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James Baker

The Business of
Satirical Prints in
Late-Georgian
England

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Eight years earlier—whilst conducting research towards a Master's degree in History at the University of Southampton—I first stumbled across late-Georgian satirical prints and in particular the work of Isaac Cruikshank. It was, like all the best discoveries, serendipitous, made whilst browsing library shelves. I vividly recall being fascinated by Isaac's use of line and his scrappy presentation of comedy. As I leafed through Edward Nygren's catalogue of Isaac's drawings, the cryptic meaning of his *The Absent Man* (Robert Sayer, 10 January 1792) stuck out. In this design, Cruikshank has Thomas Paine—the infamous radical author of *Common Sense* and *The Rights of Man*—hide under a tree to escape a downpour as a fashionable couple pass him, arm in arm, protected from the rain by a parasol. Was, I wondered, Cruikshank saying that Thomas Paine was a coward for hiding from the rain? Was he suggesting that Paine was behind the times for resorting to such a crude and inefficient means of protection from the elements? Or was Cruikshank's decision to have Paine seek protection from a tree meant to suggest, somewhat provocatively, that Paine was in truth a man of nature and that his writings had a natural logic to them? To this day I have no idea which reading I prefer, though I suspect Cruikshank and his publisher meant for all three readings to be possible simultaneously: after all—I surmised—a broad ideological appeal

could give printed copies of the design a potential commercial advantage. These opening forays into the world of Georgian caricature were not conducted in isolation. From the University of Southampton, I thank Alastair Duke for inspiring me to think critically about pictures and to embark on a career using pictorial sources as a lens through which to understand historical phenomena.

In 2007 I resumed in earnest my work on Isaac Cruikshank. That year I began my doctoral studies in the School of History at the University of Kent. Ideas that were subtexts of the thesis that resulted—‘Isaac Cruikshank and the Notion of British Liberty: 1783–1811’ (2010)—would eventually mutate into the present book. My six years at Kent indelibly shaped the historian and the person I am today, and I thank all the colleagues and students I had the pleasure of working with, getting to know and talking shop with during that time. Particular thanks are extended to Robin Armstrong-Viner, Alixe Bovey, Dara Blumenthal, Kate Bradley, Oliver Carpenter, Mark Connolly, Grayson Ditchfield, Angelos Evangelou, Kenneth Fincham, Krista Bonello Rutter Giaponne, Jim Gibson, Stefan Goebel, Nick Hiley, Mark Hirst, Diane Houston, Andy Kesson, Tim Keward, Steven London, Emma Long, Jane Newton, David Ormrod, Emily Jane Roe, Crosbie Smith, Jackie Waller, David Welch, and all the regular members of the Postgraduate Short Story Reading group. Whilst many of these individuals have since moved to pastures new, I will always think of them through the lens of Kent.

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Where once the early career scholar sought support and nourishment in the corridors of our great institutions, today the social network has expanded the venues, volume and velocity in which this can take place. For filling gaps in my knowledge, sparking ideas, and debating the hell out of everything, I thank (to use their Twitter handles) @adam_crymble, @ajprescott, @ernestopriego, @katrinanavickas, @louisefalcini, @martin_eve, @mathewdlincoln, @mhbeals, @pj_webster, @smcoulombeau, @tim-hitchcock, and @thomasgpadilla.

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