

The Humorous Times

Newsletter of the International Society for Humor Studies

Fall 2014

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Association News

2014 ISHS Membership and Finances

Martin Lampert, ISHS Secretary-Treasurer



The International Society for Humor Studies had a good year in 2014 with 262 affiliates, including 253 new and returning members and 9 additional Board Members and Consulting Editors of the journal, *HUMOR*. At the October 31 close of 2014 membership, the Society was financially sound with 55,300.73 in unaudited revenue including 36,304.73 carried over from 2013 and \$18,996.00 from 2014 membership dues and fees. Operating expenses through October included 192.92 for recognition awards and an estimated 14,684.00 for membership subscriptions to *HUMOR: International Journal for Humor Research*. Revenue over expenses by the end of 2014 is estimated to be 40,423.81.

Between December 1, 2013 and October 31, 2014, Holy Names University received an additional \$1917.15 for the ISHS Scholarship fund. From this fund, the Society made one \$530 and three \$280 awards in 2014 to graduate students who attended the 26th ISHS Conference in Utrecht in the Netherlands. As always, I would like to thank the members who made contributions to the ISHS Scholarship Fund, and I would like to encourage others to make donations with their 2014 membership applications.

We look forward to another great year in 2015 with the publication of the 28th volume of *HUMOR* and the Society's 27th international conference to be held at Holy Names University in Oakland, California from June 29 to June 3, 2015. You can register and submit paper proposals for the 2015 Conference online through the Society's website, www.humorstudies.org. For Conference information, you can also write to Conference Registration at ishs2015@hnu.edu or write to the ISHS Executive Secretary at ishs@hnu.edu. If you would like to host a future ISHS Conference, you can contact me for more information on how to submit a Conference proposal.

In past years, the Fall issue of the *Humorous Times*, provided an ISHS Membership application; however, you will not find a membership application with this newsletter as we have gone online! To apply for 2015 Membership, please visit the membership page on the Society's website at www.humorstudies.org. On the membership page, you will find a link that will allow you to renew your membership. You can also renew your membership online with 2015 Conference registration on the Conference registration page. If you require a paper application form, contact the ISHS at ishs@hnu.edu. On the online application forms, you will notice the Society's current fee structure, which allows for membership with either a print or online

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Next Issue

The next *The Humorous Times* is due February 2015.

subscription to the Society's journal, *HUMOR*. For 2015, membership is \$110 with a print subscription and \$69 with an online subscription. Please note that online renewal includes a 3% plus \$1 processing fee. However, regular members who renew before January 31, will can take a \$5 discount on dues, allowing everyone to renew early with an online journal subscription for just \$65 plus processing. If you do not wish to receive the journal, but do wish to be a member to receive our other benefits, you can still join ISHS as an Associate member for just \$30 plus processing.

Finally, thank you for your support of the International Society for Humor Studies. Your participation in ISHS helps to advance the importance of humor research and, as always, is greatly appreciated.

2015 International Society for Humor Studies Conference

Holy Names University, Oakland, California, June 29 – July 3, 2015



The 27th Conference of the International Society for Humor Studies will be held from June 29 to July 3, 2015, at Holy Names University, overlooking the San Francisco Bay, in Oakland, California. Conference activities will begin on Monday, June 29, with a pre-conference workshop on the history, research, and applications of comedic improvisation. The Conference will open officially in the afternoon with a Conference welcome followed by a plenary session on Judiciary Humor. The first day will continue with a roundtable on humor in animation art with artists from Pixar Animation Studios and the San Francisco Cartoon Museum. Tuesday, June 30 to Friday, July 3 will be full conference days with plenary addresses, symposia, workshops, and paper sessions. Twelve humor studies associations from around the world will hold symposia, and the conference will host a one-act comedy competition across the first four evenings.

The 2015 ISHS conference invites research papers, symposia, and workshops on humor within the thematic areas of (1) Cognition and Creativity, (2) Public and Private Discourse, (3) Individual Styles, (4) Culture, Gender, and Diversity, and (5) Health and Well-Being. We also invite submissions for the one-act comedy competition. **The deadline for all submissions is March 15, 2015.** Registration, submission, and accommodation information is now available through www.humorstudies.org and on the Conference website at www.hnu.edu/ishs/ISHS2015. Inquiries can be sent to the ISHS Executive Secretary and Conference Convener, Martin Lampert at ishs@hnu.edu or to Conference at ishs2015@hnu.edu.

Upcoming Events

2014 Conference of the American Humor Studies Association & the Mark Twain Circle of America

Sheraton Four Points Hotel, New Orleans, Louisiana, USA, December 4-7, 2014

The American Humor Studies Association and the Mark Twain Circle of America will convene their joint quadrennial at the Sheraton Four Points Hotel in New Orleans. For more information visit the [AHSA website](http://www.ahsa.org) or contact, Janice McIntire-Strasburg, Saint Louis University, at mcintire@slu.edu.

Twenty-First AHSN Colloquium

Flinders Institute for Research in the Humanities, Adelaide, South Australia, February 4-6, 2015

The 21st Colloquium of the Australasian Humour Studies Network (AHSN) will be held from February 4 to 6, 2015 at the Flinders Institute for Research in the Humanities in Adelaide, South Australia. The conveners are Christine Nicholls, Robert Phiddian, Colette Mrowa-Hopkins, and Antonella Strambi. The conference theme will be Humour: Politics, Pragmatics, Ethics. For more information, contact Dr. Christine Nicholls at christine.nicholls@flinders.edu.au or visit the AHSN website at <http://www.sydney.edu.au/humourstudies>.

Fifth Texas Humor Research Conference

Texas A & M University–Commerce, Texas, USA, February 20-22, 2015

The 5th Texas Humor Research Conference invites submissions for a multidisciplinary conference in Rockwall, TX. The conference theme will be “Humor and Pedagogy” and the conference will include an opening plenary, paper sessions, posters, and workshops. Paper proposals can be sent to

CHSSA@tamuc.edu. The submission deadline is December 15, 2014. For inquiries, contact the Conference Organizers, Christian Hempelmann at c.hempelmann@tamuc.edu or Owen Lynch at olynch@mail.smu.edu, or visit <http://web.tamu-commerce.edu/academics/colleges/humanitiesSocialSciencesArts/nethrc/>.

Forty-First Annual Meeting of The Association for the Study of Play

University of San Antonio, San Antonio, Texas, USA, March 4-7, 2015

The 41st Annual Meeting of The Association for the Study of Play will be held from March 4 to 7, 2015 at the University of San Antonio, San Antonio, Texas, USA. The 2015 TASP Conference's theme will be *Play across the Lifespan*. The proposal deadline is November 14, 2014. For information, contact Eva Nwokah at playconference2015@ollusa.edu or visit the TASP website at www.tasplay.org/about-us/conference.

Twenty-Eighth Meeting of the Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA, May 29-31, 2015

The 28th Conference of the Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor will be held May 29-31, 2015 at the Penn's Landing Hyatt Regency in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA. The theme of the 28th AATH Conference will be *Stayin' Alive: Keeping Your Brain Healthy & Active with Humor*. For more information, visit the AATH Conference page at <http://www.aath.org>.

Fifteenth International Summer School and Symposium on Humour and Laughter

Saint Petersburg, Russia, July 13-18, 2015

The 15th International Summer School and Symposium on Humour and Laughter will be held in Saint Petersburg, Russia from July 13 to July 18. Alyona Ivanova and Sergei Troitckii are the organizers. For more information, visit the summer school website at <http://humoursummerschool.org/15/>.

Book Reviews

Shakespeare's Great Stage Fools

From Penny Gay, Emeritus Professor, University of Sydney

Robert H. Bell. (2011). *Shakespeare's Great Stage of Fools*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 186 pp. USD 128.

The cover image of this book has to be one of the funniest I have ever encountered. It's a typically dry *New Yorker*-style cartoon - no caption needed - showing a jester about to be guillotined, attended by an impassive executioner. We eventually realise that the head will fall into a small, perfectly-positioned custard pie. This is blackly funny, and as Bell argues in this engaging book, 'nobody minds because the clown is a pretend person, a diverting interlude' (10). The tradition of the medieval jester in literature means that he is never a 'real' person in whatever narrative he inhabits but is simultaneously outside of, looking in. So our withers are unwrung, and our sense of humour is mightily tickled by the sheer aptness of the visual joke.

Bell's other images sprinkled throughout the book are, if not as amusing, very informative. Various Dürer illustrations, for example, make it clear that the cap, bells and bauble were indeed standard motley for medieval fools. It is regrettable that Bell chose to reproduce a Victorian imagining of Rosalind and Touchstone without acknowledging its anachronicity, but otherwise these pictures add a good historic grounding to the argument, which begins, as one would expect, with Erasmus' *Praise of Folly* as a point of reference, and moves quickly on to Shakespeare's complicating of this model over the course of his playwriting career.

Bell has a light and felicitous prose style; he is not averse to making jokes himself, and there is a corker in note 19 to chapter 4, a piece of po-faced pastiche about the plot of *Much Ado* worthy of the great master himself, James Joyce, on whom Bell has previously written. This stylistic ease makes the book a relaxing

and engaging read, even though much of its substance (as opposed to its theoretical base) is basic close reading in order to develop a case for the complexity of the fools in Shakespeare's oeuvre. There are too many valuable insights to quote at length, but from his reminder of the comic genius of the scenes between Launce and his dog in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, through the great romantic comedies, to Falstaff's place in the story of Prince Hal/Henry V, to the more problematic 'dark comedies' and tragedies, he rarely fails to provide a thought-provoking comment. Theory is here, but it sits lightly:

Nowadays fools ... [are] carnivalesque lords of liminality, demons of deconstruction, and purveyors of subversion. Fools illustrate Shakespeare's hybridity and liminality, grotesque or monstrous amalgamations, dialectics of high and low, excess or extravagance, resistance to resolution, antic discombobulation, and infinite supplementarity. (5)

Bell's analyses of Puck, Bottom, Touchstone, Feste and Falstaff are particularly felicitous. He notes that these are characters who don't exist in Shakespeare's source material – so we can use them to help develop an idea of Shakespeare's theory of comedy, if we wish. Bell's arguments and examples are a good starting-point (there are other plays, he acknowledges, that he would like also to have included: *The Merchant of Venice* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, for example). Which brings us to the point, who is this book for?

Clearly Bell is a fine teacher, and much of this material will have been developed in class work with his students. Young scholars beginning (bravely) to explore a dissertation on Shakespeare and comedy, or the single plays discussed by Bell, will find him a clear and thought-provoking interlocutor. There is a useful glossary of comedy-related terms at the end ('A Rhetoric of Fooling'). As I was reading, it seemed to me that a non-traditional readership could find a great deal of value in the book: directors and actors in companies who are perhaps not all that familiar with Shakespeare. The subtlety of Shakespeare's clowns is laid out for them to see and savour, even if they then decide to do something else with them in the staging. There is a fine example (obviously close to Bell's heart) in the discussion of the disguised Rosalind's 'flyting' with Orlando:

Tempting as it may be to envision the heroine on top for once or at last, zeal to lionize Rosalind and deprecate Orlando may overlook a game-changing possibility that Orlando is *also* fooling – or feigning. In addition to redeeming the hero's tattered honor, this hypothesis sets up an elaborate hall of mirrors, magnifying reflection and self-reflection ... (67)

and, of course, providing a satisfying image for a modern audience of a well-matched, witty and knowing, romantic pair. I can attest that this idea works, having seen it in performance at a recent Shakespeare's Globe production in London. It was so charming and gave the play such a sexy zing (and a lot more complex comic moments) that I had to go back and see it a second time. As Bell sums up in his epilogistic discussion of Shakespeare's epilogues, 'Irreverent and naughty, laughing and teasing, coaxing and flirting, Rosalind cajoles audiences into self-indulgence, pleasure, and irresponsibility — pleasure in the highest degree!' (129)

Critical Approaches to Comics: Theories and Methods

From Villy Tsakona, *Democritus University of Thrace, Greece*

Matthew J. Smith & Randy Duncan, Editors. (2011). *Critical Approaches to Comics: Theories and Methods*. New York, NY: Routledge. 328 pp. Paper: USD 50.98, ISBN 978-0-415-88555-3; Cloth: USD 160, 978-0-415-88554-6.

Etymology reminds us of the close relation between *comics* as a genre and *the comic* as a plesionym of humor. Comics originally narrated humorous stories, but this no longer seems to be the case. The meanings of words change in time and sometimes in unexpected if not mysterious ways. The words *comics* and *comic books* nowadays refer to "tales of heroic deeds, humorous events, love stories, space adventures, and so on" (p. 104) consisting of "a series of snapshots that [give] us not only the outside picture of what is going on [in the tale] but the inner images, or inner dialogues of the characters" (p. 104). So the question is, why should a collection of papers on comics without a specific focus on humor be worth introducing to humor scholars. In what follows I shall try to argue that the volume presented here could be an inspiring piece of scholarship for anyone interested in the analysis of humorous genres.

It comprises 21 chapters categorized into 5 parts entitled *Form, Content, Production, Context* and *Reception*, and aimed at critically exploring diverse aspects of comic books and analyzing a wide range of data. Each chapter involves a distinct theoretical and methodological perspective. As a result the book illustrates the interdisciplinarity of the field of Comics Studies and, more specifically, includes chapters that apply various approaches such as semiotics, genre theory, narratology, auteur criticism, journalism, feminism, philosophy, political economy, history and cultural history, ethnography and critical ethnography. The diversity of theoretical approaches will appeal not only to readers interested in different aspects of the production, interpretation and dissemination of comics, but also, and most importantly in the present context, to humor researchers. Although studies of the form and content of humorous texts are common within humor research, ethnographic or political economic approaches to humor production and reception are not. In general, the diversity of the volume could inspire humor researchers aiming at offering an interdisciplinary analysis of humorous genres, whether multimodal or not.

Another strong aspect of the book is the structure of its chapters. All the authors follow more or less the same pattern, as is highlighted by the (often identical) titles of the subsections: after briefly presenting their own point of view and topic, they offer an elaborate discussion of their underlying theoretical assumptions and the methods employed, so that it will be clear even to undergraduate students with no research experience how each discipline works. This is further supported by rich bibliographies and a thorough analysis of a particular example. Despite the strict, easy-to-follow of the chapters, most of them lack – perhaps owing to space limits – a final subsection summarizing their analysis and content such as might open areas for further research.

Also missing is one chapter that would focus on humor *per se*. Humor appears to be an important aspect of comics, be it as an ingredient in their plots and dialogues (e.g. in *Astérix*) or as surfacing occasionally in punchlines or visual gags used in ostensibly serious comics like *Superman*. Hence it would be worth exploring the multiple functions of humor in comics from a critical perspective, namely as a means of attracting readers, constructing the identities of the characters, naturalizing specific sociopolitical views and ideologies, playing with reader expectations about the established conventions of the genre, etc.

Nevertheless, the discussion of humor is not totally absent from the book. Beronă (Chapter 1, p. 21) acknowledges that punning is an essential meaning-making feature in cartoons, while, more importantly, Witek (Chapter 2, pp. 28-41) discusses the influence of humorous cartoons on visual representation in both humorous and serious comics. He distinguishes between the *cartoon mode* which “grows out of caricature” and is based on “simplification and exaggeration” (p. 28), and the *naturalistic mode* which “derives from the recreation of physical appearances in realistic illustration” (p. 28). The detailed description of the two stylistic modes accounts for the significant semiotic differences between humorous and non-humorous comics which often go unnoticed by humor researchers, who tend to focus on humorous multimodal texts without comparing them to non-humorous ones. More interestingly still, Rifas (Chapter 16) concentrates on a particularly striking instance of a public debate that erupted over a humorous text considered controversial owing to its humorous and/or racist content. He offers an “ideological analysis” (p. 223) of Hergé’s *Tintin in the Congo*, which in 2007, i.e. more than 60 years after its first publication, caused an online war of comments between on the one hand those who defended freedom of expression and the fictional and humorous nature of the book, and on the other those who protested against the racist representation of the Congolese people and culture. The arguments raised by both sides are strongly reminiscent of those expressed in similar debates (e.g. Kramer 2011, Stewart 2013, Tsakona 2013), while their insightful analysis reflects a highly significant case-study which has not, to my knowledge, been previously discussed in humor literature.

My final comment suggests how the authors’ analyses and findings might benefit those who primarily support the comic book industry, namely children and young people. The volume could have been complemented with a chapter on the use of comics in education as a means of cultivating student literacy (e.g. Bakis 2012). Popular culture has infiltrated school textbooks for some time now and comic books, among other genres, have been used to cultivate students’ linguistic skills. Given that many of these chapters emphasize the visual aspects of comics, and all of them adopt a critical perspective, the observations and findings that here emerge could assist both teachers and students in reading between the lines and images of comics, thus contributing to a more in-depth and critical interpretations of such texts.

Comics have been long considered unworthy of scholarly attention, a “‘subliterate’ form of cultural expression” (p. 3) or even a “monumental waste of time” (p. 1). Defying such views and driven by their “desire for a place where comics can be taken seriously” (p. 2), the contributors to this volume argue convincingly for the creation of “a discipline called Comics Studies” (p. 1) such as could interact valuably with the discipline of humor research.

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- Kramer, E. (2011). The playful is political: The metapragmatics of internet rape-joke arguments. *Language in Society*, 40, 137-168.
- Stewart, C. O. 2013. Strategies of verbal irony in visual satire: Reading *The New Yorker's* “Politics of Fear” cover. *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research*, 26, 197-217.
- Tsakona, V. (2013). Okras and the metapragmatic stereotypes of humour: Towards an expansion of the GTVH. In M. Dynel (ed.), *Developments in linguistic humour theory* (pp. 25-48). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Prosody and Humor

From Marta Dynel, University of Łódź, Poland

Salvatore Attardo, Manuela Maria Wagner, & Eduardo Urios-Aparisi, Editors. (2013). *Prosody and Humor*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. Benjamins Current Topics, No. 55. 192 pp. Hardback: ISBN 9789027202758. E-book: ISBN 9789027271181. EUR 85.00; USD 128.00.

This volume edited by Attardo, Wagner and Urios-Aparisi addresses the very interesting topic of prosody and humor, a burgeoning area of interdisciplinary investigation. In each of the eight chapters, preceded by an introduction by the editors, the authors consider the prosodic and multimodal features which are thought to mark or create humour. Whilst addressing this general theme, the papers also display a rich variety in terms of specific research topics, language data sources, theoretical approaches, and methodologies deployed by the authors, as evidenced by the very succinct presentation of the chapters below.

Henry S. Cheang and Marc D. Pell report findings of their study on whether or not speaker intentions concerning sarcasm, sincerity, humorous irony, or neutrality that are conveyed through prosody in an unfamiliar language (English or Cantonese) can be accurately recognised. Salvatore Attardo, Lucy Pickering and Amanda Baker conduct a case study of the prosody and multimodality of conversational humor, which is juxtaposed with narrative canned humour. In their ethnographic study, supportive of the encryption account, Thomas Flamson, Gregory A. Bryant and H. Clark Barrett examine the acoustic features of spontaneous humorous utterances in communal business meetings in Portuguese on a rural Brazilian collective farm. Christy Bird explores prosodic cues in wh-questions (those that begin with which/why/when etc) in riddles told in interaction vis-à-vis questions in ordinary conversation, the primary focus being on the differences in pitch. Gregory A. Bryant champions a form-function method of investigation into verbal irony in spontaneous conversations, indicating the full spectrum of cues accompanying irony. In her cognitively-orientated chapter, Ann Wennerstrom proposes that two patterns of intonation (the intonation of contrast and the intonation of given information) conflict with lexical and syntactic structure, thereby fostering the humorous incongruity in chosen canned and spontaneous jokes. Roxane Bertrand and Béatrice Priego-Valverde present a Conversation Analytic study of conversational humor in recorded interactions in French in order to tease out the underlying sequentially organised devices (reported speech and repetition) and prosodic cues involved in them. Finally, Eduardo Urios-Aparisi and Manuela Maria Wagner study the role of pitch and pausing as humour markers, which are seen as communicative strategies operating on several levels of interaction and also as characterisation tools in a television series entitled *Sex and the City*.

The papers included in this collection were previously published in a prestigious journal (a Special Issue of *Pragmatics & Cognition*, except for the last paper released in the same journal in issue 19.3). This fact is

both a merit and a shortcoming of this volume (as it is of some of the other volumes in the Benjamins Current Topics series, which specialises in publishing special issues of established journals). On the one hand, the chapters show high academic quality, having undoubtedly undergone very strict reviewing. On the other hand, a query may arise as to whether the book will find many buyers, given that its contents are widely available in the journal, which is both printed and publicised online, whilst the individual papers can be easily traced thanks to the authors' prominence in humour studies. All the same, the papers are worthy of perusal. They will be of crucial importance to researchers and students with interests in the prosody of humour, and they are bound to inspire academic discussions on this topic.

Rires Africains et Afropéens [The Laughters of Africa and Afro-Europe]

From Peter Hawkins, University of Bristol, United Kingdom

Rémi Astruc, Editor. (2013, Autumn). Rires Africains et Afropéens [The Laughters of Africa and Afro-Europe]. *Humoresques* (Vol. 38, Special Issue). 194 pp.

Humour has been a common literary strategy in dealing with the contradictions and paradoxes of the postcolonial situation for a generation of African writers, and this collection of articles provides a useful survey of the variety of comic approaches deployed by Francophone authors in response. Many of them are now living in exile in Europe and North America, and some were born and raised in the context of European cities: hence the invention by Léonora Miano of the label 'Afropean' to account for the particularity of their experiences.

The authors covered include some of the best-known figures of recent African writing in French, such as the novelists Alain Mabanckou and Calixthe Beyala, as well as some less familiar names such as the playwrights Kossi Efoui and Koffi Kwahule and the novelist Sami Tchak. The range of reference is not exclusively Francophone, however: comparisons are drawn with well-known Anglophone writers such as Wole Soyinka and the contemporary West Indian novelist Zadie Smith. Not surprisingly the humour analysed is often satirical, as in the comparison drawn by Christina Horvath between the sophisticated London-based Afropeans chronicled by Zadie Smith in *NW* and those of Paris by Léonora Miano in *Blues pour Elise*. The satire can sometimes be caustic and virulent, as in Sami Tchak's novel *Place des Fêtes*, compared by Rémi Astruc with the Céline of *Voyage au bout de la nuit* and *Mort à Crédit*. Andrew Asibong draws into the frame the novels of Marie Ndiaye, who has always refused to be situated in the orbit of African and postcolonial writing, but whose fictions betray a bitter humour described here as a 'blank laughter'.

The humour of Calixthe Beyala's novels is described by Daniel Larangé as being both 'black' and 'white', comments that reflect the grotesque characters she evokes and the hollow ridicule of the situations she recounts. The humour of Alain Mabanckou, as described by Violaine Houdart-Mérot, is more literary, and arises from the narrative conventions skillfully sustained in novels such as the *Memoirs of a Porcupine* in which the narrator is the totem animal of an African village murderer. The essays are not restricted to literary material, however, and include Alain Cyr Pangop's wide-ranging survey of contemporary African popular theatre and an analysis by Marie Fremin of a daringly comic treatment of the issue of slavery in the film *Case Départ*. The collection is rounded off by some more sociological studies, including Delphine Chaume-Japhet's account of some journalistic cartoons from the Congo, which suffers somewhat from the absence of any reproductions of the drawings discussed.

The last two articles, by Inès Pasqueron de Fommervault and Marie-Madelaine Bertucci, undertake a more anthropological investigation into the functioning of humorous insults and their role in community relations. Bertucci's article in particular analyses the banter of young urban blacks and the multiple influences that create this complex verbal form of humour. In broad terms this collection reflects a considerable richness and diversity in the practice of humour in recent African-inspired cultures from which, however, it is difficult to extract any general conclusions. Few common approaches or shared methodologies emerge from the articles such as might enable a broader synthesis, but the impression of vitality and vigorous intelligence remains, in both the subject matter and the analyses it inspires.

The Senses of Humour/Les Sens de l'Humour.

From John Parkin, University of Bristol, United Kingdom

Eugenia Zuroski Jenkins & Patrick Coleman, Editor. (2014, Summer). The Senses of Humour/Les Sens de l'Humour. *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* (Vol. 26, No. 4).ISSN 0840-6286; E-ISSN 1911-0243.

The editors introduce this special number of *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* by noting how notions of pain and suffering are endemic within the humour of their period; a classic case in point might be the much anthologized *Modest Proposal* whose author indeed forms the subject of the first article they include. Otherwise they are keen to re-examine how the Galenic notion of humour was accommodated, consciously or not, to the comical writings and indeed images of a period in which French and English humorists differed significantly. The latter are still found lauding the colourful British eccentric, even though the festive connotations of carnival laughter have diminished, while their Gallic cousins, including by adoption Casanova, remain much darker in their comic perspectives, witness Diderot, the somewhat agelastic Rousseau, and the problematic nature of salon wit, a humorous mode often as aggressive as it was entertaining.

Considering Swift's *A Tale of a Tub* Katie Lanning observes how, for its author, humour connotes fancy, whim and thus impermanence, his text itself concealing a meaningless centre under digressions and fragmentations that later and posthumous editions only increased. However Swift also uses the word in its modern sense of a mode of writing that, in his case, enhances a satire intended to be curative rather than merely punitive. Vivian Davis turns to theatre for her subject matter, contrasting Addison's classical sense of tragedy with Colley Cibber's awareness of how, witness Shakespeare, that genre could accommodate humour. Despite his flawed reputation, Cibber was a genuine man of the theatre, and as an actor one fully responsive to audience reaction and whose taste for bawdy merriment harks back to the Restoration, witness his romping burlesque of Lee's *The Rival Queens* entitled *The Rival Queens*.

Douglas Duhaime returns to the physiological meaning of humour when considering Smollett, for whom the circulation of the bodily fluids (a process described somewhat too frequently) is vital for the health of both the human body and the State, a point that emerges from his medical studies, his fiction and his political and economic theories in all of which he underlines the importance of humoral equilibrium. Humour in the modern sense, however, barely figures in Duhaime's treatment, while David Francis Taylor's reading of Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* illustrates amply the link between violence and 18th century satire, and that more significantly in how it concentrates on a female protagonist's deployment, in both personal and political terms, of what was conventionally seen as a masculine cultural mode, namely satiric caricature.

Concentrating on terminology rather than literary analysis, François Lavie seeks to trace the evolution of the English concept of humour from the 16th to the 18th centuries, noting how an association with, again, the medical term came to be doubled by a sense whereby humour became merely a category within that which stimulates amusement. Wit, in contrast, never bore medical connotations, though throughout this period it grew perceptibly closer in meaning to its sister term, even if a theorist such as Corbyn Morris still distinguished between them, and in the process created the important category of the benevolent humorist, richly represented in English authors of the period and beyond. Turning to the subject of black humour, Erik Leborgne examines some striking examples drawn from Casanova's *Memoirs* and Diderot's writings, subtly analysed with a predominantly Freudian apparatus: he opines that such readings might help to clarify the difficult but highly significant article "L'Humour" published in the *Encyclopédie*.

Still in the French eighteenth century Marco Menin analyses Rousseau's thoughts on humour reckoning that, despite his reputed mirthlessness, he valued "le véritable rire" as a moral reaction connoting a gaiety fully worthy of "la socialité humaine" (sic: p. 706), whilst the contrasting "rireraille" derives from negative aspects of self-regarding superiority as experienced by Jean-Jacques in (need one say?) the Parisian salons. This reaction is amply supported by Dominique Hölzle's examination of refined society in the 18th century where he discerns a corruption of the witty gallantry and *bel esprit* prized in the classical period. Hence perhaps Voltaire's hesitation, shared with others, concerning the actual definition of the word *esprit* and his distinction (q.v. again the *Encyclopédie*) of the praiseworthy *homme d'esprit* from the more ambiguously described *bel-esprit* and the obviously damnable, wisecracking *faux-esprit* whose unintelligent puns merely impede proper conversation. Hölzle admits, moreover, with textual proofs to hand, that the antisocial desire to dominate a company always figured in the mentality of the salon wit.

Turning from text to image, Frank Felsenstein examines a print by Rowlandson entitled “Peter Plumb’s Diary”, dated 1810 and readable superficially as a crude indictment of English bourgeois mercantilism, though he admires the relative lightness of the artist’s caricatures as contrast the Juvenalian spirit of Hogarth, and his detailed analysis certainly elucidates some intriguing and easily missed social and psychological implications. Misty Anderson’s companion piece entitled “Unholy Laughter” completes the collection by commenting on a series of prints relevant to eighteenth-century religion and which formed part of an exhibition entitled “Sacred Satire” held in Connecticut in 2011. They mirror important changes in the state of the Anglican Church at that time, with the rise of Methodism and the enthusiasts it encouraged, the increase in social mobility which jeopardized the parish system, and a revived anti-Catholicism reflected particularly in Hogarth’s satires of religious imagery.

One might find it hard to identify the playwright Farquahr (p. 633), and wonder whether Swift actually imagined Aristotle “hizzing” an arrow over Bacon’s head (p. 519), or if the character Sempronious really figures in Addison’s *Cato*, though these are minor slips, just like the misdating of Descartes’ *Passions de l’âme* on p. 700. The only serious misquotation concerns Locke on p.641, and the few grammatical errors that arise never impede one’s understanding of a balanced, thoroughly argued and illuminating series of contributions.

Seriously Funny: Mexican Political Jokes as Social Resistance

From Christie Davies, University of Reading, United Kingdom

Samuel Schmidt. (2014). *Seriously Funny: Mexican Political Jokes as Social Resistance*. Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press. 279 pp. USD 39.95.

Samuel Schmidt is to be congratulated on having written a detailed study of Mexican political jokes that relates them to the history and political leadership of that authoritarian country. It is a worthwhile project and has produced a comprehensive book. However, because Mexico is not a totalitarian dictatorship with a sophisticated population as the former Soviet Union was, the jokes are not ‘seriously funny’ in the way the Soviet ones were. Nor are the jokes anything like as insightful or revealing.

William Beezley writes in the blurb on the cover that “Mexicans have the best, most biting and most bitter humor in the world.” They certainly do not have anything like the best or the most biting humour; that honour goes to the Jews, who of course invented many of the old Soviet jokes and Samuel Schmidt, who is Jewish, should have pointed this out to Beezley. However, the Mexican jokes are probably the most bitter, bitter because deep down the jokers know that it is not just their politicians who have failed but the Mexican people. The Mexican combination of machismo, mistrust, corruption, untruthfulness, xenophobia and unreliability that underlies the jokes is a recipe for self-destruction. Some of the jokes reveal this. They are as much about the personal shortcomings of the citizens as about political resistance.

What are the three lies of the Mexican?

“I’ll pay you tomorrow.”

“It’s not going to hurt.”

“We’ll get married soon.” [p.75]

The section ‘What does the Mexican Laugh At?’ is indeed depressing but then so are those classics of Mexican humour the skeletal images created by José Guadalupe Pasada and the coarse *Picardia Mexicana*. Even if the political system were reformed the society beneath is odious for the serpent has strangled and eaten the eagle. The jokes are bitter because the people have a lot to be bitter about. For many the only option is migration to the United States where they end up at the bottom of the social order and the subject of ethnic jokes

What do you get when you cross a Mexican with an octopus?

I don’t know but it sure picks tomatoes fast with all those arms. [p.89]

Mexico is an authoritarian society in which some of the forms of democracy are present but where in practice the members of a relatively closed elite seem to do all the winning. There are opportunities for commercial enterprise but political connections are vital which is why Mexico City, which is the real seat of government, is enormously and disastrously larger than any other urban centre, including Monterrey, whose

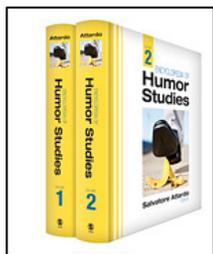
businesslike citizens, the Regiomontanos, are the subject of jokes about being canny. There is censorship but its extent is uncertain. There are fewer rigid certainties to mock which is why the jokes invented by the urban elite are neither as extensive nor as insightful as those in the former Soviet Union. Many of the jokes are generic switchable ones that move from country to country. Many are like indeed reminiscent of the old Soviet ones and the author has noted many similarities. I would go further and say that the ones held in common are of Soviet origin and moved to Mexico and never in the other direction. In which case Beezley's claim that Mexican jokes are the best looks even more untenable.

Rather the jokes tend to focus on the stupidities and foibles and thieving of particular named individual politicians which rather reduces their appeal to foreigners who have no reason for knowing anything about them. For the outside the targets of the jokes seem to be an undifferentiated mass of corrupt scoundrels: Porfirio Díaz, Francisco Madero, Pancho Villa, Álvaro Obregón, Plutarco Elías Calles, Lázaro Cárdenas, Manuel Ávila Camacho, Miguel Alemán and so on. They are famous in Mexico but outside that country about as well-known as the historic rulers of Uruguay or San Salvador. This makes Schmidt's book in English an invaluable guide to these distant jokes but they did not have the impact on the world of their Soviet counterparts. Also the jokes are not seriously funny. Many are dependent on word play, such as a pun in Spanish on a politician's name. Others are about their wives, their sex lives including alleged homosexuality, or the exiguous dimensions of their privy parts. Social resistance to *de facto* political hegemony, yes, but hardly political jokes. The history of the Soviet Union can be told in political jokes but not that of Mexico. The political history of Mexico to be discovered in Schmidt's book is that it consists of a long string of defective and unpopular political leaders and jokes about men of this ilk tend not to differ very much from those about defective and unpopular people in general.

Schmidt is not to be blamed for the deficiencies of Mexican humor. Rather he should be congratulated on his diligent scholarship in collecting and explaining a wealth of humorous material to outsiders.

Recent Publications

The Encyclopedia of Humor Studies



Salvatore Attardo, Editor. (2014). *The Encyclopedia of Humor Studies*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Pub., Inc. 2 Vols. 929 pp. ISBN: 978-1-4129-9909-0. Hardcover. USD 350.

From the Publisher

The Encyclopedia of Humor Studies explores the concept of humor in history and modern society in the United States and internationally. This work's scope encompasses the humor of children, adults, and even nonhuman primates throughout the ages, from crude jokes and simple slapstick to sophisticated word play and ironic parody and satire.

As an academic social history, it includes the perspectives of a wide range of disciplines, including sociology, child development, social psychology, life style history, communication, and entertainment media. Readers will develop an understanding of the importance of humor as it has developed globally throughout history and appreciate its effects on child and adult development, especially in the areas of health, creativity, social development, and imagination. This two-volume set is available in both print and electronic formats.

New Joy

Li Xiaoxiao. (2014). *New Joy*. Hong Kong: Four Seasons Press. 224pp. ISBN: 9789881310187

More information in the author's blog (in Chinese) at: <http://blog.sina.com.cn/xinxilixiaoxiao>

Li Xiaoxiao (pen-name) studies film and cinematography. In Chinese scholarly writing, it is customary to adopt a pen-name especially when self-publishing in a novel and not well-understood field. A review copy of the book (Chinese language only) is available on request, email: 2090699863@qq.com

Based on his studies of movie-making, the author has developed an insight into how the three basic humour theories (incongruity, superiority and relief) combine in creating instances of humour. The resulting theory is called "The New Joy Theory of Humour" and this book recently published in Hong Kong sets it

out. The key premise, according to the author, is that for there to be a good humorous movie, there must be a good script. This in turn requires the movie to have good humor, a good plot and depth of insight into the nature of human life. Indeed humour is a vital ingredient today as a lot of people are in great need of it in their lives. These insights stimulated the author to try to discover the nature of humor and what its scientific methodology, might be, which he outlines in the chapters of his new book.

The book is divided into three parts: a theoretical first section, followed by an outline of different methodologies for structuring humour. These can be summarized under the following headings: contradiction, intermediation, affirmation, negation, relationships, numerals, conditions, results, emotions and objectives. The book closes with a short practical section applying the New Joy theory to the understanding of humour.

The author has described his theory as follows. It is based on the psychological concept of joy, where joy is a particular kind of emotional experience in which our innate desires (to experience superiority, safety, health, food, sexual satisfaction, intelligence, wittiness, power, ownership, etc.) are satisfied and tension released. He claims that the experience of joy varies according to the measure of its unanticipatedness. In the New Joy theory, an incoming imaginary idea connects with an outgoing one so as to satisfy a person's desire via humour.

Humorous things usually consist of two parts or two contradictory things that connect in some way. When the brain moves from accepting or considering one thing, and jumps to another, it is accompanied by a fluctuation in mood. If that satisfies a previously felt desire, then the jump creates the experience of joy or pleasure. Thus, the New Joy theory identifies that the incongruity of two objects or thoughts, when combined with the positive emotion of joy, produces humour and laughter. Theoretically, then, humour consists of a connection made between an Incoming imagination (A) with an Out-going imagination (\hat{A}) in such a way as to satisfy a desire. It may be written as: $\text{Humor} = (A + \hat{A}) * \text{Desire}$ where "+" stands for the connection of the two parts and "*" indicates that the combination contains a desire. Thus laughter comes from fluctuation in mood plus joy.

Laughology: Improve Your Life with the Science of Laughter

Stephanie Davies. (2013). *Laughology: Improve Your Life with the Science of Laughter*. Carmarthen: Crown House Publishing. 256 pp. ISBN 978 -1-845907-92-1; EUR 17.58; USD 19.76.

From Steffen Steinert, Ludwig-Maximilians University, München

This slim volume is a how-to manual for people who want to use humor to enhance communication and deal with difficult situations. In a very accessible manner, Stephanie Davies presents some of the science behind laughter and mirth and introduces a humor toolkit that can be used to gain a more positive attitude towards the world. Davies' underlying assumption is that humor is a universal coping skill that can be trained through practice. This is why the book contains plenty of exercises. *Laughology* offers an entertaining way to apply the positive power of laughter and humor in everyday life.

Homo Ridens: A Phenomenological Study of the Essence, Forms and Functions of Laughter

Lenz Prütting. (2013). *Homo ridens: Eine Phänomenologische Studie über Wesen, Formen und Funktionen des Lachens* (Homo Ridens: A phenomenological study of the essence, forms and functions of laughter). Munich: Karl Alber Verlag. 1950 pp. ISBN 9783495486023

Free Translation from Publisher's Summary

Lenz Prütting (b. 1940) took his doctorate in Philosophy and Dramatics from Erlangen and Munich. After a decade at the Institute for Dramatics at the University of Munich, he has worked widely as a dramaturg and theatre director and has also translated many dramatic texts (Shakespeare, Molière, Synge).

The first historical part of Prütting's phenomenological study entitled *Homo ridens* offers a comprehensive analysis of the interpretation and evaluation of laughter from European antiquity to the present. It gives a critical analysis of the four most important and influential models of argumentation: the

ethically-oriented Platonic-Stoic-Augustinian tradition of argumentation, that regards laughter with suspicion and is sometimes even hostile towards it; then there is the anthropologically-oriented tradition, ranging from Aristotle to Joubert and Kant up to Plessner and Schmitz, that interprets and defends laughter as a *proprium hominis*; the physiological-mechanistic-energetic tradition, starting with Descartes and passing on to and beyond Freud; and the evolutionary-historic-ethological tradition, founded by Darwin, which is perhaps the most dominant tradition today.

The second, systematic part of the book pursues the anthropologically oriented tradition of argumentation on the basis of the New Phenomenology developed by German philosopher and phenomenologist Hermann Schmitz (b. 1928). In the second part Prütting describes three basic types of laughter (avowal-laughter, interaction-laughter and resonance-laughter) operating at various ontogenetic levels of laughter-maturity as a game of personal emancipation and personal regression. He also discusses a whole range of synergetic-synesthetic behaviors with various attitudes and in different situations.

The last two chapters offer a consideration of the life-function of humor and recommendations for developing trust in one's own embodiment as a basis for personal existence.

Modern Jewish Jokes with Bite

Ilan Weiss, Editor. (2012). *Moderne jüdische Witz emit Biss (Modern Jewish Jokes with Bite)*. Berlin/Leipzig: Patchworld Verlag. 96 pp. ISBN 978-3-941021-21-1. €14.90.

From the Publisher

“Jewish humour has always been the weapon of choice for a minority group, because humour doesn't kill.” Following the first book in this series, “Sex on the Sabbath,” this second volume now offers the best of Jewish jokes. Ilan Weiss has tirelessly collected these priceless examples of biting humour over many years. Using charm, irony, a slice of black humour and savage critique, the joke almost always serves to defend humanity against ideology, power and bigotry. With a special chapter on the Jeckes, the German Jews. Their jokes not only sweeten life, they describe it: precisely and astutely in just two or three sentences!

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 May 2014. If you have a recent publication, let us know. We will include it in a future newsletter.

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- Finlay, F., Baverstock, A., & Lenton, S. (2014). Therapeutic clowning in paediatric practice. *Clinical Child Psychology & Psychiatry*, 19(4), 596-605. doi:10.1177/1359104513492746
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In Remembrance



Walter Redfern

1936-2014

From John Parkin, University of Bristol

Walter Redfern of Reading University, a renowned student of humour and of French fiction, died on October 10 of this year. An occasional participant in ISHS conferences (we first met at Birmingham in 1995), he also contributed articles and reviews for our publications, most recently on Da Silva and Pell's edited volume *At Whom are we Laughing* (2013) and two lapidary entries on “Aphorism” and “Epigram” in the *Sage Encyclopedia of Humor Studies* (ed. Salvatore Attardo, 2014). He was also a creative writer of note, producing a number of short stories, an anthology of poems, and a novel, *A Calm Estate*, which came out in 1987. However his major academic achievement lay in the area of research, where his analysis of the concept and application of humour led to significant publications such as *French Laughter* (OUP, 1998), while his book entitled *Puns* (originally Blackwell, 1984) is currently into its fourth edition.

Apart from a year spent at the University of Illinois, Walter spent his entire career at Reading University where he was appointed assistant lecturer in 1960, rising steadily up the academic ladder to a personal chair awarded twenty years later, and retiring as Emeritus Professor in 2001. His students remember in particular the deadpan humour colouring his lectures, a quality which friends and family enjoyed equally. His printed output is little short of staggering, numbering over twenty books and fifty articles, and concerning in particular the humour of authors such as Raymond Queneau, Jules Vallès, Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Michel Tournier, Beckett and Flaubert. Otherwise his interest in the linguistic aspects of humour, especially in word-play and puns, led to extensive treatments that included *Puns and their Kin* (Academica Press, 2014), *The Dead and the Quick: Clichés and Neologisms in the Written, Spoken and Visual Cultures of Britain, The United States and France* (ibid., 2010), *Clichés and Coinages* (Blackwell, 1989), plus various interviews and broadcasts for the BBC.

All in all, those who read his works will acknowledge the power of an intellectual initiative which he combined with deep erudition, a refreshingly uninhibited approach to established theory plus a stimulating and inventive style of writing guaranteed to secure and maintain the reader's attention. Those who knew him will recall a plain-speaking but thoroughly humane, loyal and sensitive individual; indeed among the numerous tributes came one claiming that "we shall never see his like again". That may well be true, though it is certain that humour studies are much the poorer without his participation. He is survived by Angela, whom he married in 1963, by his two children Kate and Sam, and his granddaughter Eleanor. We offer them our profound condolences and our sincere good wishes.



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