

## *Caricature Talk and Characterisation Technique*

What does the caricature talk of the Romantic period have to do with literary criticism's persistent notion of 'caricature' as a technique or style of characterisation in an author's work? Does caricature have a formal existence, a set of stylistic markers, which can be identified in fictive characters across literary works?

Most of the time, this book keeps 'caricature' shut up in inverted commas to remind us that authors and critics have different concepts of caricature, rather than caricature being a discrete genre, technique or other object of analysis. But this is not to say that caricature talk has no relationship with novelists' characterisation techniques; on the contrary, when novelists use the language-game of character talk, use caricature talk and anti-caricature rhetoric in their writings – as they often do – caricature talk helps constitute literary character for realism.

There is no 'caricature-writing' technique or style without a corresponding 'caricature-reading' method dictated by caricature talk. The incorporation of caricature talk into novels recognises that exaggeration, humour and satire are contingent on cultural specifics (regional, historical, linguistic) and that responsibly 'real' (realist) fiction might find ways to tell readers when, how and why exaggeration, humour and satire are happening in the text. With caricature talk being necessarily always about things other than caricature (gender, ethnicity, nation, class, morality, civility), in the realist novel it recommends particular characterisation techniques and styles as just and accurate representations of such things. Whereas some realisms are quite ready to assume that the reader shares, to a greater or lesser extent, the author's view of real people's characters, other realisms scrupulously provide terms of caricature talk for the reader. Caricature talk puts the -ism in character realism. Caricature talk 'tells' us about the characterisation techniques with which the author supposedly 'shows' us characters.

Chapter 4 in particular illustrates this principle, analysing how caricature talk co-operates with characterisation technique in Austen's novels.

We are told in *Sense and Sensibility* that John Dashwood's new wife is a 'strong caricature of himself'; and in *Pride and Prejudice*, when Mr Bennet is compared with his wife, that '[h]er mind was less difficult to develope'. We are told, in *Emma*, that Miss Bates is humorous to imitate; we are told, in *Sanditon*, that Charlotte can 'scarce keep her countenance' around Arthur Parker. Austen's moral concept of caricature participates in such moments that tell the reader how to read characters. In Chapter 5, I turn my attention to Scott's use of caricature talk to construct historical characters for compendious realism. Chapter 6 looks at Shelley's and Scott's use of literalised caricature in 'horrid realism', contemplating the effacement of character by physical peculiarity. Wherever caricature talk tells us how to read characters, framing them as comic, historical or grotesque, fiction manipulates and manufactures the reader's sense of a social reality shared with the author.