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Todd Porterfield, ed., *The Efflorescence of Caricature, 1759-1838*. Farnham: Ashgate 2011. xvi + 224 pp. Figures, notes, bibliography, and index. £60 (cl). ISBN 978-0-7546-6951-5.

Review by Brian Maidment, Liverpool John Moores University.

If you leave the dates off the title of Todd Porterfield's collection of essays on caricature, what remains—"The Efflorescence of Caricature"—might well serve to place this new work among a startlingly vigorous contemporary scholarly interest in graphic satire of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Until recently, while the main contours of the rise and fall of caricature as a major British and French cultural form had been mapped, caricature had remained difficult to access both because of the nature of its physical presence and because of the demands that its topicality, ephemerality and complex graphic codes make on the 'reader.' Further levels of inaccessibility are provided by the conceptual and methodological issues raised by the history of caricature. Whose views are represented in the commentary that graphic satire made on contemporary political events, and how far did caricature merely reinforce rather than change public opinion? Did caricaturists have settled political affiliations or would they draw in an entirely opportunistic manner in pursuit of an immediate comment? How widely available was caricature to public scrutiny if not through purchase then through the street spectacle provided by the print shop window? How aesthetically ambitious and self-conscious were caricaturists? How knowing was the dialogue between caricature and high art, often expressed through travesty, pastiche or lampoon?

Until recently the significant commentary on such issues had been provided by a few noteworthy overviews along with detailed biographies or studies of the best known caricaturists such as Gillray, Rowlandson and, from a slightly later date, George Cruikshank in Britain and Daumier and Gavarni in France. Dorothy George's *Hogarth to Cruikshank: Social Change in Graphic Satire* (1967) was built on her work in compiling the monumental *British Museum Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires*, and offered a lively and knowledgeable introduction to the ways in which caricature might offer a commentary on broader issues than the narrowly political.[1] George was a social historian, and it took until 1996 for an art historian to publish a broad overview of Georgian satirical prints. Diana Donald's *The Age of Caricature* (1996) brought together the political vision of caricature with both an account of its modes of production and distribution and an understanding of the graphic codes and iconography through which the images were constructed.[2] Ronald Paulson's wide ranging study of responses to the French Revolution, *Representations of Revolution (1789-1820)* (1983), was largely organised by the modes, genres and graphic vocabulary used by artists to represent political events.[3] Sheila O'Connell's *The Popular Print in England* (1999) succeeded in situating graphic satire among the broader production of cheaply available prints, although the issue of whether caricature prints can be called either 'popular' or 'available' remains a moot one.[4]

In a pre-digital age such scholarly work was inevitably largely derived from a few major collections, most obviously those of the British Museum, the Lewis Walpole Library at Yale and the Yale Centre for British Art in New Haven. The British Museum collection was clunkily available on microfilm, but the possibility of easily surveying a large number of images remained remote. No area of scholarship has been more profoundly transformed by the ready availability of online digital resources than the study of prints, and much of the recent "efflorescence" in the study of caricature derives from the wondrous new presence of digital archives. The ability to scroll through and examine in digital detail such collections as those held at the Lewis Walpole Library, which began to offer free internet access to its magnificent holdings a decade ago, the Metropolitan Museum of Art,

the New York Public Library and the British Museum, to say nothing of many more specialist collections that contain an element of graphic satire in their resources, has undoubtedly contributed hugely to renewed research on the history and significance of caricature. Web access to major collections has been supported by weblogs that bring individual items into focus. Julie Mellby's blog derived from the Princeton Graphic Arts Collection is an excellent example of such a resource. But caricature has also been important to those social historians who have become interested both in the ways in which graphic images reveal and construct social meanings, and in the historiographical challenges offered by graphic satire.

The last decade has seen the publication of a considerable number of books on British and French caricature that have to some extent been exercises in popularising the field. The visual pleasures of graphic satire, as well as its sustained currency in the popular press, have been persuasive in encouraging museums, galleries and libraries to mount exhibitions containing, and often contextualising, late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century British caricature within a broader view of comic and satirical art. The subsequent publications attached to these shows have enjoyed considerable success. The "Rude Britannia" exhibition held at the Tate Gallery in the summer of 2010, despite a number of shortcomings, did stress a number of important issues, such as the freedom from governmental legislation and censorship that British caricature has long enjoyed, the persistence of the energy and edge of eighteenth-century caricature in to the work of a number of contemporary cartoonists like Steve Bell and Martin Rowson and fine artists like Grayson Perry, and the continuing fascination with the grotesque and, in particular, the distorted body that emerges in British comic art.[5] The Metropolitan Museum of Art's "Infinite Jest" exhibition, curated by Constance McPhee and Nadine Orenstein in 2011 and 2012, resulted in an elegant volume that drew in French, Dutch and American images alongside British prints to suggest the continuities and trans-national relationships that the form has enjoyed.[6]

Importantly, McPhee and Orenstein's volume is organised thematically rather than historically. Also in 2011 a large scale Rowlandson exhibition, shown first at Vassar but then moving on to Edinburgh, was memorialised in a publication that, to use the subtitle of the exhibition, viewed Rowlandson's work as exemplifying the "Pleasures and Pursuits of Georgian England," a timely focus in view of the widespread popular interest in Georgian domestic life fostered recently by documentary television in Britain.[7] Such contextual readings of Rowlandson within his socio-political context and historical moment also formed the basis of Matthew and James Payne's *Regarding Thomas Rowlandson 1757-1827: His Life, Art and Acquaintance* (2010) [8], and such a stress on the conviviality and urbanity of late Georgian caricature culture has informed two extremely accessible yet intensely scholarly books by the social historian Vic Gattrell: *City of Laughter: Sex and Satire in Eighteenth Century London* (2006) and *The First Bohemians: Life and Art in London's Golden Age* (2013).[9] Both books were widely reviewed in newspapers and magazines and have been considerable popular successes.

More thematically orientated monographs that address the evidential issues raised by the study of caricature from the last few years have included Cindy McCreery's *The Satirical Gaze: Prints of Women in Late Eighteenth Century England* (2004) [10] and Pat Mainardi's *Husbands, Wives and Lovers: Marriage and Its Discontents in Nineteenth-Century France* (2003).[11] Mainardi's volume contributes to the very considerable body of recent work on French graphic satire, much of it stimulated by the bi-centenary of the French Revolution in 1998, and reminds us that the history of British comic art is both related to and distinct from various European experiences. Ian Haywood's continuing evaluation of the visual components of Romantic politics has most recently been expressed in *Romanticism and Caricature* (2013) [12], an important recognition of the continuing political function and importance of caricature after 1800. My own *Comedy, Caricature and the Social Order* (2013) begins to map the waning of the caricature tradition and the emergence of more varied commercially derived forms of comic art within the market place for print culture in the 1820s and 1830s.[13]

Where does *The Efflorescence of Caricature*, a book comprising ten short specialised essays, a polemical introduction by the editor, Todd Porterfield, and a lengthy bibliography, stand in

relationship to the “efflorescence” of scholarly interest in caricature in the last decade? The volume primarily addresses specialist scholarly readers rather than attempting to attract a broader readership. The essays are sharply focused on the detailed explication of a single print or small group of prints. They are relatively brief, suggesting their origins as conference papers given at an event in Montreal in 2006, but also freighted with an impressive cargo of footnotes that both elaborate interpretative detail and contextualise the images studied in their broader historical setting. The bibliography is equally weighty, and occupies sixteen pages.

The majority of the essays have been written by relatively established art historians working in America, Canada, Germany, France and the UK. Three essays deal centrally with French caricature. The international and comparative interests of the contributors are much to be welcomed, as is their willingness to bring traditional art historical methodologies into alignment with precisely drawn socio-historical context. Certainly caricature is treated here with the full rigour and seriousness of academic art history. Given the highly specialised content of the essays and the rather intimidating scholarly superstructure built to accommodate the essays, it falls to Porterfield’s introductory chapter to argue not just for the book’s coherence but also to champion its ambitious attempt to challenge received wisdom about the nature and history of caricature. Porterfield argues with considerable polemical vigour that the close readings of small groups of images that make up each of the chapters of this book offer exemplary ways in which caricature might be read, and that the book as a whole adds up to a cogent and progressive guide to new and challenging approaches to the “constituent element of modernity” (p. 1) that forms graphic satire’s main claim on scholarly attention.

Porterfield’s challenges to scholarly orthodoxies begin with a denial of the teleological narratives that have been attached to caricature, in particular that of an historical shift from caricatures as offering an arcane and largely impenetrable code for a limited genteel audience towards a more accessible, transparent and democratised form of socio-political commentary. He also refuses to see caricature as high art’s low ‘other’ and confronts traditional defences of caricature’s ability to speak ideas of freedom and progress without constraint. In pursuing these challenges Porterfield sees his authors as centrally concerned with three aspects of caricature—its broad geographical spread both in terms of content and distribution; the specifics of its making, including its iconographic base; and its range of interactions within, and effectiveness as, a form of opinion within diverse socio-political discourses. The dates attributed to the “efflorescence”—1759-1838—are somewhat arbitrary and related to the specific focus of the chapters, but are extended enough to suggest how far caricature engaged with major geo-political upheavals at a global level.

The widespread trafficking of images across national boundaries is a persistent theme in the book. Further challenges to scholarly orthodoxy made by Porterfield include a questioning of caricature’s often invoked ethical role as a moral corrective to widespread corruption and of its necessary dependence on, and satire of, prestigious art historical categories, especially ambitious history painting. Porterfield’s challenges are interesting and important ones, but despite the fervour of his rhetoric it is not always easy to find such a self-consciously progressive or oppositional agenda within the individual essays. The claims in the introductory chapter are not always fully substantiated in the detailed studies that follow. Porterfield’s introduction rather forms a manifesto that asks to be tested out by new work in the field, followed by a sequence of essays that do begin to approach some of the major issues raised. Together these provide a vastly enhanced scholarly agenda for studying the nature of the audiences for caricature and the distribution networks and trans-national influence graphic satire evolved to engage with contemporary issues.

All the essays gathered here offer valuable insights into their chosen topics. Dominic Hardy’s account of George Townshend’s clandestine renderings of General Wolfe raises complex issues about the locales in which graphic satire might be circulated and understood as well as wider issues about the history of caricature in Canada. Pierre Wachenheim analyses the re-appropriation of early modern Dutch emblems as a central structural element in French eighteenth-century graphic satires of religious controversies by means of a study of persistent iconographic elements. Reva Wolf usefully adds to the considerable literature on the graphic presence of the figure of John Bull by

suggesting the ways in which his image becomes emblematic of caricature itself as a British institution.

In a deft and subtle essay that brings together precise historical understanding with an equally telling sense of the interrelationships between high art and caricature, Douglas Fordham explores Gillray's response to the ill-fated British diplomatic expedition to Peking in 1792. Helen Weston considers the ways in which representations of the magic lanternist in France shift during the Revolutionary period, transforming his role from that of itinerant troublemaker to that of trusted surveyor of the socio-political scene. The competing ways in which revolutionary supporters and counter-revolutionaries represented the *assignat*, the post-revolutionary form of currency introduced in France in the 1790s, forms the basis of Richard Taws's essay. Focussed on a single print, Taws suggests the ways in which historically informed close reading can open up wider issues, in this case an evaluation of "the competing claims to truthfulness of both *assignat* and caricature" (p. 96). Mike Goode's essay on the much discussed topic of print shop windows steps beyond the well-rehearsed arguments about the extent to which caricature was visible to a broad range of viewers to consider the more difficult question of the extent to which caricature ultimately influenced public opinion. Goode's essay, drawing on a range of cultural theorists including Benedict Anderson and Habermas, thus directly addresses one of the key areas laid out by Porterfield as a site for further debate. Robert Patten extends his previous work on the semiotics of caricature to consider Albert Boime's proposition that one aspect of modernism is an understanding that art movements comprised "arbitrary sign systems subject to historical change" (p. 139).

Looking beyond localised historically constructed significances to the broader shapes and forms in caricature might suggest the possibility of a "pan-European imagery" (p. 140) that drew together popular and high art. In the most broadly based and conceptual essay in this volume, and using Gillray as her focus, Christina Oberstebrink offers an account of the trajectory accorded to caricature as an art historical category from its roots in neoclassical thought through to Baudelaire's belief in its "modernity." Ségolène Le Men brings Ernest Jaime's 1838 *Musée de la caricature* to the attention of scholars as an important early attempt to offer an overview of French satirical art.

Primarily a book for specialists, *The Efflorescence of Caricature* brings together an important and challenging agenda for future study, trenchantly formulated in Porterfield's introductory chapter, with a series of carefully wrought studies of particular prints that suggest the kinds of cross-disciplinary, trans-national and theoretically self-conscious ways in which scholars need to approach the awkwardnesses and difficulties of interpreting caricature. If the essays that follow Porterfield's ringing and declarative introduction do not quite fulfil his agenda they do nonetheless suggest its importance and relevance to further work in this field.

#### LIST OF ESSAYS:

Todd Porterfield, "The Efflorescence of Caricature"

Dominic Hardy, "Caricature on the Edge of Empire: George Townsend in Quebec"

Pierre Wachenheim, "Early Modern Dutch Emblems and French Visual Satire: Transfers of Models across the Eighteenth Century"

Reva Wolf, "John Bull, Liberty and Wit: How England Became Caricature"

Douglas Fordham, "On Bended Knee: James Gillray's Global View of Courtly Encounter"

Helen Weston, "The Light of Wisdom: Magic Lanternists as Truth-Tellers in Post-Revolutionary France"

Richard Taws, "The Currency of Caricature in Revolutionary France"

Mike Goode, "The Public and the Limits of Persuasion in the Age of Caricature"

Robert L. Patten, "Signifying Shape in Pan-European Caricature"

Christina Oberstebrink, "James Gillray, Caricaturist and Modern Artist *avant la lettre*"

Ségolène le Men, "The *Musée de la caricature*"

#### NOTES

[1] M. Dorothy George, *Hogarth to Cruikshank: Social Change in Graphic Satire* (London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1967).

[2] Diana Donald, *The Age of Caricature: Satirical Prints in the Reign of George III* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996).

[3] Ronald Paulson, *Representations of Revolution (1789-1820)* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983).

[4] Sheila O'Connell, *The Popular Print in England* (London: British Museum Press, 1999).

[5] Tim Batchelor, Cedar Lewisohn and Martin Myrone, eds., *Rude Britannia: British Comic Art* (London: Tate Publishing, 2010).

[6] Constance E. McPhee and Nadine M. Orenstein, eds., *Infinite Jest: Caricature and Satire from Leonardo to Levine* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2011).

[7] Patricia Phagan, ed., *Thomas Rowlandson: Pleasures and Pursuits in Georgian England* (London: D Giles Ltd., 2011).

[8] Matthew Payne and James Payne, *Regarding Thomas Rowlandson 1757-1827* (London: Hogarth Arts, 2010).

[9] Vic Gatrell, *City of Laughter: Sex and Satire in Eighteenth-Century London* (London: Atlantic Books, 2006); Vic Gatrell *The First Bohemians: Life and Art in London's Golden Age* (London: Allen Lane 2013).

[10] Cindy McCreery, *The Satirical Gaze: Prints of Women in Late Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004).

[11] Pat Mainardi, *Husbands, Wives, and Lovers: Marriage and Its Discontents in Nineteenth-Century France* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004).

[12] Ian Haywood, *Romanticism and Caricature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[13] Brian Maidment, *Comedy, Caricature and the Social Order 1820-1850* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

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