CHAPTER 4

Jane Austen and Anti-caricature

Critics have often claimed that Jane Austen 'never stooped to caricature',[1] and that avoidance of caricature made her fiction superior and distinctively 'natural' in its realism. The first part of this chapter traces the development of a critical tradition which, in the nineteenth century and beyond, insisted on Austen's 'delicacy' and 'accuracy', and posited caricature as the antithesis of her literary achievement. More than any other novelist of the period, Austen has been seen as fundamentally 'anti-caricature'. I argue that the critical tradition's tendency to deny caricature in Austen's works has substantially helped to secure the reputation of her realism: critics continually use anti-caricature rhetoric to express the author's exemplary femininity and promote a homogeneous Englishness – picking up on the vocabulary and imagery of the 'snug' aesthetic that the novels themselves present as metonymic of their distinctive reality. Moving on to twentieth-century criticism and recent studies more sceptical of the anti-caricature consensus, I consider how the critical tradition has used 'caricature' to distinguish Austen's early works from the mature novels and to position *Sanditon* as an outlier.

I offer a new definition of Austen's 'anti-caricature' in the second part of this chapter, refocusing the discussion on the moral concept of caricature that operates within Austen's novels, and showing how caricature talk works in concert with characterisation techniques. I examine how the narrator's 'character appreciations' take the word 'caricature' for ethical criticism, modelling the language-game of talking about fictional characters as though they were real people and vice versa. I argue that in Austen's realism, caricature is the aesthetic effect of self-interestedness, is self-reflexive and self-inflicted. Austen's textual styling of character is bound up with her moral concept of caricature, so that the writer's comic and satirical characterisation techniques can pretend to be ethical criticism of real people. Thus Austen's characters are 'explained caricatures'; by this sleight of hand, realism substitutes humour and satire for reportage and analysis.

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To look in detail at this co-operation of caricature talk and characterisation technique, I explore how Austen's moral concept of self-reflexive caricature interacts with characterisation techniques in Austen's depictions of fat bodies. I argue that Austen deploys an ethics of fatness in conjunction with formal techniques that represent fat bodies as comic, making 'corpulence' representative of the 'real' or 'explained' caricature. Discussing the key stylistic features Austen typically uses in dialogue to characterise the explained caricature – prolonging, repeating, reiterating – I demonstrate that the third-person narrator shifts into that same formal pattern when she talks about fatness and fat bodies. This stylistic resonance between narrator and caricature, I suggest, makes openings for the reader to identify Austen's fat-hating as an eccentricity and subject it to ethical or psychological criticism.

While Austen's reputation as a superlatively feminine and English realist has insisted on her refusal to caricature, in fact her novels present their own characterisation techniques under the aegis of a moral concept of caricature, telling readers what 'caricature' means in the social world that Austen's realism purports to show them. Through caricature talk, Austen's realism offers readers the pleasure of comic and satiric characterisations packaged as accurate, instructive and morally principled, where 'explained caricatures' are supposed to pre-exist the text as objects of ethical or psychological criticism. My broader argument about caricature talk's constitution of realism responds to Jane Stabler's provocative insight that Austen's novels show how 'our notion of realistic characterization needs to include caricature, not exclude it'.[2]

Looking beyond Austen, the 'anti-caricature' of nineteenth-century realism has less to do with the avoidance of caricature through 'restraint' or 'simplicity' of technique or style, than with the appropriate framing of characterisation techniques through caricature talk. The artifice of a writer's comic or satiric characterisation can be naturalised, rationalised and moralised into the 'explained caricatures' of a reality supposedly already populated by caricatures, where distortions of character are attributed to the external and internal forces that shape people.

Austen in the 'Age of Caricature'

The phrase 'the Age of Caricature' has done some heavy lifting where critics have wanted to align the characterisation techniques of Austen's writing with the distinctive features of late-Georgian satirical prints. Asking for Austen to be recognised and admired as a 'caricaturist',

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Donald Greene writes: 'One needs to remember that she grew up in the great age of English caricature, when Hogarth's engravings were on every wall, and Gillray, Rowlandson, and the Cruikshanks were producing their twisted, grotesque distortions of the human frame.'[3] Though it is reasonable to assume that Austen would have come across single-sheet satirical prints (perhaps pasted to a wall or screen, or interleaved with cuttings and drawings in a borrowed portfolio), it is more difficult to ascertain what 'caricature' her writing could have gained from satirical prints that it did not gain from elsewhere. As yet, we have no concrete evidence – textual or material – of Austen's engagement with the single-sheet satirical print, a genre with socio-economic contexts and formal properties that should complicate our assumptions about how late-Georgian graphic caricature parallels contemporaneous comic and satirical literary works. 'Hogarth and Gillray' is itself a problematic pairing for the Romantic period; so too, I think, is 'Gillray and Austen'.

Later in this chapter, I briefly refer to John Kay's caricature portraits and to Diana Beauclerk's and Lavinia Spencer's caricature drawings of Edward Gibbon as a counterpoint to Austen's characterisation of fat bodies as explained caricatures; I suggest some nuances in the ways that late-Georgian parliamentary satirical prints use fatness and thinness; and I point the reader to new studies of fatness in Georgian culture. So, I do address the 'visualising' aspects of Austen's representation of fat bodies as caricatures – without fully exploring parallels in contemporaneous graphic caricature or visual culture more broadly. Readers looking for analyses of Austen's writing alongside particular satirical prints might start with Rachel Brownstein's 2015 article 'Character and Caricature: Jane Austen and James Gillray' and Jane Stabler's 2007 article 'Jane Austen and Caricature'. Readers who want to know about possible links between Austen and graphic caricature might consider Cassandra Austen's portrait of her sister, and their collaborative *History of England*, in relation to the amateur caricaturing I discuss in Chapter 1.

I am cautious of relying on the 'Age of Caricature' as a context for literature's caricature as it existed during roughly the same historical period. But the phrase has enabled, in Austen's case, some scepticism of the 'anti-caricature' rhetoric in the critical tradition and some willingness to contemplate how caricature might be constructive in literary texts. This is because print historians' work and consequent increased scholarly interest in Georgian satirical prints has made *caricature* a less dirty word in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literary studies. 'Fifty years ago',

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Brownstein points out, 'it would have been unthinkable to speak in the same breath, or the same paper, as Jane Austen and [graphic] caricature'.[4] Analysing Austen's writing alongside prints by James Gillray, Brownstein suggests that Austen 'saw caricature as a mode of characterization'.[5] We need not establish direct influences or shared contexts, to gain insights from the comparison of textual and pictorial characterisation.

While my approach does not put Austen and graphic satirists on parallel tracks, for reasons discussed here and in Chapter 1, I share other critics' interest in stepping away from the debate over which of Austen's characters are 'caricatures' and when – to think instead about caricature in terms of forms and concepts, in ways facilitated by exploring what caricature means in different media and contexts of the late-Georgian period.

Austen and Anti-caricature

Before surveying the longer critical tradition on caricature in Austen's novels, I want to consider a manuscript that registers Austen's interest in how her comic and satirically rendered characters were received by her first readers. The text, untitled by Austen, is known as 'Opinions of Mansfield Park and Opinions of Emma' (British Library, Add. MSS. 41253A). 'Opinions' ostensibly transcribes the opinions of other people, but inevitably it is Austen's reception of her reception: at least partly a subjective interpretation of the opinions' content, and probably using some of Austen's own vocabulary and linguistic constructions. For one thing, the Opinions are written in the third person, suggesting that verbatim transcription was not Austen's overriding priority. It is impossible to know either how closely the Opinions reflect the readers' original responses, or how spontaneous or authentic those opinions were to begin with. Did they come to Austen via letters, or in conversation? Did Austen actively elicit them, and did she question friends and family on particular topics? In the absence of evidence on such issues, I understand the Opinions as 'belonging' to their author. This is literally true of the manuscript – but the opinions also belong to Austen in the sense that she believed them worth shaping into a private document for (presumably) some combination of self-reflection and self-congratulation on her authorship. Seen this way, the Opinions are all the more helpful as a document for understanding how Austen might have used caricature talk for comic and satiric characterisation in anticipation of the reception of her novels by contemporary readers.

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The Opinions pay ample attention to the comically and satirically rendered characters in *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park* and *Emma*. In this respect, the Opinions present *Emma* – a novel that twentieth-century critics have often seen as Austen's subtlest, most restrained and 'mature' work – as relatively slim pickings after *Pride and Prejudice*. Austen notes her friends and family apparently seizing on Mrs Elton and Miss Bates as highlights, with one reader 'delighted with Miss Bates, but thought Mrs Elton the best-drawn Character in the book'. One declares that 'Miss Bates is incomparable'; another that, on reading *Emma* a second time, they 'liked Miss Bates much better than at first'. Phrases evocative of 'strong' characters, and familiar tropes from anti-caricature rhetoric, appear in words and phrases such as 'rather too much', 'highly-drawn', 'strongly marked' and 'interesting', as opposed to 'natural' – without using the words 'overcharged' or 'caricature', which would judge unequivocally that Austen had gone too far. References to comic exaggeration and satirical emphasis are carefully understated and balanced by praise in opinions such as 'Miss Bates excellent, but rather too much of her' and a diplomatic statement attributed to Anna Lefroy, that the characters in *Emma* are 'perhaps less strongly marked than some, but only the more natural for that reason—Mr Knightley Mrs Elton & Miss Bates her favourites'. Austen records a blunter opinion about the effect of the characterisations in *Emma*: Mrs Guiton apparently 'thought her [Emma] too natural to be interesting'. Austen's mother similarly finds *Emma* 'not so interesting as P. & P.', a judgement recorded in proximity to her remark that there are 'no characters in it equal to Ly Catherine & Mr Collins'. This disappointment with *Emma*'s characters is echoed by a contemporaneous review in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, that the latest novel 'has not the highly-drawn characters' of *Pride and Prejudice*.[6]

When it comes to *Mansfield Park*, the Opinions seem to dwell on readers' reactions to the character most emphatically presented as comic and satirical, Mrs Norris. One reader 'admired [the novel] very much—particularly Mrs Norris'; other opinions are: 'Delighted with Mrs Norris', 'Enjoyed Mrs Norris', 'Mrs Norris is a great favourite of mine'. Did Austen seek opinions about Mrs Norris specifically, because Mrs Norris was a great favourite of *hers* or because she was concerned that she might have gone too far in creating such a 'strongly marked' character? At any rate, the Opinions suggest an author conscious that 'favourites' are a crucial part of her literary achievement; and if we own that Austen's novels might have been shaped by anticipating and responding to feedback from family and

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friends, she was not under pressure to excise all 'caricature' from her novels – quite the opposite.

This chapter argues that Austen's 'anti-caricature' is not, and has never been, the mere avoidance of techniques that could be described as 'caricaturing'. In the critical tradition, anti-caricature is the strategic insistence on Austen's understatement and her supposed avoidance of caricature; in Austen's writing practice, 'anti-caricature' is the strategic overstatement of literary understatement, and the framing of 'explained caricatures' as referential to a real social world. While my account, in the next few pages, of how literary critics have insisted on the femininity and 'delicacy' of Austen's satire, might give the impression that 'anti-caricature' was a set of ideas *imposed* on her work, I will be arguing later that anti-caricature was – as the Opinions suggest – intrinsic to Austen's realism.

Anti-caricature and Femininity in the Early Critical Tradition

From the 1820s to the mid-twentieth century, critics frequently complimented Austen on her avoidance of caricature. Sometimes they did so with relatively gender-neutral language. *The Retrospective Review* refrains from many tropes of femininity that would become associated with Austen's anti-caricature, when it positions the author – who by 1823 had been dead for several years – as a contemporary cultural touchstone: 'In the lively and spirited caricatures of Evelina and Cecilia, we may see the style of portrait-painting relished by our fathers. Turning from them to the soberly coloured and faithful likenesses of Jane Austen, we may behold that approved by ourselves.'[7] Most of the time, however, anti-caricature was bundled up with femininity and domesticity. Richard Whately, in 1829, uses a range of phrases linking anti-caricature and femininity that would become clichés in later nineteenth-century criticism on Austen: he praises the author's 'accurate and unexaggerated delineation of events and characters', her 'minute fidelity of detail' and 'minute fidelity to nature'.[8] George Henry Lewes, in 1859, maintains that in *Emma*, Mrs Elton's vulgarity is never tainted 'by caricature of any kind'.[9] Julia Kavanagh approves Austen's 'most delicate portrait of character [. . .] no caricature, no exaggeration'; Margaret Oliphant approves her 'finesse' and 'self-restraint' in creating works so 'softly feminine and polite'.[10] Words such as 'gentleness', 'softness', 'delicacy', 'minuteness', 'neatness', 'nicety', 'precision', 'exactness', 'faithfulness' – referring to literary works by women – insistently cluster together, fabricating a femininity for anti-caricature.

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Based on the claim that she avoided caricature, Austen was favourably contrasted to other women novelists, as in *The Retrospective Review*'s opposition of Fanny Burney's 'caricatures' to Austen's 'likenesses'. Anna Laetitia Barbauld, who was generally wary in her *British Novelists* essays of the potential vulgarity of literary caricature, notes Burney's use of different linguistic registers for 'vulgar characters'; and *The Retrospective Review* deprecates Burney's 'exaggeration of nature' and 'everlasting sameness of character', reprising the theme of Horace Walpole's observation that Burney 'never lets [characters] say a syllable but what is to mark their character, which is very unnatural'.[11] This contrast with Burney's 'caricatures' continued to feature in Austen's reception throughout the nineteenth century. In 1843, Thomas Babington Macaulay contrasts Burney's 'extravagantly overcharged' characters to Austen's 'touches so delicate [. . .] that we know them to exist only by the general effect to which they have contributed'.[12] In 1862, Julia Kavanagh notes Burney's 'turn for caricature', supposing that her ability to 'verg[e] on caricature' secured her more popularity than Charlotte Smith, whose best characters are 'wholly free from caricature or exaggeration'.[13] A reviewer for *The Standard* judges Austen's work, with its 'rarest delicacy and refinement of mind [. . .] more subdued and subtle than Miss Burney's', in 1884.[14] Susan Ferrier and Maria Edgeworth were also perceived as less womanly for the 'breadth' and 'force' of their fictional characterisations. Edgeworth is accused of caricature as early as 1815, when a writer for *The Edinburgh Review* observes that Edgeworth's characters 'are all caricatures [. . .] distinctly marked'.[15] In 1834, praising Austen's 'delicate mirth [. . .] gently hinted satire [. . .] feminine decorous humour', Sara Coleridge writes that 'Austen's works are essentially feminine, but the best part of Miss Edgeworth's seem as if they had been written by a man'.[16] Mary Ward, in 1884, comments that in Ferrier's novels, 'everything is done to death [. . .] everything superabundant and second-rate'.[17]

Austen herself would have recognised the rhetoric in this gendering of delicacy, which reveres and belittles simultaneously. In a much-quoted letter to her nephew, Austen compares her writing to a bird's building of a humble nest, and to a miniature-painter working on a 'little bit (two Inches wide) of Ivory [. . .] with so fine a Brush, as produces little effect after much labour'.[18] It was a short step from the miniaturist's two inches of ivory – small, delicate, private – to the hinged sets of ivory tablets (polyptychs) where women's memoranda were pencilled and effaced. One example of a simple two-leaf ivory memorandum tablet, made in London circa 1760, was kept in an agate mounted dressing case or necessaire

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among toiletries and other personal items.[19] Ivory memorandum tablets and miniatures were, to pun on Austen's phrase, 'little effects', kept close to the body, their contents concealed by hinged lids. By the time Austen described her work this way, in 1816, she had published several novels. Her self-deprecating imagery in this letter – 'a Nest of my own' – can be read both as humorously exaggerated humility and as appropriately feminine self-effacement, in a personal missive that depends on the existing understanding between sender and receiver for the (in)stability of its meaning. Critics in the nineteenth century take these images seriously as fitting metaphors for the supposed domesticity, simplicity and finitude of Austen's work, as when R. H. Hutton locates her appeal in 'the reduced scale [. . .] of her exquisite pictures', their 'delicate touches' and 'lightest tracing' made by a 'fine feminine sieve'.[20] Many refer to her novels as miniatures, while James Edward Leigh in 1869 and Anne Thackeray in 1871 compare a novel to a nest 'which some little bird builds of the materials nearest at hand [. . .] curiously constructed out of the simplest matters', imagining Austen's literary work as a confined yet cosy habitation.[21]

When we date these metaphors of homemaking and handiwork that appear in anti-caricature rhetoric about Austen's novels, it seems that they were facilitated by posthumous accounts of Austen's domestic and feminine virtues: the 'dear Aunt Jane' of Austen-Leigh's 1869 memoir. Thus, in an essay responding to the memoir, Richard Simpson links Austen's novel-writing to her domestic offices: 'Her handwriting was beautiful, her needlework delicate. She was neat-handed in any operation that required steadiness and precision.'[22] The critical tradition associates Austen's anti-caricature with the respectable labours permitted to gentility – pencil-drawing, letter-writing, needlework – using imagery and idioms relating to hands, or which imply the action of fingers, such as the word 'touches'. Critics' references to genteel femininity and respectability, both explicit and implicit, dovetail with defences of Austen's reputation against accusations of 'caricature'. As discussed in Chapter 1, pictorial caricaturing was associated with the social and political elite; it was primarily through the novel, where writers seemed often to slip into 'caricature' when focusing on lower-class, provincial or criminal characters, that textual caricature became strongly associated with vulgarity. When E. M. Forster recognises, in 1927, the century-long consensus that Austen 'never stooped to caricature', his choice of image – physical abasement – captures the critical tradition's suspicion of the ways literary works seemed to lower themselves to the level of the 'vulgar' people whom genteel writers

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represented in caricatured ways. Austen did not deal in such 'vulgar' characters; nor did she deal in foreign ones.

'Pure English': Anti-caricature in Austen's Novels

In 1818, after twenty years of commercial success and critical attention for novels set in European, Irish and Scottish locations, *The Edinburgh Magazine* looks forward to a new cycle in literary fashion: unmixed Englishness. In an essay on *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*, the writer admits to being wearied of the national peculiarities of vulgar characters exhibited in some contemporary novels. Austen's novels, plainer and simpler, 'have fallen [. . .] upon an age whose taste can only be gratified by the highest seasoned food'. Austen will only be fully appreciated once readers return to the fictional English characters – 'the Partridges and the Trullibers [. . .] the Clementinas and Clarissas', that made them laugh 'while [they] could enjoy a work that was written all in pure English, without ever dreaming how great would be the embellishment to have at least one half of it in the dialect of Scotland or of Ireland'.[23] Indeed, Austen's characters typically return from their travels beyond England's borders apparently 'uncoloured' by their experience, literally and figuratively. Austen's Colonel Brandon, blandly 'not unpleasing', returns from India with no peculiarities, no talk of '"nabobs, gold mohrs, and palanquins"'; whereas Scott's nabob Touchwood in *Saint Ronan's Well* is full of his acquired knowledge, his face 'burned to a brick-colour' and 'seamed by a million of wrinkles'.[24] In 1818, readers were still avidly consuming art and literature set in strange times and exotic places with characters to match, and Austen's novels could easily be seen as lacking interest because they exclude foreign picturesque and peculiarity.

Austen's choice to set every one of her novels in England – a deliberate, even contrarian, choice for the time – fits with her self-reflexive presentation of her writing as adhering to an aesthetic of cultivation and habitation. This 'snug' aesthetic specifically idealises rural southern England, as a cultivated and productive yet tidy and comfortable landscape, organised by working estates, farms and dwellings. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Elinor's future husband delivers a manifesto of the snug:

> '"I like a fine prospect, but not on picturesque principles. I do not like crooked, twisted, blasted trees. I admire them much more if they are tall, straight, and flourishing. I do not like ruined, tattered cottages. I am not fond of nettles, or thistles, or heath blossoms. I have more pleasure in a snug

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> farmhouse than a watch-tower—and a troop of tidy, happy villagers please me better than the finest banditti in the world."'[25]

The land is beautiful because it is worked, because it is good and useful. Walking purposelessly around an unproductive landscape is, for Austen's characters, a dangerous sign: we are told that Catherine Morland is not a sedentary person, and that she is not industrious, in the same breath. Weighing up Catherine's 'defects of that sort', Mrs Morland 'could not but perceive them now to be greatly increased. [. . .] In her rambling and her idleness she [was] a caricature of herself'.[26] Her mother tells her, '"there is a time for work"' and '"now you must try to be useful"'. Since Catherine Morland lacks the mountains or moorland that would necessitate real 'rambling' and make a fitting backdrop for the feelings of a romantic heroine, she wanders sadly around her family's comfortable house and productive orchard. In her purposeless, twisting and circular path, 'caricature' Catherine is out of step with the order and practicality of her surroundings.

Edward Ferrars's descriptions of English landscape in *Sense and Sensibility* can be read as the kind of satire on eighteenth-century picturesque conventions that had itself become conventional and even affected. Elinor says as much (jokingly) to Edward and Marianne: '"Because he believes many people pretend to more admiration of the beauties of nature than they really feel [. . .] he affects greater indifference and less discrimination in viewing them himself than he possesses"'. Edward, however, positively asserts his preference for the snug aesthetic, his right to discriminate in favour of neatness, utility and comfort:

> 'I shall call hills steep, which ought to be bold; surfaces strange and uncouth, which ought to be irregular and rugged; and distant objects out of sight, which ought only to be indistinct through the soft medium of a hazy atmosphere. I call it a very fine country—the hills are steep, the woods seem full of fine timber, and the valley looks comfortable and snug—with rich meadows and several neat farmhouses scattered here and there. It exactly answers my idea of a fine country because it unites beauty with utility.'[27]

The aesthetic includes preferences for language as well as for landscape: preferences for specific items of vocabulary, and also high tolerance for repetition of general terms of approbation. Edward forgoes 'bold' for 'steep', 'rugged' for 'strange' and 'indistinct' for 'out of sight'; he uses the word 'fine' four times and 'snug' twice in the space of a few sentences. His contentedness with unpoetic and unpretentious language aligns the snug

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aesthetic with 'plain English', disdaining the artifice that 'caricatures' nature by striving for great effects.

The English landscape is aligned in *Northanger Abbey*, too, with a nature enclosed and made safe and useful. Henry Tilney ironically invites Catherine to imagine 'a piece of rocky fragment and [. . .] withered oak' to romanticise the summit of Beechen Cliff; he then transitions to instructing Catherine and Eleanor on 'forests, the inclosure of them, waste lands, crown lands and government'. Following this discussion of land management issues, Tilney's speech aimed at dispelling Catherine's Gothic illusions ('"Remember the country and the age in which we live. Remember that we are English, that we are Christians"') maps out a landscape of enclosed fields, open roads and watchful neighbours. To the south, to the north, and to the west, the landscapes might be mountainous and the people monstrous – these are for other writers to exploit. Austen sets out her plot in a snugly enclosed 'midlands', all the more real for being in the middle, which still – as Catherine learns – has cruelty and inequality enough to furnish plots for a thousand and one English novels:

> Charming as were all Mrs. Radcliffe's works, and charming even as were the works of all her imitators, it was not in them perhaps that human nature, at least in the midland counties of England, was to be looked for. Of the Alps and the Pyrenees, with their pine forests and their vices, they might give a faithful delineation; and Italy, Switzerland, and the South of France, might be as fruitful in horrors as they were there represented. Catherine dared not doubt beyond her own country, and even of that, if hard pressed, would have yielded the northern and western extremities. But in the central part of England there was surely some security. [. . .] Among the Alps and Pyrenees, perhaps, there were no mixed characters. [. . .] But in England it was not so; among the English, she believed, in their hearts and habits, there was a general though unequal mixture of good and bad.[28]

The professed anti-caricature of Austen's work is perhaps most obviously spelled out here in *Northanger Abbey* and *Sense and Sensibility*, the first two full-length novels she completed, through the future husbands' pragmatic attitudes to rural landscape and to England. Contemporary readers could have recalled numerous examples of the sublime massifs in foreign lands that feature in Catherine and Isabella's favourite Gothic novels.

That kind of scenery, and its associations with 'horrors' and 'vices', are taken to the extreme in Matthew G. Lewis's *The Monk* (1796), John Thorpe's preferred reading material and the most notorious Gothic fiction of the 1790s. The story, set in Spain, chronicles the protagonist-villain Ambrosio's swift transformation from angelic to demonic. He signs his

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soul over to the Devil, writing in his own blood with an intravenous iron pen. In exchange, the Devil rescues Ambrosio from the Inquisition – but flies him straight from Madrid to the steepest part of the Sierra Morena. The novel culminates in a fantastic scene where the Devil drops the monk from 'a dreadful height'[29] onto the top of a mountain peak, and Ambrosio then dies slowly over the course of seven days, giving him full opportunity to experience sharp rocks, oppressive temperatures, bloodthirsty animals and torrential rain. In Lewis's enthusiastic parody of the Gothic sublime, the natural features that would usually impress the protagonist with exhilaration or dread become literally painful and deadly. Whereas a protagonist in a Radcliffean Gothic novel might be awed, yet excited, to see eagles at a distance, Ambrosio becomes their prey: as he lies paralysed with 'broken and dislocated limbs', '[t]he Eagles of the rock tore his flesh piecemeal, and dug out his eyeballs with their crooked beaks'.[30] Whereas a protagonist in a realist novel might become ill after being caught in the rain, in *The Monk* Ambrosio's body is carried away when a river burst its banks in a lightning storm. It can be read as a parody of the Gothic, as totally ridiculous; but read dramatically, with reverence, it could be Biblically serious; and staged and filmed as horror, it could be a straight-faced torture scene. In Austen's novels, injuries are incurred more by people's risk-taking than by the obstacles themselves: dangerous driving (e.g. *Northanger Abbey*, *Persuasion*) and attempting bad roads (*Sanditon*), jumping off steps onto hard pavements (*Persuasion*), sitting in wet grass and running at full speed down hills (*Sense and Sensibility*) are all dangerous enough. Austen's anti-caricature landscapes participate in the snug aesthetic while providing realistic dangers to move plots along.

By explaining and regularly emphasising the distinctive 'Englishness' of their aesthetic and subject matter, by setting themselves in opposition to the perceived exaggerations of the sentimental, the romantic and the Gothic, Austen's novels lay claim to their own representation of the real, one that is emphatically *not* the inclusively 'full and authentic report' of Watt's formal realism. There is much that the novels leave out – and these limitations and enclosures are explicitly part of the novels' anti-caricature reality, of their supposedly unmixed Englishness. Thus, Austen provides the vocabulary and the oppositions by which she wishes her novels to be defined. Scott's essay in the *Quarterly Review*, analysing the determined ordinariness of Austen's novelistic reality, uses language that might have come straight from Ferrars's manifesto: Austen's novels, he explains, 'bear the same relation to that of the sentimental and romantic cast, that cornfields and cottages and meadows bear to the highly adorned grounds

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of a show mansion, or the rugged sublimities of a mountain landscape.'[31] *Sanditon* provides a comic dramatisation of this difference, in the Parkers' 'bad exchange' of a snug rural setting for a windswept coast. Their ancestral home is a 'moderate-sized house, well fenced & planted, & rich in the Garden, ~~Ground~~ <Orchard> & ~~Orchards~~ <Meadows>', situated in a 'sheltered Dip' which Tom describes as a '"contracted Nook, without Air or Veiw"' [sic]. His wife looks back at 'such an excellent Garden' as a paradise lost.[32] Like Ferrars's manifesto, the novels are so consistent and unabashed in their purported aesthetic, that those who most disparage the snugness of Austen's fictional world are those who have seen its distinctive character most clearly. If Austen had heard of a reader's dislike for her 'carefully-fenced, highly-cultivated garden, with neat borders [. . .] no open country, no fresh air' (in Charlotte Brontë's phrase), she might have thought it a kind of compliment to her novels' declared differences to other novels.[33] Actually the novels' settings and aesthetic effects are more diverse than this – recall the Portsmouth scenes in *Mansfield Park*, or even the winding glen in Mr Darcy's Derbyshire estate in *Pride and Prejudice* – but Brontë has taken up Austen's own rhetoric and selection of imagery as metonymic for a novelistic reality that relies on limitations and exclusions.

Limitations placed on the English language – on a version of Southern Standard English, specifically – is another key facet of Austen's characterisation techniques interacting with caricature talk. The figures who would presumably speak most differently from the genteel characters on which the novels focus – servants, farmers, itinerants, the working poor – never speak even when named, as in *Mansfield Park* and *Emma*. For example, Austen avoids direct reportage of the speech and writing of two minor but key characters in *Emma*, the tenant farmer Robert Martin and Mr Knightley's bailiff William Larkins. Although Knightley's relative intimacy with these men helps characterise him as a responsible and kind landlord, their voices are not allowed to interrupt the novel's 'pure English' style. Austen's linguistic narrowness helps to avoid drastic switches between styles for characterisation, an effect that was criticised in Scott, whose interactions between 'high' and 'low' characters struck some readers as jarring mixtures of history, tragedy and comedy. At the same time, the linguistic homogeneity of Austen's novels increases readers' sensitivity to irony created through structural and quantitative variations in language (a technique long used in the writing of comic dialogue).[34] Rather than widely varying characters' vocabularies, or using orthographic difference to render characters' different phonetic realisations of the same words,

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Austen uses 'disorganised' syntax, oral punctuation and repetition. W. F. Pollock, in 1860, contends that 'there are no catch words or phrases perpetually recurring from the same person' in Austen's novels, which is not true – but I agree with Mary Lascelle's statement that Austen individualises her characters in relatively 'low relief'.[35] Marilyn Butler, in her response to J. F. Burrows's findings that Austen's 'pure narrative' is interspersed with 'character narratives' more divergent and heterogenous than in the novels of Henry James, E. M. Forster and Virginia Woolf, points out that when Austen is compared with her contemporaries and with eighteenth-century novelists, her characters' dialogue actually appears relatively homogenous. Austen's dialogue, Butler argues, represents a change in the novel's well-established trade in peculiar characters: 'Minor characters become more vivacious, eccentric, linguistically distinctive as the 18th century wears on. [. . .] Novelists go on portraying the social panorama through minor characters' diversity until this dispersed, atomistic emphasis is superseded by a generalizing one.'[36]

Austen's writing in particular might be seen as a decisive move in that gradual shift towards linguistic generality in narrative fiction. As well as limiting linguistic variation in reported dialogue with speech tags, she famously uses a formal technique that encloses characters' voices and (incompletely) assimilates them to the narrator's voice: free indirect discourse has become nearly synonymous with Austen's name in anglophone literary criticism. I see Austen's version of free indirect discourse less as a method for ironically and subtly introducing characters' differences, more as a method of conservation for the purity of the narrator's style. As Frances Ferguson observes, 'the novel of free indirect style has characters and society speaking the same language',[37] whether that speech be 'real' and its rendering in the novel 'realistic' or not. The linguistic errors and tics of Austen's comic characters are actually more descriptive of spoken language, more realistic than the implausibly fluent speech of the serious characters – but in anti-caricature's contract with realism, linguistic features that are actually realistic and natural are prescriptively framed as distortions of the English language.

Many other factors can account for the qualities of Austen's English that I have discussed here: some critics have wondered, for example, whether Austen could reasonably have felt unable to represent 'low' characters convincingly, or politely. I have shown that her homogenisation of English – through the formal limits she places on text's capacity to represent linguistic variety, and through the techniques of free indirect discourse and free indirect style – aligns with her commitment to an aesthetic and a

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rhetoric of English anti-caricature. Austen's characterisations, I argue, are conscious of their tactical exclusions and assimilations. As incorporated in Austen's novels, anti-caricature strategically overstates realism's understatement.

Sanditon and Caricature's Threat to Permanence

Anti-caricature rhetoric has played a significant part in the critical tradition's efforts to justify a permanent place for Austen in English Literature. Macaulay contends, in his 1843 essay on Burney, that 'the chief seats' among the literary classics, 'the places on the dias and under the canopy, are reserved for the few who have excelled in the difficult art of portraying characters in which no single feature is extravagantly overcharged'.[38] Earlier reviewers trust that Austen's understated Englishness represents a return to the imagined timelessness of 'English classics'. In the *Edinburgh Magazine*, Austen's characters will join those of Fielding and Richardson as a source of 'permanent delight' and 'pure English' to be enjoyed by an intergenerational readership; in the *Retrospective Review*, Austen's characters surpass those 'spirited caricatures' beloved merely by 'our fathers'. Austen is both legitimised by a connection to the literary past and projected into the future, kept current by a readership that will always circle back to uncaricatured works of literary permanence while satirical 'temporary characters' and 'originals' grow ever less intelligible and amusing – at best, puzzling embellishments and textual hangers-on to a work still worth reading. Posterity is not kind to literary 'caricatures', as I discuss further in Chapter 5.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, and on into the twentieth, critics increasingly concede to the presence of caricatures or 'caricature touches' in Austen, but typically contextualise them within the development of Austen's art over time. In 1870, Richard Simpson identifies a tendency to caricature in the early novels that is then surpassed: 'Miss Austen in her later novels has given us new and improved versions [of these characters . . .] Sir Walter is a character constructed in the same way as Mr. Collins, with simpler means and less caricature.'[39] I disagree with this view of Sir Walter: it seems necessary to misconstrue or misremember characterisations in order to place the novels on what Donald Greene has described as the 'generally descending' curve on a graph of Austen's supposed 'caricaturing', a curve that *Sanditon* has seemed to disrupt.[40] With anti-caricature rhetoric, *Emma* and *Persuasion* have been elevated as the mature and 'mellowed' works. Barbara Thaden, for example, suggests

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that in *Emma* Austen 'attempts to broaden the sphere of her characterisation' by taking for her protagonist a rich young snob whose shortcomings she might otherwise have 'painted with the bold, harsh, and spare strokes of the caricaturist'. By giving so much of the novel from Emma's perspective, 'the quality of all other caricatures is softened [. . .] they must be painted with a softer brush because they are the heroine's friends'. Thaden speculates that Austen 'perhaps realized by this time that her unsympathetic characters were mere caricatures, entertaining but unconvincing'.[41]

On the basis of the thesis that Austen's satire softened over time, *Sanditon* – the work most susceptible to being accused of caricature – has often been grouped with Austen's early manuscripts: as Anne Toner warily observes, 'the style of the juvenilia is most commonly thought to re-emerge in the caricatures of Austen's last work *Sanditon*, especially in its improbable hypochondriacs'.[42] Austen's last novel, the unfinished work of fiction conventionally titled *Sanditon*, has been the most serious obstacle for the anti-caricature school of Austen criticism. As it exists only in manuscript form, however, its 'caricature' can be seen as provisional, its forms unstable. Critics have not found it easy to reconcile *Sanditon* with a literary career defined by maturity, consistency and permanence. R. W. Chapman seems shocked by the manuscript's 'roughness and harshness of satire [. . .] which at its worst amounts to caricature', and assumes that a later draft would have 'smoothed these coarse strokes, so strikingly different from the mellow pencillings of *Persuasion*'.[43] Michelle Levy argues that *Sanditon*, in its unfinished state, provides evidence for a composition process whereby Austen softened and relegated her 'satirical renderings of minor eccentric figures' before sending a final version to print.[44] On the other hand, B. C. Southam observes that the revisions Austen made to the manuscript do not (yet) 'mellow' or 'soften' the caricatures – 'she was not toning down but heightening their traits and eccentricities' – and asks whether *Sanditon*'s excess might have been 'the product of an imagination stimulated in ill-health'.[45] In Southam's view, caricature is so essentially uncharacteristic of Austen that its seemingly deliberate practice can be taken for a symptom of disease. Kathryn Sutherland sees *Sanditon*'s eccentric formal properties in more positive terms, as 'the imprint of a peculiar imagination' and 'the vivid emergence of imagination and perception from the decay of form'.[46]

A fun and fascinating document in itself, *Sanditon* is also an opportunity to revisit our opinions about caricature in Austen's published novels. I have argued that key elements of the anti-caricature rhetoric that so dominates Austen's critical reception can be derived directly from the

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novels themselves. In the following pages, I argue that Austen's snug aesthetic and anti-caricature rhetoric cooperate with a moral concept that frames and exculpates the author's use of characterisation techniques that might be accused of caricature. In the final section of the chapter, I focus on Austen's depictions of fat bodies in *Persuasion* and *Sanditon*, aiming to challenge the notion that Austen's 'caricature' of Mrs Musgrove is inconsistent with her approach to satirical characterisation elsewhere in the novels, and likewise to problematise the idea that *Sanditon*'s 'caricatures' are atypical of Austen's oeuvre.

Austen's Moral Concept of the Self-Reflexive Caricature

In modern literary studies, the first critic to enthusiastically acknowledge literary caricature's relationship with ethics in Austen's novels was D. W. Harding, in his 1940 lecture on 'Regulated Hatred' and the less known essay 'Character and Caricature'. However, Harding's detailed account of Austen's satirical characterisation is underpinned by the faulty assumption that textual caricature was perceived as 'innocuous' by Austen and her contemporaries, and thus was an acceptable means of 'regulating hatred'. Harding writes that Austen's caricatures relied on 'one of the most useful peculiarities of her society [. . .] its willingness to remain blind to the implications of caricature', and that caricature in Austen becomes 'a means not of admonition but of self-preservation'.[47] While this book contradicts a key aspect of that idea, the essence of Harding's thesis – that Austen's caricature must be innocuous – is borne out by the methods Austen used to frame her characterisations, and those which her readers used to promote the idea of her 'anti-caricature'.

Austen's characterisation techniques – both the content of what characters do and say, and the formal presentation of their dialogue, actions and bodies – operate not only in the frameworks of anti-caricature rhetoric and the snug aesthetic, but also under the aegis of a moral concept of caricature. By this concept, caricature is moralised as an effect of self-interest: absorption in one's individual experiences and in one's social and material wants, acted out through the distribution of social and material goods (information, food, affection, money and so on).

Stabler engages with this moral concept of caricature when she 'recognize[s] a pervasive role of caricature as an extreme, necessarily truncated expression of self – a psychological peculiarity [. . .] that might be unleashed when the interests of the self override the almost instinctive self-surveillance that preserves the interest of the general' in Austen's

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novels.[48] In *Sense and Sensibility* and *Northanger Abbey*, Austen uses the word 'caricature' in pre-emptive analyses or 'character appreciations' of the self-interested Dashwoods and the self-absorbed Catherine as though they were real people. I have already touched on Mrs Morland's character analysis of her daughter in *Northanger Abbey*, which portrays Catherine as idle and selfish. Returned from Northanger, Catherine's character is not matured as her mother hoped: 'In her rambling and idleness she [was] a caricature of herself.'[49] This passage should be read alongside the double portrait of Mr and Mrs John Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility*, where the word 'caricature' is also used to represent a character who fails their family by being too much themselves: more selfish, less helpful, more oblivious to other people's disapproval or disgust than they have hitherto proved themselves capable of. Elinor and Marianne's already 'rather cold hearted and rather selfish' brother takes a wife who, far from being his better half, is 'a strong caricature of himself:—more narrow-minded and selfish'.[50]

The self-reflexive grammatical constructions in both passages – 'caricature of himself', 'caricature of herself' – position caricature almost as an uncanny aesthetic effect, where familiar people behave in ways so typical of themselves that they actually become strange. The description of the Dashwoods has an interesting pronoun mismatch: 'she was a strong caricature of himself' technically should be 'she was a strong caricature of *him*', as 'himself' would ordinarily pair with 'he'. The disjuncture in the grammar makes each partner in the marriage both the subject and the object of the sentence, that is, John Dashwood and the new Mrs John Dashwood are both 'more narrow-minded and selfish' than the original John Dashwood. The woman's name is revealed later to be 'Fanny', but the convention of using the man's first name for both partners happens to underline the idea of John Dashwood doubling his self-interest. This kind of narcissism by relationship, crossing the boundaries of gender and rank, is redescribed in the patronage of Mr Collins by Lady Catherine de Bourgh, where Collins makes the self-absorbed aristocrat an extension of his own self-importance. Collins's dialogue recurs to Lady Catherine so that the reader often encounters the two 'caricatures' simultaneously, while Collins's sense of entitlement to the Bennet daughters and the legal entailment of Bennet estate complements the *droit de seigneur* outlook of the entitled Lady Catherine.

In this 'explained caricature' – explained as an effect of psychological self-indulgence – the 'true' self is conflated with the self-interested distortion 'of himself' or 'of herself'. The characterisation simultaneously manages to tell us what a particularised fiction character is 'really like now',

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through the intensification, doubling or extension of their self as a 'caricature', *and* to estrange them (to a lesser or greater extent) from that caricature as a distortion of their better self. This ontological claim does not seem odd once contextualised in precepts about self-reflection and self-regulation that are familiar from studies of ethics and religion in Austen's writing. As a term in Austen's character talk, and a concept in ethical criticism about fictive characters, 'caricature' posits the existence of a better self that remains essentially flawed – 'rather selfish', 'not very industrious' – but with less pernicious material effect. Her moral concept of caricature evokes a 'moral realism' lacking in puritanical fervour: it does not imagine human beings able to free themselves from sin; it describes people who cannot be made ideal (or evil), cannot be made radically or even qualitatively different, but who might be improved (or worsened) in some measure.

The Greedy Caricature: Austen's Morally Meaningful Fatness

Austen's association between caricature and quantitative increase participates in the meanings generated in the process of abstracting *caricatúra* from its equivalence with graphic portraiture. As discussed in Chapter 1, by the time Austen was writing, *caricatúra* and 'caricature' were well established in the English lexicon such that they could be freely used to describe representation in any medium or art form. Once British readers could be expected to know what Browne's '*Caricatura* Draughts' were, writers increasingly used the word independently of references to pictorial art, and in ways that played on the associations the Italian word *caricatúra* derived from its grammatical elements and the idioms in which it figured. For Austen, caricature's fundamental meaning of overstated peculiarity, while abstracted from the concrete techniques of *ritratti carichi*, remains grounded in *caricatúra*'s etymological associations with corporeality, size and force. In Austen's moral concept, caricature involves the increase of weight, defined as a body or object's relative mass as it occupies space and produces downward force.

Giuseppe Baretti's Italian–English dictionary, as discussed in Chapter 1, contextualises the definition of *caricatúra* in its linguistic constituents and the phrases in which these were used. Among these, a common theme is material objects – including objectified human bodies and body parts – being filled and laden, heavier and bigger. This would be inconsistent with an understanding of caricature as the shrinking of smaller things as well as the enlarging of bigger things, of 'exaggeration' as comprising extreme understatement as well as overstatement. However, the prevailing concept

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of caricature is biased to giganticism, to addition and enlargement. *Cárica* (weight, freight, load, charge, burden) is an object defined by being added to, or pressed on, something else. Among Baretti's illustrations for the verb *caricare* is the figurative usage of *caricare* for speech and writing: 'accrescere in parlando la cosa più che veramente sia' (to make something bigger, in the telling, than it really is), which Baretti translates as 'to enlarge, to be more vehement than it is need [sic], to exaggerate'. Other examples register caricature's semantic associations, via *caricare*, with gluttony and other forms of surfeit: 'Caricar l'orza (mangier molto) *to eat one's belly full*. A vulgar expression', 'Carico di vino, *drunk*'.[51] Moral concepts of caricature are thus etymologically underpinned by ideas about aggrandisement and by idioms that use *caricare* more literally, to describe the filling of the stomach.

Austen's moral concept of caricature refers to *caricare*'s suggestion that full satisfaction is vulgar: to eat or drink one's fill, to have as much as you can hold, is to alter oneself for the worse. Austen's caricature talk attempts to circle back from the figurative usage of *caricare* (*accrescere in parlando*) for an increase created 'in the telling', to the literalised meaning of a real increase in the mass, the downward force, of a person's social and material existence. Crucially, when Austen thus moralises caricature as an effect of self-interested satisfaction, caricature's increase becomes self-inflicted: not something the author does to the character, but something the character does to themselves. 'Caricature' becomes something real and ordinary, taking up space in the world – and taking up more space than it should: in *Persuasion* and *Sanditon*, Austen depicts fat bodies in ways that link corporeal fatness, more than any other physical attribute, with the moral failings of the self-made caricature. The characterisation of Arthur Parker's sisters in *Sanditon* – 'slender', 'delicate', 'thin & worn by Illness & Medecine' – suggests a more general sizeism that points out a family resemblance between too fat and too thin, and moralises them both as failures to self-regulate.[52] In practice, with the special attention that Arthur Parker's and Mrs Musgrove's bodies receive and the textual space that they are made to occupy, the novels construct 'too fat' and 'too thin' as inequal failures. Fatness is a special occasion for anti-caricature rhetoric's pretence to moral criticism.

We might be tempted to read Austen's emphatically comic and satirical characterisations of fat bodies – which moralise corpulence as the outward attribute of an inwardly 'fat self' – as an almost unintended consequence of the bias to enlargement in concepts of caricature. I would argue, however,

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that the etymological underpinnings of *caricare* (to weight, to enlarge) and *exaggerare* (to unrestrictedly heap up) are simply convenient to the decided antipathy to fatness that exists in Austen's novels. It is because the fat body, for Austen, is a particular target for humour and satire that the fat character becomes a special occasion for anti-caricature's claims to accuracy and moral rectitude.

Ideas about 'corpulence' or 'fatness' contemporary with Austen's novels are constructed by historically specific concepts of race, gender, sexuality, beauty, health, affluence and so on. Texts and images that might seem, to us, to represent or comment on fatness, do so through different media and genres. Georgian-period fatness can too easily be read through any and every idea about fatness that might occur to modern readers, while phenomena such as the wearing of false stomachs or the gravitas of the 'power paunch' require explanation.[53] While graphic satire, for example, might play a particularly important role in our understanding of Georgian fatness and fat-hating, the depictions of fat bodies in satirical prints are perhaps also particularly fraught with interpretive pitfalls. Is corpulence meaningful by default, in these images; to what aspect of the satire does it belong; and what are its precise meanings in the depiction of individuals? I would argue that while satirical prints do make fatness part of a moral commentary on an individual's particular vices sometimes, most prints use fatness for more general satirical purposes. Fat bodies are often in dyads with thin bodies, in straightforward visual gags and in claims about modern statesmen generally falling short of classical ideals. Well-fed fatness is apparently linked with nationalism and masculinity in propagandist satirical prints where John Bull's body represents British prosperity in contrast with scrawny *sans-coulottes* and an emaciated 'French liberty'. Does this reflect ideas about fatness in the period, and how far did such ideas extend beyond the elites and gentility who consumed satirical prints? When – and to what extent – can we read fatness as a moral critique of an individual, for example in graphic caricatures of the Prince Regent? New scholarship on late-Georgian representations of fatness is adding to our knowledge and transforming our understanding of the various ways in which graphic satire, among other forms of visual and material culture, has historically constructed fatness.[54]

The problematic status of fatness in graphic caricature can help us to begin contextualising and relativising the attitude to fatness in *Persuasion* and *Sanditon*. Are Austen's depictions of fat bodies and fat characters in *Persuasion* and *Sanditon* typical of her period, or in some way anomalous? Could satirical prints or caricature drawings have influenced the way she

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looks at fat bodies in her novels? Austen did not belong to the West-End world that primarily drove the production and consumption of commercial single-sheet satirical prints, but she was a member of the genteel classes that had adopted the aristocracy's leisure pursuit of drawing caricature portraits without commercial motives, a practice that predated and outlasted the 'Age of Caricature'. Because such portraits were occasions for polite amusement confidentially shared between the artist, the subject and their circle, we would expect them to be relatively polite and tactful about fatness, as about all physical features subject to framing as 'peculiarities'. It is fair to suppose that many amateur caricaturists, with intimate knowledge of their subjects' sensitivities, and with relationships to maintain, would have deliberately avoided the exaggeration of particular characteristics – trying to achieve a balance of flattery and honesty that could be acknowledged as 'more like' the subject than an idealising painting or miniature would be, while still participating in portraiture's sociability.

Many surviving examples of amateur *rittrati carichi* are not at all recognisably satirical to us – at least not by comparison with the single-sheet prints, which have political points to score. Notwithstanding the techniques for parsing and exaggerating physiognomy that Mary Darly's and Francis Grose's manuals attempted to teach, many of the amateur drawings that contemporaries understood to be 'caricatures' – like the portraits of the Edinburgh caricaturist John Kay discussed in Chapters 1 and 5 – do not follow the conventions of visual exaggeration that we might expect to find in something described as a caricature portrait. There are graphic caricatures in which it is difficult to detect pointed satire, and where any deliberate visual exaggeration is far from the grotesqueness of the single-sheet prints. Frequently it is the size and shape of *clothing* that is most obviously exaggerated for comic effect. Frequently in caricature prints and drawings, the physical attributes that modern readers might identify as 'fat' lack physiognomic meaning, and it is far from clear that all such depictions disapprove of fatness in itself.

Arguably, fatness is even valorised in pictorial caricature when it is key to a celebrity's real physical presence and recognisability. In the ink and graphite drawings of Edward Gibbon by the noblewomen Diana Beauclerk and Lavinia Spencer, for example, the subject's fatness is not made to say anything about a 'fat character', and fatness is not depicted as repellent. If we were to insist that these drawings involve fatness in graphic *satire*, our claims about these *ritratti carichi* – which do not depict actions or use text to make fat something of moral consequence – would speak to the culturally and historically specific ways that we read fatness and its cultural

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meanings into portraits. I argue that these high-society caricatures, like many others, allow the viewer opportunities for some acknowledgement of body mass that need not be forced into a meaningful 'fatness', but which simply is there.

Not so, I think, in Austen's writing. Turning our attention to the realist novel, we do not have to look far for characters whose fatness is made physiognomically meaningful. In these cases, we might be able to distinguish at least two types of culturally constructed fatness: first, the application of physiognomic principles that deplore fatness as a violation of classical proportions and make it one of many indices to a generally bad character; second, the forging of semantic and/or causal links between the character's fatness and their individual flaws or failures. There is an example of the former in Fielding's *Amelia* (1751), where initially Mrs Ellison's fatness seems incidental to her character: Amelia's first impression is of a woman 'short and immoderately fat', a 'good woman' whose 'good humour and complaisance [. . .] were highly pleasing'.[55] When Amelia discovers that Mrs Ellison is a pimp, the fatness that was framed as merely superficially unappealing retrospectively becomes a minor physical manifestation of her fundamentally unappealing character. Here, Fielding ascribes fatness to the character's enemy in a way that makes fat physiognomically meaningful, yes – but as one of several qualities judged to be aesthetically unpleasing. The text describes Mrs Ellison's body only briefly and does not use fatness to make a particular ethical point by linking it with specific character traits. In *Persuasion* and *Sanditon* on the other hand, Austen frames fatness both as aesthetically unpleasing in itself *and* as symbolic of an individual's specific flaws and failures. Austen's view of fatness as the literalised caricaturing of the body describes the fat body not simply as a reflection of the character's general moral imperfection, but as the physical manifestation of a 'fat character', a self that makes too much of itself.

In developing this argument, I have encountered some pushback on my claim that Austen's writing is fat-hating. Working on an earlier draft of the material in this chapter, I was advised to alter phrases that 'might sound as though you are saying that Austen is fatphobic'. My response is to make it clear that I *do* see Austen's writing as dehumanising people by moralising fatness, and that I am suspicious of attempts to distance this writing from Austen herself. I argue that Austen's novels despise fatness, not fleetingly or trivially, but consistently and substantially; and I would suggest that Austen engages with fatness in ways that anticipate mainstream moral panic about an 'obesity epidemic', where preconceptions about fatness – and the consequent medical and social treatment of individuals perceived

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as 'overweight' – can have significant impacts on people's health and happiness.

Here, I propose that Austen's novels engage with fatness in ways that were distinctive within British literary culture of the eighteenth century and Romantic period, and which would have been objectionable to some of her contemporaries. In *Persuasion*, for example, we can read the narrator's pre-emptive justification of her disdain for the fatness of a fictive character as a kind of insurance against the negative reactions that Austen must have anticipated from some readers. 'There are unbecoming conjunctions, which reason will patronize in vain' is a statement explicitly precluding a rational response to fatness, explicitly naturalising fat-hating as an inevitable response to something intrinsically distasteful and ridiculous. I see no harm in contemplating the question: if the author herself possessed no negative emotions, no animus towards fatness, why would she write passages that call on readers to accept as normal certain emotional responses to fat bodies?

I have tried to analyse the role of fatness in Austen's textual styling of caricature without dismissing the complexity of her writing about bodies, or forgetting that fat-hating can be just as focused on one's own body as on other people's. To be plain, however: 'Austen was fatphobic' is a valid enough shorthand for what I describe in this chapter. I think that the word 'fatphobia', while certainly anachronous, is more helpful for placing Austen's depictions of fat characters in the history of moral panics about body size and shape than more scrupulously historical phrasing might be. However, for the purposes of this chapter, I have settled for 'fat-hating', another term not used by Austen's contemporaries. This is an attempt both to recognise the distinctiveness of new concepts of 'fatphobia' (a term coined in the 1990s), and to convey the intensity of the anxious aversion to fatness which, I argue, comes out through what Austen's novels say about fat bodies, and how they back it up through caricature talk expressing the idea that a fat individual is already a caricature of themselves.

The Exceptional Caricature of Fat Bodies in Austen's Novels

It has become a truism that Austen avoided the description of character's physical bodies. Lewes suggests that, by having to visualise Austen's fictive characters for themselves, readers are unfortunately 'missing many of the subtle connections between physical and mental organisation'. He regrets this particularly in the case of a satirically rendered character such as

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Mr Collins, whose caricature might have been given a physiognomic dimension:

> [W]e might imagine that this was a purblind world, wherein nobody saw anybody, except in a dim vagueness that obscured all peculiarities. It is impossible that Mr. Collins should not have been endowed by nature with an appearance in some way heralding the delicious folly of the inward man. [. . .] Balzac and Dickens would not have been content without making the reader *see* this Mr. Collins [. . .]. It is not stated whether [Austen] was shortsighted, but the absence of all sense of the outward world – either scenery or personal appearance – is more remarkable in her than in any writer we remember.[56]

In this respect, Lewes seems not to remember Austen's writing very well: he has come away from the novels with no lasting impression of the many settings that are described there, even in *Pride and Prejudice* alone. He is far from the only reader to claim that Austen did not visualise characters.

This may be true as a rule – but not when it comes to fat characters. Fat bodies are exceptionally caricatured by Austen, compared with other physical attributes mentioned in the novels. To start with, in *Pride and Prejudice* there is the richly vague description of Mr Collins as 'heavy-looking'.[57] This is a physiognomic clue to individual character, associating a visualised heaviness with the self-involvement of a 'fat self', which is echoed in *Sanditon*'s description of Arthur Parker, '<heavy in Eye as well as figure> ~~He had in every respect a heavy look~~'.[58] The negative associations of fatness come to the foreground in *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion* as well as in *Sanditon*, where fat bodies visualise the selfishness of self-made caricatures who indulge themselves without restraint. Brownstein suggests that Austen's 'satire on selfishness' is particularly conspicuous in her depictions of self-interested relationships with food: '[w]hen Mr Woodhouse refuses to serve enough food to guests, when Dr Grant dies of gluttony, when Mrs. Norris steals away from Southerton with a cream cheese for her own consumption, the dining room and the table are identified as the arena where gobblers give themselves away'.[59] (Mr. Woodhouse's selfishness around food has to do with hypochondria, self-superiority and the tyranny of the invalid rather than the greed of a gourmand.) In *Sanditon*, Arthur Parker fits the pattern Michael Parrish Lee discovers in Austen's published novels, of social maturity being constructed against the desire for food. There is a lot of not eating in *Sense and Sensibility*: Parrish points out, for example, that when the prepubescent Margaret Dashwood regrets missing her dinner, her 'un-blunted appetite signals a social immaturity that contrasts with the deeply

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sympathetic feelings of the older Dashwoods'.[60] *Sanditon* discounts Arthur Parker as a marriage prospect almost as soon as he is introduced: he is more concerned about dinner than he is about Charlotte.

Not only making fatness metonymic of psychological self-indulgence and self-involvement, Austen's oeuvre also frames fatness as the direct result of self-indulgent overeating. Among the published novels, it is in *Mansfield Park* that Austen puts fatness in a cause-and-effect narrative: first, the moral character faults of idleness and selfishness; second, fatness; third, ill health and premature death. Dr Grant's inactivity and gustatory self-indulgence are discussed in third-person narration and in several characters' dialogue: for example, Tom Bertram, who hopes for the clergyman's speedy death, describes him as '"a short-necked, apoplectic sort of fellow [... who], plied well with good things, would soon pop off"'. Throughout *Mansfield Park*, Dr Grant's appetite provides a series of small comic moments, with some detail about what he is eating and drinking: goose, pheasant, turkey or mutton, raids on the sandwich tray and claret every day. He suffers from 'gouty symptoms', and in the novel's dénouement he is said to have 'brought on apoplexy and death, by three great institutionary dinners in one week'. In a humorous conversation about '"slovenly and selfish"' clergymen, his sister-in-law Mary Crawford describes Dr Grant as '"an indolent, selfish bon vivant, who must have his palate consulted in everything; who will not stir a finger for the convenience of any one; and who, moreover, if the cook makes a blunder, is out of humour with his excellent wife"'. Whereas Fanny attempts to defend Dr Grant on the grounds that he '"would have been in a greater danger of becoming worse in a more active and worldly profession"', since weekly sermons '"must make him think"' and '"restrain himself"', Edmund holds the opinion that Dr Grant has caricatured himself, by '"a great defect of temper, made worse by a very faulty habit of self-indulgence"'. When Mary accuses him of '"preferring an income ready made, to the trouble of working for one [...] doing nothing all the rest of his days but eat, drink, and grow fat"', Dr Grant's fatness is causally linked with unrestrained eating and drinking.[61]

Sanditon likewise draws a causal link between fatness and self-indulgence: in the context of its satirical focus on invalidism, the text positions Arthur's fatness as the natural product of gourmandism, hypochondria and reluctance to undergo the discomforts of abstinence and activity.[62] The character of Arthur combines the self-interest of a gourmand such as Dr Grant with that of a valetudinarian such as Mr Woodhouse. Observing Arthur closely, Charlotte gathers details of a self-indulgent lifestyle:

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> Certainly, M^r^. Arthur P.'s enjoyments in Invalidism were very different from his Sisters – by no means so spiritualized. – A good deal of Earthy <Dross> hung about him. ~~He seemed of haveing~~ [sic] ~~chosen~~ <Charlotte could not but suspect him of adopting that line of Life,> ~~cheifly~~ [sic] <principally> for the indulgent of an indolent Temper – & to be determined on having no Disorders but such as called for warm rooms & good Nourishment.[63]

Arthur enjoys heavily buttered toast, strong cocoa and wine every day, for his nerves. Charlotte presses him to take '"daily, regular Exercise, – and I should recommend rather more of it to you than I suspect you are in the habit of taking"', then questions the efficacy of his existing exercise regime.[64] As in *Mansfield Park*, the fat person is lazy and vulgarly debased in their habit of making food the centre of their social life.

The fat character's supposed obstructiveness and inertia in society links Austen's fat gourmands Dr Grant and Arthur Parker with the 'Mrs Musgrove' character in *Persuasion*. In *Sanditon*, when Arthur is absorbed in food he loses interest in Charlotte, 'turning completely to the Fire' and saying nothing but 'a few broken sentences of <self->approbation ~~of his own Doings & prosperity~~ >& success'.[65] When Arthur finally turns back to Charlotte, she finds that his bulk comes in useful, and repositions herself 'to have all the advantage of ~~him for~~ <his Person as> a screen'.[66] Struck through and replaced by 'his Person' as Austen was writing, the fat character is experienced more like the surface of an object than an individual. In *Persuasion*, Mary Elliot complains to Anne that her new in-laws, the Musgroves, '"are both so very large, and take up so much room"',[67] anticipating Anne's experience of the fat body as an inconvenient object later in the novel, when Mrs Musgrove obstructs the developing relationship between Anne Elliot and Captain Wentworth:

> They were actually on the same sofa, for Mrs Musgrove had most readily made room for him; they were divided only by Mrs Musgrove. It was no insignificant barrier, indeed. Mrs Musgrove was of a comfortable, substantial size, infinitely more fitted by nature to express good cheer and humour, than tenderness and sentiment; and while the agitations of Anne's slender form, and pensive face, may be considered as very completely screened, Captain Wentworth should be allowed some credit for the self-command with which he attended to her large fat sighings over the destiny of a son, whom alive nobody had cared for.[68]

Here, corporeal fatness associates with the self-affliction of emotional pain. While Mrs Musgrove's body takes up too much space, she grieves for 'a thick-headed, unfeeling, unprofitable Dick Musgrove, who had never

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done any thing to entitle himself to more than the abbreviation of his name, living or dead', her 'large fat sighings' exceeding her proper feelings. It was Wentworth who induced Dick to write 'the only two disinterested letters' he ever sent to his parents, whom he was always asking for money.[69] That last phrase – 'whom alive nobody had cared for' – implies that not even Mrs Musgrove cared for her son while he lived. Her fat body and its 'fat feelings' are positioned as barriers to more genuine social connection and introspection.

Marvin Mudrick points out that *Persuasion*'s satirical portrait of a grieving fat woman echoes humorous remarks about self-indulgent mourners in Austen's letters: Austen refers to a Mrs Bromley as 'a fat woman in mourning', and seizes on the idea that excessive mourning betrays self-absorption: 'Dr Hall in such deep mourning that either his mother, his wife, or himself must be dead'.[70] Disproportionate, self-absorbed and self-stimulated grief is similarly characterised in *Sense and Sensibility*. When Henry Dashwood dies and the new Mrs John Dashwood arrives, immediately and unannounced, to move into the property occupied by his widow, Mrs Henry Dashwood abandons herself to her feelings – 'in sorrow [. . .] carried away by her fancy' – and encourages Marianne to do the same:

> Elinor saw, with great concern, the excess of her sister's sensibility; but by Mrs. Dashwood it was valued and cherished. They encouraged each other now in the violence of their affliction. The agony of grief which overpowered them at first, was voluntarily renewed, was sought for, was created again and again. They gave themselves up wholly in their sorrow, seeking increase of wretchedness in every reflection that could afford it, and resolved against any consolation in future.[71]

This is a critique, in a form suited to the realist novel, of the unchecked sentimentality that Austen parodies in *Edgar and Emma* (1787), where the heroine literally never stops crying: 'having no check to the overflowings of her greif [sic], she gave free vent to them, & retiring to her own room, continued in tears the remainder of her Life'.[72] In *Persuasion*'s satirical characterisation of Mrs Musgrove's 'large fat sighings', Austen's consistent attention to the comic potential of tears and sighs combines with the disapproving, even hostile attitude to fat bodies in *Mansfield Park* as well as *Sanditon*. I have argued that fatness is exceptionally visualised compared with other physical attributes in Austen's novels; that there are several precedents in Austen's oeuvre for the comic and satirical portraits of Mrs Musgrove and Arthur Parker as 'fat characters'; and that the 'fat character' is presented as a self-inflicted 'explained caricature' that pre-exists textual characterisation.

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Next, I investigate the textual styling of caricature in Austen's depictions of Mrs Musgrove and Arthur Parker. I show that, while Austen's narrator claims in *Persuasion* that distaste for fat bodies is universal and inevitable, the stylistic features of the passages about Mrs Musgrove and Arthur Parker – which prolong, repeat and reiterate with variations what they have to say about fatness – suggest an author implicated in her own moral concept of caricature.

Fat-Hating and Narrative Style in Persuasion and Sanditon

Austen's textual styling for explained caricature, in *Persuasion*'s and *Sanditon*'s passages about fat characters, makes openings for the reader to identify the text's fixation on fatness. The narration palpably makes too much of the fat characters – 'goes on' about them for too long, too digressively and too emphatically – as if we have been cornered by an eccentric who wants to lecture us about fat people. In these passages, Austen's third-person narrator takes on key stylistic features that she ordinarily uses to render characters comically and satirically through dialogue, creating a resonance between narrator and caricature. The style becomes more discursive and cumulative, seemingly to accommodate a compulsion to describe fat characters and moralise fatness.

In *Sanditon*, third-person narration prolongs the scenes where Arthur interacts with Charlotte, with minutiae, redundancy and variations on themes. Charlotte sums up Arthur's vices as indolence and self-indulgence – but only once the scene has accumulated several pages of evidence for this judgement, using a series of examples to position his invalidism, again and again, as a form of hedonism. Arthur's dialogue is styled as explained caricature, with dashes, exclamation marks, hyperbole and a tic of emphasis: 'very fond of standing at an open window', 'very nervous', 'a very poor creature', 'very fond of exercise', 'a very good Toaster', 'very bad for the Stomach', 'very bad indeed'.[73] The satirical import and comic effect of the dialogue's content – which all revolves around Arthur's body – is pointed up by these formal features. Repetitive use of an intensifier such as 'very' or 'really' is not unusual in natural speech, but in literary language it conventionally signifies unsophisticated, unselfconscious and recursive thought patterns. While Arthur's dialogue – itself characterised by detail, redundancy, repetition and variation – takes up considerable space in the scene, much of its content is replicated by the third-person narration, in Charlotte's minutely observed running commentary on Arthur's activities. The account of Arthur making toast and

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cocoa, then talking to Charlotte about toast, then eating his toast with butter, goes on for pages of the manuscript. Charlotte watches him closely enough to notice him, after having 'scrupulously scraped off <almost> as much butter as he put on [. . .] seize an odd moment for adding a great dab just before it went into his Mouth'.[74] Watching Arthur sneak butter this way, Charlotte 'c[d.] hardly contain ~~himself~~ <herself>'. Despite her supposed distaste for the 'Physics' of a body which, Arthur shares, is 'very subject to Perspiration',[75] Charlotte's disapproval of fatness involves some self-gratification, for which she keeps Arthur under continuous surveillance. The pleasure that Arthur self-administers through food, warmth and rest becomes 'food' for Charlotte's own self-gratification.

One of Austen's own favourite meals was cheese on toast, a recipe which in the Austen household called for careful measuring of quantities: Martha Lloyd's method was to '[g]rate the Cheese & add to it one egg, & a teaspoonful of Mustard, & a little Butter'. A more indulgent recipe in Hannah Glasse's cookbook gives instructions to soak toast in red wine, 'then cut some cheese very thin and lay it very thick over the bread, and put it in a tin oven before the fire', a lengthier process closer to Arthur's fireside 'coddling' of his meal.[76] Charlotte, who prefers her own toast with a 'reasonable quantity of butter spread over it',[77] can support and supplement any self-denial she might need with the self-satisfaction she derives from quantifying what Arthur eats and drinks.

In *Persuasion*, too, the fat body is described redundantly, through synonyms, intensifiers and variations. 'Mrs Musgrove was of a comfortable, substantial size', we are told, 'no insignificant barrier' between Wentworth and Anne, who is 'very completely screened' by Mrs Musgrove and her 'large fat sighings': 'comfortable' and 'substantial' are synonyms for 'fat', Mrs Musgrove is both a 'screen' and a 'barrier', and her sighs are immediately 'large' and 'fat'.[78] Then, in *Persuasion*'s notorious three sentences about the 'unbecoming conjunction' of fatness and feelings, Austen justifies her characterisation of Mrs Musgrove with a statement couched as a universal aesthetic principle:

> Personal size and mental sorrow certainly have no necessary proportions. A large bulky figure has as good a right to be in deep affliction, as the most graceful set of limbs in the world. But, fair or not fair, there are unbecoming conjunctions, which reason will patronize in vain, —which taste cannot tolerate, —which ridicule will seize.[79]

I see no irony here, no indication that this straight-faced statement should be attributed to anyone but the narrator, and every indication that the

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author expects the rational and tasteful reader to share her opinion – as long as they have a sense of humour. In these three sentences, where action, dialogue and setting are dropped completely, Austen uses several rhetorical devices (concession, variation, repetition) as well as intensifiers to get her point across. In the first two sentences, there are three ways of expressing the same concession: there are 'certainly [. . .] no necessary proportions' between body mass and mental suffering; larger bodies have the same 'right to be in deep affliction'; and it is 'not fair' for a fat person's suffering to be ridiculous. As in the description of Mrs Murgrove, fatness is conveyed through an immediate pair of synonyms, 'large bulky'. In the third sentence, Austen's aesthetic principle of 'unbecoming conjunctions' takes the form of a distinctive rhetorical device (isocolon) whose serious tripartite structure is punctuated with long dashes that ask the reader to pause and consider each clause as a separate facet of the argument that a fat person's suffering is aesthetically unpleasing. The digression into aesthetic principles reframes Mrs Musgrove's 'large fat sighings': even if her grief were in proportion to its object (if her true feelings were deeper, if Dick better deserved them), she still would be ridiculous.

Some critics have found here an acid antidote to the innocuously pleasant 'Aunt Jane'; others have ascribed the 'unbecoming conjunctions' statement to someone other than Austen, for example by arguing that the narrator is ventriloquising a conventional opinion that Austen might actually disapprove.[80] Marvin Mudrick has called the passage 'a savage caricature' that 'serves as a pretext for abusing Mrs. Musgrove'.[81] Reflecting on parallels with Gillray's prints, Brownstein suggests that: 'At their most disturbing, [Austen and Gillray] pair the organic with the elaborately artificial, the beautiful with the disgusting. As either Anne Elliot or the narrator reflects, some people – physically and/or morally – are sometimes simply comical.'[82]

But interpreting the 'unbecoming conjunctions' passage either in very specific terms (as 'abuse of Mrs Musgrove' as an individual) or in very general terms (as a remark about 'some people, sometimes') might gloss over the fact that Austen's theory of unbecoming conjunctions refers to fat (specifically) people (generally). It states that they are unbeautiful, and comical when they express sadness or distress. In her picturing of characters' personal appearances, Austen makes an exception for fat bodies: fatness is a special occasion for characterisation. This exceptionalism plays out in the narrative voice, which loses the stylistic concision and proportion that seem to contribute so much, elsewhere, to its composed, rational impersonality – laying its author open, like her own characters, to

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questions of ethical or psychological criticism like the ones I have asked here. There are other such passages, on different topics: the ones I have analysed here are relatively conspicuous due to the theme of fat-hating. For the duration of these lapses in style, the narrator might seem to share the formalised and framed 'eccentricity' of her satirically rendered characters. Throughout, Austen's characterisation techniques operate under a moral concept of caricature as self-inflicted, which works (not always successfully) to present us with a narrator who is essentially likeable and believable, and to show us people as they really are.

There is a tendency to judge the 'realism' of Austen's novels – to distinguish Austen's 'caricatures' from her 'characters' or one character's 'roundness' from another's 'flatness' – according to the reader's own conceptions of what is plausible or realistic. 'Most often', Woloch notes, 'readers have understood Austen's flat characters as a reasonable imitation of actual life. If there are round and flat characters in Austen, this is an accurate representation of the real social universe [. . .]. Other critics take an opposite tack, noting the way that Austen's minor characters are *clearly* distorted and, therefore, cannot be interpreted as the transparent reflections of credible persons'.[83] Woloch's identification of Mr Collins as a minor character must still assume that one can discern a writer's 'simple exaggeration' of what could be more credibly represented, as well as recognising the formal elements of caricaturing. The (in)credibility of the character's *content*, Woloch suggests, is fundamental to the caricature: 'Collins's caricatured personality, the symptom and sign of his minorness, emerges through three interrelated registers: the simple exaggeration of his faults, his incessant repetition of these faults, and the continual annoyance or disruption that these faults provoke.'[84] Perhaps we cannot avoid, when engaging in (anti-)caricature talk about Austen's novels, participating in 'naive realism' by implying the existence of some actual person or people like Mr Collins, whom it might be possible to extricate from the text's caricaturing. In this chapter, I have shown that caricature talk is crucial to Austen's realism, not only in the critical tradition but also because her co-operations of caricature talk with characterisation techniques work so hard to persuade us that her comic and satirically rendered characters are 'real' or 'explained' caricatures, pre-distorted, made ridiculous by what they are and not by how the writer presents them.

Perhaps we must, to be sceptical of that strategy, assume our familiarity with *what* has been 'simply exaggerated' or 'clearly distorted', and believe ourselves capable of making ethical judgements about it. For example, if we agree with Woloch that writing one character's negative reaction to

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another – contradicting what they say, or laughing at them – can be a 'caricaturing' technique, our character talk will probably have to make some reference to our real social universes; that is, we believe there are real people like Mr Collins, who are actually annoying, and thus that the other characters are reasonably annoyed.

In this chapter, where I describe how Austen's caricature talk interacts with her characterisation techniques, I have tended to emphasise the *how* of characterisation (formal and rhetorical devices) over the *what* of characterisation (the content of a character's history, actions and dialogue). This is not because I want to attempt reading fictive characters as purely formal constructions that can be understood independently of assumptions about their imitation and distortion of actual life. In fact, our tendency to assume the *what* of caricature, as well the impulse to question our assumptions, is a necessity for full, interminable and shared caricature talk that participates in writers' self-conscious realisms.

We use caricature talk when we discuss fictive characters that have what McKeon calls 'the concrete particularity of probabilistic "realism"',[85] and particularly to examine the moments when we might lose faith in the fiction's heightened or selective reality. In these discussions, the anti-caricature claim that humorous or satirical characterisations accurately reflect the distorted forms of people in the real world can be strongest where the fictional text provides its own compelling rules for understanding 'explained caricatures' with underpinning concepts of morality, psychology, society or history that explain how such 'caricatures' come to be. George Lukács describes how Goethe, in *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, 'draws characters in whom the specialization, brought about by the capitalist division of labour, ossifies one feature of their personality to the point of caricature, leaving the rest of their humanity to atrophy completely'.[86] The artifice of the writer's characterisation technique is caught up and partly concealed in a realism that attributes caricature to the structures and forces that externally and internally shape people – away from what they might have been, into what they are.

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