Preface

What was caricature to novelists in the Romantic period? Why is Mr Dashwood's wife 'a strong caricature of *him*self' in *Sense and Sensibility*? Why does *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* imagine that its detailed account of eighteenth-century Edinburgh might 'serve as an illustration of Kay's caricatures'? Why is the body of Frankenstein's creature 'in proportion', but then 'distorted in its proportions' – and does caricature have anything to do with it? This book answers those questions, and shifts our understanding of *caricature* as a critical term for literature in the decades when 'the English novel' was defined and canonised as a distinct literary entity.

Literary scholarship has often taken 'caricature' to be the disreputable doppelgänger of 'character', and caricaturing as the antithesis of good characterisation. 'Caricature', its conceptual difficulty left unexamined, has long been used as a critical tool for debating the relative quality of fictive characters. However, caricature has historically played a more complex role alongside character – both in fiction readers' understandings of fictive character, literary form and literary realism, and in realism's intensified self-consciousness about using 'the real' to amuse, charm and shock readers in new ways. Novelists in the Romantic period incorporate concepts of caricature into their narration: they integrate caricature talk and anti-caricature rhetoric with characterisation technique, in order to 'tell' readers what different realisms are purporting to 'show' them. Meanwhile, in Romantic character criticism, caricature talk involves and generates readers' knowledge and feelings about fictive characters as 'realist' writing.

Part I, 'Caricature Talk', collates source material from periodicals, newspapers, books and dictionaries to establish the full scope of caricature's significance for literature and letters in the Romantic period. In Chapters 1 and 2, by comparing the ways in which the word 'caricature' was used, I recover meanings lying outside notions of caricature as either 'a satirical representation' or 'a humorous portrait', extricate the Romantic period's understanding of textual caricature from the contemporary genres

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of single-sheet caricature prints and *ritratti carichi*, and explain the relation of prosopographic textual caricature to fictive textual caricature. The primary purpose of Chapters 2 and 3 is to trace a central thread in the criticism and writing of the Romantic novel, a grouping of vocabulary, concepts and rhetoric about textual exaggeration that I call 'caricature talk'. To illustrate caricature talk, Chapter 3 analyses key passages from *The Spectator* (1711–12) and its critical reception between the 1770s and the 1820s. I suggest that the caricature talk that features in the critical recognition and writing of the Romantic novel derived key topics of interest – diversion, originality and realism – from the *Spectator* and other humorous character-driven periodicals of the early eighteenth century; and I show how anti-caricature rhetoric became conventionalised in essays that sought to explain and promote the appeal of Addison and Steele's character Sir Roger de Coverley.

Part II, 'Novel Caricatures', opens with a note on the question of textual caricature having a formal existence in the Romantic novel. If Part I has shown that *concepts* of caricature are important to the novel, might Part II show how *techniques* of caricature were used by novelists? I argue that different novelistic realisms incorporate specific meanings and usages of 'caricature' from among the range discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, in telling readers the significance and effects of characterisation techniques that purport to show real minds and bodies. Each chapter describes how a single writer's oeuvre engages with concepts of caricature in unique ways – but since I focus on three writers now considered so definitive of different strains of realist prose fiction, I hope that my reader will find some generalisable insights: to the comic, moralist and contemporary from Austen, to the 'compendious' and historical for Scott, and to 'body horror' from Shelley. Several themes converge and diverge between chapters, and there is no chronological or conceptual narrative implied by my ordering of the chapters. For example, Chapters 4 and 5 both discuss how novelists use anti-caricature rhetoric in their novels; all chapters discuss realism's habilitation of 'explained caricatures'; and all chapters engage with realism's forced grotesquing of deviant bodies, as enabled by social critique's literalisation of caricature into flesh – fat bodies in Austen's novels, dwarfism in Scott's and Shelley's fiction, and dead and 'straight-laced bodies' in *Frankenstein*.

This is a history of literature's caricature, which cannot be taken in at one glance, or encapsulated in a sentence. Starting with the dictionaries in which the Romantic-period reader might have sought a deeper understanding of *caricatúra*, I build a picture of a literary 'caricature' that branched and varied, yet retained definition.

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