Afterword

This book tells a history of literature's caricature in the Romantic period, investigating caricature talk's legacies in the self-reflexive realisms of comic, historical and horror fiction. By shifting the focus to 'caricature talk' – the varied yet well-defined ways in which 'caricature' and associated terms were used to talk about art and reality – I have reconceived 'caricature' as a concept substantially concerned with text, literature and the novel. I extricate the 'caricature' of Romantic-period Britain from the late-Georgian satirical print of 'the golden age of caricature', while illustrating its ties with the etymology and idioms of *caricatúra* that first entered British consciousness with *ritratti carichi* in the seventeenth century. David Taylor has called for caricature to be thought of in 'more rigorously intermedial terms', wondering whether 'the golden age of caricature' might 'become a way of thinking about a moment in literary history as much as in art history'.[1] This study has suggested that caricature's importance to literature in the Romantic period is clearest in the criticism, canonisation and self-reflexive writing of novelistic realisms. And perhaps 1817–18 was a 'golden year' for the concept of caricature in the novel, with the publication of texts that furnish many of the examples in this study: *Northanger Abbey, Persuasion*, *Rob Roy*, *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* and *Frankenstein* – and *Sanditon* left unfinished. Was there any consciousness, among critics and writers in the Romantic period, that their texts participated in some special 'age of caricature'?

Inevitably, given the Romantics' consciousness of 'the spirit of the age' illuminated by James Chandler's study of Romantic historicism,[2] my research has uncovered a handful of statements reflecting on the possible causes of a 'taste for caricature' in the current historical moment. Some critics use anti-caricature rhetoric simply to express the idea that society is becoming progressively jaded in its tastes. A writer for the *Morning Chronicle* in 1796 regrets that '[t]he taste of the day leans entirely to caricature' and 'we must have something grotesque and disproportioned,

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cumbrous with ornament and gigantic in its dimensions'.[3] E. J. Clery has observed that in the 1790s 'the French Revolution was being written, and consumed by a paranoid British public, like a gripping romance translated from the German'.[4] Commentators of the time did make this connection between news and novels, venturing to find a basis for contemporary culture's seeming 'caricature of nature' in the reality of their own specific historical period. A review of Austen's novels in the *Edinburgh Literary Miscellany*, and Walter Scott's review of *Frankenstein* in the *Scots Magazine* – both published in the spring of 1818 – theorise that the 'wondrous and gigantic' scenes, events and characters of the Napoleonic era have raised readers' expectations for entertainment. The reading public is ready for *Frankenstein*, 'one of the productions of the modern school in its highest style of caricature and exaggeration', while neglecting English classics of the eighteenth century. Anti-caricature rhetoric is here turned on reality itself, with the war years seen as a period of magnified character and eventfulness:

> There never was a wilder story imagined [than *Frankenstein*], yet, like most of the fictions of this age, it has an air of reality attached to it, by being connected with the favourite projects and passions of the times. The real events of the world have, in our day, too, been of so wondrous and gigantic a kind,—the shiftings of the scenes in our stupendous drama have been so rapid and various, that Shakespeare himself, in his wildest flights, has been completely distanced by the eccentricities of actual existence. Even he would scarcely have dared to have raised, in one act, a private adventurer to the greatest of European thrones,—to have conducted him, in the next, victorious over the necks of emperors and kings, and then, in a third, to have shewn him an exile, in a remote speck of island, some thousands of miles from the scene of his triumphs. [. . .] Our appetite [. . .] for every sort of wonder and vehement interest, has in this way become so desperately inflamed, that especially as the world around us has again settled into its old dull state of happiness and legitimacy, which we can be satisfied with nothing in fiction that is not highly coloured and exaggerated; we even like a story the better that is disjointed and irregular, and our greatest inventors, accordingly, have been obliged to accommodate themselves to the taste of the age [. . .]. The very extravagance of the present production will now, therefore, be, perhaps, in its favour, since the events which have eventually passed before our eyes have made the atmosphere of miracles in which we most readily breathe.[5]

The *Edinburgh Literary Miscellany* strikes a similar note to Scott by attributing readers' new preferences for strong characters not to vitiated taste but to the fascinating qualities of real-life characters. Looking forward

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to a time when readers will settle down again with English classics, the reviewer hopes that 'our sons and daughters will deign once more to laugh over the Partridges and the Trullibers, and to weep over the Clementinas and Clarissas of past times, as we [did] ourselves before we were so entirely engrossed with the Napoleons of real life, or the Corsairs of poetry'.[6]

Yet, eschewing anti-caricature rhetoric, this review celebrates the novelists and poets of the Romantic period – with their 'striking', 'powerful' and peculiar characters – for giving literary form to the 'strong character' of their own times:

> This [taste] . . . may be partly owing to the wonderful realities which it has been our lot to witness. We have been spoiled for the tranquil enjoyment of common interests, and nothing now will satisfy us in fiction, any more than in real life, but grand movements and striking characters. A singular union has, accordingly, been attempted between history, and poetry. The periods of great events have been seized on as a ground work for the display of powerful or fantastic characters: correct and instructive pictures of national peculiarities have been exhibited; and even in those fictions which are altogether wild and monstrous, some insight has been given into the passions and theories which have convulsed and bewildered this our 'age of Reason.' In the poetry of Mr Scott and Lord Byron, in the novels of Miss Edgeworth, Mr Godwin, and the author of *Waverley*, we see exemplified in different forms this influence of the spirit of the times,—the prevailing love of historical, and at the same time romantic incident,—dark and high-wrought passions,—the delineations, chiefly of national character,—the pursuit of some substance, in short, yet of an existence more fanciful often than absolute fiction.[7]

Caricature, I have shown, played its own distinctive part in the critical tradition of the realist novel that emerged in the Romantic period, and became especially bound up with novelists' self-consciously realist characterisation techniques in the early nineteenth century. Rather than being *about* caricature in any deliberately conceptual way, caricature talk is always concerned with art and literature's 'substance' and 'originality' as weighed against the 'realities' of people, places and times. I end this book with the *Edinburgh Literary Miscellany* and the *Scots Magazine*'s irresistible suggestion that the novelists and poets of the Romantic period formed their literary realisms in competition with reality, proving literature's own imaginative strength and substance against the gigantic character of the age.

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