

The Humorous Times

Newsletter of the International Society for Humor Studies

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Association News

2016 ISHS Election Results

From Martin Lampert, ISHS Executive Secretary-Treasurer

In Fall 2015, the Society held its biannual Board elections through the internet service, *Qualtrics*. With 138 returned ballots, Delia Chiaro (University of Bologna, Italy) received the majority of the votes cast for ISHS President. She will serve as ISHS President through December 31, 2017. Sharon Lockyer (Brunel University, UK) and Liisi Laineste (Estonian Literary Museum) were elected as ISHS Board Members-at-Large and will serve through December 2017. We thank Larry Ventis for his service as ISHS President for 2014 and 2015 as well as Graeme Ritchie (University of Aberdeen, Scotland) and Moira Marsh (University of Indiana, USA) for their service as ISHS Board Members from January 2012 through December 2015. Our best wishes to the new ISHS President and Board members.

Message from the New President

From Delia Chiaro, University of Bologna, Italy

It is a great honour for me to have been elected to serve as the new president of ISHS for the next two years. I am well aware of the fact that I stand on the shoulders of several giants in humour research who have preceded me in this position and I shall do my utmost to rise to the occasion. I am further honoured to stand alongside Jessica Milner Davis and Alleen Nilsen as one of the three women to have been elected presidents of this society. I truly hope that in the future more female humour scholars will follow suit and stand, as we have done, for election.

My thanks go to past president Larry Ventis who has already been providing me with precious support during my first weeks of office and upon whom I will be relying for advice throughout my term. I would also like to thank the members of the outgoing committee for their work, while I look forward to working with the new committee and editorial board. However, huge thanks also go to our executive secretary, Martin Lampert, who is our jewel in the crown. ISHS is extremely fortunate to have Martin at the true helm of the society dealing with day-to-day organizational tasks, housekeeping, running the website and keeping the president and committees on track. I foresee two years of constant communication between us both.

My goal as president, like those before me, is to support the excellence of ISHS publications and conferences and sustain the good standing of humour studies. In particular, first, I hope to be able to encourage more young scholars to engage in humour

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Next Issue

The next *Humorous Times* is due in August 2016. Items for the August issue should be sent to ishs@hnu.edu.

research. In 2002, at the Bertinoro conference, Willi Ruch and I initiated the emerging scholar prize and I am happy to see that many prize-winners over the years have well and truly emerged. Second, I hope to find ways to establish more interdisciplinary research, although this will only be possible with the representation and foregrounding of more disciplines. As we all know, a wide range of disciplines are represented in our society, but many seem to remain in the background with respect to others. Last but not least, I hope to encourage more networking preferably focussed on funded projects to bring us together more often in summer schools, symposia, think tanks and conferences and, above all, research projects.

And what better place to network than at our next conference in Dublin. I look forward to meeting old friends and new in Ireland, the land of Guinness, Poitín and above all wits such as James Joyce, Samuel Beckett, George Bernard Shaw, and Oscar Wilde, to mention just a few from an endless list. *Féach tú i mBaile Átha Cliath!*

Message from the Immediate Past President

From Larry Ventis, College of William and Mary, Virginia, USA

It has been both a pleasure and an honor to have been granted the opportunity to serve as the president of the International Society for Humor Studies for the last 2 years. I extend my sincere thanks to the membership for the quality of your scholarship and the pleasure of your company over so many years, and in so many fascinating locations. My special gratitude to all of the hosts and hostesses who have generously donated their time and talent in inviting us to their institutions and making us all feel truly at home. Having participated in our organization for what is now approaching a half century (gasp!), I can truly say that I belong to no other professional society that has even come close to rewarding me so richly with provocative ideas, meaningful personal and professional relationships, interesting perspectives on a range of topics, and the priceless treasure of laugh-out-loud humor over decades. You have afforded me a wealth of personal and professional riches. I am most grateful to you all (note the mildly southern linguistic flourish). I enthusiastically congratulate and welcome Delia Chiaro as our new president, and I look forward with confidence and hope for an equally rich future for our unique, genuinely international professional society.



28th Conference of the International Society for Humor Studies

Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland, June 27 to July 1, 2016

The 2016 ISHS Conference will be held from June 27 to July 1, 2016, at the Trinity College in Dublin Ireland. This year's Conference Convener is Eric Weitz from Trinity College's Drama and Theatre Studies Department. Conference activities will begin on Monday, June 27, with pre-conference sessions, which will include interdisciplinary huddles for attendees who would like to engage in moderated small-group discussions with researchers from diverse scholarly and practical backgrounds. The Conference will open officially in the afternoon with a brief welcome from Conference Fool, Little John Nee—whose song, "The World Brings Fools Together," provides the informal tag line for the Conference—followed by the ISHS Presidential Address. Participants will then have the opportunity to attend a wine reception in the Long Room of Trinity College's Old Library, with its vaulted ceilings and historic holdings.

Tuesday, June 28 to Friday, July 1 will be full conference days with plenary sessions, panel discussions, practice-based workshops, installations and paper sessions. A conference banquet will be held on Wednesday night in Trinity's Hogwarts-like Dining Hall, with a dinner scheduled for the final night at a local eatery. A special Conference performance is planned for Thursday night, June 30, entitled,

“Laughter in Our Bones: A Comic Cultural Buffet,” offering short, classic comic pieces from Dublin’s ethnic communities and several Irish sub-cultures, within a free-moving, fairground atmosphere. Other events will include a limerick competition as a variation on the Society’s yearly joke contest.

Registration, program, travel, and accommodation information can be found on the Conference website at www.irishcomedy.ie. Inquiries can be sent to the Conference convener, Eric Weitz through the Conference website at www.irishcomedy.ie/contact.html.

Other Upcoming Events

Sixteenth International Summer School and Symposium on Humour and Laughter

Braşov, Romania, July 4-9, 2016

The 16th International Summer School and Symposium on Humour and Laughter will be held in Braşov Romania, Romania from July 4 to July 9. Stanca Mada, and Razvan Saftoiu are the local organizers. For more information, visit the summer school website at <http://humoursummerschool.org/16/>.

The 2016 Taboo Conference

Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona, Spain, September 20-21, 2016

The 3rd Taboo Conference will be held at the Universitat Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona, Spain from September 20 to 21, 2016. The theme of the Conference will be *Taboo Humour: Language, Culture, Society, and the Media*. For more information, write to thetabooconference@gmail.com or visit the Conference website at <https://portal.upf.edu/web/taco>.

Book Reviews

The Birth of Comedy

Jeffrey Rusten, Ed. (2011). *The birth of comedy: Texts, documents, and art from Athenian comic Competitions, 486–280*. Translated by Jeffrey Henderson, David Konstan, Ralph Rosen, Jeffrey Rusten, and Niall W. Slater. Baltimore MD: Johns Hopkins University Press. 816 pp., 42 halftones, 1 line drawing. ISBN: 9780801894480.

Reviewed by Michael Ewans, University of Newcastle, Australia

The Birth of Comedy provides for the first time a comprehensive and high quality set of translations of the fragments of ancient Greek comedy which Kassel and Austin published in *Poetae Comici Graeci* (PCG: 1983>). Where new Greek editions of the fragments of particular authors have appeared subsequently to PCG, these are used. Also included, and probably of most interest to readers of *The Humorous Times*, are ancient definitions of and theories about comedy (chapter 23); there is also a good selection of images – primarily either vase paintings or terracotta models of actors in costumes and masks. But the one whole surviving play and longer fragments of Menander are omitted, on the grounds that they are available in translation in other books.

Rusten’s introduction is of high quality. It discusses the sources from which fragmentary quotations come; provides a very good short history of Athenian comedy; and takes a balanced and sensible position on the possible origins of comedy, a subject which has been highly controversial among both ancient and modern scholars. The historical account is especially good on the earliest period 486-445 BCE, and afterwards on that of the Peloponnesian War; both were times in which there were major poets (e.g. Cratinus and Aristophanes) who did not shrink from political satire, and others whose comedies were less edgy and more fantastic (e.g. Crates). Provocatively, Rusten suggests that at least two lost plays, Eupolis’ *Demes* (of which chapter 6 presents extensive fragments) and Cratinus’ *Wine Flask*, might have been as good as any of the eleven comedies by Aristophanes that have been preserved. He notes that eight out of the eleven extant Aristophanic plays did not win first prize. He should perhaps have reflected, however, that the Athenian festival judges failed to award first prizes to other plays later recognized as masterpieces – in tragedy, Euripides’ *Medea* (accorded third prize) comes straight to mind!

The historical introduction continues with the virtually apolitical Middle Comedy (Timocles excepted) and ends with the sit-com style New Comedy of Menander, Diphilus and others, which, despite what this reviewer regards as blandness and excessive moralizing, was not only very well regarded in itself, but became the basis for the much more vigorous Latin adaptations by the Roman playwrights Plautus and Terence.

You are not advised to read the main text of the book (pp. 45-741) consecutively, but to use it as a reference work. If you do read the whole book, you may well become depressed by the high percentage of the fragments that relate to food! This is partly because a major source of quotations from Middle and New Comedy is the *Deipnosophistai* ('Wise Banqueters') of Athenaeus, a symposium at which many of the quotations offered by the banqueters relate to their gourmet tastes; but other sources also provide lots of quotations concerned with eating. There are also many shorter, often one-word quotations from Greek grammarians and lexicographers who found what seem to be strange verbal usages in the comic texts; I counted at least three separate instances where a comic poet is recorded as using the Greek word for 'cock' instead of 'hen' when referring to a chicken that lays eggs.

Apart from the regrettable dramatic poverty of much of the material, I have three reservations about this edition:

1. The translators as a panel do not follow a uniform policy in regard to whether or not to update/modernize. For example, most quotations use the ancient currency – minas, drachmas and obols – but sometimes dollars (or, colloquially, 'bucks' and 'C-note') intrude. The two policies are seen in bizarre conjunction in fragments 15 and 16 on p. 352; cf. p. 569, where 'high school senior' appears!). And on p. 495 'Chanel No. 5' appears as a 'translation' of a Greek perfume. More seriously, the equally anachronistic 'second act curtain' (meaning, as a footnote points out, the end of the fourth act of a five-act New Comedy) appears in an otherwise excessively free translation of an important fragment from Antiphanes' *Poiesis*. This occurs again on p. 734. The expression 'second act curtain' is particularly unhelpful in both places, as many modern plays are not now in three acts, but in two, and the Greek Act 4 refers to a climax prior to the resolution of issues and of conflict at the end of Act 5. So the use of 'second act curtain' is totally confusing. I have no objection to modernization in translations of Greek comedy (cf. my own two volumes of Aristophanes!), but I do think that Rusten should have imposed consistency on his contributors. All of them are eminent translators, but evidently they came to this task from different perspectives.
2. Typos are rare: on p. 285 under Anagyros 'dame' should be 'deme': on p. 369 # 15 'bridge' should be 'bride'. And there is one howler; on p. 544, footnote 14, it is Dionysus, not Apollo, who appears *ex machina* at the end of Euripides' *Bacchae*.
3. In chapter 10 on the theatre, pp. 401-2 should have warned readers that some of the sources, especially Pollux and Vitruvius, are late and unreliable, contaminated by knowledge of Roman-era theatre design and production.

This is a valuable reference work; it is truly unfortunate that what survives from antiquity is not enough to give us a good overall picture of Aristophanes' predecessors, rivals and successors. The problem lies not with the hard-working academics who have compiled this volume, but with the unfortunately narrow purposes of those in later antiquity who collected quotations from the comic poets, and with the concentration of substantial fragments on Middle and New Comedy. These were of course far more popular in later antiquity than the Old Comedy which modern taste has found much more worthy of study and performance. The book provides some very interesting tit-bits - e.g. Platonius' comparison of Aristophanes and Eupolis (p. 223), a remarkable fragment from the *parabasis* of Eupolis' *Toadies* (pp. 247-8), and a fascinating comparison by Aulus Gellius between two parallel speeches in Menander and Caecilius, which the writer quotes in full before concluding strongly in Menander's favour; '[Caecilius stuck] in some other buffoonery, and managed somehow to lose Menander's true-to-life simplicity, accuracy, and delightfulness' (pp. 647-8). But you have to wade through a lot of dross to find these gems!

How to Write Comedy

Tony Kirwood. (2014). How to write comedy. London, UK: Constable & Robinson Ltd. 194 pp. ISBN: 9781845285258

Reviewed by Christopher Molineux, Brunel University, UK

The ability to create comedy is often looked upon through the blurred lens of ignorance as an innate gift that allows mirthful material to tumble forth only from the minds, mouths, pens, and keyboards of those somehow lucky enough to have been born with the ability to create it. This noxious little myth has been powerful enough to steer many creative souls away from writing comedy and bestowed nagging insecurities on those brave enough to pursue a career in the comedy arts. In this practical little book Tony Kirwood ably conveys the slightly more mundane truth which is that the writing of comedy is a skill that can be learned but which often requires a great deal of time, patience, organisation and resilience in the face of failure and rejection.

The emphasis on straightforward practicality that Kirwood favours begins with the un-ambiguous title “How to Write Comedy” and continues in the introduction where he states that “we want to create the laughs, not analyse them”. He begrudgingly gives a brief overview of some of the dominant themes in humour theory and then moves briskly into explaining the realities of comedy writing and the fundamentals of sketches and their construction. A large number of organisational study tools are placed strategically throughout, including ideograms, exercises, “now try this” suggestions and a summary at the end of every chapter, all of which make it the type of book that can be referred to again and again. There is also an appendix bursting with useful websites, contacts and courses that is worth the price of the book in itself. It is made evident from the start that the author intends to provide guidance about selling comedy as well as writing it, and much consideration is given on how to design, format and pitch your comedy writing to TV and Radio executives which many readers will find appealing (and useful). All the TV and Radio in question is, however, pointedly British, and so are the majority of examples of comedy referred to throughout, which means that the book is of more limited value to anyone on the other side of the Channel, let alone the other side of the Atlantic.

The reader (whether British or otherwise) is, however, well rewarded with step-by-step guidance through the process of writing various different types of comedy, and the author flexes his own comic muscles with examples of the creative process. It is a credit to him that he chooses to include some examples of his own writing which he admits are not top notch but are followed by the accurate observation that comedy writing doesn’t always appear absolutely hilarious in the first draft. This is part of his awareness of the importance of confidence in the comedy writing process, and he does an admirable job of predicting and answering any questions or concerns that the struggling comedy writer might have.

While there are some references to team-writing and to the testing of comedy material in front of other people, the emphasis is strongly tilted towards the practice of sitting down alone and writing at a desk. It is important to recognise that this is only one approach to the writing of comedy, and for many comic performers, particularly stand-up comedians and improv actors, it is an approach that is often rarely used, if at all. In the business of comedy a great deal of material is written either on stage or within the social dynamic that exists in interactions between performers and their peers, friends, or members of the general public. All the world’s a stage, and while the material that results from these interactions may reflect ideas that the author is expressing, it is not constructed in a detached, methodical way, which feature gives a more natural and individualistic feel to the end product. To be fair, stand-up and improv are not primary focal points of the book, but the reality of the interactive performative element in the writing of comedy is not given enough attention, given (a) how crucial it is to the creative process and (b) the fact that it is something that can be taught in a similarly structured format.

The bottom line is that this book provides a fairly comprehensive beginner’s guide to the structured writing and selling of comedy material in the UK. If you are an organised and methodical British citizen keen on pursuing a career in comedy writing but uncertain as to how to proceed, then this is the book for you. After diligently connecting the dots that Mr Kirwood presents, you will certainly make real progress, and even if you don’t achieve your desired level of success you will be secure in the knowledge that you have done all the right things to make the most of your talents.

Good Humor, Bad Taste: A Sociology of the Joke

Giselinde Kuipers. (2015). *Good humor, bad taste: A Sociology of the joke* (2nd rev. ed.). Mouton Textbook Series. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter. 282pp. ISBN: 978-1-5015-1044-1

Reviewed by Jessica Milner Davis, University of Sydney, Australia

This updated edition of Giselinde Kuipers' ground-breaking study of humor taste-cultures in The Netherlands and the USA is very welcome. As I noted in my review of the 2006 edition (*HUMOR: IJHR*, 22: 2 [2012]: 211-4), the book lays out a path for the advancement of cross-cultural studies of humor, and given a growing number of college courses on humor, it is good to see it now appearing as a Mouton Textbook (it was previously part of the Mouton Humor Research book series).

While the contents of the two volumes are roughly the same, considerable benefits are derived in this new edition from improved editing. The English text is much more readable in all chapters deriving from Kuipers' original 2001 Dutch-language study (*Goede humor, slechte smaak*, reviewed by Goldstein and Doosje in *HUMOR: IJHR*, 18: 1 [2005]: 103-124).

A new Preface is very welcome, and still more so the inclusion of footnotes which replace the previously unpaginated running list of endnotes at the back of the book. Rather than resting on past laurels, the author has taken considerable trouble to address recent scholarship, adding a number of judicious but brief comments to most chapters. Updated references are carefully incorporated into the body of the text as well as included in the final list. Thus, this edition definitively replaces the earlier one.

Nevertheless, the book's fundamental findings from its two pioneering studies have not changed. Kuipers thus continues to identify how, in two very different cultures, highbrow and popular humor tastes possess different notions of what is "good humor". These vary on such issues as whether humor should be "sociable or confrontational, hard or civilized, artistic or relaxed" (p. 100; and see pp. 82-101 for a more complete summary of the various segments and taste-styles identified in The Netherlands and pp. 218-229 for the comparative American findings). The general conclusions drawn concerning humour and social/class relations in these cultures also throw new light upon both sets of jokes being studied: i.e. the rather well-known American corpus plus the less familiar Dutch. Many of these conclusions are generalizable cross-culturally, but to this reviewer at least others are less clearly applicable to other "taste-cultures", even those that are quite closely related, for example British or Australian humour.

While it is disappointing that this new edition still omits details of the instruments used for interviews and sampling, the connections that are here mapped out between sociology and humour studies – and in particular the demonstration of how they work cross-culturally—constitute a vivid reminder of the importance of Kuipers' work and the soundness of her methods. Scholars who have followed this path include Sam Friedman with his recent *Comedy and Distinction* (Routledge: 2014); but it is Kuipers' book that deserves a place in every humor researcher's library.

Bon Mots, Jeux de Mots, Jeux sur les Mots

Brigitte Buffard-Moret, Ed. (2015). *Bons mots, jeux de mots, jeux sur les mots. De la création à la réception*. Arras: Artois Presses Université. 232 pp. ISBN 978-2-84832-221-6.

Reviewed by John Parkin, University of Bristol, UK

Preceded by their editors' brief but enlightening *Avant-propos*, this collection of thirteen chapters covers a variety of genres and periods, beginning with Philippe Jousset's treatment of the "sur-énoncé", which is a type of verbal allusion that connects with recognisable commonplaces (one example is the graffito "je dépense donc je suis", another Beckett's witticism "in the beginning was the pun"), and which serves to reinforce the fundamentally dialogic and intertextual nature of language. Françoise Rullier-Theuret turns, particularly via the author Frédéric Dard, to a (somewhat ungrammatical) analysis of puns (*calembours*) and plays on words (*jeux de mots*), a distinction perhaps hard to define. Her assertions (e.g. that we laugh louder at bad puns than at good, or that there is no such thing as involuntary comicality, ["comique involontaire"]) are also not beyond question. Joël July examines the use of linguistic *défigement* (i.e. unblocking) in the lyrics of various French song-writers including the renowned Georges Brassens. Thus stock locutions such as "jusqu'au bout des doigts" (to the fingertips) are revived by the

substitution of “dents” (teeth) for *doigts* and the evocation of sexual intimacy: the illicit lovers are about to kiss. Such verbal inventiveness is one of the many ways in which *chanson* can secure its cultural validity.

Anna Fierro moves from song to literature (and illustration) by considering Balzac’s *Contes drolatiques* as accompanied by Doré’s drawings, a collection where the author generated an invented medieval French while also challenging the Romantic view of the Middle Ages, not to mention current standards of taste. Balzac also figures strongly in Laélia Véron’s study of aggressive laughter (“La Force agonistique du rire”) given that his depictions of how wit can operate, successfully or not, in the hugely varied social contexts of the *Comédie humaine* bear important implications for the sociology and psychology of the period. Still in the 19th century, Sylvain Ledda reflects on the multiple uses of word-play in Musset’s theatre, noting for instance how it can amuse via its subversive implications, but also draw attention to tragic undertones and even to the cruelty and aggression concealed within human relations, factors of which the author was ever aware, even if his humour softened markedly in his later works perhaps as his own misanthropy declined.

Shifting into English literature, Pascale Drouet treats Shakespeare’s use of comical malapropisms, principally as committed by Elbow in *Measure for Measure*, and which may be read as a commentary on the serious action of a play whose tragic potential it helps to negate. Oddly inaccurate in her own quotations, Drouet still makes ingenious connexions between the different levels contained within a famously problematic comedy. Mariana Perişanu studies the use of nonsense, contradiction and illogicality in Ionesco’s theatre, capitalising on her own Romanian background to expose and explain some of his more obscure word-play which can reflect proverbs from his mother tongue that would escape uninitiated readers. Allied with alternative patterns of linguistic inventiveness, Ionesco’s aim, obviously enough, is to broaden theatrical language via a clowning reconstruction of the playwright’s role.

Ridha Bourkhis explores the problems of translating *jeux de mots*, noting, again obviously enough, that the task requires a full awareness of their connotations. It may seem excessive, however, to require that their translator or reader be acquainted not only with every nuance of the source language, but also with its “univers de culture” as composed of a collective imagination and a shared history and sensibility: can anyone meet those standards? The problem is revisited interestingly in Yen-Mai Tran-Gervat’s following chapter where she analyses the practicality of translating various significant puns in *Don Quixote*, including that hero’s very name. By choosing his title, Cervantes clearly implied that the Don is mad, though that connotation is entirely lost in both the French and English versions of the tale, something less true of his nickname *Caballero de la Triste Figura* given the ambiguity of the French adjective *triste* (sad or dismal?). Where the languages are more distant, as is generally the case for English versions, translation of necessity becomes more interpretative than literal, though at the regretted expense of much implicit humour. Jacques Bouyer undertakes a similarly practical approach to the translation of the Greek author Marios Hakkas, recommending that any translator should carefully respect both the phonology and the coherence of the puns with which he is faced. Only thus will a non-Greek reader be able, in this case, to appreciate the ideological conflicts that Hakkas faced and of which his word-play offers the clearest markers.

Sophie Genet turns to Freud via Lacan to investigate the psychological function of witticisms, beginning with the famous *famillionaire* pun recounted by Freud via Heine and Hirsh-Hyacinth (sic). I find that her brief (eight-page) discussion is fully derivative, accepting without question for instance Freud’s distinction of innocent from tendentious jokes and, seemingly, his implication that sexual humour is an exclusively masculine domain. Roland Dubillard, a French author whose death in 2011 went relatively unnoticed by the public at large, is subjected to an assessment by Maxence Cambron in which Freud and Lacan reappear: Dubillard was both pupil and patient to the latter. His *Diablogues* (a compendium of sketches in two volumes) form a rich source of linguistic humour including puns, paronyms, neologisms and grammatical solecisms plus an entire macaronic language of his own which gives rise to some intriguing dialogue employed in his theatre. The point is not only to amuse, but also to emphasise the independence and basic alterity of language itself.

The volume concludes with Georges Zaragoza’s survey of a series of 321 puns drawn from a year-long study of the French weekly *Télérama*. Beginning with the more than dubious pronouncement that

every linguistic utterance aims to communicate a piece of information (Jakobson please note), he immediately notes that the *jeu de mots* forms an exception. Different types of pun are exemplified and classified, particular emphasis being given to those which demand a certain cultural awareness: e.g. à propos of *Singing in the Rain* “He has grace, Kelly”, or, perhaps more demandingly and concerning the American serial *Sons of Anarchy*, “There is something rotten in the state of bikers.” Such word games, dependent on a double register, present a compliment to the discerning reader at the risk of creating a degree of cultural snobbery, called by Zaragoza the Trissotin effect, with an appropriate nod towards Molière and the French classics.

All in all a set of papers which vary in terms of depth and originality, but none of which could be dismissed as unworthy of inclusion and the best of which merit full consideration.

Wordplay and Metalinguistic/Metadiscursive Reflection

Angelika Zirker & Esme Winter-Froemel, Eds. (2015). *Wordplay and metalinguistic/metadiscursive reflection: Authors, contexts, techniques, and meta-reflection. The Dynamics of Wordplay 1.* Berlin: De Gruyter. 311 pp. ISBN: 9783110406726.

Reviewed by Villy Tsakona, University of Thrace, Greece

This is the first of two volumes opening De Gruyter’s book series on *The Dynamics of Wordplay*. The essays were first presented at a conference in Tübingen in 2013 as part of an interdisciplinary project on “Wordplay in Speaker-Hearer Interaction” bridging literary studies and linguistics.

In their introduction Angelika Zirker and Esme Winter-Froemel outline the main points of the whole endeavor:

1. to explore the metalinguistic/metadiscursive dimension of wordplay which “directs the hearer’s/reader’s attention to the message and the language itself, as it often functions as a riddle that has to be solved, and, in order to be solved, requires the hearer’s reflection about the meanings and ambiguities involved as well as about the structures of language that are playfully manipulated” (p. 8)
2. given the above, to investigate the communicative/pragmatic functions of wordplay such as creating appealing and funny literary characters, offering comic relief in serious/tragic contexts, attracting audience attention, increasing memorability, creating intertextual allusions for those “in the know”, outscoring opponents by quick-wittedness, fostering ingroupness and alienating outgroup members, building a playful atmosphere, criticizing, denigrating rules and institutions and creating new words and meanings.
3. to highlight the formal diversity and the presence of wordplay in a wide variety of genres and contexts, whether literary or everyday. It is therefore not accidental that nowhere in their introduction do the editors provide a concrete definition of wordplay: this leaves plenty of room for the authors to explore diverse perspectives applicable to their subject.

In this context, Martina Bross explores the various meanings that can be ascribed to Hamlet’s first and second lines addressed to Claudius. These meanings shed light on different aspects of their relationship, such as its paradoxical closeness and hostility, and the ambiguities created point to various pieces of knowledge related to the content or the linguocultural context of the play, thus enhancing its coherence.

Thomas Kullman discusses Shakespeare’s *Much Ado about Nothing* and Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* where wordplay is employed to display wit, mastery of language and a good education, and to create a relaxed environment in social gatherings. It is therefore considered a prominent social practice distinguishing those who were able to participate in such contexts from those (e.g. children) who wished to or had to be initiated to them.

Investigating wordplay in British Restoration and Early Eighteenth-Century comedy, Maik Goth demonstrates that it is a significant means for portraying characters as intellectually superior and verbally skillful, while the meanings involved in wordplay provide information on their relationships with others and their own moral values and social attitudes. Those who cannot play with words, on the other hand, are

denigrated and become the object of satire. Yet at that time many literary critics expressed negative attitudes towards wordplay, thus favoring an “unequivocal language” (p. 85).

Wordplay can also be used to entextualize private feelings of loss and isolation, as Sheelagh Russell-Brown suggests in her discussion of Gerard Manley Hopkins’ “Dark Sonnets”. The poet bends strict linguistic rules to lament “his loss of faith and poetic power” (p. 97). He draws on Anglo-Saxon oral/dialectal and poetic traditions as well as on German compounding mechanisms to create new – and often incongruous – words, meanings, and connotations expressing his inscape and “redesign[ing] the sonnet to accommodate [his] own private visions” (p. 113).

Vincent Renner explores the interplay between wordplay and word-formation through a morphological linguistic perspective and provides examples from various (mostly European) languages to illustrate specific mechanisms used for lexical blending. At the end he refers to the importance of deciphering the meaning of lexical blends, which process establishes “a common ground which leads to phatic bonding between the speaker/writer and hearer/reader” (p. 131).

Pierre Arnaud, François Maniez, and Vincent Renner focus on proverbs and their manipulated versions to demonstrate that the majority of modified proverbs do not actually constitute wordplay. Adapting a proverb to a specific co(n)text may achieve a variety of effects (e.g. enhancing memorability, criticism, aesthetic pleasure, establishing common ground), but this is not necessarily perceived by hearers as wordplay unless the adaptation results in some semantic complexity and a humorous effect, and shows cleverness.

Sebastian Knospe concentrates on bilingual puns, words created through the combination of elements from two different languages. The author offers an interesting sociohistorical account of the institutional status and high prestige of English in Germany to contextualize his research in German-English puns. Adopting a cognitive linguistic perspective, he explains the mechanisms of formal and conceptual blending employed in bilingual puns and the interpretative steps expected to be followed to decipher their meanings.

Johannes Kabatek builds on a discussion of puns and their translations in the comic series of *Astérix* to elaborate on wordplay as part of the discourse tradition of a language. Repetitive elements in a language tend to become traditional elements which may in turn become challenges for the interlingual transference of wordplay.

The issue of wordplay translation is further, and this time experimentally explored by Svea Schaffler who focuses on audiovisual translation to investigate to what extent parameters such as proficiency in English as L2, age, gender, the coexistence of spoken English dialogues and written subtitling, and the type of translation (information-oriented or humor-reproducing) influence audience perception and comprehension of a short English-speaking cartoon film with German subtitles.

Monika Schmitz-Evans suggests that Lewis Carroll’s mathematical thinking and expertise are behind his construction of *Alice’s* world. Besides mathematical figures, structures and spaces, Carroll draws on the philosophy of language, in particular on the arbitrary and conventional nature of linguistic signs, to create wordplay, thus highlighting the instability and unreliability of verbal communication.

Matthias Bauer concentrates on cases of secret wordplay which he tries to distinguish from open wordplay. As contrast open wordplay, secret wordplay enhances the coherence of the text without disrupting it. It contributes to the emergence of additional, not immediately obvious meanings resulting from a switching between languages, intertextual allusions, and conceptual connections, all of which bond the author with the reader and increase their sense of self-gratification.

An original and insightful addition to this collection of essays is the interview with the poet Ian Duhig whose answers bring to the surface striking similarities and intriguing differences with the analyses supplied elsewhere. Among other things he discusses the definition and poetic functions of wordplay as a “condensation of language” (p. 199) and a “way of answering back to those who have power over you” (p. 198), and his readers’ incomplete or unexpected interpretations of his own wordplay.

The metalinguistic/functional perspective of the volume is significant, given that wordplay research often has an exclusively structural/formal orientation. The variety of texts and genres examined is another strong point combined with in-depth analyses and well-argued results. Only in a few cases may the reader find it difficult to follow the arguments and points made by the authors. Sometimes the data presented and analysed may seem inadequate (e.g. to support the significance of wordplay as part of discourse

traditions), the analytical tools may not sufficiently account for the metalinguistic/functional dimensions of wordplay (e.g. strict formal analysis, mathematical concepts), and certain distinctions made (for instance between secret and open wordplay) do require more solid criteria.

And one question remains open: do readers/hearers *actually reflect* on the multiple meanings, connotations, functions or associations of wordplay? Do they *really* grasp (at least some of) these interpretations, or are these analyses merely speculations on or directives about what recipients might do when faced with wordplay? Future research could therefore delve into wordplay interpretation and perception *by the recipients*. Even so, this volume is a welcome addition to wordplay research and one which convincingly refutes earlier approaches that underestimate wordplay as trivial or merely disruptive. Hence it is a must-read for those interested in the multifunctionality of this phenomenon.

Theater and Laughter

Eric Weitz. (2016). *Theatre and laughter*. London, NY: Palgrave. 108 pp. ISBN: 9781137356086

Reviewed by Oliver Double, University of Kent, UK

Eric Weitz's admirable new book is part of Palgrave's 'Theatre &' series, a collection of small-scale volumes which aim to condense a range of cutting-edge thinking and make it accessible to any reader. The author has fulfilled the brief well, managing to cram a lot of content into *Theatre & Laughter's* hundred or so diminutive pages, and covering such ground as the evolutionary basis of laughter, the roots of theatrical comedy in Ancient Greece, play theory, categories of laughter, classic theories of comedy, ethical issues, and so on.

In order to discuss such issues he deploys a wide range of theatrical examples, embracing Beckett, Aristophanes, Jarry, Trevor Griffiths' *Comedians*, *One Man Two Guvnors*, farce, commedia dell'arte, and pantomime – not to mention stand-up comedians like Richard Pryor, Louis CK, and Sarah Silverman. In some ways the book's title is a misnomer, because it goes beyond the realm of live theatre to accommodate examples from television, including stand-up and sketch shows like *Saturday Night Live* and *Victoria Wood: As Seen on TV*, sitcoms such as *The Office* and *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, satires including *The Daily Show*, animations, *The Simpsons*, for example, and even dryly comic dramas like *Breaking Bad*.

The book does well to render its ideas and analyses fully appreciable, being mercifully free of jargon and written in a clear and lively prose which grabbed me at the first sentence and kept me on board throughout; that said, intellectually speaking it pulls no punches. Some may struggle a bit through certain passages, because Weitz readily discusses challenging and difficult ideas which at times might leave the casual reader pausing to catch his or her breath. Yet I was pleasantly surprised to find that even as somebody who has spent nearly 30 years researching in this area, I still found I was coming across new bits of information and new ideas and insights that hadn't occurred to me before. It is important to point out that the book provides more than a mere simple survey of existing ideas about comedy and comic performance, as the author chooses his own personal path through the material, adding original observations and conclusions at many points.

Indeed, I would have liked to see some of these featured more prominently. For example, on page 2 he makes a brilliant link between the social nature of laughter – as Robert Provine puts it, 'The necessary stimulus for laughter is not a joke, but another person' – and the social nature of theatre, as summed up in Peter Brook's famous assertion that, 'A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged.' However the rest of book does not quite live up to the promise of exploring as fully as it might the importance of the direct communication between co-present performers and audiences that occurs in theatre and joking, and that not least because so many of its examples are taken from television. Instead Weitz returns to Brook only briefly at the end in order to introduce a charming final passage about the subjectivity of humour appreciation.

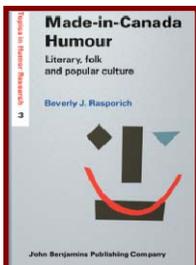
Overall *Theatre & Laughter* is a fascinating encounter with some of the key issues that arise from comic performance, and is written with the kind of brevity which provides those of us who are interested in how comedy works with a pleasant read which could be polished off in a single evening.

Recent Publications

Two New Titles in John Benjamins Topics in Humor Research Series

The John Benjamins Publishing Company provides ISHS members a 30% discount on the books in its Topics in Humor Research Series. Contact ishs@hnu.edu for details on the membership discount.

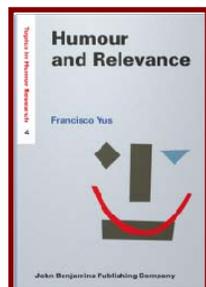
Made-in-Canada Humour



Beverly J. Rasporich. (2015). *Made in Canada humor*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 300 pp., ISBN-13: 978-9027202307

From the Publisher: *Made-in-Canada-Humour* is an interdisciplinary survey and analysis of Canadian humour and humorists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The book focuses on a variety of genres. It includes celebrated Canadian writers and poets with ironic and satiric perspectives; oral storytellers of tall tales in the country and the city; newspaper print humorists; representative national and regional cartoonists; and comedians of stage, radio and television. The humour gives voice to Canadian values and experiences, and consequently, techniques and styles of humour particular to the country. While a persistent comic theme has been joking at the expense of the United States, both countries have influenced one another's humour. Canada's unique humorous tradition also reflects its emergence from a colonial country to a postcolonial and postmodern nation with contemporary humour that addresses gender and racial issues.

Humor and Relevance



Francisco Yus. (2016). *Humor and Relevance*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 367 pp., ISBN-13: 978-9027267214

From the Publisher: This book offers a cognitive-pragmatic, and specifically relevance-theoretic, analysis of different types of humorous discourse, together with the inferential strategies that are at work in the processing of such discourses. The book also provides a cognitive pragmatics description of how addressees obtain humorous effects. Although the inferences at work in the processing of normal, non-humorous discourses are the same as those employed in the interpretation of humour, in the latter case these strategies (and also the accessibility of contextual information) are predicted and manipulated by the speaker (or writer) for the sake of generating humorous effects. The book covers aspects of research on humour such as the incongruity-resolution pattern, jokes and stand-up comedy performances. It also offers an explanation of why ironies are sometimes labelled as humorous, and proposes a model for the translation of humorous discourses, an analysis of humour in multimodal discourses such as cartoons and advertisements, and a brief exploration of possible tendencies in relevance-theoretic research on conversational humour.

Two Recent German Titles

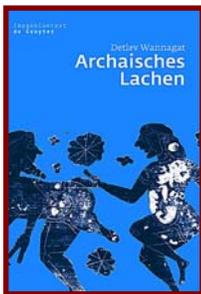
Ausgelacht: DDR-Witze aus den Geheimakten des BND



Hans-Hermann Hertle & Hans-Wilhelm Saure, Eds. (2015). *Ausgelacht: DDR-Witze aus den Geheimakten des BND*. Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag. 144pp. ISBN 978-3861538448

From Steffen Steinert, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Germany: This book is about jokes in times of persecution. In their short and accessible introduction the editors give some historical background on how the West-German intelligence service collected political jokes in order to grasp the public opinion in the GDR. The jokes printed here reflect a wide range of topics and aptly express the political and social situation the people of the GDR had to deal with. This book (only available in German) is more than a collection of political jokes told in the last years of the GDR. It is a valuable contribution to research on contemporary history and showcases how humor can be a creative answer to the oppression of freedom of speech.

Archaisches Lachen (Archaic Laughter)



Detlev Wannagat. (2015). *Archaisches Lachen: Die Entstehung eine komischen Bilderwelt in der korinthischen Vasenmalerei*. Image and Context, Vol. 3. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter. 357 pp.

From Michael Ewans, University of Newcastle, Australia: Archaic Laughter is a revised and expanded version of a dissertation submitted in 2001 to Freiburg University. The presentation is very fine; a handsome, well designed and very fully illustrated book. The work presents a study of comic images created in paintings, on vases, and in terracotta statuettes, focusing as the title suggests on artifacts from the period of activity in ancient Corinth, which began in C7 BCE. The book is in five parts; in Part I ('Starting Points'), Wannagat ventures some theorization on the form and function of the comic, discusses the overall role of comedy in ancient Greece, and then focuses in on the beginning of "eine komische Bilderwelt" ("a world of comic images") in Corinth. Part II is devoted to bodies (the figure of the cripple and exhibitionist presentations), Part III to dance and combat, and Part IV to heroes with sections on dancers in heroic attitudes, the comic hero, and the antihero. Part V is devoted to Thesen – propositions about comic narrative structures. Wannagat concludes that festive occasions, especially symposia, inspired potters to produce the highest quality artworks, as these are often found on the large kratērs which played a principal role at such events. But other decorated pots with high quality images are also found which were used on other occasions, e.g. as funerary objects. He stresses the use on many vases to comic effect of images of the ugly, the deformed and the sexually depraved, which anticipates Aristotle's equation of the comic and the ugly; and he also notes a number of vases depicting such characters aspiring to heroic roles, which would conform with Kant's incongruence theory of comedy.

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 December 2015. If you have a recent publication, let us know. We will include it in a future newsletter.

- Allen, D. (2014). Laughter really can be the best medicine. *Nursing Standard*, 28(32), 24-25.
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