



The Art of Exaggeration Caricature in Sweden

Texts in English



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caricare [Ital.] to burden, overload

Caricature uses exaggeration to ridicule. But the exaggeration must not be taken too far, for then it turns to bullying or slander. A skilful drawing awakens our admiration and softens the irony.

Elegance spreads like a smile across embarrassment and threats. Human faces, physiognomies and body language have been an experimental field for artists throughout the ages, for fun and in earnest, and initially through characters in fables and in the typological physiognomy galleries.

The caricature, in the modern sense of the word, focusing on the features and peculiarities of separate individuals, was born in the 17th century. For the pioneers Carracci, Bernini and Ghezzi caricatures served as a form of private visual bickering, since the opportunities to spread them were limited.

In the 18th century, caricatures became more public on the Continent, not to mention England, thanks to artists such as Gillray and Hogarth. In Sweden, caricatures were still only shared discreetly among friends, and with great frequency between Ehrensvärd and Sergel.

With the advent of new printing media in the 19th century, however, and the appearance of illustrators such as Daumier and Gavarni in France, and Darell, Tollin and Gustaf Wahlbom in Sweden, caricatures

and the illustrated press became a power to be reckoned with. In time, it was a veritable mark of celebrity to have been caricatured, especially in the humorous and weekly magazines at the end of the century.

In the 20th century, caricature took hold of the leader pages in the daily press but interest in the genre declined at the end of the millennium. In 2005–2006 however, the so-called Mohammed Drawings proved that this several-centuries-old medium was still explosive.

From left: Giambattista della Porta, *Man and Rooster*, 1586. Agostino Carracci, *Eight Caricatures of Monks, Prelates and an Old Women*, late 1500s. William Hogarth, *Choristers*, the 1720s. Ferdinand Tollin, *Farewell Sermon*, 1840s. Carl August Ehrensvärd, *Sergel snoring heavily*, about 1797. Honoré Daumier, "*The Past, the Present, the Future*", (*The King as Pear*), 1834. André Gill, *Richard Wagner*, 1869. Stina Eidem, *Maud Olofsson*, *Dagens Nyheter* 31/1 2007. OA (Oskar Andersson), *Nansen and his Companions*, 1890s.



The Alphabet of Caricature

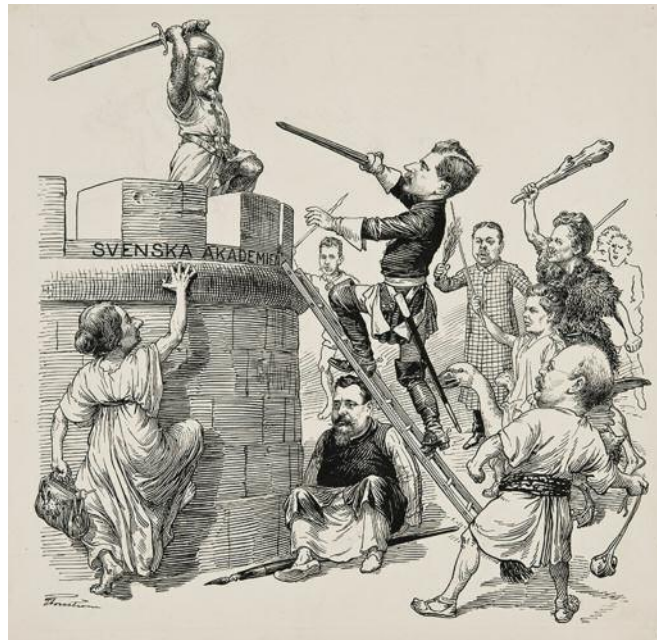
consists of the FACE
and its EXPRESSIONS.

of the FIGURE
and its BODY LANGUAGE.

EXPRESSIONS + BODY LANGUAGE = SITUATION.

The SITUATION can develop into COMEDY and
occasionally into a COMEDY OF SITUATION that
can turn into a JOKE or even a CARTOON.

A CARICATURE *can* be a cartoon, but not always.
It is based on the familiar expressions and body
posture of an individual – regardless of whether
the situation is funny or not.



From norm to abnormality

Caricature is low status in art theory, but it has a given place in two major academic traditions: the anatomical and physiognomical studies of the art academies and the natural sciences. Artists have studied physiognomy to learn to capture typical and unique features in the human face and body language.

Bestial and human: fable and metaphor

Human emotional expressions have been compared to animal characteristics, as in the fables. In 1586,

Giambattista della Porta published an illustrated work called *De humana physiognomonia*, with comparisons between humans and animals, and this confabulation lived on in the field of physiognomy, especially in Johann Caspar Lavater's work. Both King Gustav III and the publisher Lars Johan Hierta have been portrayed as foxes, one swaggering and the other fawning. In Russia under the tsar, the bear represented the people; today it is used to symbolise Putin and the state.

Alike and unlike

How far can we depart from the identifiable? The famous author and feminist Ellen Key was Sweden's most caricatured woman in her day, and was often pictured as a belligerent Amazon, a shy biddy or a grotesque beast. Caricature relies on likeness and our ability to recognise people and identify them. At the same time, the exaggeration creates a distance. Parodies, libellous portraits and cartoons are some of the names used for caricature. The boundary between a portrait of a friend and a caricature can be fuzzy.

From private to public

In Sweden in the 18th century, caricatures belonged in the private sphere; they were hand drawings that were exchanged in correspondence among friends, such as those between Johan Tobias Sergel and Carl August Ehrensvärd. The pictures were unique, but the jokes and subjects were passed on from one generation to the next. When Jean Eric Rehn launched the art of etching in Sweden, the caricature – or *charge* as it was called in French – began to circulate publicly in the higher echelons of society.



Secret Caricatures

Sergel's caricatures

Sergel's busts and medallions have given us a series of excellent portraits of people in the Gustavian era. Despite the idealised appearance, he often achieved a poignant characterisation of his models, as witnessed by his contemporaries. This was partly due to his practice – or bad habit – of constantly

sketching his observations, noting every shift in the face of his models, and never resisting the urge to portray strongly expressive, or even grotesque, traits.

His caricatures are very much like an illustrated diary, in which he ridicules himself and his artist friends, his distinguished patrons in the royal family and people associated with the royal court, but also less notable bourgeois or working-class individuals he met in the street.



Rehn's caricatures

In the early 1740s, Rehn was sent to Paris to study etching. The new, swift technique, where a motif could be drawn freely and directly onto a coated plate with a sharp needle and then etched in with acid, opened up a wide field of work for him on his return to Sweden in 1745. His skills were harnessed mainly for a series of propaganda images of the new royal palace designed by Nicodemus Tessin the younger in Stockholm. He was also commissioned, however, to do smaller, less prestigious work of a more private nature for his superiors.

For Carl Gustaf Tessin, for instance, he did an etching titled "Heureux Assemblage", inspired by the English illustrator William Hogarth. It is a collage of grotesque "mugs" belonging to a number of famous Stockholm personalities. For Carl Johan Cronstedt he devised a whole series comprising 18 prints – "Charges tirés du cabinet du comte C.J. Cronstedt à Stockholm" – after what was believed to be caricatures by the Italian artist Piere Leoni Ghezzi (1674–1755).



Ehrensvärd's caricatures

Ehrensvärd was a military man. As an artist, he was a mere amateur, albeit one with a sharp and vitriolic pen that was forever following new trains of thought. In his youth, when he lived at Sveaborg Fortress, where his father was commander-in-chief, he studied drawing under the landscape artist Elias Martin, who had been summoned to design ornaments for the new Archipelago Fleet. He threw

himself at subject after subject with restless energy, but grew weary of it and amused himself with drawing whole galleries of grotesque types on the reverse side of the sheets.

The same burlesque and bizarre style is found in the countless drawings he made later in life. Mirthfully and grossly he wantonly ridiculed what he considered to be the frailties and vices of his time. In these caricatures, he heckled everything and everyone, including himself.



Power and the media

In the 18th century, illustrations were spread more widely, albeit in small editions. The caricature had already become popular in Britain and France. Ironically, the dethroned Gustav IV Adolf was the first Swedish king to be "mass-mediated". An aid-de-camp, Per Otto Adelborg, distributed his caricatures of the king as line etchings, launching the caricature in its future role as a political power factor in Sweden.



Visual rebellions

Lithography, limestone printing, meant that artists were no longer restricted by the line system of copperplate etching, and more personal styles of drawing could be printed. The lithographic capacity to print editions of tens of thousands gave the visual arts more scope in the emerging media society. From the 1830s, the French weekly magazines *La Caricature* and *Le Charivari* created a new visual culture, ridiculing the rulers of the time regardless of censorship and constant threats of closure, for instance when the French king was portrayed as a pear. Illustrators such as Daumier and Gavarni turned up the lithographic blackness to an artistic pitch, setting the standard for all future caricature art.



Daredevils and social critics

Oppositional officers and public officials were the first in Sweden to use lithography for social criticism. Their illustrations were published under pseudonyms, Ille, Nihil fecit, Kardborre (Teasel) etc. Charles XIV John retaliated by reviving a law banning illustrations, and threatening with exile and even the death penalty. Carl von Scheele, Johan Adam Cronstedt, Carl Fredrik Darell and Ferdinand Tollin were all punished, but the laughs were on their side – that is, those who managed to get hold of their prohibited prints.



Plebeian tribunes and rabid radicals

Illustrated journalism was born in the 1840s, with the wood engraving technique, a relief printing technique that could be printed together with text in mass editions that could potentially be as large as several hundred thousand copies. This had instant effects on costs and distribution. The caricature

immediately made its entry in the news press, mainly thanks to Gustaf Wahlbom and Gustaf and Carl de Vylder. Radical papers such as *Söndags-Bladet*, *Friskyttan*, *Folkets Röst*, *Corsaren* and *Fäderneslandet* with their editors Edvard and Franz Sjöberg, Carl Ugglå and – with Hierta behind the scenes – tempted readers with their humorous illustrations. They were discussed in all social circles, despite their bad reputation. People deplored “little Wahlbom, the Messrs Sjöberg and the evils of the world!” In 1862 , Wahlbom started *Söndags-Nisse*, which would become Sweden’s main arena for caricature.

The originals for these newspaper engravings were rarely kept. Therefore, the illustrations shown here are photographic reproductions. However, one small original drawing of *Söndags-Nisse* by Wahlbom was found in the Nationalmuseum archives.



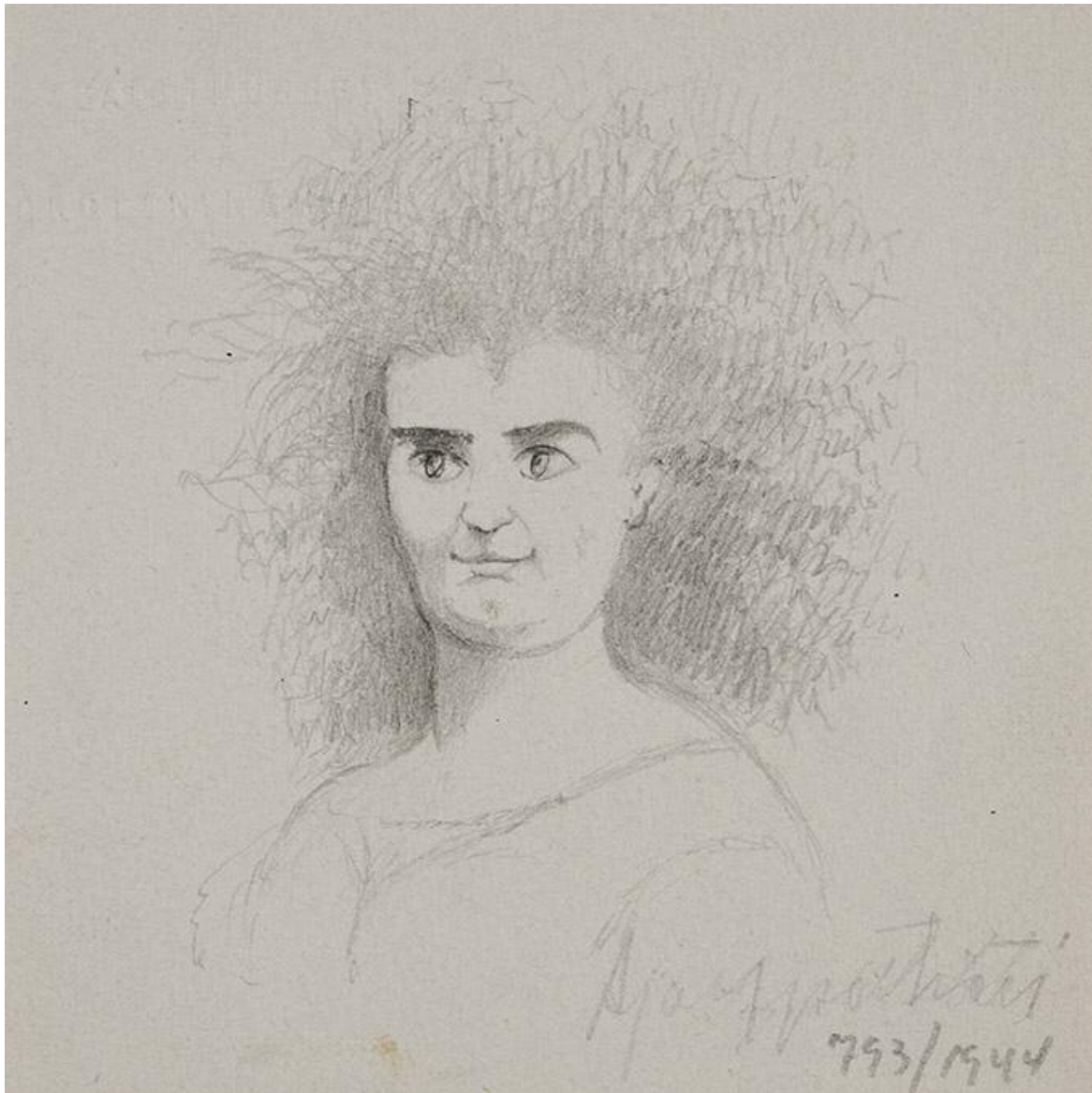
Mass media bullying

Despite their democratic pathos, these “plebeian tribunes” had no scruples against engaging in ethnic and religious persecution. Jewish immigration was especially targeted. Newspapers and illustrators contributed to anti-Semitism. The focus alternated between racial characteristics to ridiculing social and religious practices. Teetotallers, labour organisations, dissenters and Catholics also got their fair share, especially the dowager queen Josephine, who allegedly gave the Catholic Church funding from her own pocket.



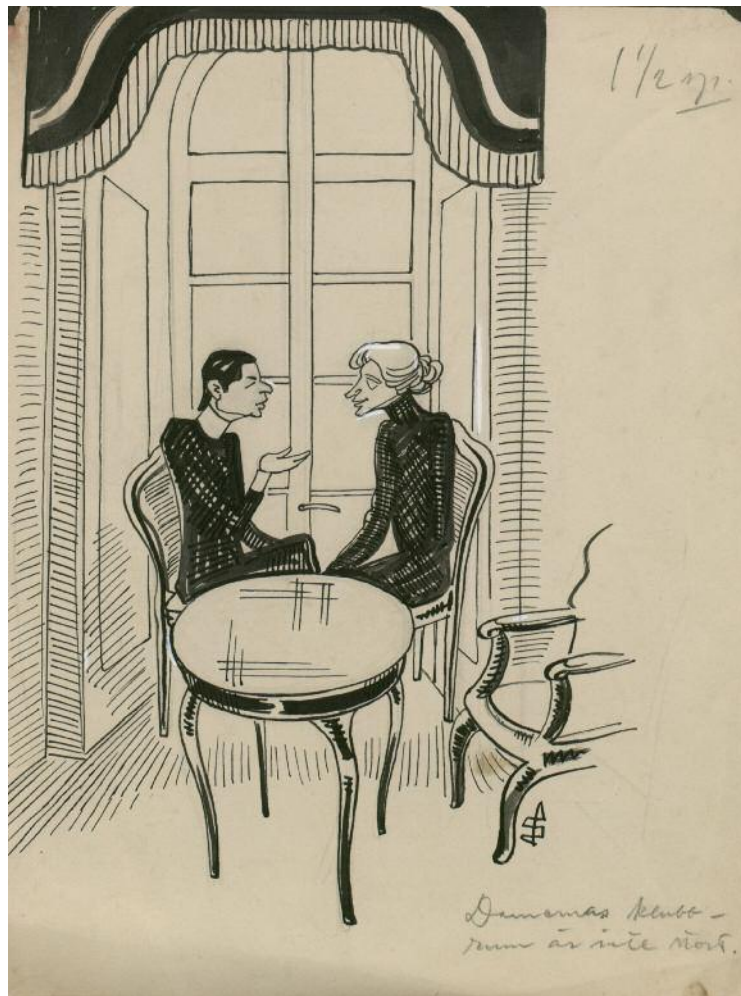
The gentlemen's club Sweden: celebrity-generating satirical press

In the latter half of the 19th century, the satirical image made new conquests in album publications and in magazines such as *Söndags-Nisse*, *Figaro*, *Kasper*, *Karbasen*, *Puck* and *Strix*, written and illustrated by men. Scandals on the cultural scene were diligently reported. These were the decades that saw the breakthrough of the realist novel, Strindberg's years of struggle, Ellen Key's publication of her ideas on reform, when the Artists' Federation rebelled against the Academy of Art, and the Swedish Academy battled under its permanent secretary Carl David af Wirsén. The "celebrity factor" was enhanced by photographically realistic portraits. The labour movement also appeared in images – mainly through pictures of its leaders – and the autodidact Axel Petterson, Döderhultarn, portrayed rural eccentrics in wood sculpture.



Caustic solitaires

In private, the famous and unfamous were ridiculed as always. The poet Geijer poked fun at the church potentates, as did the painter Höckert with the military; the artist Josabeth Sjöberg clandestinely sharpened her claws, and the singer Signe Hebbe delivered ironic reflections on herself.



The 20th century of lines and blackness

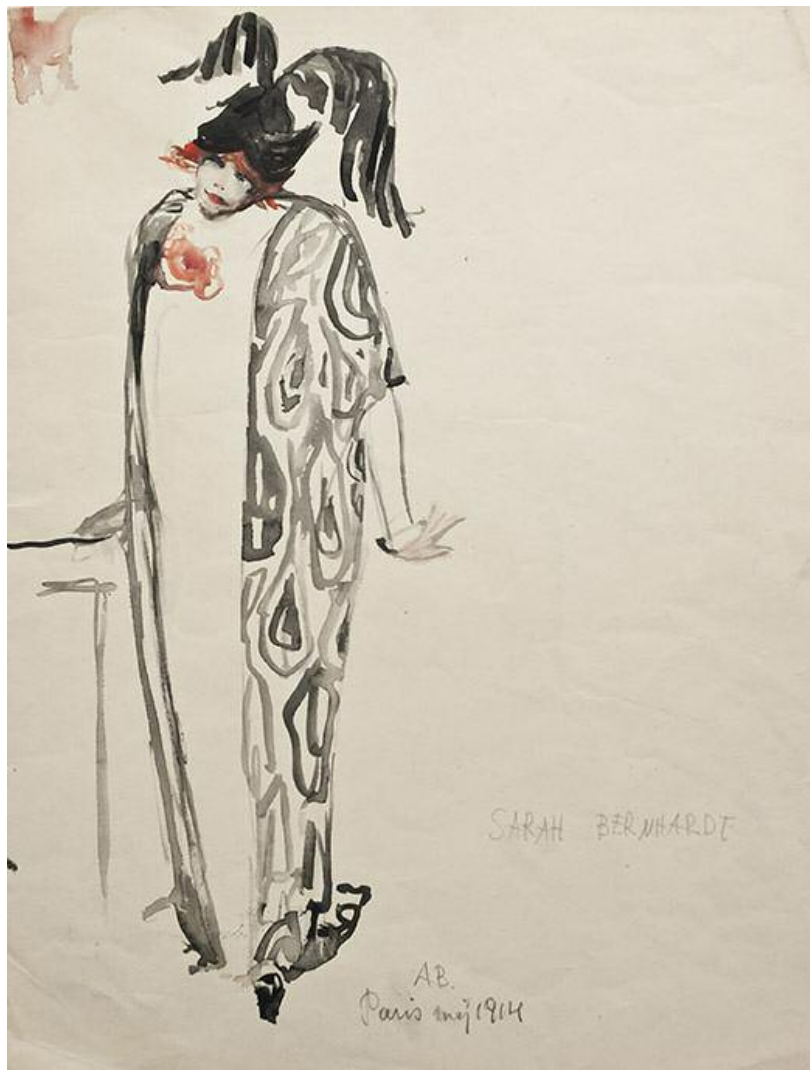
There are many ways of explaining the tendencies that change art and seeing. Technical progress is an underrated explanation, but photography and autotypes were crucial to the development of graphic design in the 20th century. The Jugend and art deco styles at the turn of the century made

sharp lines and terse black-and-white images fashionable. The daily press went from no illustrations to a regular use of images. Caricatures soon became a common feature on the leader pages and entertainment section. Some illustrators favoured the contour style, sketches or flowing ink. Some opted for standard solutions such as flexible stick drawings. Women also established themselves as illustrators.



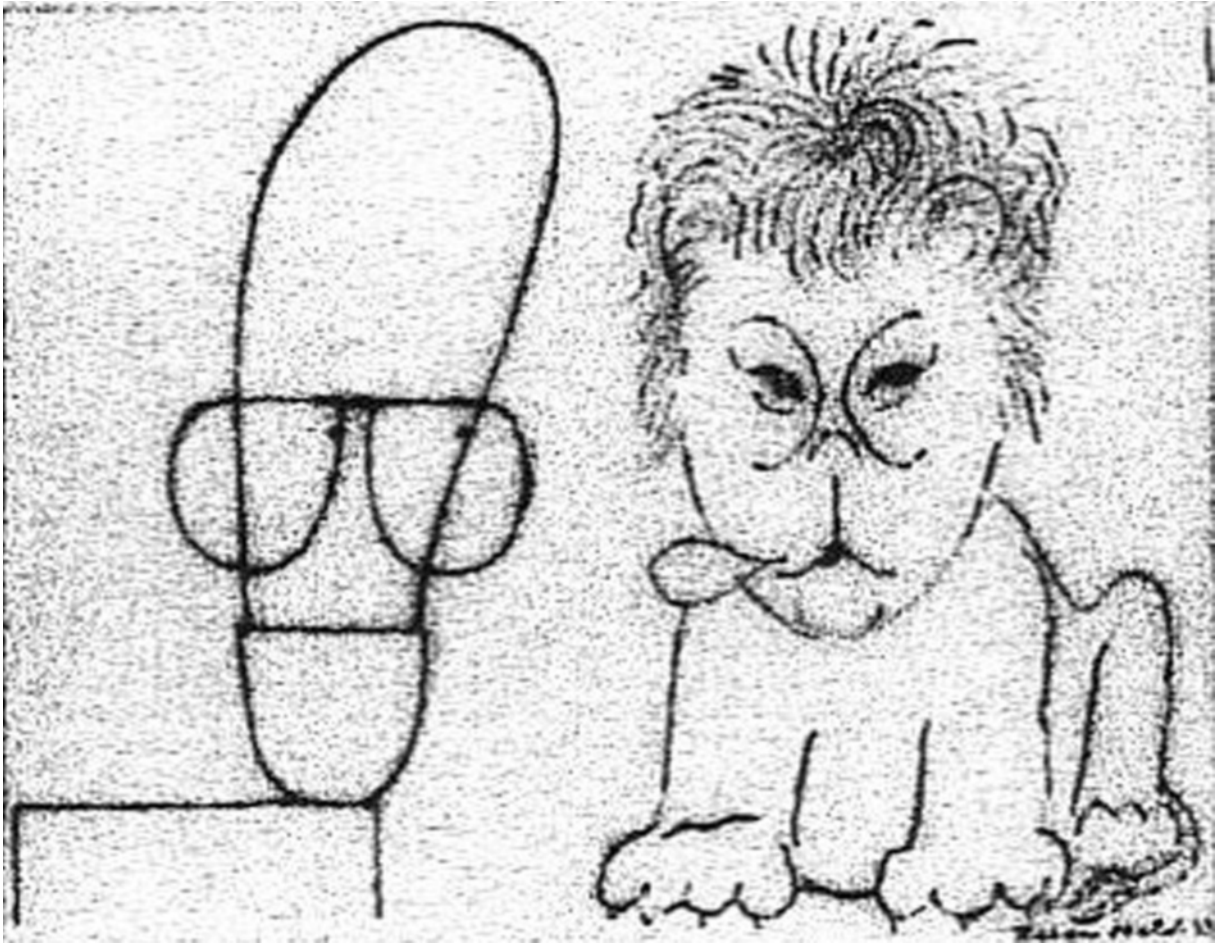
Masks of theatre and caricature

Theatre and caricature are compatible media that employ the exaggeration of masks and makeup. Theatrical caricature is based on the dynamic of the drama, but does not preclude allusions to jokes on and around the stage. In caricature, some actors became iconic to the degree that posterity can hardly envision them without their stylised black-and-white masks, as in the case of Inga Tidblad and Gösta Ekman Sr – shown here in colour, for a change.



Gender impact – but still no breakthrough

Women caricaturists and newspaper illustrators are blatantly absent for the first 200 years. Theatres, on the other hand, opened as a new arena for women artists in the 1910s. Annie Bergman is especially impressive for her aesthetic diversity, and won recognition alongside Lydia Skottsberg.



A Medium of Familiarity and Fear

Family joke or voodoo attack?

Sigmund Freud, the originator of psychoanalysis, regarded the caricature as a peculiar social act and an aggressive deed, not to say a voodoo attack. However, art is not created in a passion but requires emotional precision. In the case of caricature, it is

crucial that the artist's pen does not tremble when capturing a person's facial features and body posture, while maintaining a suitable detachment to his or her mind. Therefore, most caricatures are created in a calm, compassionate mood, rather than out of temperamental malice. They have the nature of a family joke, slightly embarrassing at times, but rarely cruel. Humour and the bravura of the line tone down the fierce darkness and tempt us to laughter and understanding.



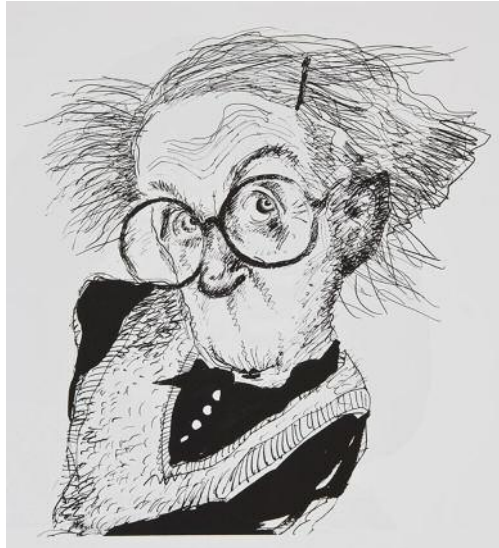
Cultural one-liners: the comical interaction of word and image

The caricature often plays on metaphoric images and the rules of rhetoric. Sometimes, a verbal joke is translated directly into pictures. The Moderate Party leader in 1980 Gösta Bohman, for instance, is in the portrayed riding a “nuclear bike” (alluding to the Swedish expression, to be out biking – which means to be out on a limb), in connection with the debate on nuclear power. Alternatively, the joke is generated by the image, as when former prime minister Ingvar Carlsson’s long face was converted into the sole of a shoe. Verbal and visual traditions were interwoven when the art critic Ulf Linde, in a Magritteparaphrase was playfully *not* portrayed as *not* a painting by Piero della Francesca.



Facial equilibrists

The face is the main character in the alphabet of caricature, and caricaturists are the tight-rope walkers of portraiture, balancing similarity against dissimilarity, and interpreting facial and mental traits using exaggeration and simplification. Albert Engström makes a grotesque face through a magnifying glass, and EWK almost carves out the strong features of the author Vilhelm Moberg in a technique that resembles the woodcut. Frantic lines illustrate both the energy and the ageing of Swedish MP and famous Gothenburger Ingrid Segerstedt-Wiberg. Minister of finance Anders Borg's massiveness is emphasised by the two-dimensionality of the collage, while the pinkish colour suggests an incendiary nature. Large, fluid brush strokes convey the dignity of art college principal Inez Svensson in this full-length portrait.



Timeless and topical – flavour of the month and long-life culture

In 2005–2006, the venerable art of caricature once again played a part in international debate. The Danish daily paper *Jyllands-Posten* published satirical cartoons of the prophet Mohamed, with global repercussions. The history of caricature is full of examples of how apparently current illustrations have presaged the future. When Ivar Starkenberg ridiculed Hitler in the Swedish labour press in 1938, the German ministry of propaganda launched a counterattack together with Swedish conservatives. In the 1960s, Lena Svedberg's furious underground perspective caused painful rifts in the Swedish consensus politics, and the thalidomide scandal is still a current issue.

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