

Ian Haywood, *Romanticism and Caricature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. Pp. xiv + 221. £60. ISBN 9781107044210.

The ‘golden age’ of caricature in Britain (c.1760–1830) is enjoying something of a ‘golden age’ of historiography of late. The process began with the publication of the ‘English Satirical Print’ series in the mid-1980s but reached new heights of intellectual distinction with Diana Donald’s *The Age of Caricature* (1996) and Vic Gatrell’s *City of Laughter* (2006). The dominant motif of these and associated studies is caricature’s ability to act as a barometer of the social and political tensions of the age. No longer can caricatures be dismissed as a sort of whimsical visual wallpaper worthy of passing attention as book illustrations. The on-going digitisation of the major collections of British satirical prints on both sides of the Atlantic has rendered access to the source material in a high quality format more immediate. However, increased access has made it (in some respects) harder to understand caricature as a phenomenon – which prints are representative of the whole? How ephemeral were they as productions? To what extent did they represent the commercial decisions of publishers and print-sellers as opposed to the artists themselves? Likewise, the chronology and terminology of a ‘golden age’ – beloved by scholars from the time of M. Dorothy George (the first serious student of English political caricature) in the 1950s – has enveloped the subject in a self-referential halo of exemplary artists (James Gillray, the Cruikshanks, Thomas Rowlandson), as if what followed from the 1830s was irredeemably devalued and ‘unauthentic’ by comparison. Fortunately, scholars like Brian Maidment are doing something to restore the importance of the later period whilst Ian Haywood, at the outset of the book under review, promises us a sequel to take his study from its current terminus in 1832 down to the 1840s.

Haywood approaches caricature as a literary scholar and (what might be described as) an archaeologist of texts. There are plenty of references to Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault along the way, and he has mined deep and wide in contemporary sources. Essentially, Haywood’s approach is to transplant the process of ‘deep reading’ to the study of caricature, ‘by treating a range of single prints in the same detailed manner in which we look at paintings or literary texts’ (8). Though this is hardly unique, especially to art historians, it is a measure of the state of caricature studies until recently that it offers an innovative methodology in the field. Whereas Dorothy George’s unsurpassed catalogue of the British Museum’s collection was strong on identification and immediate context, Haywood seeks to de-atomise individual prints – all of which come from the established ‘masters of the genre’ (Gillray, Rowlandson, William Hone and George Cruikshank with a welcome final chapter on William Heath and Charles Jameson Grant) – and place them in their wider artistic, literary and intellectual framework. This helps to establish long-term reference-points, notably Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and the revival of the medieval allegory of the ‘Dance of Death’, as well as reinforcing the sense of ‘inter-textuality’ (or communication) between individual prints, their influences and successors. Haywood’s discussion of ‘Lethal Money’ (tied to the contemporary concern with forged bank notes), his consideration of Gillray’s neglected visual work for the *Anti-Jacobin Review* and his exploration of the attempt to ‘blacken’ (figuratively speaking) Henry Hunt’s political reputation after he entered Parliament, through reference to his ‘matchless blacking’ shoe polish business and his political radicalism, are all original and well-rounded discussions which build on our current understanding of those subjects.

Occasionally, the book’s origins in earlier journal articles shows through too clearly and the author might have excised some repetition both of content and theme. Haywood is also rather

too quick to dismiss (or at least downplay) important questions which still exercise historians of the subject; most especially, the degree to which caricatures were ‘read’, bought and understood by a non-elite audience. It remains a standing problem that, as scholars, we lack much evidence as to the impact of caricatures (individually or collectively) on their audience – the equivalent of saying that though ‘x number of books were written and produced’ we have no discernible sense of their readership or influence except on a small number of occasions, including, as Haywood notes, the Hone and Cruikshank collaborations of 1819–21. Haywood’s book offers an important addition to what is fast becoming an expanding field, providing a series of separate though related studies of caricature’s interventions in political, social and cultural debate during the Romantic age. It is also highly suggestive of future research potential: to that extent, Haywood’s professed hope of pioneering a new methodology for caricature studies may yet bear rich fruit from diverse hands.

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