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Ian Gregson. *Character and Satire in Postwar Fiction*. London: Continuum, 2006. 181p.

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Ian Gregson has compiled an interesting and eclectic mix of postwar fiction to subject to his critical focus on characterization and satire. Chapters center primarily on the works of ten authors, who share a “satirical attitude to the self” (4). The concluding section serves as a summative commentary on caricature versus character. Gregson’s choices achieve the purpose of demonstrating his thesis about the importance of caricature in Postmodernism, a thesis that holds that the “deconstruction of the traditional monolith of Western and masculine cultural values” has been replaced by a “cultural polyphony in which self-consciously gendered and racial perspectives have claimed their right to assert themselves” (4). Inevitably, some of the studies are more rewarding than others. For this reader the chapters on Joseph Heller and Philip Roth were the most thought-provoking and illuminating.

“Joseph Heller’s *Allegories of Money*” is the title of Gregson’s analysis of Heller’s use of caricature to satirize institutions. He labels it Heller’s “most distinctive achievement” (31). Gregson’s dissection of Heller’s calculated non-realistic character development through “making one person literally exchangeable for another” (36) and “portraying human beings as broken machines” (38) is effective and convincing. After his thorough explication of Heller’s manipulation of allegory and character in *Catch 22*, Gregson turns to *Something Happened*, the former satirizing the military and the latter corporate business, which he points out “ought to be entirely different from each other, but are in fact shockingly similar” (48). Gregson’s ability to demonstrate the way these various authors use recurrent images of the puppet, the dummy, and the doll in the service of their satire is another of this work’s noteworthy accomplishments.

“Philip Roth’s *Vulgar, Aggressive Clowning*” is the title of the excellent explication of that writer’s energetic confrontational style, which Gregson writes: “makes him a satirist of a flagrant and caricatural kind” (55). Gregson concentrates on *Sabbath’s Theatre*, *American Pastoral* and *I Married a Communist*, Roth’s novels of the 1990s and the most brilliant reflection of the tension in that author between realism and satire. Gregson is particularly effective in detailing Roth’s tendency to “slip, too often for comfort, into misogyny” (73). Still, Gregson finds that there is a positive aspect of Roth’s conspicuous anti-feminism in that it allows him to say “such fascinating things about masculinity” (74).

Gregson’s analysis of Ralph Ellison’s masking and metaphor in *Invisible Man*, especially as he unveils how “the protagonist’s ingenuousness leads him to become

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the serial victim of everybody else's designs" (16) is lucid and helpful. However, his failure to include the grandfather's dying words about being a "spy in the enemy's country" and his counsel to "overcome 'em with yeses, undermine 'em with grins, agree 'em to death and destruction" is inexplicable since those words are foundational to an interpretation of Ellison's ironical exploration of black identity, particularly since it is Grandfather who first counsels the wearing of the mask as a weapon, a way to turn the white man's commodification of the black man back on him.

In the concluding chapter, Gregson surveys the connections among earlier satirist writers such as Swift, Pope, and Dickens, working through James and Eliot, and including visual satirists such as Warhol and Lichtenstein. He laments the lack of analysis of the influence of visual caricature on literature. Gregson contrasts realistic authors who, because of the underlying premises of realism, treat their characters "sensitively, discreetly, and sympathetically," with Modernist and Postmodernist authors, that is, caricaturists, who treat their characters "roughly, dismissively, and often cruelly" (153). As he explains in his defense of Roth's grotesque satire in *American Pastoral*, "only a wildly non-realist mode can deal with a reality as grotesquely aberrant" (69) as what American culture has become. As Roth wrote about American reality, "the actuality is continually outdoing our talents." When reality is so grotesque, caricature is all that is available to the artist. Gregson's entire text is an argument for the importance of caricature as an appropriate idiom in a mechanistic age.

If there is one minor flaw in the text, it is that, at times the language is such as to limit the audience. There are places where anyone other than a theory-grounded academic or PhD student would be stopped in his/her tracks by the jargon-heavy language. One sentence in the Morrison chapter comes to mind: "This also explains its eponymous status in Morrison's novel, which is preoccupied with polyphonic style and racial and ontological hybridity" (13). On the other hand, I had a colleague who once declaimed that if an article did not send him to his dictionary regularly he felt that he was not learning enough. ✱