CHAPTER 1

Defining Caricature

Say that a reader in the Romantic period noticed the word *caricatura* when they were reading the works of Thomas Browne, or when they encountered a reference in the *Scots Magazine* to Alexander Pope being 'hurt by the caricatura of his figure'.[1] Say that they recognised this word as Italian and were curious about its origins. Which reference work could they have turned to?

The best choice, I think, would have been one of the many editions of Giuseppe Baretti's *Dictionary of the English and Italian Languages*. Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language* was not an option: Johnson did not define 'caricature', and though a brief entry was added posthumously then expanded by H. J. Rodd in the 1818 edition, it contains no helpful information about the word's Italian origins. Pocket editions of Johnson's dictionary define caricature simply as 'a ludicrous, droll likeness',[2] while Thomas Sheridan's *Complete Dictionary* (1790) defines it as 'exaggerated resemblance in drawings'. If the reader was uncertain how to pronounce the word and looked it up in John Walker's *Critical Pronouncing Dictionary* (1823), they would have been referred to Baretti's dictionary.[3] Alternatively, they might have picked up the latest edition of Giuspano Graglia's *New Pocket Dictionary of the Italian and English Languages*, titled *An Italian and English Pocket Dictionary* when first published in 1787 and in its seventeenth edition by 1837.

What light would Italian have shed, for British readers in the Romantic period, on the meaning of *caricatúra*, assimilated into English as 'caricature'?

From *Caricatúra* to Caricature: A History of the Word in English

Looking it up in Baretti's dictionary, the reader does not immediately find the kind of definition they might expect from an Italian–English dictionary: a definition written in English. Baretti's first 1760 edition explains *caricatúra* in Italian – 'dicesi anche di ritratto ridicolo in cui siensi

grandemente accresciati i diffetti' – and notes that '[t]he English have adopted the word. See *caricare in* [sic] *ritratto*'.[4] Graglia's 1787 pocket dictionary, which reproduces content from Baretti, defines *caricatúra* only as 'a caricature'. Thus, to understand the meaning of *caricatúra*, the reader must look higher on the page, where a series of definitions trace the word's etymology.

First, we have *cárica* ('charge, burden, load') and *cáricare* ('to charge, to load, to burden, to lay a burden upon'), with several examples of figurative usage such as 'to charge one with something, to lay the fault upon him'. Graglia's dictionary has *caricárla ad uno*, 'to play tricks with one', and *caricársi*, 'to take upon one's self'. In one of Baretti's examples, the reader will find a definition of pictorial caricature: to *caricare un ritratto* is 'to paint a portrait so, that the original may appear ridiculous by a kind of exaggeration of the parts of his face, yet without losing the resemblance'. Baretti's definition would have helped the English reader with *caricatúra* as it appears in *Letter to a Friend* (1690), where Browne describes the face of a dying man with a reference to Italian *caricatúra* drawings:

> [A] weak Physiognomist might say at first eye, This was a face of Earth, and that *Morta* had set her Hard-Seal upon his Temples, easily perceiving what *Caricatura* Draughts Death makes upon pined faces.[5]

This is one of the earliest references to *caricatúra* in an English-language text. Two decades later in no. 537 of the *Spectator*, John Hughes saves his reader the trouble of consulting a dictionary by providing his own definition of 'those burlesk pictures, which the Italians call Caricatura's'.[6] By the late eighteenth century, when English readers were expected to know what 'caricature' meant, Baretti's dictionary was there for any reader interested to know the history of this Italian-sounding word – especially when encountering it in its original Italian form, as in Walter Scott's *Rob Roy* (1818). After asking Frank to describe his father, a businessman, Rashleigh responds:

> 'O rare-painted portrait! [. . .] Vandyke was a dauber to you, Frank. I see thy sire before me in all his strength and weakness, loving and honouring the King as a sort of lord mayor of the empire, or chief of the board of trade, venerating the Commons, for the acts regulating the export trade, and respecting the Peers, because the Lord Chancellor sits on a wool-sack.' 'Mine was a likeness, Rashleigh; yours is a *caricatura*.'[7]

Rob Roy being set in 1715, Scott uses the period-appropriate '*caricatura*' rather than the assimilated 'caricature' in this dialogue. Baretti's explanation of *caricare un ritratto* is clearly relevant to this analogy between the two young men's opposing verbal descriptions of Mr Osbaldistone and

two different styles of portraiture, the Flemish painting and the exaggerated comic *ritratto*.

So far, so good. But say that this reader in the Romantic period had also come across other uses of the word 'caricature' where the 'caricatures' in question are clearly not literally *ritratti*, pictures or graphic portraits, but rather instances of writing, reviewing, editing and public speaking. Letters to the editor, newspaper advertisements for comic plays, Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, the *Scots Magazine*'s review of *Frankenstein* – all these refer to textual or verbal caricatures. Would Baretti's dictionary have provided any helpful context for such references to written or spoken *caricatúra*?

> I have been told formerly, that it is the office of a Critic to discover the *beauties* as well as the *defects* of a work. Our modern reviewers present us with nothing but *caricature* (*Morning Post*, 1775).

> The best method, I believe, that can be adopted to correct a fondness for novels is to ridicule them; [. . .] if a judicious person, with some turn for humour, would read several to a young girl, and point out [. . .] how foolishly and ridiculously they caricatured human nature, just opinions might be substituted instead of romantic sentiments (Wollstonecraft, 1792).

> The taste of the day leans entirely to caricature: We have lost our relish for the simple beauties of nature. The caricature in acting, in novel-writing, in preaching, in parliamentary eloquence is entirely in rage. We are no longer satisfied with propriety and neatness; we must have something grotesque and disproportioned, cumbrous with ornament and gigantic in its dimensions (*Morning Chronicle*, 1796).

> This present evening Their Majesties Servants will act (never performed) a new Dramatick Caricature, in one act, called THE UGLY CLUB (*Morning Post and Gazetteer*, 1798).

> The Brain-Sucker. Or, the Distress of Authorship. A Serio-Comic Caricature. In a Letter from Farmer Homely, to an absent Friend (*Morning Star*, 1798).

> SIR,—After seeing my letter of the 10th instant, in your Register of Sunday last, chequered, caricatured in Italics, and pared away, as it there appeared, *ad libitum*, for to suit your own purpose, I had almost resolved to desert the correspondence (*Cobbett's Weekly Register*, 1807).

> 'The Lord of the Manor' was performed yesterday, and the House, as on Monday, was crowded to an overflow. JONES played *Young Contrast* with all that pleasantry of caricature which made the character so

> important when the Opera was first revived at this Theatre (*Morning Post*, 1814).
>
> Here is one of the productions of the modern school in its highest style of caricature and exaggeration [. . .]. There never was a wilder story imagined, yet like most of the fictions of this age, it has an air of reality attached to it, by being connected with the favourite projects and passions of the times (*Scots Magazine*, 1818).[8]

None of these examples ask the reader to think specifically of drawings or graphic portraits. The *Morning Chronicle* gives several examples of caricature, all of which involve verbal expression and none of which are pictorial. For the *Scots Magazine* writer, caricature is a 'style' of writing.

Readers could have thought of these expressions as metaphors, analogies that apply Baretti's definition of an exaggerated portrait – *caricare un ritratto* – to a 'portrait' in textual or verbal form. Indeed, verbal and textual caricatures are occasionally compared with graphic *ritratti*, whether implicitly (as in the *Gentleman's Magazine*'s profile of the Shakespearean commentator George Steevens) or explicitly (as in John Hughes's letter to *The Spectator* advertising his own 'Ode to the Creator of the World'):

> A characteristic bon mot, is a kind of oral caricature, copies of which, are multiplied by every tongue that utters it (*The Gentleman's Magazine*, 1800).[9]
>
> Politicians can resolve the most shining actions among men into artifice and design; others, who are soured by discontent, repulses, or ill usage, are apt to mistake their spleen for philosophy; men of profligate lives, and such as find themselves incapable of rising to any distinction among their fellow-creatures, are for pulling down all appearances of merit, which seem to upbraid them: and satirists describe nothing but deformity. From all these hands we have seen such draughts of mankind as are represented in those burlesk pictures, which the Italians call Caricatura's; where the art consists in preserving, amidst distorted proportions and aggravated features, some distinguishing likeness of the person, but in such a manner as to transform the most agreeable beauty into the most odious monster (John Hughes, no. 537 of *The Spectator*).[10]

But despite the analogies, these 'caricatures' were not simply textual versions of caricature *ritratti*, humorous portraits of individuals' distinctive physical features. None of the oral or written caricatures mentioned in these examples involve people's physical features, and only some of them are humorous; others are noted for having satirical or aesthetic impact, or being misinformative. Would a reader who consulted Baretti's explanation of *caricare un ritratto* ('to paint a portrait so, that the original may appear

ridiculous') and his definition of *caricatúra* ('ritratto ridicolo') have thought that, in being applied so diversely to verbal 'caricatures', the English borrowing of *caricatúra* was losing its meaning?

Perhaps not, since Baretti does offer the anglophone reader an Italian precedent for 'caricature' as exaggerated speech or writing. The last of the dictionary's examples for the verb *cáricare* is 'Caricare (accrescere in parlando la cosa più che veramente sia)'. Baretti renders his definition into English as 'to enlarge, to be more vehement than it is need [sic], to exaggerate', omitting to translate his phrase 'in parlando' – 'in speaking' or 'in the telling'. The English reader could have found further linguistic justification for the 'caricature' that was not a *ritratto ridicolo* in the alternative definition for *caricare un ritratto* included in some editions of Baretti's dictionary, 'to overshadow a picture', suggesting exaggerated contrasts rather than enlarged features. If they read through all Baretti's entries under *carica–*, they would have found that *caricatúra* also meant 'the charge of a gun' ('certa quantità di munizione'), and that to *caricar l'inimico* was 'to charge or attack the enemy' – a double meaning suggesting that an exaggerated 'caricature' might be more violent and hurtful than humorous and ridiculous. Baretti's dictionary, where *caricatúra* appears alongside definitions of *cárica* and *cáricare* – and next to explanations of phrases like 'caricare un archibuso', 'caricar l'orza', 'caricare (accusare)' and 'caricare (in parlando)' – calls the English reader's attention to the fact that *caricatúra*, when it describes a graphic or verbal likeness, is a figurative usage of *cáricare*. To use the word 'caricature' to describe an overblown sermon, a distorting abridgement of one's letter to the editor about the Poor Laws, or the style of the new novel *Frankenstein*, was not to misapply *caricatúra* but to reinvest it with some of *cáricare*'s many idioms – contrast, force, impact, plenitude, addition, emphasis – that were subordinated in the *ritratto ridicolo* definition. Any reader who jumped from *Cobbett's Weekly Register* or the *Scots Magazine* to Baretti's dictionary would have been reassured that 'caricature' – used so freely of texts and speeches in the English language – was securely in the linguistic tradition of *caricatúra*.

I like to think that this scenario of mine is not hypothetical: that many readers in the Romantic period really did consult Baretti's entry for *caricatúra* – or familiarise themselves with the word's etymology elsewhere. In his *Rules for Drawing Caricaturas* (1788), Francis Grose implicitly recognises that the *ritratto ridicolo* is a 'charged' picture but not necessarily an 'overcharged' one, when he advises the amateur graphic caricaturist 'not to overcharge the peculiarities of their subjects, as they would thereby become hideous instead of ridiculous, and instead of laughter excite

horror'.[11] Wollstonecraft insists that her satirical description of the dependent woman is 'not an overcharged picture'.[12] Austen's manuscript of readers' opinions about characters in *Emma* records one reader thinking that Miss Bates might be 'overcharged', and Thomas Babington Macaulay describes Fanny Burney's characters as 'extravagantly overcharged'.[13] English's use of 'overcharged' to mean 'over-exaggerated' indicates that English readers and writers continued to be aware of caricature's linguistic ties with *cárica* and *cáricare*.

When, in the late Georgian period, Britain's political graphic satirists became more adept in the techniques of the *ritratto ridicolo*, writers recognised these distinctive designs as 'caricature prints' – but caricature's semantic range was not eclipsed by the strengthened association with satirical prints. A letter to the *Morning Post*, in 1776, describes Robert D'Arcy, 4th Earl of Holdernesse, as 'foremost in the patronage of operas, opera singers, and every species of foreign taste, and foreign *vertu*'; thus, the writer thinks – referring to a print titled *The Idol* (c. 1756–58) – '[t]he well known satyrical print of his Lordship at the feet of Mingotti was not a *caricature*'.[14] When 'caricature' is used in late eighteenth-century newspapers and periodicals to mean a graphic portrait, it usually alludes to drawings and amateur sketches – except where there is a discussion or advertisement specifically about satirical prints, such as a notice in the *Morning Herald* that '[t]his day is published by W. Holland [. . .] A Caricature Print of Lloyd's Coffee-House, and another of Wright's Oyster-Room, the first 4s, the other 3s'.[15]

The richness of Baretti's entries under *carica–*, and the varied ways 'caricature' was used in the Romantic period as just quoted, suggest that the history of the modern graphic caricature – its development in Renaissance Italy and its export to Britain in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – is not quite as relevant as I once assumed, when it comes to the history of literature's caricature in the Romantic period. In the following pages, some context on the Italian *ritratti carichi* and on that genre's appropriation by the British elite, gives a background for British writers' understanding of graphic caricature as an artistic tradition long preceding the satirical prints of the late Georgian period.

Literature and the Caricature Print in the Romantic Period

The inception of Romanticism in British culture and literature coincides with what twentieth-century scholarship dubbed the 'Age of Caricature' (sometimes the 'golden age of caricature'), a period understood to span the

1770s to the 1820s. In this common shorthand, 'caricature' means the genre of single-sheet satirical prints that possessed a distinctive aesthetic and that seems to have attained an artistic high point in the late Georgian period. The very phrase 'Age of Caricature' tempts literary scholars – me among them – into imagining that poets and novelists in the Romantic period might have been struck by the 'caricature' of the satirical prints, might have incorporated the prints' qualities into their own works, or might have been influenced by prints via some larger cultural phenomenon that graphic satirists helped create, with satirical prints representative of caricature as a 'spirit of the age'. Such claims often lean on phrases denoting contemporaneity ('the age of ', 'of the day', 'in the period when'): for example, Michael O'Neill remarks that '[g]reat Romantic short lyrics have something in common with the caricaturist's eye for the telling detail (this is the age of Gillray, after all)'.[16] What was the relationship between the satirical prints and the new literature being published in the Romantic period? On the way to answering that question, several points should be made about the relation of the word 'caricature' to the satirical print genre, the social status of the satirical print, and how the satirical prints and Romantic literature represented each other.

The satirical prints of the late Georgian era, laden with text and intertextual allusions, are a literary genre in their own right. Literary critics' recent forays into the study of the genre are made possible by decades of work by print and art historians – most significantly the eleven-volume *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires Preserved in the Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum*, which not only systematised the British Museum's collection of thousands of single-sheet prints and caricature drawings but also annotated them with relevant historical information and identified the individuals depicted. Between 1868 and 1883 Frederic George Stephens, founder member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, compiled the first four volumes, comprising BM Sat 1 to 4838. Historian Mary Dorothy George took up the project in 1930, completing seven further volumes between 1935 and 1954. At the end of the twentieth century a new generation of print historians aimed to understand the genre in its broader cultural and socio-economic contexts, with Eirwen E.C Nicholson's 1994 PhD thesis, a review and critical analysis of scholarship on political prints c. 1640–c. 1832, in the vanguard. Critics have had the benefit of print historian Diana Donald's persuasively titled *The Age of Caricature: Satirical Prints in the Reign of George III* (1996); and for any literary critic with a serious interest in the topic, James Baker's account of the genre's socio-economic history in *The Business of Satirical Prints in Late-Georgian England* (2017) is indispensable.

Now a new generation of scholars subject the eighteenth-century satirical print to cultural historicism, critical theory and close-reading techniques – notably Amelia Rauser's ground-breaking study *Caricature Unmasked: Irony, Authenticity and Individualism in Eighteenth-Century English Prints* (2008), *The Efflorescence of Caricature, 1759–1838*, a collection of essays edited by Todd Porterfield (2011), Ian Haywood's *Romanticism and Caricature* (2014), Temi Odumosu's *Africans in English Caricature, 1769–1819* (2017) and David Taylor's *The Politics of Parody: A Literary History of Caricature, 1760–1830* (2018).[17] While Odumosu uses a more capacious definition where 'caricature' can refer to satirical characterisations in plays, novels and periodicals as well as in satirical prints, generally these book titles reflect the pattern that has emerged in the study of satirical prints as a literary genre, of the word 'caricature' habitually standing in for the genre of the single-sheet satirical print. It is true that, as scholars acknowledge, the Georgian satirical print drew heavily on the techniques of Italian caricature portraiture, and some artists often used more extravagant, fantastic imagery than previous 'emblematic' political prints had done. However, caricature was not synonymous with the single-sheet satirical print at any point during 'the Age of Caricature' itself. Nor is it clear that we can expect to find significant lines of influence running directly between satirical prints and the new literature published in the Romantic period.

Due to the satirical prints' borrowing from an established literary canon – Shakespeare, *Paradise Lost*, *Don Quixote*, *Gulliver's Travels*[18] – as well as from Gothic imagery and from the idioms of the press, it is inevitable that there are coincidences in imagery and wording between Cruikshank and Scott, between Gillray and Shelley. For example, as Haywood points out, *Frankenstein* shares its subtitle with George Cruikshank's satire on Napoleon exiled to Elba, *The Modern Prometheus, or Downfall of Tyranny* (1814).[19] Cruikshank certainly did not invent the phrase: it appears in a wide range of contemporary publications, for example referring to the electro-magnetic therapist James Graham in 1781, and to the anti-vaccination Benjamin Moseley in 1805, before being applied to Napoleon in 1815.[20] Shaftesbury may have coined the phrase to cast aspersion on con artists, writing in *The Moralists* (1709) of 'our modern PROMETHEUS'S, *the Mountebanks*, who perform'd such Wonders [. . .]. Shou'd we dare to make such *Empiricks* of the Gods, and such a *Patient* of poor Nature?'[21] Perhaps most pertinently, given the link between Galvanism and Frankenstein's electrified oak tree, the epithet was applied to Benjamin Franklin. A poem published in the *London Evening*

Post in 1777 portrays Franklin ascending to heaven 'in chains of wire, / To perish by his stolen fire', describing him in a footnote as 'this arch patriot, philosopher, modern Prometheus, and rebel'.[22] Contemporary references to Napoleon as Prometheus – including Cruikshank's print – dwell on Prometheus chained rather than on Promethean fire. Shelley's tagging of Frankenstein as a Prometheus draws on any number of negative associations the 'modern Prometheus' had gathered since Shaftesbury's ironic statement in the early 1700s.

Looking beyond such coincidences of imagery and allusion between literature and satirical prints, it can be argued that the late-Georgian satirical print 'evokes a parallel with Romantic aesthetics' more generally, as Haywood does: 'to the extent that it showcases a distorting application of the inspirational imagination, we can regard caricature as renegade Romanticism'.[23] E. H. Gombrich supposes that around the time of the late-Georgian print, Romanticism was inculcating a taste for 'the weirdest combinations of symbols, the most grotesque conglomerations of images, [. . .] phantoms, nightmares, and apparitions'.[24] Robert Patten sees the late-Georgian caricature print as 'another manifestation of the Romantic movement' in the sense of 'the exploration of individuality and difference which confuted Augustan assumptions about universal norms'.[25]

I would suggest, however, that the extravagant imagery of some late-Georgian satirical prints – most prominently Gillray's – should not be allowed to dominate any discussion of 'caricature' as a cultural phenomenon with close connections to literature in the Romantic period. Parallels between Romanticism and late-Georgian satirical prints cannot be grounded in an argument that novelists and poets of the Romantic period generally saw satirical prints as the model for a 'caricature' applicable beyond the most topical political events and matters of high society. Moreover, the comic and grotesque artistic techniques that became associated with *caricatúra* preceded the satirical print genre by hundreds of years – marginal drawings in medieval manuscripts, stone gargoyles, the 'fancy head' genre – and British connoisseurs were well aware of the modern caricature portrait's origins in the Italian Renaissance, with *Bell's Court and Fashionable Magazine* in 1815 observing that '[i]t is to no less persons than to those eminent restorers of the art of painting, Michel Angelo, and Leonardi di Vinci, that we are indebted for some of the first caricatures which have ever appeared in modern times'.[26]

British interest in modern graphic *caricatúra* was sparked by the comic *ritratti carichi* of sixteenth-century Italy that are credited to Annibale Carracci, a Bolognese painter of altarpieces and frescoes paid for by elite

families. These early modern graphic caricatures followed a literary fad for short satirical 'portraits' in verse, and Donald Posner suggests that the first *ritratti carichi* were pictorial illustrations for these verses.[27] Only a few examples survive of the caricatures by Carracci and his fellows: Malvasia's *Life of the Carracci* mentions drawings of people depicted variously as dwarfed and hunchbacked, with animalistic physiognomies, or made to resemble inanimate objects. E. H. Gombrich identifies these techniques with 'the theoretical discovery of the difference between likeness and equivalence'.[28] Carracci named the *perfetta deformità* ('perfect deformity'), a distinctive physical aberration supposed to contain the essence of a person's real physical likeness, and which could be exaggerated or made the basis of a fantastic portrait that still, thanks to the perfect deformity, resembled the subject.[29] Anne Summerscale notes that Carracci conceived of his *caricatúra* as something greater and more intellectual than mere 'comic distortion'; rather, it was a realism born of perverse creativity, which sat alongside the Carracci family's artistic reform movement.[30] In 1582, when the Carracci founded a school for artists in Bologna, the Academia degli Incamminati ('Academy of Those Who Are Making Progress'), fine art was dominated by the strand of Renaissance art that came to be seen as exaggeratedly elegant, 'Mannerism'. The Carracci advocated a return to nature, flouting church doctrine by allowing artists to draw nudes from live models.[31] *Ritratti carichi*, visual jokes that captured individuals' physical likenesses in unflattering ways, became fashionable in the elite society that patronised the Academia's painting. Noble men and women tried their hands at caricaturing each other, as well as commissioning professional portraits of themselves, their family and friends. The trend was imported to Britain by connoisseurs who returned from their Grand Tour with group portraits of themselves and their travelling companions: desirable souvenirs, especially if drawn by an acclaimed artist such as Pier Leone Ghezzi or the Italian-trained English painter Thomas Patch.[32] When the British elites took up caricaturing as a hobby, enterprising publishers offered engraving and printing services so that amateur caricaturists could distribute copies of their drawings around the social circle that would recognise the likeness.

The most prominent of the publishers were Mary and Matthew Darly, who engraved portraits by George Marquess Townshend. Mary Darly created a drawing manual, *A Book of Carricaturas* (1762), to appeal to her clientele. In a run-on sentence introducing the book, she calls attention to caricaturing's fashionably aristocratic and Continental origins, while patriotically endorsing the British upper ranks' talent for this new pastime: