

The Humorous Times

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Ralph Mueller, Editor

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Association and Conference News

Reflections on the 20th ISHS Conference in Alcalá de Henares. Spain

Gathered by Till Weingärtner, Freie University, Berlin

A report on the 2008 Conference will appear in the Fall 2008 Issue of the Humorous Times.

Raoudha Kammoun, English Department, University of Manouba, Tunisia



Although I am an ISHS-member for several years now, this has been the first time for me to take part in a humor conference. I could not dream of a more beautiful place for a conference and also a more relevant one regarding humor. It is my first trip to Spain. Alcalá de Henares is such a wonderful place.

I enjoyed Christie Davies' plenary very much since I am working on ethnic humor myself. Also the papers by Jessica Davies were outstanding. Christie showed such a great sense of humor during the whole conference. Altogether, I think I got a good overview of the current trends of humor studies in general.

Javier Muñoz-Basols, Medieval and Modern Languages, University of Oxford, England

This year's ISHS conference was the second one that I attended. Since my first one in Dijon in 2004, I have been in touch with many of the people that I met there. I have also expanded my research on translation and humor studies. Hence, I was very pleased to be able to present my latest work in Alcalá de Henares and receive immediate feedback from experts working in the field of humor and cultural studies. I was very impressed by the quality and the scope of all the presentations I attended, especially the papers delivered by the Japanese (dream) team or on Japanese humor, which I found particularly interesting and innovating. It was also very nice to meet new people who are active members of the ISHS and exchange valuable information. I hope to keep in touch with everyone I met and if by any chance you come to Oxford, please drop me a line!



Vicky Manteli, Department of English Studies, University of Athens, Greece



It was my first time taking part in an ISHS Conference. I had been doing research on the revival of Aristophanes' comedy (translation and performance) in the Department of Theatre Studies, University of Athens, Greece for four years before I learnt about the ISHS conference through a friend. I was very happy to present my paper at the panel on translation and I believe that I learnt quite a lot of things there and met some interesting people. So it has been a valuable experience for my further research projects.

I would like to thank Maribel Muñoz who was the chairperson at our session and really did a wonderful job and was quite helpful with problems at the spot. I also enjoyed the social programme which the organisers had prepared for us, especially the Siguenza visit! I don't think I can really judge all presentations since they belonged to various disciplines I am not familiar or interested in. But I would have liked to have listened to more oral presentations and maybe the Organising Committee could have worked out another planning of parallel sessions. But after this experience I am thinking about becoming a full member of the ISHS.

Junichiro Sano, Soka University, Japan

I feel lucky to be one of those who have been able to attend all ISHS conference except Chicago during the last 12 years. Everytime I join the conference, I am very moved by the hard-working staff. Our studies and delights are always supported by their great work behind the scenes. So, with respect, I would like to appreciate Alicia Gonzalez and her fellow volunteers once again. The most beautiful figure of humor can be seen in such a hearty welcome. I do believe so.



Upcoming ISHS Conferences: Long Beach (2009) & Hong Kong (2010)

The 21st ISHS Conference will be held on the campus of California State University, Long Beach, from June 17 to June 21, 2009. For more information on the Long Beach Conference, you can contact Amy Bippus, 2009 Conference Convenor, at abippus@csulb.edu.

At this Summer's Conference, the ISHS Executive Board reviewed three proposals for the Society's 22nd Conference, and after carefully consideration, selected the City University of Hong Kong for the site of the 22nd ISHS Conference to be held from June 24 to June 27, 2010. For more information on the Hong Kong Conference, you can contact Xiaodong Yue, 2010 Conference Convenor, at ssxdyue@cityu.edu.hk.

If you would like to host an ISHS Conference, the ISHS Executive Board is now entertaining proposals for the 2011 ISHS Conference in North America. Members interested in hosting the 2011 Conference should contact Martin Lampert, ISHS Executive Secretary, at ishs@hnu.edu for proposal procedures.

Recent Events

4th European Workshop on Humour Studies: Humor, Language, Culture and Media

Bertinoro, Italy, May 24-25 2007

From Maria Cristina Paganoni, Univ. of Milano, Italy

The 4th European Workshop on Humor Studies, organized by Delia Chiaro and the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies in Languages, Translation and Culture of the University of Bologna at Forlì, took place for the fourth consecutive year at the panoramic University Centre at Bertinoro, which also hosted the 14th ISHS Conference in 2002 and the three previous Humor studies workshops in 2003, 2004 and 2005. The two-day workshop focused on Humor, Language, Culture and Media and saw Frances Gray from the University of Sheffield (UK), Giseline Kuipers from the University of Amsterdam (the Netherlands), Paul Lewis from Boston College (USA) and Sharon Lockyer from Brunel University (UK) as the main guest speakers. The other participants included a group of Italian scholars and a lively group of students from the University of Bologna at Forlì. Though the workshop was slightly shorter than its past versions, it nevertheless managed to offer ample food for thought, given the relevance of its general theme.

The encompassing aim was to explore and examine different facets of Humor in the media, ranging from theoretical problems to the issues of global Humor, political problems and social change, with particular reference to whether and how Humor travels and is perceived cross-culturally by audiences.

The first afternoon was devoted to the lectures of the four speakers. Tackling Humor in British sitcoms, Frances Gray began by commenting on being English and embarrassed exemplifying this through traditional made-in-Britain materials.

Along a similar perspective, Sharon Lockyer analysed the ambiguous use of language in television comedy in relation to issues surrounding representation and identity, focusing on popular and financially successful formats such as sitcoms, sketch shows and documentaries.

At a more theoretical level, Giseline Kuipers underlined how the marketing of mass culture has turned Humor into a marketable commodity whose function is to "spice up" other forms of discourse, from advertising to politics. Acting as gatekeepers for European networks, television buyers decide what TV formats from other markets (and especially the US) are best suited to the different cultural contexts and one of the dimensions they need to take into account is indeed Humor.

Paul Lewis's plenary was dedicated to Humor and horror, especially on the other side of the Atlantic. Quoting from an illustrious predecessor, Edgar Allan Poe's *The Raven*, Lewis argued that, though Humor often has a dark side to it, horror may work in very different ways. Gothic stories, for example, move from laughter to fear, while mock Gothic texts pass from fear to laughter, hinging on a strategy of denial that makes one utter: "It's only a joke". What is emerging as a fairly new phenomenon in contemporary western culture is the relatively recent appearance of the "killing joker" character, best exemplified by Freddie Kruger in the *Nightmare on Elm Street* series. As Freddie jokes about his victims while he kills them, in a sense he is going beyond Freud (who explained Humor as an indirect form of aggressiveness) since he releases both violence and laughter. A similar psychological pattern is retraceable in *The Silence of the Lambs*. At this point Lewis quoted Anthony Giddens' *Consequences of Modernity*: in a world in which people increasingly feel out of control, Humor becomes a way to detach oneself from humanity and, as such, is very ambivalent.

The following morning started with a delightful workshop led by Frances Gray that saw all participants take up fake identities, working first in pairs and then performing to the entire group. After picking a card from a deck passed around, the main task was to attempt to raise one's status or to bring down one's partner's, according to the value of the card in one's hands. A number of very funny exchanges took place in which Delia Chiaro, in particular, showed all her histrionic talents.

Paul Lewis then expanded on a number of media-driven Humor events from the global conflicts resulting from the distribution of the Danish cartoons to the popularity of fake-news comic characters (such as Borat) and spoof websites (such as The White House.org). Lewis stressed how the current eruption of joke and anti-joke response in the US political sphere was fuelled by the Iraq war. Again, he claimed that the function of Humor can be extremely ambiguous, as it can reinforce stereotypes and trivial forms of debate instead of contesting them, and invoked an ethical scrutiny of Humor.

In the afternoon the media scene was dominated by the *Simpsons* under Sharon Lockyer's guidance. After watching an episode of the series, group work followed aimed at identifying the main narrative frames of the video and explaining the visual and verbal humorous devices that kept them together. The several Italian students attending the workshop all showed their sensitivity to the workings of Humor in the sphere of the media, especially to its production and reception according to culture-specific factors that have to be borne in mind in any act of linguistic and cultural translation.

Giselinde Kuipers concluded the workshop by illustrating the findings that have emerged through her recent research carried out across Europe in which she delves into the world of the whys and wherefores of European TV channels when they go shopping for sitcoms.

Upcoming Events

Conference of the Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor

Las Vegas, April 2-5, 2009.

The next Conference of the Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor will take place at The Riviera Hotel in Las Vegas. For more information, please visit the Internet on <http://aath.org/conference.htm>.

Second International Conference on Cross-cultural Humor: Images, Aspects and Languages

Lucca, Italy, Fondazione Nazionale Carlo Collodi, 6-8 April, 2009.

Submit a title and a summary of up to 250 words to fondazione@collodi.it, on behalf of Prof. Daniela Mareschi. Presentation languages are Italian, Portuguese, English and French.



*For more ISHS news and upcoming events,
visit us on the web at www.humorstudies.org.*

Remembrance

George Carlin (May 12, 1937 – June 22, 2008)

George Carlin, internationally renowned star of stand-up comedy, died on June 22 in Santa Monica, California. He was best known for his “Seven Words You Can Never Say on Television” routine which resulted in a late 1970s court case. Jerry Seinfeld wrote a beautiful tribute to George Carlin, which can be found online in the June 24, 2008 issue of the *New York Times* at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/24/opinion/24seinfeld.html>.

New Books on Humor

Alastair Clarke: *The Pattern Recognition Theory of Humour*. Pyrrhic House, Cumbria 2008.

Pattern Recognition Theory of Humor promises an “analytically justifiable explanation of any instance of humor”.

Drawing on evolutionary psychology Clarke explains humor by the reward of recognizing abstract patterns.

Special issue on humor: *Lodz Papers in Pragmatics*. The articles are available on-line, free of charge at <http://versita.metapress.com/content/120719/>. A printed version will be available in December.

Contributions and Submissions

Next issue is due in Fall 2008. Please send information, member news, contributions and announcements to ralph.mueller@unifr.ch!