank.”<sup>42</sup>

For decades George fought with his family about their common use of the surname to identify different hands. Unscrupulous publishers trumpeted plates by Robert as by “Cruikshank,” hoping to gull George’s customers. An 1835 collection of reprints was entitled *Cruikshankiana*, an instance of that pococurante notion that “Cruikshank” was a generic qualification, since the volume contained, in addition to images by the two brothers, etchings by several other artists. When Percy, Robert’s son, started signing his wood-engravings “Cruikshank the Younger,” George exploded into print.<sup>43</sup> He managed to alter Percy’s practice but failed to forestall subsequent cataloguers, including those in the British Library, from listing himself as “George Cruikshank Senior,” “George Cruikshank the Elder,” or to crown the confusion, “George Cruikshank Junior.”<sup>44</sup> He was also sometimes mistaken for Frederick Cruickshank, a miniaturist and portrait painter.<sup>45</sup> One correspondent complained that George hadn’t returned a picture, to which he could only reply, “I am sorry that I am not the ‘Cruikshank’ with whom yr. miniature was left, for if I had been the party you would have had it ‘long long ago.’”<sup>46</sup>

The situation became even more complicated when Percy honored his uncle by naming his son George Percy. At the time, Cruikshank was pleased. But when George Percy grew up and was gazetted a bankrupt, his great-uncle had a notice inserted in *The Times* stating, “for the information of persons who have written to him, that ‘George Cruikshank, jun., artist’, whose name appears as a bankrupt in ‘The Times’ of yesterday, is the grandson of his late brother Robert.”<sup>47</sup> A few years later, when his namesake was struggling to make a living as an illustrator, the similarity of names created further confusion. Seeing in the Christmas 1872 number of *London Society* the statement that one of the illustrations was by George Cruikshank, the old man shot off another letter to *The Times*:

the illustration mentioned is not by me, but by the son of my nephew, Percy Cruikshank. The two Georges appearing as illustrators, without sufficient distinction as to their individuality, must create much confusion. The young man, in order to make some distinction, signs himself “George Cruikshank, jun.” but as he is not my son, this addition leads to mistakes. I have therefore suggested to my nephew that his son should henceforth alter his signature



to "G. Percy Cruikshank" and, should he do so, the public would then see that anything he might place his name to would be his own production and not the work of, sir,

George Cruikshank<sup>48</sup>

This solution, Percy reports, "met with a decided refusal," and George's fall-back alternative of "George Calvert," after the boy's mother, "raised such a maternal gale, that *even he* was glad enough to run before it."<sup>49</sup>

Try as he might, Cruikshank could not always guarantee recognition of his identity. Many, unaware that Phiz is the pseudonym Hablot Knight Browne adopted to chime with Dickens's early pseudonym Boz, thought, and still think, that Cruikshank rather than Browne illustrated the majority of Dickens's novels. "The Public at one time supposed that I had adopted the name of 'Phiz' to illustrate the works of 'Boz,'" Cruikshank explained to W. J. McClellan in 1870 a few months after Dickens's death, "& the reason why many believed them to be by me was because my style of work was closely imitated."<sup>50</sup> As early as 1838 a stranger asked George to settle a dispute about his identity. "I maintain that [the illustrations to *Pickwick Papers*] are not yours for two reasons. 1st that they are much harder & harsher than your etchings & 2nd that you always illustrate under your proper name. A friend of mine will have it that you did them and he says that the publishers told him so."<sup>51</sup> There may be poetic justice in what Cruikshank termed the mistake of "two *single* gentlemen rolled into one," since physiognomy, from which "Phiz" derives, is so strong an element in the Cruikshank caricatures that partly shaped Browne's early style.<sup>52</sup> From bandy legs to pseudoscience may seem an improbable chain of associations, but it indicates how many changes might be rung on a single name, and how readily an artist's nominative identity could be disrupted.

There may be poetic justice, too, in the conviction of many Victorians that Cruikshank was his own grandson, if not grand-nephew. The canard was so prevalent by the 1860s that the committee exhibiting Cruikshank's gigantic oil painting *The Worship of Bacchus* requested some of his early works "in order to show that they were the production of one and the same person, or to prove, in fact, that I am not my own grandfather."<sup>53</sup> Not everyone heard the news. One old gentleman, returning in the 1870s from an extended stay in India, visited Dr. Benjamin Ward Richardson, Cruikshank's physician, at



a time when Cruikshank paid a call. "It must be the grandson, or the son, at any rate, of the great artist I remember as a boy," said the patient. Dr. Richardson tried to reassure him that the same artist who had defended Queen Caroline fifty years earlier was still hard at work, but only George himself, executing a lively sword dance over the poker and tongs in order to prove his vitality to the astonished traveler, could demonstrate that he was not a third-generation reincarnation.<sup>54</sup>

Europeans appropriated George's name in characteristic national fashion. The artist of *Punch and Judy* was, in Paris, known as "Georges Cruishanck," and the translator of *Nicholas Nickleby* calls him "le célèbre Cruiskank."<sup>55</sup> Germany, by contrast, was the home of serious philological investigations. Dr. Georg Kaspar Nagler, while preparing his *Neues allgemeines Künstler-Lexicon* (New Comprehensive Artists' Dictionary), read an exchange of letters printed in the *Spectator*. Robert Cruikshank had complained there that his publisher, William Kidd, by suppressing the Christian name when advertising Robert's three-volume album *Cruikshank at Home*, made it seem as if Robert was trading on George's fame. "Nonsense," Kidd rejoined, immediately capitalizing on the publicity by composing an advertisement that reprinted the letters and left it to the public "to determine which of the two is the 'real Simon Pure.'"<sup>56</sup> This lost quite a bit in translation. Nagler dutifully composed an entry for "Pure, Simon," appending the information that it was the true name of the celebrated caricaturist "Georg" Cruikshank.<sup>57</sup> When George's attention was called to the entry, possibly by Dickens, he wrote a letter patiently explaining that the phrase "real Simon Pure" had been used to distinguish him from other artists of the same name. He then ventured on a little humor that may not have been appreciated by his correspondent: "I do not wish to be set down as a *simpleton*, or pass off as a very doubtful pattern of *purity*—I beg therefore] to subscribe myself neither Simon nor Pure."<sup>58</sup>

For the most part, however, Cruikshank was not amused by any incident that might confuse or obscure his singular identity as an artist. He depended on brand-name identification for his livelihood. On a deeper level, he made a name for himself that far outshone those of his father and brother: if not descended from the kings of Scotland, through his own unrelenting exertions he became, for a time, the king of caricaturists. And in making a name for himself, he also made himself a name. His medium was the line, and into the peaks and bumps of his florid signature he poured all the energy and self-assertion of his forceful character.