

## Preface: To the Reader

This is a story about stories—stories about an artist whose life was shaped by and who shaped stories. George Cruikshank recounted many tales: biographical ones about his ancestors, training, and invention; cultural ones about his rapidly changing society, its governing classes and working men and women; political ones about Britain's domestic and foreign policies over seventy years; social ones about fashion, manners, customs, and habits; imaginative ones about fairies, witches, demons, and things that go bump in the night. Additionally, he expressed through visual designs stories that others narrated in words. He and his collaborators articulated conflicting versions of how those fictions were created. Both during his lifetime and after his death he was also the subject of many stories circulated by admirers and adversaries at court, over dinner and drinks, on the platform, in periodicals and books.

Cruikshank savored, embellished, and saved these stories. A magpie hoarder, he retained more than 8,500 letters by or to him and tens of thousands of preliminary sketches, finished designs, tracings, proofs, and other papers registering his creativity. What he did *not* do was stabilize one story about his own life, times, and art, in the context of which the anecdotes and assessments of others might be evaluated.

Consequently this book incorporates many stories told whenever possible in the original words. To say that George's mother was a strict disciplinarian would be to speak of his upbringing in our terms; to say, as Cruikshank's nephew does, that Mary Cruikshank's laws were, like those of the Medes and Persians, never altered, asserts something similar in phrasing that also summons up the intimate familiarity with biblical history that characterized the Presbyterian

culture of Cruikshank's youth. Quotations bring out the polyphony of voices, attitudes, values, educations, temperaments, and emotions that govern and are embedded in the tales people tell.

Moreover, both the manifest content and the hidden, deflected, or suppressed content of many of these stories make it difficult to pick a single version as authentic. For instance, Cruikshank's prints often point overtly to one reading while conveying different, even contradictory, implications through allusions, design, dialogue and captions, or the energy of composition, drawing, and empathy. Cruikshank frequently contradicts himself on political and social issues, alternatively supporting Tories and Whigs, advocating authoritarian measures in one plate and libertarian ones in another. Pierre Macherey demonstrates that "no ideology is sufficiently consistent to survive the test of figuration."<sup>1</sup> Cruikshank's art would seem to confirm the converse, that no significant figuration will consistently express a single ideology. My effort has been not to simplify the record of stories into one biographically, politically, and artistically coherent tale, but rather to assemble and investigate the multiplicity of interpretations Cruikshank's life, times, and art generate.

Biographers often identify with their subjects. I want to understand what happened to a hard-working creative artist situated on the margin of nineteenth-century British culture and twentieth-century intellectual concerns. George Cruikshank had no financial resources beyond his meager earnings. He was not a major politician, only a commentator who infrequently and indirectly influenced policy. He was not a prominent social reformer, although he induced thousands to alter their personal habits and diets. While he sold some prints in numbers far exceeding those for engravings of Burlington House favorites, he was never accorded the prestige of election to the Royal Academy. Unsuccessful as an independent author, he nevertheless collaborated on the narratives of at least a dozen bestsellers and by his illustrations provided the scripts to scores of dramatic adaptations. When later in life he received pensions from the Royal Academy and the government, their modest size reflected his inconsiderable status. And even though Ruskin compared him to Rembrandt and his peers designated him the second Hogarth, his multitudinous works appeared in ephemeral formats; he produced too much quantity and too little quality for posterity to rank him among the great.

A related question this narrative addresses is why there have been so few substantive accounts of Cruikshank. Too much uncatalogued documentation? His circumscribed imagination? Distasteful personality or personal life and values? Too comic or satiric to be profound? Jurisdictional haziness, since his career touches on art, history, and literature? Economic constraints restricting study of and publication about marginal figures? These issues raised during Cruikshank's lifetime largely governed the stories told, and not told, after his death and down to the present.

In turn, my orchestration of voices will be supplemented and superseded by other compositions deploying different materials and strategies of interpretation. To be of value, this narrative must tell a story sufficiently interesting to hold your attention over time and "tease you into thought" about the kinds of stories we tell to make history, art, and human lives vital.

Houston, Texas  
26 April 1990

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## Acknowledgments

*George Cruikshank's Life, Times, and Art* began in the late 1960s, when in the course of exploring the nature of serial publication I became interested in the illustrations to Dickens's novels. E.D.H. Johnson, at the time chair of the English Department at Princeton, encouraged me to undertake a full-scale investigation of Cruikshank's work, using the extensive materials, largely uncatalogued, in the Princeton Library. I am grateful for this suggestion, which has essentially directed my intellectual life for over twenty years, and for his unwavering support. The first fruits of this research were enabled by a grant from the American Philosophical Society in 1972: an exhibition of Cruikshankiana at the Firestone Library, and a collection of commissioned essays, *George Cruikshank: A Revaluation*. One of the contributors to that volume was a leading Cruikshank collector and scholar, Richard A. Vogler. He introduced me to Frank S. Bradburn of Liverpool, who until his death shared with me his unequalled knowledge of the artist's life and work, and who allowed me access to his annotated copy of the Cohn catalogue and the entire room full of books, plates, correspondence, and memorabilia he had assembled over forty years. I regret exceedingly that neither Richard nor Frank lived to see the results of their extensive tutoring.

After several summers spent in Princeton sorting through boxes of Cruikshank papers apparently unopened since the turn of the century, I received a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship for Independent Study and Research during 1977-1978. Two exceptionally capable and dedicated research assistants, Beth Rigel Daugherty and Susan Tresch, collaborated in writing to 1,928 libraries having annual acquisitions budgets of more than \$25,000 to ascertain their Cruikshank holdings; to the 827 librarians who

responded I am indebted for much of the essential information that undergirds this study. We then began organizing, transcribing, and filing the documents provided by dozens of archives.

In 1980 a fellowship from the Guggenheim Foundation and an appointment as visiting research fellow at the Victorian Studies Centre, University of Leicester, allowed me to track down relevant documents in British repositories, to prepare a chronological index of Cruikshank's works, and to assemble a file of reviews from the unmatched collection of contemporary newspapers in the British Library at Colindale. I received invaluable assistance from Chris Bernstein, Ronald J. Davis, and Karen E. Proudfoot, as well as from two Princeton students, Carolyn L. Dinshaw and Diane Eisenberg, who indexed and transcribed incoming correspondence in the Princeton collections, and from a University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill student, George Angell, who performed the same task for the 1,955 items in the Southern Historical Collection there. M. Veronica Stokes, archivist for Coutts and Co., not only inducted me into the mysteries of British banking practices but also traveled with me to Welders in Buckinghamshire where we spent a week transcribing relevant accounts. The following year Princeton appointed me a visiting fellow so that I might begin writing. In 1986 a grant from the Swann Foundation for Caricature and Cartoon allowed me to computer-process the information and text we had generated. Over the next two years, a project grant and a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities, an appointment at the National Humanities Center, and another at the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts at the National Gallery of Art provided the resources and time to complete a first draft. Logan D. Browning worked with me for three years, ferreting out references, checking quotations, and in countless ways improving my presentation. Throughout this protracted gestation, support from Rice University in the form of leaves, sabbatical, and grants, and the forbearance of my colleagues who filled in during my absences, permitted me to concentrate on what was very nearly an overwhelming undertaking. Karen Hudgins, Theresa Munisteri, and Joy Shaw in the English Department; Eva Browning, Rachel Dvoretzky, and the late Pat Toomey, curators of the slide collection in the Art and Art History Department, Connie Coleman, secretary in the dean of humanities office, and Nancy Boothe, director of the Woodson Research Center, contributed in

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