

# The Humorous Times

Newsletter of the International Society for Humor Studies

Spring/Summer 2015

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## Association News

### 2015 Conference of the International Society for Humor Studies

From Martin Lampert, 2015 ISHS Conference Convener



California Supreme Court Justice Carol Corrigan opened the session on Judiciary Humor

The 27th Conference of the International Society for Humor Studies was held at Holy Names University in Oakland, from June 29 to July 3. This year's conference included over 150 presentations, workshops, and performances from scholars and professionals representing 26 countries and 31 states within the U.S.A. Paper sessions and workshops were organized into five thematic areas: (1) Cognition and Creativity, (2) Culture, Gender, and Community, (3) Health and Well-Being, (4) Individuals and Individual Styles; and (5) Public and Private Discourse. On June 29, opening day began

in the morning with a preconference workshop on the Art of Improvisation, led by Regina Saisi and Chris Sams of the BATS School of Improv. The Conference opened officially in the afternoon with a welcome from Conference Convener, Martin Lampert, followed by a plenary session on Judiciary Humor, chaired by California Supreme Court Justice Carol A. Corrigan. In the later part of the afternoon, the Conference hosted a roundtable on Humor in Animation Art with artists from Pixar Animation Studios and the San Francisco Cartoon Art Museum.

From June 30 to July 3, each Conference day began with a plenary session in the early morning followed by paper sessions and workshops in the late morning and the afternoon. In addition to the



Christie Davies presented on the humor about judges in the United Kingdom



Artists from Pixar Animation Studios and the San Francisco Cartoon Art Museum discussed the creation of humor in animation art. From left to right are Austin Madison, Jeff Pidgeon, Andrew Farago, Christian Roman, and Craig Good.

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### Next Issue

The next *Humorous Times* is due in November 2015. Items for the November issue should be sent to [ishs@hnu.edu](mailto:ishs@hnu.edu).

Judiciary Humor session, the other plenaries focused on Humor and Well-Being (June 30), Women in Stand-Up Comedy (July 1), Mark Twain in the West (July 2), and Cognitive Science and Humor Studies (July 3). Featured plenary presentations at the 2015 ISHS Conference included

*Funny Judges: Judges as Humorous, Judges as Humorists*  
Marc Galanter, University of Wisconsin Law School

*Humorous Anecdotes about Judges in the United Kingdom*  
Christie Davies, University of Reading

*Supreme Wit:  
The Use of Humor by the United States Supreme Court*  
Pamela Hobbs, Attorney at Law, Los Angeles

*Humor and Health: Has Research Supported the Popular Movement?*  
Paul McGhee, The Laughter Remedy

*Humor and Subjective Well-Being*  
Willibald Ruch, University of Zurich

*The Evolution of Humor over the Lifespan*  
George Vaillant, Harvard University Medical School

*Women Matter in British Stand-Up Comedy*  
Sharon Lockyer, Brunel University

*Japanese Traditional Sit-Down Comedy*  
Kimie Oshima, Kanagawa University

*The Best Stand-Ups Stand Up for Something:  
The Politics of Troublemaking Funny Women*  
Regina Barreca, University of Connecticut

*Mark Twain in the West: An Exhibition*  
Victor Fischer, University of California, Berkeley

*Editing Mark Twain in the West*  
Benjamin Griffin, University of California, Berkeley

*Scotty Briggs vs. the Minister:  
Persona, Humor, and Metaphorical Conflict in Roughing It*  
John Bird, Winthrop University

*No one will Ever Wonder Why, They Said: Conceptual Blending  
and Humorous Memes Cross the Road, They Said*  
Seana Coulson, University of California, San Diego

*The Breakfast of Duchampions:  
Irony and Rule-Breaking in Rule-Based Generative Systems*  
Tony Veale, University College Dublin



Sharon Lockyer (top), Regina Barreca (center), and Kimie Oshima (bottom) spoke in the plenary session, *Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Women in Stand-Up comedy*

For the first time, the Conference also included ten symposia and general sessions sponsored by ten international humor research organizations with additional papers provided throughout the Conference by the Australasian Humor Studies Network. The ten symposia and their sponsors were *Revisionist Strategies for the Study of 19th Century American Humor* (American Humor Studies Association), *The Myths and Realities of Applied and Therapeutic Humor and Laughter* (Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor), *Cross-Cultural Perspectives of Women in Stand-Up Comedy* (Center for Comedy Studies Research, Brunel University), *Humour in Communication Styles* (European Journal of Humour Research), *Humor in the Hispanic World between Poverty and Wealth* (International Society for Luso-Hispanic Humor Studies), *Israeli and Jewish Humor* (Israeli Society for Humor Studies), *Catastrophe Humor* (Japanese Society for Laughter & Humor Studies), *Mark Twain in the West* (Mark Twain Circle of America), *Humor: Mirror of Society* (Observatoire de l'Humour), and *Humor and Play: Partners in Child Development* (The Association for the Study of Play).



From left to right, ISHS Graduate Student Award recipients Ori Amir and Stephen Skalicky. And DANYS Award recipient, Alan Roberts

At a special luncheon on July 1, the Society also honored the exceptional work of three graduate students. Alan Roberts (University of Sussex) received the Don and Alleen Nilsen Award for his paper, *Philosophical Foundations for Humor Research*. ISHS Graduate Student Awards went to Ori Amir (University of Southern California) for his paper, *The Neural Genesis of a Joke*, and to and Stephen Skalicky (Georgia State University) for his paper, *Study Finds Jack Shit: An Investigation of the Mental Processing of Satirical Onion Headlines*. The Society also honored Paul McGhee with its Lifetime Achievement Award for his pioneering research on the psychology of humor and his more recent work on humor, health, and resiliency.

In addition to the scholarly sessions, the Conference offered a special exhibit, organized by UC Berkeley's Bancroft Library, on Mark Twain's early life and works in California and Nevada. The Conference also held an evening performance series that included an Improv Competition (June 30), a Stand-Up Comedy Competition (July 1), and the play, *Lend Me a Tenor* (July 2), directed by Joel Schlader of Oakland's Woodminster Theater. Competing Improv teams included the Secret Improv Society, the Un-Scripted Theater Company, the Improvables, and the winning team, the Made-Up Theatre. The Stand-Up Comedy Competition was hosted by Yakov Smirnoff, and included Mike Capozzola, Jamie Herrera, Kate Fox, Gabe Masson, Natasha Moss, David Nyugen, and co-winners, Gayla Johnson and Samson Koletkar.

The Conference concluded on July 3 with the Society's Annual Meeting of Members and a farewell dinner. We now look forward to next year's ISHS Conference to be held next summer at Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland.



ISHS President Larry Ventis congratulates Paul McGhee upon receiving the 2015 ISHS Lifetime Achievement Award

## 2016 International Society for Humor Studies Conference

Trinity College, Dublin Ireland, June 27 – July 1, 2015

The 28th Conference of the International Society for Humor Studies will be held from June 27 to July 1, 2016, at Trinity College in Dublin Ireland. Inquiries about the 2016 Conference can be sent to the Conference Convener, Eric Weitz, at [weitzer@tcd.ie](mailto:weitzer@tcd.ie).

## Upcoming Events

### 16th Conference of the International Society for Luso-Hispanic Humor Studies

Federal University of Mato Grosso, Cuiabá-MT, Brazil, October 14-16, 2015

The 16th Conference of the International Society for Luso-Hispanic Studies will be held at the Federal University of Mato Grosso in Cuiaba, Brazil from October 14 to 16, 2015. For more information visit the Conference's facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/XVICongressoHumorLusoHispanico> or contact the Conference organizers at [humor.luso.hispanico@gmail.com](mailto:humor.luso.hispanico@gmail.com).

### 4th LAFAL Symposium

University of Łódź, Poland, March 17-18, 2016

The theme of the fourth LAFAL symposium will be "Theoretical Issues in Humour: Building Bridges across Disciplines." The symposium provides a forum for linguists who are interested in concepts and language issues of relevance to humor research. Plenary Speakers will be Alexander Brock, Raymond Gibbs, James Mahon, Limor Shifman, and Francisco Yus. Paper proposal can be sent to [marta.dynel@yahoo.com](mailto:marta.dynel@yahoo.com). The deadline for all submissions is October 5, 2015.

### **Redeeming Laughter: The Comic Dimension of Human Experience**

*From John Morreall, College of William and Mary*

**Peter L. Berger. (2014/1998). *Redeeming Laughter: The Comic Dimension of Human Experience*. 2nd edition. Berlin: DeGruyter. 201 pp. ISBN 9783110353938.**

As humor research has matured, more and more specialized books have appeared, especially in the fields of psychology and linguistics. This book goes in the opposite direction. It is by an eminent sociologist but is not a book in sociology. It touches on issues in philosophy, psychology, literary studies, religion, and culture, but is an old-fashioned generalist treatment of humor.

In Part I, “The Anatomy of the Comic,” Berger searches widely for a comprehensive definition of the comic, but finds none. Through the rest of the book, he relies on a vague version of the Incongruity Theory: “Perception in a comic mode has its particular focus on *incongruence*” (viii). His other theses are laid out near the beginning: 1) “The comic conjures up a separate world, different from the world of ordinary reality, operating by different rules.” 2) In the comic world, “the limitations of the human condition are miraculously overcome.” 3) The experience of the comic is . . . a promise of redemption.” and “Religious faith is the intuition . . . that the promise will be kept.” (xiv).

The six chapters in Part I delve into philosophy, physiology, psychology, and sociology, with side trips into Chinese humor and Jewish humor. Part II is more literary, with essays on benign humor, tragicomedy, wit, and satire. Part III is the most original, with an essay on the humorlessness of traditional theology and one on the comic as a “signal of transcendence.” The latter idea is that in presenting us with a distinct world, humor makes room for other worlds transcending ordinary reality, such as those believed in by religious people.

For a fuller assessment of Parts I to III, see my positive review of the first edition of this book in *HUMOR: International Journal of Humor Research*, 11-3 (1998), 313-315. What is new in this second edition are fourteen pages at the beginning and less than a page at the end. On the first page, Berger admits that “I’m not sure that I have anything new to say about it [his belief that “the comic is at the very core of being human”], except perhaps for one question that I allude to at the end of the book but do not develop beyond a single mention—namely, whether the comic has a distinctly modern form” (vii). And, indeed, the three prefatory sections don’t say anything new, and the final page only raises the question of whether modernity has produced a new form of the comic.

### **Humor in Contemporary Junior Literature**

*From Alleen Pace Nilsen, Arizona State University*

**Julie Cross. (2014/2011). *Humor in Contemporary Junior Literature*. New York and London: Routledge/Taylor & Francis, 246 pp. ISBN: 978-0-415-82267-5 (cloth), 978-1-138-81650-3 (paper).**

Julie Cross fills her book with solid information concerning humor within children’s literature, while implying that other aspects of the subject are no less worth studying. Having previously contributed chapters on children’s literature to various well respected encyclopedias, she begins her book with a 24-page Introduction which aims to review the available literature, and then includes five chapters and a conclusion of her own. Chapter one concerns “humorous transgression”, while the others treat such topics as superiority humor, anthropomorphized animal-child characters, new wave nonsense vs. traditional nonsense, differences between humor for boys and for girls, and the comic Gothic humor and its relation to incongruity theories.

Cross’s efficient labeling is helpful to all readers, whether in the UK (her main focus) or elsewhere. It starts with “junior literature”, usually termed “children’s literature” in the USA, although that can include Teen or YA (Young Adult) literature as well. She refers to the adults (parents, teachers, librarians, etc.) who share books with children as “co-readers” and writes effectively about “deliberately transgressive” characters as being related to relief theories of humor and laughter. On p. 40, the term carnivalesque is used,

borrowed from Bakhtin's work on medieval and Renaissance culture. This forms part of the development of her belief that the transgressive stories concerned are more likely to reinforce the status quo than to pander to rebelliousness, as some adults fear may be the case.

Particularly telling are the author's observations on differences between books aimed at boys as opposed to those aimed at girls. My own early experience in teaching children's literature confronted me with the prejudicial claim that the only difference between "a boy's book" and "a girl's book" was the gender of the protagonist. Cross shows how the matter is much more complicated.

Equally interesting is her discussion of how, over the last couple of decades, she has seen in both children and adults a turn toward both cruel humor and vulgar humor. She conjectures that part of the reason for this change is that in the 1980s people began rebelling against political correctness, and also that television producers are having now to work harder to bring new ideas into what has become an old medium. Standards and controls on what is permitted in both film and on television have changed drastically, and so have standards for what is acceptable in children's books.

One reason why children so much enjoy a kind of mild toilet humor relates to the superiority theory of humor. Joking about such things as underpants, as in Dav Pilkey's *Captain Underpants* books, makes them feel superior because they can laugh both at the children who have yet to master the details of modesty and bodily functions, but also at themselves, in that their own control of their bodies may be quite recent. A similar kind of superiority is enjoyed, Cross speculates, when they happily laugh at Michael Bond's *Paddington Bear* stories, whose eponymous teddy bear hero manages to succeed in life despite his naïveté and his childish logic. In the USA, the most popular works of this kind are the *Amelia Bedelia* books written by Peggy Parish (d. 1988, and from 1995 by Herman Parish her nephew), which concern a housemaid who interprets all her employers' instructions literally, producing some hilarious results, although all is forgiven her because she is such a wonderful cook.

Pushed to criticize, I might question Cross's mode of referencing. It varies between citing surname alone, surname with initials, and surname with given name. The inconsistency is particularly apparent in her Index. Cross gives both first and last names for the authors of children's books, e.g. Judy Blume, Roald Dahl, Lewis Carroll etc., but for contemporary critics and writers, only last names and first initial are provided as in R(obert) Latta, P(aul) McGhee and R(egina) Barreca. For one critic, Sandra Beckett (cited on p. 13), the full name is provided – one supposes to avoid confusion with Samuel Beckett (cited on pp.101 and 190). As a general point, however, it is sometimes important for readers to know whether it is a male or a female who is expressing an idea, especially if the message relates to differences between girl readers and boy readers.

Notwithstanding this somewhat trivial criticism, Cross's work is clearly to be recommended, especially to researchers at PhD level and beyond. When asked (as I frequently have been over over the years) "What's there to learn about children's literature?" I can now respond by citing her book.

## **Marguerite Duras—Laughter in All its Glory**

*From John Parkin, University of Bristol*

**Cécile Hanania, Ed. (2014). *Marguerite Duras—Le rire dans tous ses éclats [Marguerite Duras—Laughter in all Its Glory]*. Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi. 271 pp. ISBN: 978-90-420-3906-3 (print); ISBN: 978-94-012-1188-8 (e-book).**

Drawn from the papers delivered to a conference held in Bellingham Washington State in 2011, this book aims to fill a gap in Duras studies by examining how humor colours the texts of an author often seen as serious or even sombre in her chosen subject matter and world-view. Christophe Meurée takes up this contradiction, encapsulating it within the intriguing concept of Duras's "gai désesepoir" [cheery desperation], an attitude reflected in many of her characters, not to mention her own interviews, and which uses a counter-logic, detected particularly in children, to confront the irresolvable problems of existence. A similar pattern is extended by Dominique Villeneuve into Duras's appreciation of adolescence which is characterised by her own irreverent humor and a sympathy for the youngster both in his naughtiness and his retaliation against adults' capacity to humiliate.

Yann Mével makes a laudable attempt to explain the complexities of Duras's humor, but he uses an approach which may in the end rely too heavily on Moura's book *Le Sens littéraire de l'humour*. The terms

*comique*, *satire* and *humour* as Moura understood them are applied here somewhat confusingly to a set of passages from Duras which do nevertheless merit investigation. Moura reappears in the apparatus used by Cécile Hanania, but he is here set alongside numerous other theorists and features in a somewhat clearer analysis of incongruity in Duras. This concentrates in particular on her use of syllepsis, a trope that creates incongruity by definition (e.g. she arrived in high spirits and a BMW) and is seen to have the important effect of dethroning established values and wisdom.

The notion of *gai désespoir* returns in Caroline Proulx's treatment of what is essentially black humor in Duras and where she examines in particular the anomaly of the non-existence of God, as related both to Nietzsche and to the existential position of post-Holocaust humanity. Three responses to this problem as expressed in Duras's work and thought are a derisive laughter (directed at God), laughter mixed with tears and the *fou rire* [giggling] of childhood. Catherine Gottesman follows with a chapter that surveys a wide range of instances of laughter in Duras's texts, deciding that it can signify many things including a change of scene or mood, a character's strategy (e.g. of seduction), the exclusion of an enemy and even a triumph over disaster and grief – hence her associated examination of tears and cries (“les larmes”, “le cri”) in the same author.

The second section of the volume is given over to close readings, beginning with Eva Ahlstedt's analysis of the novel *Abahn Sabana David* (1970) and its filmed version *Jaune le soleil* (1971). The film, which is notably less humorous, seems to deny the notion of “rire total” [total laughter] which Duras nevertheless appended to an early version of its script. In fact laughter is much more significant in *Abahn Sabana David*, though the book remains open to many readings, among which Ahlstedt tends to privilege Bakhtinian themes of challenge and subversion. The topics of *fou rire* and laughter in the face of pessimism return in Suk Hee Joo's treatment of Duras's tragi-comic play *Le Shaga* (1968), seen as an experiment in nonsense dialogue and burlesque that certainly defies any sense of a conveyed message.

Noelle Giguere turns to Duras's analysis of Chaplin's humor published in the French journal *Cahiers du cinéma* in 1980. However questionable or even trite Duras's comments may sound (e.g. “Chaplin était sans réflexion [...] sans jugement” [Chaplin was devoid of thought or judgment]), Giguere's own examination of Duras's techniques of what she calls her totalizing comedy does merit our full consideration. Youlia Maritchik-Sioli concentrates on the same film (*Le Camion*, 1977) to which Giguere devotes much attention, and concludes that its use of verbosity and madness -- along with an interesting disruption of cinematic conventions – illustrate once more the author's sense of sad hilarity, plus an important if oblique political message.

Given the previous three contributions, Michelle Royer's claim that no specialist has yet approached Duras's cinema “sous l'angle de l'humour” [from the perspective of humor] seems premature. She then has us return to the same notions of *gai désespoir* and laughter as the only answer to existential angst. Nevertheless the films which she treats (including once again *Le Camion*), contain important implications for the feminist movement, for Sartrean philosophy (which Duras is seen to repudiate on the basis of Freud's pleasure principle) and for the theme of childhood regression as understood by Kristeva and illustrated in Duras's film *Les Enfants*. Still on the subject of her films, Sylvano Santini examines Duras's use of slow motion which exaggerates both the grace of her female characters and the awkwardness of some of their male counterparts. Using a (somewhat outdated) Bergsonian approach, he sees her humor as deriving in some instances from society's attacks on eccentricity, before noting that, paradoxically, he is himself drawn to those who indeed attack society: proof enough of the extreme partiality of Bergson's famous *Le Rire*.

The third section concentrates more on fiction, beginning with an analysis by Annalisa Bertoni of *Le Marin de Gibraltar* (1952), a novel often criticised for its prolixity and romanticism, but viewed here as an exercise in irony that significantly foreshadowed Duras's later literary experiments. Lou Merciecca considers different texts (for instance *L'Amante anglaise*, and *Le Vice-consul*), noting how puns, jokes and laughter both permit and indicate the different reading strategies that Duras facilitates within her books. Maud Fourton uses some of the same material to investigate the author's use of insane laughter as displayed by the mad women whom she chooses as protagonists. As a textual element and theme, this topic points to her desire to perpetually renew the process of writing. Françoise Barbé-Petit situates Duras's sense of laughter, often conjoined with tears, in a feminist perspective. The often unexplained laughter expressed by

her frequently insane characters has nevertheless a transcendental and self-surpassing quality that may defy the gap separating female and male awareness: as within the family, it may permit a solidarity in the face of threats, a remedy to worries over the future, and an inexplicable answer to whatever defies explanation.

The final contribution, by Joël July, comes as a refreshing variant on the previous close readings of Duras's works. Changing the pattern, he analyses an amusing parody of her style drawn from Hervé le Tellier's *Joconde jusqu'à 100* (1998) [*Mona Lisa scores a century*] which supplied a hundred different and invented reactions to the Mona Lisa. Duras's supposed version mimics her use of the conditional as a narrative tense, recycles some of her dialogue from Alain Resnais's film *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959), and distorts the reader's expectations via its narrative indeterminacy and incoherence, including an inevitable and enigmatic reference to the smile: "un sourire qui dit qu'elle sourit" [a smile that says she is smiling]. Whatever the parodist's intentions, July sees his piece as forming an apt compliment to the author's prose-poetic style.

All in all this book constitutes a fully worthwhile contribution to the study of an author once deemed ground-breaking, but still widely read and appreciated. A rewarding read for specialists in European literature, for students of humor it furnishes in particular some useful references and applications of modern French approaches to their field.

## **Tragedy and Comedy: Special Issue of the British Journal of Aesthetics**

*From Edward Forman, University of Bristol*

**John Hyman & Elisabeth Schelleken, Eds. (2014). Special Issue on "Tragedy and Comedy," *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 54, Number 2, 155 pp. At: <http://bjaesthetics.oxfordjournals.org/content/54/2?etoc>. ISSN: 0007-0904 (print); 1468-2842 (online).**

Why does the spectacle of suffering give pleasure? This question, widely explored by aestheticians, is usually referred to as the paradox of tragedy, but considerable suffering is also witnessed in comedy, and this excellent volume subjects both genres to illuminating scrutiny.

The question is directly posed in Tzachi Zamir's essay "Why Does Comedy Give Pleasure?" Students of humour might resist being chidden for "uncritically assuming that the appeal of comedy stems from the pleasure it elicits" or for associating comedy and laughter in a way that "is overly broad [and] simplistic". The distinctions Zamir makes between "hysterical fits" and "cerebral bemusement" (for example) nevertheless help to refine the ontology of comic response. He analyses our reasons for attending comedy rather than other, more demanding, sources of pleasure, and neutralizes some apparent conflicts in laughter theory, seeing no necessary competition between superiority theories and incongruity theories; these apply to different levels of response, the explanatory and the correlational. After such dense and engaging arguments, his conclusion that "comedy gives pleasure because it creates a desirable uplifting mood" may seem disappointingly tame, but he helps to increase one's understanding of the humour process, and his insight that the experience of comedy "brings together usually disintegrated dimensions of the self" is both original and suggestive.

Andrew Huddleston turns unexpectedly to Hegel – whose approach to comedy he admits is both sketchy and questionable – in an attempt to position the pleasure afforded by comedy within the philosopher's general aesthetics. His short essay, "Hegel on Comedy: Theodicy, Social Criticism and the 'Supreme Task' of Art", argues that the social criticism Hegel found in Aristophanes, whose comedies "expose [...] general corruption" and "grapple with general public interests", enabled him to align it with tragedy in "bringing to our minds [...] the most comprehensive truths of the spirit".

John Morreall's "The Comic Vision of Life" begins by asserting that "almost no-one has spoken of a 'comic vision' of life parallel to the 'tragic vision'", a claim that students of Molière might question, but his systematic argument, based on twenty polar oppositions between tragedy and comedy, contends not only that comedy possesses its own coherent vision, but that it is superior to the tragic vision, "especially in our post-heroic era". His system leads him at times to state the obvious ("comedy pokes fun at authority [...] and it mocks traditions") and at others to generalize beyond what is justified: his claim that "ambiguity is

shunned” in tragedy overlooks the role of misleading oracles which trigger tragic miscalculations. Morreall’s conclusion is also open to debate: whilst few would deny that comedy and humour help us make “sense of the cruel aspects of life”, it seems unnecessarily tendentious to claim that tragedy “fosters a tendency to feel sadness” without conceding less grudgingly that it also offers “a very effective tool to process the realities that may lead to stress, sadness or depression”. A good laugh is beneficial to health, but so is a good cry, and to set the two experiences in opposition while insisting that they must be ranked seems unnecessarily divisive.

The final essay concerning ethical aspects of comedy is Noël Carroll’s “Ethics and Comic Amusement” where the focus on cruel humour leads him to confront the anxiety raised by morally transgressive comics – and to recount some of the better risqué jokes in the volume. (“Why is it so difficult to solve crimes in [whichever social or geographical sphere it is fashionable to disparage]?” “There are no dental records and the DNA is all the same.”) Several basic ethical attitudes towards tendentious or destructive humour are examined: is humour “beyond” good and evil? Do immoral elements in a joke always diminish or even block its humorous effect? Conversely might those same elements enhance the joke’s comic impact? Each of these positions is examined in relation to defined contexts, and Carroll’s conclusion is a perhaps inevitable compromise, termed “moderate comic moralism”: “Some humour-tokens resist uptake, due to their immorality, [...] but this is compatible with some immoral humour engendering comic amusement, even among morally sensitive folk.”

Two essays treat historical aspects of comedy in relation to early modern English tragedy. In the volume’s longest and most densely argued essay, entitled “Two Loves I Have: Of Comfort and Despair in Shakespearean Genre”, Claire Elizabeth McEachern reveals striking new perspectives on generic purity by applying Reformation ideas about the nature of knowledge, and hence about the functioning of dramatic irony, to differences between comedy and tragedy. This discussion refers to Sidney, Johnson and Coleridge but omits all mention of French Classical authors or theoreticians, who surely make some points relevant to the advantages of the *séparation des genres*. The conclusion seems less compelling than many of the fascinating points preceding it. “Aristotle’s audience views from on high; Sidney’s longs to emulate from below (a difference made explicit in the different architectures of Greek amphitheatre and Elizabethan pit).” “Calvinist predestination is [...] a structure of dramatic irony, inhabited by us.” McEachern’s differentiation between Sophocles’ and Seneca’s *Œdipus* (pithily summed up as “Sophocles shocks, Seneca racks”) is both sensitive and revealing.

Andy Kesson’s question “Was Comedy a Genre in English Early Modern Drama?” focuses largely on John Lyly (1553-1606), but his conclusions have a direct and important bearing on Shakespeare studies and on the subsequent reception of all theories about generic purity and stability. His most important material resides not in the detailed analysis of the chosen plays (by Lyly, plus an anonymous work of 1598 entitled *Mucedorus*), but in the principle that the generic label imposed on a work can impinge disproportionately and even misleadingly on its performance and interpretation: in particular, the labels loosely applied to comedies by publishers in the 1620s might raise quite false and self-perpetuating expectations among modern scholars, readers and performers.

Whilst the readers of *THT* may turn more readily to the articles dealing with comedy, the volume’s purpose is to set these alongside a consideration of tragedy. Thus Malcolm Heath’s “Aristotle and the Value of Tragedy” places the technical aspects of the *Poetics* into the context of Aristotle’s “philosophical anthropology” by applying his account of musical catharsis to the tragic experience. In a meticulous if at times slightly prudish argument, he expands the tragedy paradox by asking, “Why would emotionally well-adjusted people seek a pleasure that is preceded by distress, in the absence of a disorder for which the experience would provide therapeutic benefit?” and finds an answer in the human capacity to “recognize excellence in a variety of activities [...] and to value that excellence because of itself”. Advocates of tragedy (or indeed comedy) have no need to prove that their art is beneficial: provided its opponents, despite Plato’s attempts, cannot demonstrate that it is harmful, it will promote *eudaimonia*, the best kind of life, by providing “an appropriate object of appreciative attention in leisure”.

A. E. Denham’s “Tragedy without the Gods: Autonomy, Necessity and the Real Self” asserts that the typical dynamic of ancient tragedy, with its dependence on intervention by divine forces, remains relevant to a contemporary secular context. Drawing on recent discussions of agency, autonomy and the “real self”,

she proposes that divine interventions in the classics may be perceived as triggers for action which “undermine rather than realize [the agent’s] authority over what he does”, in circumstances where modern secular humans may yet “experience [their] actions as externally driven”.

In their “Contemporary Cinematic Tragedy and the ‘Silver Lining’ Genre”, Sandra Shapshay and Steven Wagschal assert that “film has become more popular than theatre” and that “contemporary aestheticians do not have a good definition of tragedy.” They fill that gap by detailing conditions for tragedy which determine that most films, if they approach tragic structures at all, eschew a tragic ending and so enter that category of melodrama labelled by the authors the “silver-lining” genre. Systematic and thoughtful in examining how Ibsen, Lorca and Miller adapted Aristotle to promote a definition of tragedy still applicable in the twentieth century, they also draw a fruitful distinction between the emotional catharsis of tragedy and any cognitive resolution of the ethical or moral problems that the play’s audience must confront. They then demonstrate how Sean Penn’s film *Into the Wild* (2007) complies satisfactorily with their criteria for modern tragedy, although their account of its self-centred, opinionated and incompetent protagonist seems to preclude the level of compassion they themselves expect in a tragic protagonist. It is however disappointing that they fail to mention a single other film to which they have applied these same criteria, since we are left to take on trust their assertion that *Into the Wild* is exceptional.

James Hamilton’s “Notes on the Experience of Tragedy” is the shortest, densest and most technically demanding contribution. It appeals to the concept of the *i-desire* (the “imaginative counterpart” to an “actual desire”) to account for a slightly different tragedy paradox: the reaction whereby a typical, informed spectator both wants Desdemona to be dead at the end of *Othello* (that being its aesthetically satisfying conclusion) and wants her to survive (given one’s outrage at her innocent suffering). Hamilton’s eventual conclusion to a convoluted argument – “I do not think I have gotten very far” – is less than fully disarming, since it is hard to be sure whether he is merely labouring a commonplace concerning the tragic response, or shedding genuine new light on its complexity. The argument seems ultimately to hinge on a somewhat pedantic quibble regarding the meaning “want”: in wanting Desdemona to die, the spectator may be satisfying a deeper desire to “explore dramatic and political possibilities” that constitutes the real pleasure of tragedy.

## **The Life of the City: Space, Humour, and the Experience of Truth in Fin-de-Siècle Montmartre**

*From Will Visconti, University of Sydney*

**Julian Brigstocke (2014). *The Life of the City: Space, Humour, and the Experience of Truth in Fin-de-Siècle Montmartre*. London: Ashgate. 17 b&w illustrations. 246 pp. ISBN: 978-1-4094-4896-9.**

There exists an extensive corpus of literature about the history of Paris before, during and after the Commune, and an equally wide-ranging body of work concerning the *cabarets artistiques* specifically within the 18<sup>th</sup> *arrondissement* (district) of Montmartre. However, what Julian Brigstocke proposes through this book is a contribution to spatial history of the art of urban life. *The Life of the City* examines the intersections between humor, modernity, urban space and politics, and the combinations therein.

The book is in three parts: the first deals with what the author calls the “anomalous and inhuman”, the second with the Chat Noir (black cat) cabaret, and the third with politics (specifically anarchism), humor and violence. Brigstocke begins by examining the symbolism of the (black) cat, with particular reference to the literary works of Charles Baudelaire and Edgar Allen Poe, and the presence of the black cat at the feet of Victorine Meurent as *Olympia* in Edouard Manet’s 1863 painting. He argues that the cat in its varied and frequently malevolent or mysterious incarnations is a cipher for truth, drawing on Foucault as he discusses the access to truth through art and the implications for creative transformation of spaces and the life within it.

Chapter Three highlights the notion of art-centered “experiential” authority and the tension between experiential authority and that of the Church and tradition, or of science in the wake of the Paris Commune in 1871. Here reference is made to the city poetry of Baudelaire and the work of the philosopher Jean-Marie Guyau, as we are told how lived experiences informed new forms and perceptions of social authority.

Chapter Four makes a detailed examination of humor as catharsis, investigating the role of the district as a marker for ideals of revolt, autonomy and freedom, and the emergence of humor as a means of challenging traditional modes or forms of authority. This is particularly true of cabarets like the Chat Noir and similar spaces where performance and embodied experience were employed to transgress, satirize and challenge established ideas – something that could be accomplished more easily because of Montmartre’s geographical separation (and perceived otherness) from the centre of Paris. Indeed, it must be remembered that as a district, Montmartre remained beyond the bounds of the city until not long before the events of the Commune.

Chapter Five deals with how humor was used to reimagine possibilities of place through pantomime or irony. The works of Adolphe Willette, known as much for their humorous as their frequently erotic content (or both together), are discussed here as linked to traditions of buffoonery, the carnivalesque, and corporeal experience of place within the city and the *arrondissement*. The notion of irony is taken further in the next chapter, which looks at the Chat Noir as an “anti-museum” and examines the satirical guidebooks published during the fin-de-siècle, which made fun both of bourgeois visitors and of dominant notions of colonization. They also bear a possible link to tourist guides published during the late 1800s for foreigners attending the Universal Exhibition, or even the *Guides Roses* for the numerous pleasure-seekers who flocked to venues and spaces within Montmartre such as the Moulin Rouge.

Chapter Seven discusses the shadow plays popular during the fin-de-siècle and the so-called “perceptual” life of the body, focusing on how these plays toyed with this by “un-working” (confounding or challenging) the senses. At the same time Brigstocke notes the decline of Montmartre as a genuine space of protest, a fate shared with other spaces around the world that were identified with rebellion, bohemia or otherness. The final chapter focuses on the anarchist movement within Paris. Here Brigstocke raises the idea of violence as an act of courage, along with the melding of humor and violence, and the contradictions not only of anarchism itself, but of its existence within Montmartre: at the same time as the bourgeoisie were being warned about Montmartre’s status as a hotbed of radicalism, there was a simultaneous and positive “marketing of terror” that repackaged dissent for bourgeois consumption through venues like the Taverne du Bagne, a prison-themed bar.

*The Life of the City* will naturally be of greatest use to French historians of the late nineteenth century, but also valuable to students of humor concerned with Francophone material and the European fin-de-siècle. In addition it forms a useful point of reference both for social geographers and for those interested in the literature of the period, be it Gothic or Decadent. In his conclusion, Brigstocke writes of the bohemia of Montmartre and of contemporary “neo-bohemia” (linked to urban regeneration discourse as much as to discussions of street-level culture and new media), raising the question of what new generations of performers and writers will create as they continue to engage with, shape and represent life within contemporary urban spaces.

## **Caricature—Can it be Serious? Decoding Satirical Violence**

*From John Parkin, University of Bristol*

**Pascal Ory, Christian Delporte, Bertrand Tillier, Laurent Bihl, Laurence Danguy, Emmanuel Pierrat and Marie-Anne Matard-Bonucci. (2015). *La caricature...et si c'était sérieux? Décryptage de la violence satirique (Caricature – Can it be Serious? Decoding Satirical Violence)*. Paris: Éditions Nouveau Monde. 120 pp. ISBN: 2-36942-252-1.**

Assembled with remarkable speed following the massacre of the *Charlie Hebdo* staff members in January 2015, this attractive volume contains nine chapters plus a foreword and an introduction (by Yannick Dehée and Pascal Ory respectively) which refer to the transgressive role of political satire, its function within the freedoms ratified under the Third Republic (France’s constitution from 1870-1940), the limits which need to be imposed on it, for instance in the area of racist humour, and, particularly in Ory’s contribution, to the subordinate position to which the press cartoonist has traditionally been assigned, a prejudice which the attack on the *Charlie* cartoonists has decisively invalidated.

Christian Delporte outlines the history of caricature particularly in the area of politics, concluding that if the satirical press has lost some of its popularity, the sketches that accompany it (and which are amply

supplied within this volume) can still continue to develop -- even to an unprecedented extent within modern media such as websites and social networks. Bertrand Tillier sketches the psychological basis of caricature, seeing it ultimately as a spell or curse visited on an enemy whom it reduces to a fixity or a monstrosity that we may comfortably despise. Laurent Bihl notes how caricature has in the past served propaganda, a link less apparent in more recent decades with the trend of oppositional humorists.

In his second contribution Delporte recounts the various acts of censorship imposed on caricaturists under the Fifth Republic (France's modern constitution inaugurated in 1958), noting how this trend has radically diminished, with numerous political heavyweights now being prepared to patronise the genre openly, acknowledging its basis in freedom of expression. Laurence Danguy turns to the specific role of caricature in interreligious conflicts dating back to the Reformation. Conversely, antireligious rather than interconfessional satire is seen to have begun in France under the Commune of 1871 only to reach a particularly striking peak in the *Charlie Hebdo* publications and their aftermath. He sees the latter as resulting from a radically biased interpretation of Islamic teachings concerning representations of the Prophet Mohammed and a misunderstanding of what the original Danish cartoons of 2005 actually meant. Laurent Bihl then considers the effects of censorship on French press freedoms, noting in particular the law of 1881, which, while guaranteeing those freedoms, failed to protect images that the authorities deemed unseemly or outrageous, and thus permitted the banning of subversive publications. The resulting struggle between such organs and the authorities repressing them has undergone many changes, witness various 20<sup>th</sup> century court rulings which specifically defend the right to offend. Given the relaxing of State opposition to material judged blasphemous or indecent, censorial action has passed into the hands of particular groups especially those of a religious nature; while more subtle modes of control include policy decisions made by publishing houses, cyber attacks and possible self-censorship by cartoonists intimidated by the killing of some of their more daring colleagues.

Marie-Anne Matard-Bonucci engages with a significantly different subject: the use of caricature in politically motivated propaganda, whether of a social, nationalistic or racial nature. She draws examples from the period of French colonial expansion, the Dreyfus case, the anti-German campaigns of World War I and the strong revival of anti-Jewish sentiments throughout Europe during the 1930s (whose symptoms can still be discerned for instance in Arab coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflicts). The tactic is to establish recognisable physical characteristics (for example black skin, the Jewish nose) and animal associations (the rat, the snake) in order to demonise and degrade a section of humanity and so reinforce a vicious circle of hatred.

Emmanuel Pierrat examines an important related question: should caricature be subject to restraints, despite the vital principle of freedom of expression sanctioned by the 1789 Declaration of Human Rights? That text itself admits exceptions to the rule, particularly concerning illicit abuse of that same freedom, with relevant cases decided by the courts. Plagiarism is thus considered illegal, and ditto the invasion of an individual's private life. A more telling instance is the 2007 court ruling in favour of Philippe Val and *Charlie Hebdo* after their publication of the Danish cartoons: shocking and offensive those sketches might have been, but they were not considered a direct gratuitous attack on Moslems in general. A further example concerns the openly racist comedian Dieudonné M'bala M'bala (b. 1966), who has more than once been condemned for seeking to incite racial (particularly anti-Jewish) hatred, an activity again deemed an abuse of free expression. So caricature must indeed be subject to certain limits, which evolve over time; but those limits must themselves be limited so that they do not inhibit debate, creativity and humour.

One final poignant note comes in the form of an afterword to the book, supplied by Yannick Dehée and comprising some notes by Christian-Marc Bosséno, who laments how rarely analyses of humour are actually produced by humorists themselves. He then includes three brief but instructive paragraphs drawn from relevant interviews with the cartoonists Plantu, Pessin and Tignous, the last being of course a hugely lamented victim of the *Rue Nicolas-Appert* shootings in Paris. The preceding nine chapters, though short, provide an equally stimulating read for humour scholars and are accompanied by many significant examples of the art of caricature, together with very useful bibliography: all in all a fitting tribute to a set of victims whose talents and reputations will long survive the efforts of their persecutors to defile them.

## Recent Publications

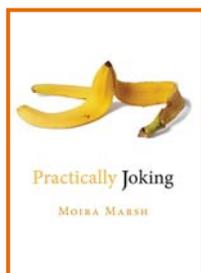
### Cognitive Linguistics and Humor Research



Geert Brône, Kurt Feyaerts, & Tony Veale. (2015). *Cognitive Linguistics and Humor Research*. Berlin, Germany: DeGruyter Mouton. 248 pp. ISBN: 978-3-11-034615-2 (cloth); 978-3-11-039503-7 (ebook).

*From the Publisher:* To what extent can Cognitive Linguistics benefit from the systematic study of a creative phenomenon like humor? Although the authors in this volume approach this question from different perspectives, they share the profound belief that humorous data may provide a unique insight into the complex interplay of quantitative and qualitative aspects of meaning construction.

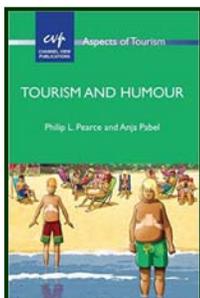
### Practically Joking



Moira Marsh. (2015). *Practically Joking*. Logan, UT: Utah State University Press. 195 pp. ISBN: 978-0-87421-983-8 (paper); 978-0-87421-984-5 (ebook).

*From the Publisher:* In *Practically Joking*, the first full-length study of the practical joke, Moira Marsh examines the value, artistry, and social significance of this ancient and pervasive form of vernacular expression. Though they are sometimes dismissed as the lowest form of humor, practical jokes come from a lively tradition of expressive play. They can reveal both sophistication and intellectual satisfaction, with the best demanding significant skill and talent not only to conceive but also to execute. Marsh studies the range of genres that pranks comprise; offers a theoretical look at the reception of practical jokes based on “benign transgression”—a theory that sees humor as playful violation—and uses real-life examples of practical jokes in context to establish the form’s varieties and meanings as an independent genre, as well as its inextricable relationship with a range of folklore forms. Scholars of folklore, humor, and popular culture will find much of interest in *Practically Joking*.

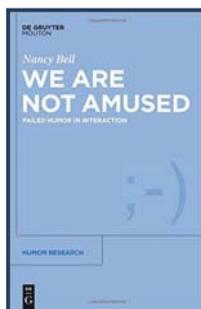
### Tourism and Humour



Philip L. Pearce and Anja Pabel. (2015). *Tourism and Humor*. Bristol, UK: Channel View. 167 pp. ISBN: 978-1-11-84541-509-9 (cloth); 978-1-11-84541-508-2 (paper).

*From the Publisher:* This book is dedicated to the advancement of knowledge about humour in all kinds of tourism settings. It discusses the many ways in which humour can occur during tourism exchanges including guided tours, tourism marketing and promotion and travel narratives. Other themes include the role of humour in enhancing the tourist experience, the benefits of tourism humour, considerations of when humour may appear inappropriate in tourism settings and the development of tourism humour theory. The work includes much original material collected by the authors. The book will be of interest to undergraduate and postgraduate students, researchers of tourism as well as humour scholars from other disciplines.

### We are not Amused: Failed Humor in Interaction



Nancy Bell. (2015). *We are not Amused: Failed Humor in Interaction*. Berlin, Germany: DeGruyter Mouton. 184 pp. ISBN: 978-1-50-151052-6 (cloth); 978-1-5015-0164-7 (ebook).

*From the Publisher:* Placing failed humor within the broader category of miscommunication and drawing on a range of conversational data, this text represents the first comprehensive study of failed humor. It provides a framework for classifying the types of failure that can occur, examines the strategies used by both speakers and hearers to avoid and manage failure, and highlights the crucial role humor plays in social identity and relationship management.

## Recent Articles in Humor Studies

*The Humorous Times* announces recent articles from *HUMOR: International Journal of Humor Research* and by researchers who publish elsewhere within humor studies. The following list, compiled by the ISHS Executive Secretary for the online ISHS bibliographies, includes humor studies articles published since February 2015. If you have a recent publication, let us know. We will include it in a future newsletter.

- Abrams, J. R., Bippus, A. M., & McGaughey, K. J. (2015). Gender disparaging jokes: An investigation of sexist-nonstereotypical jokes on funniness, typicality, and the moderating role of ingroup identification. *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research*, 28(2), 311-326.
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## Call for Journal Papers

### Special Issue of the European Journal of Humour Research

The European Journal of Humour Research is preparing a special issue on *Humor and Social Media*. The proliferation and widespread use of social media like Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram, Snapchat, Tinder, and other platforms have led to the development of a new kind of space for interpersonal and group interaction, distanced from face-to-face contact, yet somehow affording new kinds of intimacy, group response, dialogue and conversation. It is based generally on modes of socializing from 'real life', but with decidedly other technologies, practices, parameters and psycho-social implications. This issue would seek to gather a handful of responses to the ways, means, currents and meanings of the humor transaction in thrall to these new kinds of social spaces. Some areas of interest might include, but are not limited to: online joking models, social dynamics of online joking, new-media thoughts on old humor debates, implications of virality and humor, orthographic laughter (e.g., uses of 'lol', 'haha', etc.), humour on dating sites, easy-to-use technologies as ready-to-hand humor tools, satire, irony and parody in online contexts, and so forth. Please submit a 250-word abstract by 30 September 2015 to [weitzer@tcd.ie](mailto:weitzer@tcd.ie). Pre-abstract queries welcomed.



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