

British Humour

Satirical Prints of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries



Comics and caricatures were born in eighteenth-century Europe. While the Enlightenment gave rise to a culture of criticism, the bolder art of ridicule can be credited to innovative artists responding to great social changes of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

This exhibition focuses on three generations of British satirists pioneering this new form: William Hogarth, James Gillray and Thomas Rowlandson, and George Cruikshank. Hogarth, the “grandfather of the political cartoon,” lampooned the mores and behaviors of the ruling class, but no class, station, or profession was above his reproach. Following his example, Gillray and Rowlandson became thorns in the sides of aristocratic and public leaders by styling a new form of caricature with exaggerated features and proportions. Cruikshank, from a family of satirists, was able to imitate the style of Gillray so closely that Gillray’s publisher, Hannah Humphrey, hired him to complete projects the older artist left unfinished, and he was hailed in his lifetime as a “Modern Hogarth.”

But comedy is serious business, because it speaks truth to power. These artists were at turns threatened, bullied, and bribed; they became part of the very debates they depicted and derided. Each succeeded because they created and then fulfilled the demands of a highly engaged citizenry, which is part of any democratic society valuing freedom of debate and expression. Modern counterparts, from editorial cartoons to *The Daily Show*, continue their tradition.



William Hogarth (British, 1697–1764)
The complete series *Marriage à la Mode*, 1745
Etching and engraving on paper
Prints made by Gérard Jean-Baptiste Scotin II
Gift of Museum Associates (2008.16.1-6)

Hogarth's *Marriage à la Mode* was his first series of satirical images that focused on elite British society. In six episodes, it tells of the tragicomic demise of a young woman from the affluent merchant class and a lecherous viscount, who were brought together through a marriage arranged by their greedy fathers. Based on six oil paintings preserved in the National Gallery, London, these prints were etched and engraved, as Hogarth advertised, by "the best masters" from Paris. The stable income he derived from issuing prints after his own works made it possible for him to work without traditional patronage, allowing him to maintain his relative independence as a social and cultural critic.

Plate I: The Marriage Settlement
(2008.16.1)



Plate II: The Tête-à-tête
(2008.16.2)



Plate III: The Inspection
(2008.16.3)



Plate IV: The Toilette
(2008.16.4)



Plate V: The Bagnio
(2008.16.5)



Plate VI: The Lady's Death
(2008.16.6)

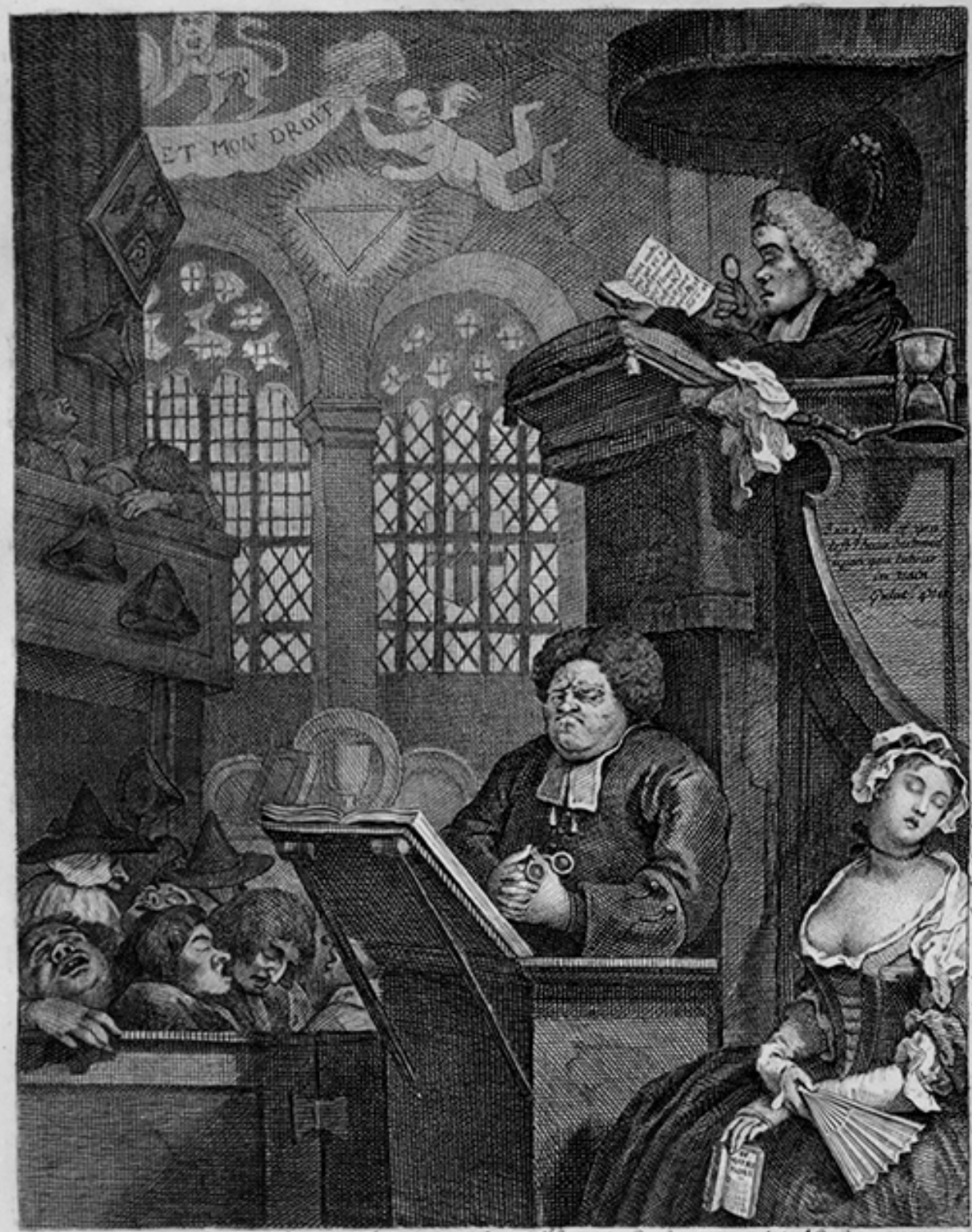
To view color images of the original oil paintings of Hogarth's *Marriage à la Mode* series as well as other Hogarth paintings, follow this link to the United Kingdom's National Gallery:

<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/william-hogarth-marriage-a-la-mode-1-the-marriage-settlement>



William Hogarth (British, 1697–1764)
Credulity, Superstition, and Fanaticism, 1762
 Engraving on paper
 Gift of Esther Randolph in memory of John Randolph (86.87)

Credulity, Superstition, and Fanaticism ridicules evangelical fervor in the ostensibly Methodist preacher, who speaks with such volume and frenzy that he cracks the sounding board above him and dislodges his wig and robes, revealing a Catholic tonsure and the harlequin suit of a theater performer. He also mocks a congregation so enraptured that a woman in the foreground gives birth to rabbits. (In 1726 a woman named Mary Tofts had declared that she had given birth to rabbits, which had been supported initially by eminent physicians – another favorite target of Hogarth’s wit.) Hogarth returns to the lax morals of clergy here as well, depicting a lecherous clergyman slipping a religious icon down the dress of an ecstatic young woman.



William Hogarth (British, 1697–1764)

The Sleeping Congregation, 1762

Engraving on paper

Gift of Esther Randolph in memory of John Randolph (86.85)

Hogarth's satirical barbs did not spare religion. *The Sleeping Congregation* criticizes a droning clergyman who has put his congregation to sleep, along with his inattentive audience, not to mention the morals of his clerk, who eyes the cleavage of a young woman.



THE BRUISER. C. CHURCHILL (once the Rev.) in the Character of a Russian Hercules, Regaling himself after having killed the Monster Caricature that so long had his Victims from the Heaven-born WILKES — But he had a Club this Dragon to Drub. Or he had no'er don't I warrant ye. — Engraved by W. Hogarth. — Published by W. & A. Smith, 1763.

William Hogarth (British, 1697–1764)

The Bruiser, 1763

Etching and engraving on paper

Gift in honor of Professor Patricia Crown, on the occasion of her retirement from her students and friends (2004.85)

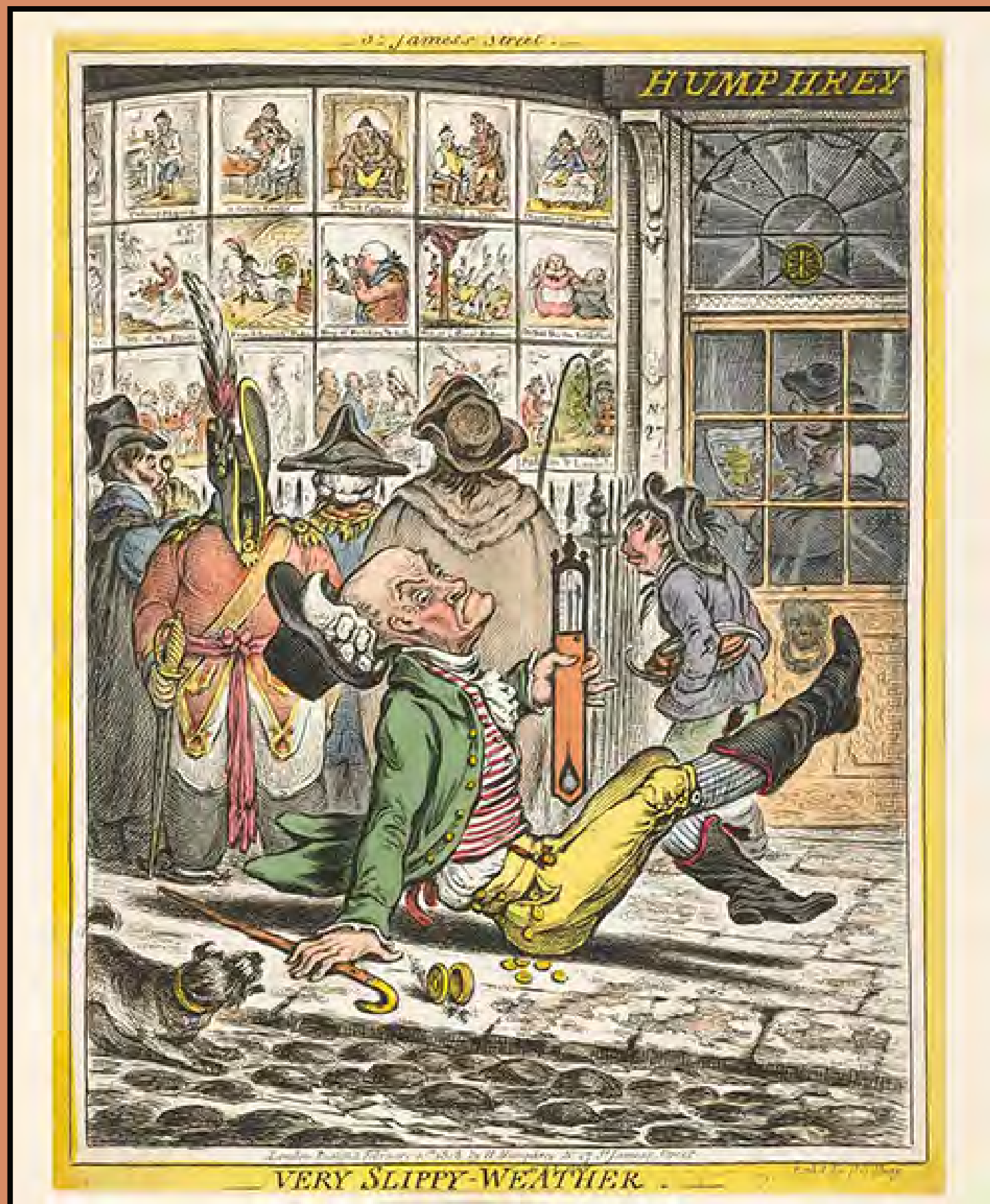
Later in his career, Hogarth participated through his art in debates about public policy as well as domestic and foreign affairs. His activity earned him both praise and contempt from contemporaries. This work — a form of self-portrait — was the culmination of an exchange of printed barbs between Hogarth and two men who disagreed with him, Charles Churchill, a satirist, and John Wilkes, a radical journalist. Churchill and Wilkes were friends.

The artist layered this image with meaning by modifying his painted self-portrait *The Painter and His Pug* of 1745 (Tate, London), already well-known because he issued an engraved version of it as a frontispiece to bound editions of his prints after 1749. Hogarth remarked on his resemblance to his beloved pug, Trump, and identified his dog as an apt metaphor for his own pugnacious personality. In this print, Hogarth takes on the guise of his pug, while Charles Churchill appears as a drunken bear in a tattered clerical collar (Churchill had been an Anglican priest). Hogarth makes clear his opinion of Churchill's scathing criticism, published as "An Epistle to Mr. Hogarth" in June 1763, as the pug urinates on a copy of the tract.



James Gillray (British, 1757–1815)
Sandwich-Carrots! dainty Sandwich-Carrots!, 1796
 Hand-colored etching on paper
 Published by Hannah Humphrey, London
 Gilbreath-McLorn Museum Fund (2015.1)

This print ridicules the 5th Earl of Sandwich, John Montagu, in a scene that the Gillray claims he observed *ad vivum* (from the life). Slipping a coin into the pocket of a market woman was reportedly a regular amusement of the earl's. Gillray depicts him grasping the apron of a curvaceous, young woman pushing a cart full of carrots, while making a lewd gesture with his other hand in his pocket. The choice of this particular root vegetable and their position pointed up at the woman reinforce the image's libidinous connotation. The caption's phrase "dainty Sandwich-Carrots" is clearly an insult to his physical attributes and sexual prowess. Satirical titles in the bookshop window behind them continue the mockery. "Life of Servant Maids" and "Doe Hunting, an Ode, by an Old Buck Hound" refer to the earl's predatory reputation and poke fun at his title of Master of the Buckhounds (an official position in the British royal household).



James Gillray (British, 1757–1815)
Very Slippy-Weather, 1808
 Hand-colored etching on paper
 Published by Hannah Humphrey
 British Museum (1851,0901.1248)

This hand-colored etching by James Gillray represents important aspects of print culture in the period: the display window of a London print seller on St. James's Street, viewers from a variety of social classes gawking at the comics and caricatures from outside, and two serious shoppers studying a print inside the shop. The work is also self-referential, as the prints on display are Gillray's own, and the shop is Hannah Humphrey's. Humphrey was Gillray's exclusive publisher beginning in 1791, and she cared for him after 1806 when his eyesight began to fail. The punning image and title also play on the very effect of Gillray's satirical art—the slipping status of his elite subjects, as an elderly aristocratic man holding a barometer falls on the pavement, losing his wig, snuff box, and several coins.



Thomas Rowlandson (British, 1756–1827)

A Milk Sop, 1811

Hand-colored etching on paper

Likely published by Thomas Tegg, London

Gift of Esther Randolph in memory of John Randolph (86.84)

A contemporary and friend of James Gillray, Thomas Rowlandson drew from direct experience of both 'high' and 'low' society for his work. After his father's bankruptcy, he was raised by his wealthy aunt and uncle in London, attended a reputable boys' school, trained at the Royal Academy, and studied art in Paris for two years. He demonstrated considerable promise as an aspiring artist, even enjoying the patronage of the Prince of Wales (later King George IV). Upon the death of Rowlandson's aunt in 1789, he received a significant inheritance, which he squandered through continental trips and gambling. By 1793 he was living in poverty. But after 1797 he maintained a stable career that bridged 'high' and 'low' culture. He fulfilled numerous commissions for Rudolph Ackermann, a publisher and dealer of prints, watercolors, and easel paintings. He also produced a substantial body of satirical work for Thomas Tegg, a publisher and bookseller on Cheapside. Often dismissed as topical, vulgar, or hackneyed, these prints are no less significant as examples of early nineteenth-century British culture than the 'fine art' prints he designed.

THE
COMIC
ALMANACK.

For 1846:

AN EPHEMERIS IN JEST AND EARNEST,

CONTAINING

"ALL THINGS FITTING FOR SUCH A WORK."

BY RIGDUM FUNNIDOS, GENT.



**ADORNED WITH NUMEROUS HUMOROUS ILLUSTRATIONS:—AND A
DOZEN OF "RIGHT MERRIE" CUTS PERTAINING TO
THE MONTHS.**

BY GEORGE CRUIKSHANK.

LONDON:

**IMPRINTED FOR DAVID BOGUE, BIBLIOPOLIST,
IN FLEET STREET.**

Vizetelly Brothers & Co., Printers, Peterborough Court, 135 Fleet Street.

George Cruikshank (British, 1792–1878)

Title page from *The Comic Almanack for 1846*

Etching

Published by David Bogue, London

The Ohio State University, digitized by Google (in the Public Domain)

The Comic Almanack, published annually from 1835 to 1853, was a fanciful collection of horoscopes, seasonal tips, poems, and amusing anecdotes, illustrated with etchings by George Cruikshank. As satire often does, the text and images commented on current events and issues. Therefore, a full understanding of the meanings of his works requires extensive knowledge of the cultural and historical milieu and can still remain elusive. His illustration for Capricorn refers to the 1846 repeal of the Corn Laws, a policy action in response to the Great Famine in Ireland. The depiction of a bull in a printer's shop for Taurus is clearly a tongue-in-cheek commentary on the press – that it is 'full of bull.' But this image, rife with puns, also alludes to Anglo-Irish relations by referring to Catholicism: a story proposal on the back wall is for "Some account of the Pope's Bull," a bull being an official papal decree. But the other connotation of 'bull' as fraudulent undermines the integrity of such a pronouncement and slights those who would follow it. Some jokes can be appreciated across time, such as the title page indicating that the 1846 almanac was written "by Rigdum Funnidos, Gent."

Following are four pages from *The Comic Almanack for 1846* in the Museum's collection.

View complete digitized issues of *The Comic Almanack* from 1835 to 1853 at <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/007934415>.



TAURUS — A literary Bull

George Cruikshank (British, 1792–1878)

Taurus — A literary Bull

From The Comic Almanack for 1846

Published by David Bogue, London

Etching

Gift of Bette Weiss (97.6)



GEMINI — Odd-fellows.

George Cruikshank (British, 1792–1878)

Gemini — Odd-fellows

From The Comic Almanack for 1846

Published by David Bogue, London

Etching

Gift of Bette Weiss (97.7)



VIRGO — Unmatched enjoyment.

George Cruikshank (British, 1792–1878)

Virgo – Unmatched enjoyment

From *The Comic Almanack for 1846*

Published by David Bogue, London

Etching

Gift of Bette Weiss (97.8)



CAPRICORNUS — A Caper-o'-corns.

George Cruikshank (British, 1792–1878)

Capricornus – A Caper-o'-corns

From *The Comic Almanack for 1846*

Published by David Bogue, London

Etching

Gift of Bette Weiss (97.9)



George Cruikshank (British, 1792–1878)
George Cruikshank's Table-book, new ed., 1869
 Edited by Gilbert Abbott à Beckett
 Published by Bell and Daldy, London
 Ellis Library Special Collections and Rare Books

George Cruikshank enjoyed a long, successful career producing thousands of illustrations for books, magazines, print series, and single-sheet prints. From a family of satirical artists, his name had become synonymous with satire by the time he published the first edition of his *Table-book* in 1845. Several editions were issued both during his lifetime and posthumously, indicating the remarkable popularity it sustained for decades.

This is the first of twelve full-page steel engravings in the book. It features a self-portrait of a middle-aged Cruikshank seated before a hearth and smoking a long meerschaum pipe, whose smoke forms an elaborate procession of imaginary characters celebrating Cupid. Another miniature Cruikshank draws a caricature of the seated Cruikshank, while a putto (cherub or cupid) roasts a heart on the blazing fire. The artist portrays himself as a brooding, imaginative genius, while simultaneously poking fun at himself; the Latin caption, which reads “to give light from smoke,” is a reference to the imaginary procession arising from the artist’s pipe-smoke, a quote from Horace, and the motto of the Liverpool Gas Light Company.