
Introduction

Caricature

The Editors

The history of European comic art is closely intertwined with that of caricature. The comic books by Swiss cartoonist Rodolphe Töpffer – his *romans en estampes* [‘novels in engravings’] – which are foundational to the medium, are essentially extended caricatures of social types (they have been called *romans en caricatures* [‘caricature novels’]): the limited but common-sensical father (Crépin); the flighty naturalist (Vieux Bois); the domineering fiancée (Elvire); the prodigal son and revolutionary (Albert); the bumbling, pretentious social climber (Jabot); etc. Together these constitute a continuation, in *bande dessinée*, of the passing portraits with which he scatters his *Voyages en zigzag* (1832 onwards). The latter in turn follow the tradition of Thomas Rowlandson’s *The Tour of Doctor Syntax* (1812, in French from 1821), which is linked to the ‘narrative series’ of engravings by William Hogarth, for whom Töpffer professed great admiration (Töpffer’s own father also drew caricatures). They have all been traced back to Charles Le Brun’s *Méthode pour apprendre à dessiner les passions* [‘Method for Learning to Draw the Passions’], first published in 1702, in which the artist explores the way physical appearance can depict interior morality.

Historically, the spread and influence of caricature, and of the comic strip and its ancestors, were made possible by the invention of the printing press and other techniques of reproduction, such as the ‘autographic procedure’ used by Töpffer (see Harry Morgan’s article, in this volume). In more recent times, caricature, like the comic strip, has been at the heart of the nineteenth-century’s industrial expansion of the presses, and, in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, has proven to be a powerful and often controversial propaganda tool or catalyst for debate, sometimes bitter and violent. As French editorial cartoonist Plantu shows in his article published here, the invention and spread of new means of reproducing and distributing caricature have radically transformed its form, meanings and impact: fax machines, photocopiers, computers and the World Wide Web enable the almost immediate (re)production, transformation and worldwide distribution of caricature, with far-reaching consequences for

cartoonists and consuming reader-viewers. These effects, which were almost unimaginable just a few decades ago, are so profound that Plantu argues for a new ethics of caricature production by cartoonists. He thereby takes his place in an illustrious lineage of cartoonists and caricaturists, including Hogarth and Töpffer, who have conceived their satirical art in terms of moral and social responsibility.

Caricature, whether visual or written, is a focus on, and an exaggeration of, selected, salient traits. It may be spare in detail, but aims to be immediately recognisable, and, like Le Brun's treatise, can use physical distortion to imply moral exaggeration, especially when it is satirical. Caricature of this type is often associated with the single-page sketches of the nineteenth century, such as those of George Cruikshank that depicted Dickensian London, or the biting visual satires (*portrait-charges* ['weighted portraits']) by Gill (Louis Gosset de Guines) of French politics and politicians during the reign of Napoléon III. The latterday equivalent would be our editorial newspaper cartoons, for example those by Plantu himself on the front page of the French newspaper of record, *Le Monde*, which for many provide the first port of call for the day's news in a humorously bearable format. Here too, comics meet caricature, for example when Plantu has depicted Nicolas Sarkozy, now French President, as the famous comics character Iznogoud. Modern caricature continues to portray the wider foibles of humankind, but also hones in on the specific social follies of the immediately surrounding world – in this case, the all-too-human traits of excessive pride and hunger for power are incarnated as the hubris and machinations of a well-known French politician.

The example of Plantu's Sarkozy-as-Iznogoud suggests that caricature in a wider, less technical sense, is close to, or a form of, parody or pastiche. Caricature of this type exists in cinema, television, literature or stand-up comedy routines. In the world of the comic strip it can be gently intellectual, as in Posy Simmonds' *Gemma Boverly* (1999), or provocatively iconoclastic, such as Jan Bucquoy's *La Vie sexuelle de Tintin* ['The Sex Life of Tintin'] (1991). And in this wider sense we can view almost all comic art as caricature, because a strip will generally simplify physically whilst producing resonances – in this case with cultural icons. As such caricature is not just a parallel to comic art, it is comic art itself.

The contributions to this volume help us reflect upon the nature and meanings of caricature, the way it functions and its possible effects (Harry Morgan's article), as well as its broader historical, geographical and socio-political contexts. In their articles, the authors (artists and scholars) evoke some of the milestones of caricature, including the Dreyfus affair (the interview of Cabu by Tanitoc), the banning of the French satirical magazine *Hara-Kiri hebdo* when De Gaulle died (Jane Weston's article), and the caricatures-of-Mohammed affair in 2005 and after (Plantu's article). The cartoons and comics of important

contemporary cartoonists, which illustrate their articles, give us the flavour of caricature, comics and – sometimes – controversy.

Several authors reflect here on the long tradition of mutual, cross-national influences and inspiration that have shaped the history of European caricature and comic art, such as the impact of English caricature on Napoleonic France (Caroline Rossiter's article), a tradition that continues with Cabu (who acknowledges the importance of Ronald Searle), or, spanning the centuries, the enduring influence of Töpffer's classics on contemporary cartoonists (the interview of Anke Feuchtenberger by Mark David Nevins). Of course, transnational borrowing and influence by cartoonists often gives rise to caricature in the sense of xenophobic national stereotypes, ethnic slurs and racist imagery, as some of our authors show. This has often extended far beyond Europe, as was the case in the colonial caricatures of French cartoonists working in, and drawing about, French-controlled Vietnam at the beginning of the twentieth century (Michael G. Vann's article). But here, too, caricature has produced surprising influences and effects: French colonial artists helped inspire Vietnamese cartoonists such as Nhat Linh (who published under the pseudonym Dong Son), Ntg, and Si Phu, whose cartoons and comics from the 1930s lampooned the conflicts produced in Vietnam by colonial modernisation. However, these colonised cartoonists generally avoided the racism found in the caricatures by French colonial artists such as André Joyeux and A. Cézard. Today, Plantu and like-minded cartoonists generously seek ways in which caricature might critique and express the contradictions of (post-)colonial postmodernity, but without recourse to imagery that is dismissive of entire religious faiths or that recalls the stinging tropes of colonial caricature.

As these examples suggest, the volume provides a variety of perspectives on the multi-layered, complex and ever-changing picture that is caricature itself.

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