



Australasian Humour Studies Network



AHSN Digest – March 2023

AHSN2023: Humour as a Human Right

Conference Report

The **29th AHSN Conference** was held on 6-8 and 9-10 February 2023 both online/Zoom & in person in the Abercrombie Business School at The University of Sydney. The Organisation team was Benjamin Nickl, Rodney Taveira, Reza Arab, Mark Rolfe and Jessica Milner Davis.

AHSN was pleased to be supported by The University of Sydney's School of Languages and Cultures & The United States Studies Centre, and for collaboration with Macquarie University & Toshiba Inc on the 8 February event "Robots, AI, and culture" and its panel on "Datafication of Laughter", hosted by Dr Benjamin Nickl and Dr Chris Müller, Macquarie University.

The conference aimed to shed light on the importance of humour in society and the impact it has on human rights and as a human right. It was well attended (together with its zoom session, it attracted twice the number of attendees as our highly successful AHSN 2022 at the University of Tasmania). It had a very diverse group of delegates, including experts in the fields of human rights, law, psychology, and humour, as well as representatives from other universities and non-academic institutions.

The online conference segment was opened by a keynote speech by Dr. Alberto Godioli, University of Groningen in The Netherlands, a renowned expert in the field of humour and human rights/law, who discussed the role of humour in promoting social justice and equality. The speech was well received by the audience and set the tone for the rest of the conference and the second keynote by North American comedian and comedy historian Kliph Nesteroff that took place on Thursday during the first day of the in-person conference segment.

Topics covered included the impact of humour on mental health, the use of humour as a tool for political activism, and the role of humour in promoting cultural understanding and diversity especially with issues of transsexual and disability and Indigenous Australian identities. An intersectional panel discussion was also held on the subject of freedom of speech and the limits of humour in society, which generated a lively and thought-provoking discussion among the panellists and attendees.

A resounding success (with spectacularly good food), the Conference provided valuable insights into the impact of humour on human rights. It emphasised the importance of humour in promoting social justice, equality, and understanding, and highlighted the need for continued research and advocacy in this area. Delegates congratulated the organising team on the smooth operations during the in-person and the online segment. A delegate from London who attended

in person lauded the conference for its accessibility that they said was outstanding. Another delegate from Melbourne who had participated in the online segment before coming to the in-person segment praised how the two sections made so many different topics and speakers available for discussion. Joint event collaborator Dr Yuji Sone expressed his thanks to the AHSN for including laughter in his Toshiba event schedule and for making his own event accessible to another audience.

The conference was well organised and ran smoothly (despite an unplanned evacuation for 30 minutes owing to a spectacular Sydney lightning storm!) and attendees left with a greater appreciation for the role of humour in society and the impact it has on human rights. ABC Radio National interviewed Ben Nickl on 10 February to feature the conference as part of the morning programming.

A Conference pre-event was a webinar by Dr Rachel Aumiller which served to draw attention to the next weeks' conference. This is now available online and several of the key conference presentations will also be made available this way in due course (**see separate item on the Aumiller webinar**).

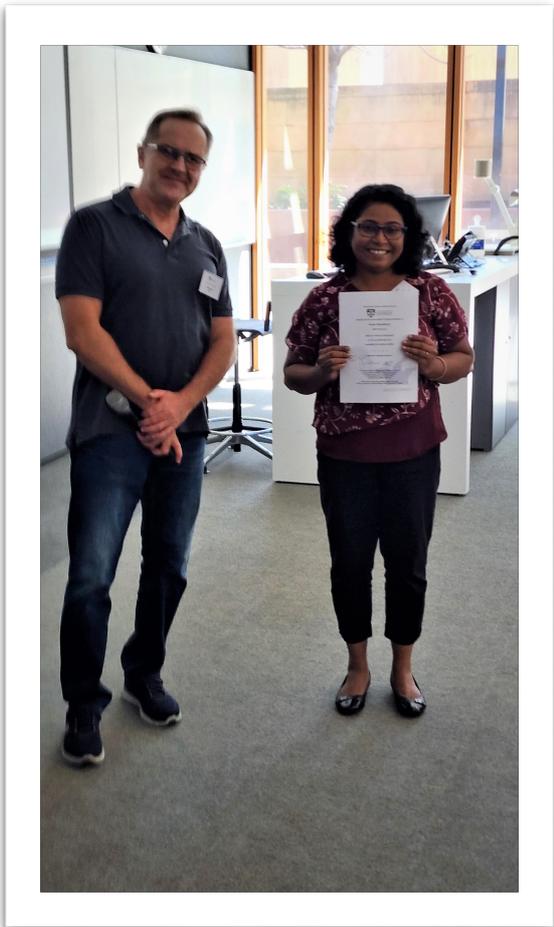
The Editors: A resounding vote of thanks to Ben and his Organising Committee members for all their hard work! And onwards to the next exciting events in 2023-4.



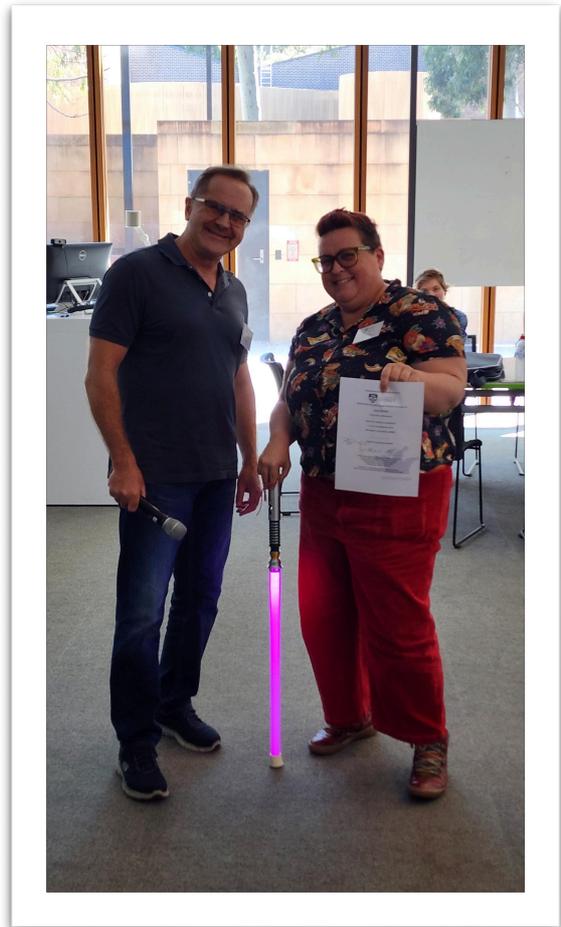
Eric Løbbecke and Exhibition



Rodney Taveira Interacts With Kliph Nesteroff



Mark Rolfe Presents Suchismita Chowdhury Scholarship



Mark Rolfe Presents Jacqui Brady Scholarship



Rodney Marks Presents New Jesster Peter Kirkpatrick to Bruce Findlay, Founding Jester (with foolscap)



Maren Rawlings Presents new Jesster Daryl Peebles

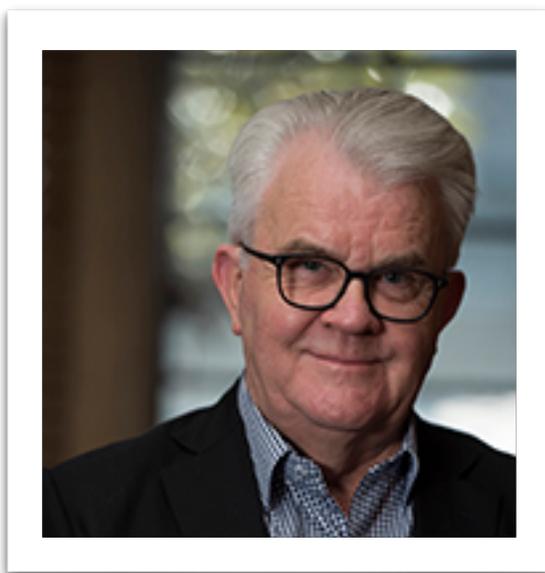
Two New Jess-ters! Celebrating the builders of the AHSN since 1997

Two inductions into the Order of the Jess-ters took place at the 29th AHSN Conference, at The University of Sydney on Friday 10 February 2010. Named after AHSN founder, Jessica Milner Davis, the Order honours the service of those who have helped build the AHSN over many years and their distinguished contributions to humour studies.

Dr Peter Kirkpatrick, University of Sydney, was presented for induction by Jess-ter Extraordinaire Rodney Marks [<https://comedian.com.au/>], himself a founding member of the AHSN from 1997, and inducted by the inaugural Jess-ter Bruce Findlay (founding Chair of the AHSN Review Panel).

Peter hosted the 2016 AHSN Conferences and several AHSN collaborative seminars at the University of Sydney and acted as the formal point of contact for all AHSN activities in the Dept of English for many years. His research and publications in liaison with Association for the Study of Australian Literature (ASAL). His key publications are *Serious Frolic: Essays on Australian Humour* (eds. De Groen and Kirkpatrick, Queensland UP, 2009), with his own chapter on the comedy of Australian writer Lenny Lower; other articles on Australian comic poetry, *Smith's Weekly* and Australia's literary life and poetry. A poet of some standing himself, Peter curated with Lindsay Foyle the cartoon exhibition *Laugh Lines and Other Distractions* at Fisher Library, The University of Sydney, to accompany the 2016 AHSN Conference.

Dr Daryl Peebles was presented for induction by 2021 Jess-ter Dr Maren Rawlings, former member of the AHSN Review Panel and winner of the ISHS Graduate Student Award in Spain in 2008. A long-standing AHSN member, Daryl hosted not one but two AHSN conferences in Tasmania, in 2011 and 2022. He presented a well-received paper at the 2015 International Society of Humor Studies Conference in Oakland, California, based on his doctoral thesis which pioneered research on the value of positive humour in the workplace. Comedian, magician, ventriloquist and poet, Daryl continues to write and perform comedy and he is tirelessly creative in ensuring that our southernmost brethren are not devoid of humour. Joining AHSN2023 by Zoom because he was convening the "Australian Wooden Boat Festival" in Hobart, Daryl was duly inducted by the inaugural Jess-ter Bruce Findlay (founding Chair of the AHSN Review Panel) but obliged to pin his own badge on himself – which he did with visible pride.



Peter Kirkpatrick



Daryl with his cat

Eds: Congratulations to both Peter and Daryl! Onwards and upwards, the Jess-ters!

A Delegate's Experience of the 2023 AHSN Annual Conference

Humour is universal, they say. Aligned with this adage was the diversity of topics presented at the 2023 AHSN Annual Conference, held at the prestigious Abercrombie Business School, University of Sydney. Presentations at the conference ranged from the legendary Lenny Bruce, free-thinking American comedian, to the use of humour by children, parents, and clinicians in paediatric palliative care settings. Stand-up comedy theory, social learning theory, Russo-Ukrainian war cartoons, the subversive potential of the French can-can, Indonesian stand-up comedy, and a wide range of papers on other topics were presented. There was also a comedy writing workshop conducted by a stand-up comedian. The audience was all ears when award-winning Australian illustrator and cartoonist Eric L bbecke delivered a talk on the simple (or perhaps not-so-simple) act of active listening. The talk was complemented by an exhibition of his works featuring caricatures with extravagant ears.

It was the first academic conference I attended in person. I met with many scholars and researchers from all over the world. I also got to present my first ever academic paper and received valuable feedback from the attendees. I am a 3rd year PhD student of RMIT University researching how stand-up comedians in India engage with the political. I thank the AHSN for making me feel so welcome, and for giving me the opportunity to present at the conference which was enriching, educative, informative, and, above all, fun.

Suchi Chowdhury

Melbourne

20 February 2023

s3871048@student.rmit.edu.au

And More Conference Thanks

Thank you so much for organising the Humour Studies conference - it was an excellent program. and an incredibly enriching experience. I enjoyed it so much - it was great to see old friends and make new ones. The food was great too.

The Mistress of Mirth, Justine Sless, Author, Comedian & Kvetcher in the Wry:
justinesless.com

The AHSN 2023 conference was a fantastic experience. As a first-time humour studies conference presenter, I was treated as an equal by academic colleagues from all over the world, most of whom have many decades more experience than me. I certainly didn't feel as though anyone was 'going easy' on their questions regarding my work either! Thanks for having me, I look forward to returning.

Alexander Sparrow (Philosophy), Victoria University of Wellington
Co-director Sparrow & Boyle Entertainment

It was a fascinating couple of days, lightning strikes included! Congratulations to the whole team for packing so much content into so little time. The Zoom component marshalling was excellent, but nothing beats meeting in person, even if it didn't allow quite enough time to chat with everyone that one might have liked. Warmest congratulations!

Fergus Edwards, Doctoral Candidate, University of Tasmania

A mammoth but wonderful week of the AHSN conference! It was incredibly well organised, and I really enjoyed the conference and meeting with members of the AHSN network. Definitely worth the long travel.

Cavyn Mitchell (He/They), Doctoral Researcher, Brunel University London Centre for Comedy Studies

Greetings from back in cold Japan. Thanks for another nice conference, and when is the next one??

John Rucynski, Okayama University, Japan

3rd Annual AHSN Zoominar Event now On-Line

'The Laughing Matter of Spirit', featuring Dr Rachel Aumiller, Columbia University, Department of English and Comparative Literature

This thought-provoking and scholarly presentation was a pre-Conference Event for AHSN2023, and took place via zoom at 9.00am-10.30am, Friday 3 February 2023.

The Moderators were AHSN2023 Convenors, Rodney Taveira & Ben Nickl, The University of Sydney. The Zoominar was a 'work in progress' talk and provided Rodney and Ben with some parts of Dr Aumiller's unpublished manuscript, *The Laughing Matter of Spirit*, appearing later in 2023 with Northwestern University Press (NUP).

Speaker's Bionote

Rachel Aumiller is interested in the ethical and political dimensions of emotions, sensations, and desire. She specifically analyzes touch as the site of disorientation and crisis. The crisis of touch ranges from ethical ambiguities surrounding sexual intimacy, to the tension between experiences of pleasure and cultural norms, to the politics of proximity and distance in response to epidemics.

In her forthcoming book that Rachel will talk about to AHSN's Rodney Taveira and Ben Nickl, *The Laughing Matter of Spirit* (under contract with Northwestern University Press), she asks, "What changes when nothing changes? *The Laughing Matter of Spirit* thus looks backwards in defeat with Hegel and Marx at the repeated failure of revolution. It looks upon the grotesque in comic-horror with Benjamin and the Yugoslavian partisan resistance. And finally, it locates a kind of political action that can only begin to take place from a position of absolute defeat, in the recognition that I have been determined as being nothing from the beginning: in the proletariat's cry, 'I am nothing, but I must be everything!'"



<https://youtu.be/V0KQOjESI8k>

AHSN Members' News -- Nicholas Holm, AHSN Review Panel Member, Appointed New Co-Editor of *Journal of Comedy Studies*

Nicholas Holm has been appointed new editor of the journal, *Comedy Studies*, alongside Adam Ainsworth (Kingston University). *Comedy Studies* is a multidisciplinary Taylor and Francis (London) journal that publishes original research addressing all aspects of comedy and the comic.

JCS has already had one Special Issue connected with AHSN: 10 (1) on the Satire of John M. Clarke (2019, co-edited by Jessica Milner Davis and Robert Phiddian), arising from an AHSN Seminar held at the University of Sydney in 2018 on Clarke's work in Aoteroa/New Zealand and Australia.

Nick writes:

The new editors are looking to expand the scope and reach of the journal to include a wider range of international contributions from across disciplines. Our goal is to make *Comedy Studies* the place to publish research that addresses humour from cultural, social, and critical perspectives. We welcome contributions from scholars at all stages and if you're interested in publishing with the journal, please get in touch by emailing me at nhfholm@massey.ac.nz.

Keynote Address at Netherlands conference on “Humour & Transgression”

Nicholas Holm was invited to deliver an address as part of an event hosted by Utrecht University exploring the Politics and Aesthetics of Transgressive Humour in February 2023. Nick spoke alongside Dick Zijp (Utrecht University), and Wigbertson Julian Isenia and Veronika Zangl (both University of Amsterdam), regarding the intersection of humour and politics. As part of his trip to the Netherlands, Nick also taught a PhD seminar with Alberto Godioli at Groningen University and gave a public talk on the Politics of Fun, organized by the Radboud Institute for Culture and History at Radboud University.

The Editors: Congratulations, Nick! We look forward to an exciting future for Comedy Studies.

AHSN Member’s News from Japan

Long-time AHSN member Ronald Stewart is currently Dean of the Dept of Sociology at Daito Bunka University in Tokyo, Japan. His new book, *Manga: A Critical Guide*, co-authored with C. J. Suzuki and published by CUNY Press (NY), is now out [see separate news item]. Initial responses have been good and a companion website for the book is planned.

AHSN members will recall that Ron facilitated a wonderful exhibition of contemporary Japanese political cartoons to accompany the 25th AHSN Conference held at RMIT University in 2019. His colleagues and friends who created them travelled with him from Japan to discuss their work. For the last several years, Ron has provided English translations for a number of cartoon exhibitions in Japan but now he himself has exhibited. His selected cartoon appeared in August 2022 in the Japanese Cartoon Society’s annual cartoon exhibition in a small gallery in Ginza, Tokyo. Ron explains that this is not the peak body the Japanese Cartoonists Association, but a small splinter group of about 40 cartoonists, a mixture of retired, but active professional, semi-professional, and (some) amateur cartoonists. Ron says “I was glad for the opportunity to keep my hand in as an artist” not just a cartoon and manga scholar.

Editors: Congratulations, Ron and we look forward to seeing you and perhaps colleagues from Japan as well at a future AHSN Conference.

AHSN Member's Upcoming Hybrid Presentation

When: Thursday 27 April 2023, 3.00-4.30pm AEST

Who: Will Visconti PhD

On What: "La Goulue and the Problematic Gaze"

Location: Schaeffer Library Seminar Room, RC Mills Building, The University of Sydney, and by zoom

On 27 April, Dr Will Visconti, who presented on "Was the Cancan a Comic Spectacle or a Serious Threat?" at the 2023 AHSN Conference, will be giving a presentation as part of the Discipline of Art History Seminar Series at The University of Sydney. The talk will be delivered in hybrid format, both in-person and via Zoom.

To register, visit the link: <https://sace-events.sydney.edu.au/calendar/la-goulue-and-the-problematic-gaze/>

About La Goulue and the Problematic Gaze

Although best known as a muse of Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, La Goulue (Louise Weber, 1866-1929) was a frequent sitter for photographers and other artists from her teen years until her death. Representations of La Goulue range from the works of fin-de-siècle artists like Charles Conder and Emile Bernard to twentieth-century artists like Kees Van Dongen and Leon Kelly. This paper examines how La Goulue returns, challenges, and problematises the gaze. She also queers the gaze in more ways than one, via her feisty persona that provides a rebuke to predominantly bourgeois male audience members, and through rumours surrounding her sexuality, which find their expression in visual representations of La Goulue and other performers around her. La Goulue's representation sits within a continuum of nineteenth-century photography that spans other celebrities and performers, such as Virginia Verasis Oldoini, the Comtesse de Castiglione, or the ballerina and alleged courtesan Cléo de Mérode.

Bionote

Will Visconti is coordinator of the Italian major at UTS. His research focuses primarily on gender, sexuality, representation and transgression, and his first book, *Beyond the Moulin Rouge: The Life and Legacy of La Goulue*, was published in 2022 by the University of Virginia Press. His forthcoming publications include a chapter about Mae West's plays in *Post-Moral Humour in a World of New Gods and Old Monsters* (Tampere University Press), an article in *French Screen Studies* about the television series *Maison Close*, and a chapter in the *Routledge Companion to the History of Paris Since 1789*. Will's current research projects include examinations of obscenity in Victorian literature, the material culture of nineteenth-century sex work, and the comic potential of the cancan. He is a long-time member of AHSN.



La Goulue c. 1885, by Bacard (Musée d'Orsay)

Major 2024 ARC Linkage Grant Awarded to AHSN-supported Project, *Comedy Country*

A major new ARC grant has been awarded to the Monash University-led Linkage Project titled 'Comedy Country: Australian Performance Comedy as an Agent of Change'. The project has been awarded funds of \$838,586 by the ARC, with its total budget of \$2,288,854 comprising partner organisation contributions of \$255,000 cash and \$1,195,268 of in-kind support.

The project brings together an interdisciplinary team drawn from three universities, five leading collecting institutions, two major comedy festivals and a media production company. The project's partner organisations have deep and valuable connections to the history and performance of comedy in Australia; they include: Melbourne International Comedy Festival, Arts Centre Melbourne, Adelaide Fringe, Adelaide Festival Centre Trust, History Trust of South Australia, State Library Victoria, State Library of South Australia and Roar Film. AHSN is an Official Collaborating Organisation with Comedy Country, and the project team includes a number of AHSN members.

Comedy Country's chief investigators include: from Monash University Associate Professor Tony Moore and Dr Steve Vizard (Steve is an Adjunct Professor at both Monash and Adelaide Universities), Professors Anne Pender and Mark Carroll from University of Adelaide; and Professor Mark Gibson from RMIT University. Partner Investigators are Susan Provan AO (CEO of the Melbourne International Comedy Festival) and Steve Thomas (Creative Director of Roar Film).

This landmark study aims to investigate the development of comic performance and its transformational relation with, and impact on, Australian society, culture and the creative industries from the aftermath of World War 2 until the present. Its key hypothesis is that since the 1950s, comic performance has not merely reflected a changing Australia but has been a powerful democratising force that has helped shape Australian social, civic and cultural expression, our transformation and identities. It asks as its key questions: How has comedy contributed to widening inclusion and democratisation? How, in the light of current cultural, technological and industrial changes, can the nation's rich tradition in comedy be made to speak to the present? How are we to address gaps in the archive such as Indigenous and LGBTQI voices, recognising their contribution to 'nation making' decolonisation and diversity? How can Australia's traditions of comic performance be adapted to emerging conditions? What policies and practices will ensure their continued vitality?

The project will utilise a transmedia model for curating and publicly distributing digital content led by partner Roar Film, with outcomes to include a series of short documentaries, podcasts, books, data visualisations and exhibition content. The project will also sponsor a symposium in its final year, hosted by the AHSN. With its partners the project will digitise archival content, conduct in-depth analyses of Australia's two major comedy festivals, and develop public programs and performances in Melbourne and Adelaide. This interdisciplinary collaboration between humanities and social sciences scholars and the arts industry, utilising innovative digital methods for archive research and transmedia communication, lies at the heart of the project's commitment to understanding and democratising the history of comedy and its national significance in Australia. The project has a strong focus on Indigenous comedy, and employs two Indigenous Research Assistants at Monash and RMIT Universities respectively, working with investigators on interviews, archive research and production. The project will also employ two Research Fellows, one in Adelaide and one in Melbourne. These fellowships will offer a major opportunity for early career researchers.

During its four-year timeframe, the project team looks forward to collaborating with scholars of comedy, performance and humour, and in particular with the AHSN and its members, as it unearths new findings about comic performance over the last 70 years.

For further information, please contact: tony.moore@monash.edu

ARC Linkage Grant

[LP220100196 — Monash University](#)

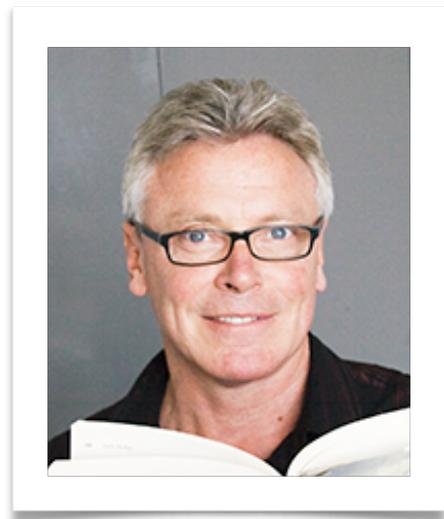
Comedy Country: Australian Performance Comedy as an Agent of Change. Comedy Country aims to investigate the development of comic performance and its transformational relation with, and impact on, Australian society, culture and the creative industries from the aftermath of World War 2 until the present. The project's key hypothesis is that since the 1950s comic performance has not merely reflected a changing Australia but helped drive social and cultural transformation.

The project partners with two festivals, five cultural collecting organisations and a media production company to build interdisciplinary Humanities and Social Sciences/industry collaborations in digital methods for archive research and transmedia communication, and deliver digital exhibitions, documentaries, podcasts and scholarly histories.

- Administering Organisation: Monash University
- Scheme Name: Linkage Projects
- Lead Investigator: A/Prof Anthony Moore
- Current Funding: \$838,586.00
- Announced Funding: \$838,586.00
- Funding Commencement Year: 2023
- Status: Not yet accepted
- Primary FoR: 4701 - Communication and Media Studies



Ann Pender



Mark Carroll



Mark Gibson



Susan Provan



Steve Thomas



Tony Moore



Steve Vizard



33rd Conference of the International Society for Humor Studies

University of Boston, Boston, Massachusetts, USA, July 3-7, 2023

From Patrice Oppliger, Conference Convener, University of Boston

The 2023 ISHS conference will be hosted by Patrice Oppliger at Boston University, the fourth-largest private university in the United States. BU is located in Boston near historic Fenway Park. The airport, train stations, historic sites, and entertainment venues are easily accessible by public transportation. Boston is a visitor friendly city and is served by most major domestic and international airlines.

The conference will take place over five days (Monday, July 3rd through Friday, July 7th) with morning plenary sessions followed by breakout sessions. In addition to the 4th of July fireworks (as much as I'd like to take credit and say they are specifically for the conference, the city of Boston provides the festivities), the conference will include an opening reception, comedy night, and banquet.

As for accommodations, there are several nearby hotels. As a more affordable option, the Student Village residence (StuVi-1) will be available for conference attendees and their guests. StuVi-1 is an air-conditioned apartment-style residence at 10 Buick Street with suite-style accommodations. Each suite is comprised of four single occupancy bedrooms, two bathrooms, a kitchenette, and common living room area. The building also has a rooftop lounge with a spectacular view of the city, several small study rooms, and a first-floor campus café and convenience store. The building is located right on the "T" (subway/trolley line) and adjacent to the Fitness and Recreation Center. The proposed housing rate for this residence is \$95.00/person/night for shared bath and \$167/person/night for private bath.

An all-you-can eat dining hall is also in close proximity to the conference venue. Costs are \$10/per person for breakfast; \$15/per person for lunch. For those who do not wish to eat in the dining hall, there are a significant number of eating establishments located within a block or two of the meeting spaces.

The Conference website will launch in early January, and online registration will begin on January 15, 2023. The paper and panel submission deadline will be March 1, 2023. For more information, prospective delegates can write to ishs2023@bu.edu. For Conference updates, visit the ISHS website at <http://www.humorstudies.org>.

Dear Current and Past ISHS Members:

This note is just an update to let you know that you can still submit paper proposals for the 2023 ISHS Conference in Boston, Massachusetts. The Call for Papers deadline has been extended to March 15, 2023, and you can register early for the conference at a discounted rate up through April 1. For additional information, you can visit the Conference website at:

<https://combeyond.bu.edu/offering/international-society-of-humor-studies-conference-2023/>

I hope that you can join us for this year's conference, and as always, if you have any questions about your ISHS membership, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Martin Lampert, PhD
Executive Secretary
International Society for Humor Studies

www.humorstudies.org

and

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Call for Panel on Humour and Free Speech and the Law for ISHS Conference July 2023

From the Convenors of the 'Humour and the Law Chat Group'

Dear friends and colleagues,

We hope this email finds you well. As many of you probably know already, the call for papers for the [2023 ISHS conference](#) (Boston, 3-7 July) is out.....Building on the inspiring discussions that took place during the Humor and the Law panel in [Bertinoro 2022](#), the [Laughing Matters symposium](#) at Columbia Global Freedom of Expression and other recent activities involving the [Forum for Humor and the Law](#), we would like to propose a follow-up panel for the Boston conference this summer.

The panel would be open to papers reflecting on the intersection between humor, free speech and related legal matters (hate speech, copyright law, defamation, censorship, etc.), whether focusing on specific cases or on broader theoretical and empirical issues. Should you be interested in joining, could you please send us your abstract (150-350 words) by **Tuesday February 21st, 23:59 CET**?

Many thanks for considering this, and apologies if this is not directly related to your research area -- please feel free to forward our message to anyone you know who might be interested.

All the best,

Laura and Alberto

[Alberto Godioli](#) (Assoc. Prof. European Culture and Literature, University of Groningen)

[Laura Little](#) (James G. Schmidt Professor, Temple University Beasley School of Law)

Eds: Both Laura and Alberto have been Keynote Speakers for AHSN Conferences, Alberto most recently at AHSN2023 and Laura in 2010. This notice readvises the Call issued to AHSN'ers via email in January. If you are interested, please contact Alberto and Laura, despite the closing date.

Call For Papers – Hybrid International Conference on 'The Nature of Laughter'

The Call for Papers for the XVth International Scientific and Theoretical Hybrid Conference 'On the Nature of Laughter', to be held in Tartu, Estonia, **May 18-21, 2023**, is open until **March 1, 2023**.

About the Conference

The nature of laughter has puzzled researchers for centuries. Humour researchers are invited to take part in the academic discussion on humour and laughter at the 15th installment of the conference series 'On the nature of laughter', after a few years' break, taking place in Tartu and also online.

Please submit your abstracts (up to 200 words) before **March 1, 2023**, via the [online form](#) (acceptance emails will be sent by April 1, 2023).

For more information, visit the conference webpage <https://folklore.ee/ri/fo/konve/2023/laughter/>

Organizers:

The Odessa Humanitarian Tradition Society

The Center for Humanitarian Education of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine

The Estonian Literary Museum

New Project on Humour and the Public Sphere

Humour and the Public Sphere <https://humorinpublic.eu/>

About Us

We are a group of scholars from universities across Europe with an interest in the study of humour. The core team of this project consists of people who are not only affiliated with the universities united in UNA Europa, but are also members of the [International Society for Humor Studies](#). This society unites scholars from many disciplines and countries in the study of humour: a form of non-serious communication that amuses and provokes laughter, but that can also have serious consequences for social relations, individual and social well-being.

We have invited fellow humour scholars from across Europe to join us in analysing humour in the European public sphere. As the [line-up of contributors](#) shows, for us Europe is more than the European Union. Instead, it is the cultural and geographic area that, for better or for worse, is united around a set of idea(l)s.

This project foregrounds one such idea(l) that we particularly like: **the public sphere**. The public sphere is a normative ideal: in open societies, people of all walks of life should be able to come together to openly, freely, and respectfully discuss public issues. Although in original statements, the public sphere seemed a rather serious (may we say: dreary and dull) affair involving white men in coffee houses, subsequent interpretations have suggested that the public sphere should encompass people and voices from different backgrounds. Importantly: a healthy public sphere should encompass and embrace many modes of communication. This includes emotions of various kinds, artistic expression, non-verbal (e.g., visual, musical) expression, play, but most importantly: humour, including wordplay, mockery, satire, irony, wit, parody, and all forms of communication that aims to make us laugh and think at the same time.

What is this project about?

The “Humour in the European Public Sphere” project, sponsored by the [UNA Europa consortium](#), aims to showcase examples of how humour works in the public sphere. Researchers from across Europe have chosen particularly telling examples of public, often controversial, humour, ranging from cartoons and memes to performances, art works and protests.

While very different in form and style, all these cases show the capacity of humour to highlight, often in a critical vein, issues of public concern. Humour, moreover, exposes rifts and disagreements about such public issues. A critical or “edgy” joke amuses some people – often, though not exclusively, those in agreement with the viewpoints and perspectives expressed. But others, often those with different opinions, are offended, indignant, hurt, in short: they are not amused. When they make their objections public, we have a **humour controversy**: a moment of public contestation of a humorous expression, leading to a dramatisation of social and political divides and oppositions.

For this project, we have asked scholars from across Europe to choose an example of something humorous – a cartoon, meme, performance, public joke – to highlight the role of humour in the public sphere, in their own country or in a wider international arena. For each example, contributors have answered three questions:

1. What do we see here?
2. What public issue is being addressed here?
3. What does the humour do?

This yielded a rich harvest of humorous forms and themes. The examples on this website show the cultural specificity of humour: most are hard to understand for outsiders, and while the explanations clarify things, they usually fail to make the joke (cartoon, meme, etc.) amusing. To truly be amused (or offended) at a joke, you need knowledge, but also emotional involvement: you need to care about the issue.

Yet, the examples also reveal commonalities. Across Europe, humour often emerges around similar public issues (e.g. themes like gender, migration, populist politicians), using similar humorous techniques and forms. Moreover, humour often foregrounds similar rifts, leading to similar types of contestations and controversies. To show these commonalities, we have added codes to each contribution (explained in a [glossary](#) developed specifically for this project).

1. form/genre
2. theme
3. humorous mechanism

This will allow readers to identify patterns in humour, including sometimes unexpected similarities and connections. The website is therefore also an invitation for people around the world: to look at examples of humour in their surroundings, and to understand what humour does in addressing public issues.

What do we want to achieve with this project?

With this website, we hope to share our insights on humour in the public sphere with people around the world (not only in Europe). Many of us have been working on humour for a long time, and we would like spread our knowledge and insights with people outside Academia.

In particular, we want to show the centrality of humour to contemporary public spheres. Often cast aside as “not serious”, or alternatively, celebrated rather uncritically as the hallmark of freedom, humour is an important, influential, and unusually complex mode of communication. Humour is an essential ingredient of a well-functioning, healthy and open public sphere.

However, humour also has a “dark side”: it can exclude, offend, and hurt, often with real, lasting consequences. Therefore, although we believe that a society that is open to humour is by definition better – healthier, more resilient, more democratic — than a society that suppresses jokes, in humour controversies we do not automatically side with the joker, or the joke. Instead, we see public humour as a magnifying glass: humour in the public sphere, whether it just addresses an issue or leads to minor or major controversies, allows us to see what is at stake in public debates. And sometimes the stakes are high indeed.

Finally: an invitation: This project is a work in progress. We will continue to add new examples of humour in various public spheres. We are also happy to welcome new contributions.

Current Participants

[Saša Babič](#)

[Dorota Brzozowska](#)

[Delia Chiaro](#)

[Władysław Chtopicki](#)

[Jan Chovanec](#)

[John Magnus R. Dahl](#)

[Isabel Ermida](#)

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[Juha Herkman](#)

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[Giseline Kuipers](#)

[Nikita Lobanov](#)

[Carmen Maíz-Arévalo](#)

[Jennifer Monroe](#)

[Jonas Nicolai](#)

[Sara Polak](#)

[Rita Repšienė](#)

[Răzvan Săftoiu](#)

[Villy Tsakona](#)

[Dick Zijp](#)

Upcoming American Conferences on Humour and Play

Thirty-Sixth Annual Conference of the Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor (AATH)

Mesa, Arizona, April 27-30, 2023

The theme of the 36th AATH Conference will be *We're Serious about Humor*. Conference discounts are available to ISHS members. For information, visit the AATH Conference page at <http://www.aath.org>

Forty-Ninth Annual Meeting of The Association for the Study of Play (TASP)

New York City, USA, May 17-May 19, 2023 The 49th Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Play will be held from May 17 to May 19, 2023 at the Borough of Manhattan Community College in New York City. The 2023 TASP Conference's theme will be *Playship: A Pathway For Building and Sustaining Equitable Playful Spaces*. Conference proposals are being accepted through January 20, 2023. For more information, visit the TASP website at <https://studyofplay.org>

Member's new publication on "Wittgenstein: Stoppard's Muse"

Fergus Edwards finds Wittgenstein everywhere in Tom Stoppard's plays, from *Jumpers* to *Leopoldstadt*.

Sir Tom Stoppard (b.1937), full-time playwright, no-time university student, discovered philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein's work in July 1968. He wrote to his old flatmate that, rather than writing his next play, he was "following Wittgenstein through [the] *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*." We know that he kept reading, because three years later his play *Dogg's Our Pet* (1971) began with a deliveryman walking onto the stage and calling out for a 'Block!' and a 'Slab!' The whole scene is lifted directly from Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (1953). Even when Stoppard developed the material into a longer, more political play, *Dogg's Hamlet, Cahoot's Macbeth* (1979), he kept all the original Wittgensteinian references.

Stoppard wrote his first play about a professional philosopher the following year. *Jumpers* (1972) follows Professor George Moore as he fails to write a speech supporting the existence of moral absolutes and of God. This is not, of course, the George Moore, famous moral philosopher: the in-joke is precisely that the name doesn't adequately refer to the person.

In the play, the character George reminisces about Wittgenstein asking a colleague what the sky would have looked like if the Earth and not the Sun were the centre of the Solar System. Words fail the other academic, who can only gesture in reply. Literary scholars spotted that Stoppard was recycling material from an unproduced screenplay, *Galileo*. They didn't recognise that the anecdote was lifted straight out of G.E.M. Anscombe's *An Introduction to Wittgenstein's Tractatus* (1959).

Jumpers also provided proof, were it needed, that Wittgenstein is funnier than Spinoza. In early performances, George called the police and gave a false name: 'Spinoza'. No laugh. So Stoppard changed the pseudonym to 'Wittgenstein'. Laughter ensued, problem solved.

Before the decade was out, Stoppard had written a whole colloquium of philosophers. In his TV play *Professional Foul* (1977) he sent a bunch of them to a conference in Prague, where their pristine ethical constructs were sullied by practical experiences of communist totalitarianism. The Professor of Ethics from Cambridge University concludes his speech with a *Tractatus* echo and inversion: "Whereof we cannot speak, thereof we are by no means silent..."

All this direct reference might seem rather brutal work for a muse. Wittgenstein's influence on Stoppard is frequently more subtle. Consider the radio play *Artist Descending a Staircase* (1972). Before blindness takes over, Sophie falls in love with an artist she sees standing by his painting of black railings in the snow. After a long and unhappy relationship, it turns out that the exhibition also featured a painting, by a different artist, of a white fence on a black background. We never find out which painting Sophie actually saw. A philosopher in the audience may be reminded here of Wittgenstein's *Investigations*, with its white cross on a black background and its black cross on a white background, which are, of course, the same figure.

Still too blunt? Well, there are no philosophers in *The Real Thing* (1982). There are playwrights, actors, and a famous speech comparing a wellwritten oration to a well-made cricket bat, "so that when we throw up an idea and give it a little knock it might... travel." Its opening scene of marital infidelity turns out to be from a play set within Stoppard's own play. The name of the inner play? *House of Cards*. An echo, perhaps, of *Philosophical Investigations*' self-declared statement of intent: "What we are destroying are only houses of cards, and we are clearing up the grounds of language on which they stood."

We can, perhaps, stretch the Wittgensteinian connections even further – at least as far as the character of Kerner in Stoppard's play about Cold War spies, *Hapgood* (1988).

It might be unsurprising that in the normal course of business, Stoppard came to know several philosophers who had themselves known Wittgenstein. He met A.J. Ayer after Ayer's positive review of *Jumpers* for the *Sunday Times*. Stoppard's introduction to Stephan Körner was a little less predictable, and far more prosaic. Körner, a Czech refugee like Stoppard himself, had studied under Wittgenstein at Cambridge, and went on to senior roles at the Universities of Bristol and Yale. Yet Stephan only met Tom because they shared an accountant: Peter Stoppard, Tom's older brother. It seems at least plausible, then, that the clever, decent, triple-agent of a quantum physicist in *Hapgood* is another link to Wittgenstein.

Where we might need to squint a little harder to see the Wittgensteinian muse, is in the 1972 TV show *Tom Stoppard Doesn't Know*. Stoppard wrote a script in which he finds himself pestered by a journalist constantly asking for his comments on the moral questions of the day: apartheid, abortion, censorship, Vietnam: right or wrong? Stoppard repeatedly answers that he simply doesn't know, and that he refuses to offer an illegitimate pretence of certainty. The one thing he does know however, is that the M4 is the fastest way to drive home. This is all very reminiscent of Wittgenstein's *Lecture on Ethics* (1929), where we learn a surprising amount about the right road to Grantchester in Cambridge, but are also encouraged to accept the fundamental unknowability of ethical demands. Had Wittgenstein taken the M4, the history of ethical philosophy might have been very different. As would the history of the British motorway system, of course.

The final scene of *Tom Stoppard Doesn't Know* takes place in the London Library. Thirty years after filming, in 2002, Stoppard would become President of the Library – a post he would hold for fifteen years. But in 1972 he arranged to be filmed in the Library's 'W' section, telling us what he doesn't know. As *The Guardian's* film critic Michael Billington spotted, that meant that, there in the background, were the works of Wittgenstein.

Stoppard turned eighty-five last April, and he's still writing. His most recent play, *Leopoldstadt* (2020), stages increasingly anxious scenes from the life of a wealthy Viennese family of Jewish heritage, in 1899, 1924, and 1938, before a visceral concluding scene set in 1955. Reviewers spotted here moments drawn from Stoppard's past: a doctor stitching a child's cut hand; an aunt disclosing the full extent of the family's Jewish heritage and its terrible Holocaust losses. But while seeing those threads, the reviewers didn't observe the Wittgensteinian fabric, including a family of wealthy Viennese industrialists who thought their distant Jewish heritage was beyond politics until it was almost too late; a brother who lost the use of a limb in the First World War; a sister who was painted by Klimt; and the gifting of Klimt's painting, *Philosophy*, to the World's Fair when it was rejected by its commissioners at the University of Vienna. All this is drawn directly from Wittgenstein's family history.

A muse is more than a co-author, a source, an allusion, a reference point, a character or a punchline, of course. But if there is a presiding genius hiding in Stoppard's work, then surely it is Ludwig Wittgenstein.

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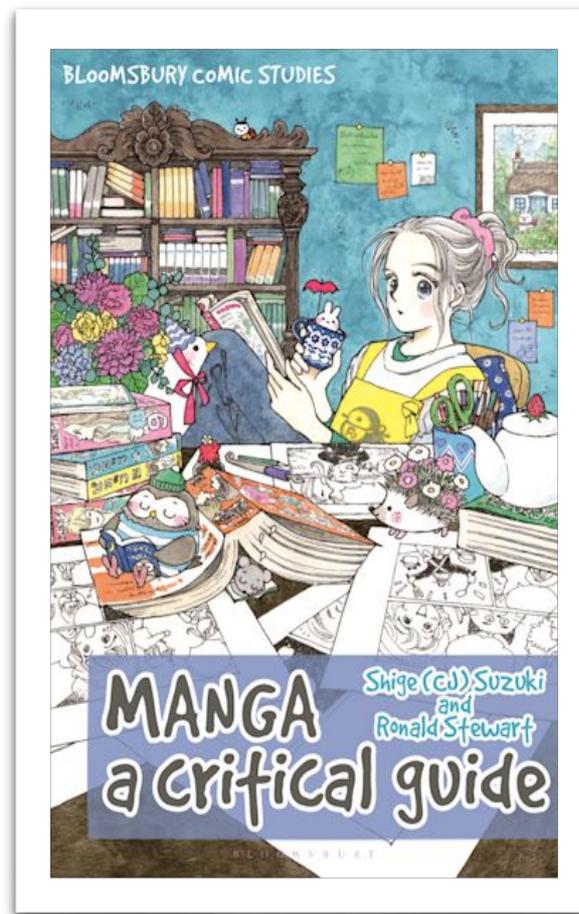
Note: This article originally appeared as Fergus Edwards. 2023. Wittgenstein: Stoppard's Muse. *Philosophy Now*. At: https://philosophynow.org/issues/154/Wittgenstein_Stoppards_Muse (accessed 9 February 2023). Fergus Edwards is a doctoral student at the University of Tasmania and an AHSN Scholarship Winner from AHSN2022.

Member's New Book on Manga and Cartooning

Shige (CJ) Suzuki and Ronald Stewart. 2022. *Manga: A Critical Guide*. Bloomsbury Comics Studies. 280pp. 26 bw illus. London: Bloomsbury Academic Publishing. ISBN 9781350072343

<https://www.bloomsbury.com/au/manga-9781350072343/>

See also link to resources at: <https://mangaguide.commons.gc.cuny.edu/useful-links/>



Publisher's description

A wide-ranging introductory guide for readers making their first steps into the world of manga, this book helps readers explore the full range of Japanese comic styles, forms and traditions from its earliest texts to the internationally popular comics of the 21st century. In an accessible and easy-to-navigate format, the book covers:

- The history of Japanese comics, from influences in early visual culture to the global 'Manga Boom' of the 1990s to the present
- Case studies of texts reflecting the range of themes, genres, forms and creators, including Osamu Tezuka, Machiko Hasegawa and Katsuhiro Otomo
- Key themes and contexts – from gender and sexuality, to history and censorship
- Critical approaches to manga, including definitions, biography and reception and global publishing contexts

The book includes a bibliography of essential critical writing on manga, discussion questions for classroom use and a glossary of key critical terms.

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Towards Character-Driven Narratives and a Profession

Children's Manga Growth, Media Interplay, and the Dark Valley of War

Part II: 1945 to the Present

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After the Death of "God"

3. Social and Cultural Impact

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Historical Questions and Historical Representation

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Appendix:

Glossary, List of Museums, Resources, Index

Members' new publications

Beatriz Carbajal-Carrera. 2023. Hierarchies among intertextual references: reading Reggaeton Ilustrado's digital humour through the colonial matrix of power. *Critical Discourse Studies*. Published online 18 January 2023. DOI: [10.1080/17405904.2022.2157851](https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2022.2157851) (open access)

About: This article examines intertextuality in digital humour through a combination of tools from pragmatics and decoloniality. The study draws on a dataset of Spanish image macros that intertwine highbrow and lowbrow intertextual references. The analysis is framed by key theoretical concepts at the discursive and hierarchical levels. Specifically, three domains of the colonial matrix of power (knowledge, humanity and governance) are used as analytical categories to identify specific intertextual strategies and hierarchies present in the data. The visual and verbal components of the items are analysed through critical discourse analysis with attention to their salient signs. The use of the colonial matrix of power as an analytical tool for identifying hierarchies in intertextual references stands out as a methodological application with the potential to be further replicated in discourse analysis.

Fergus Edwards. 2023. Wittgenstein: Stoppard's Muse. *Philosophy Now*. At: https://philosophynow.org/issues/154/Wittgenstein_Stoppards_Muse (accessed 9 February 2023).

About: See separate item for full text, with thanks to the publishers.

Anja Pabel and M. Turnšek. 2022. Travel-related humour and COVID-19: insights from memes. *European Journal of Humour Research*, 10 (3), 211-216. <https://doi.org/10.7592/EJHR.2022.10.3.659>

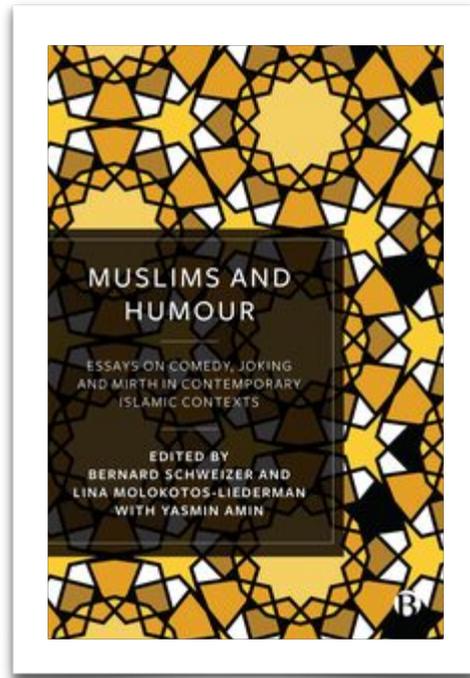
Stephen Skalicky. 2023. *Verbal Irony Processing*. Elements in Psycholinguistics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009234566>

About: A (relatively) short and approachable overview of the psycholinguistic study of verbal irony. Although most of the research reviewed is cognitive and psycholinguistic, the *Element* reviews theories and concepts which are fundamental to all studies of verbal irony.

Stephen Skalicky and Victoria Chen. 2023. *Leaving this unsaid: A case study of empty this in North American satirical newspaper headlines*. In [Laure Gardelle](#), [Laurence Vincent-Durroux](#), and [Hélène Vinckel-Roisin](#). 2023. *Reference: From convention to pragmatics*. Amsterdam & New York: John Benjamins. [Studies in Language Companion Series](#) No. 28. vi + 349 pp. <https://benjamins.com/catalog/slcs.228>).

About: Stephen Skalicky and colleague Victoria Chen have contributed a chapter that is included in the "creativity" section of this book [<https://doi.org/10.1075/slcs.228.11ska>]. It explores how satirical headlines from North American satirical newspapers can (sometimes) exploit an empty referent in order to prompt a reader towards satirical inference. The volume provides an innovative approach to the referential process, thanks to its focus on the relationship between conventions and discourse pragmatics. It brings together a cross-section of current research on referential conventions and pragmatic strategies, in a number of different fields (formal and theoretical linguistics, semantics, discourse analysis, psycholinguistics, interactional linguistics, natural language processing), in a variety of verbal and non-verbal languages (English, German, different varieties of French, Indonesian, Belgian sign language) and in a diversity of contexts (the coining of names, language acquisition, second language learning, and various genres such as news articles, narratives, satire or game playing). The book is meant as a series of thought-provoking studies which place speakers and addressees at the core of the referential act, thus providing evidence on how they negotiate and adjust, depending on the context.

New Book on Muslims and Humour



Bernard Schweizer, Lina Molokotos-Liederman, and Yasmin Amin, eds. 2022. *Muslims and Humour: Essays on Comedy, Joking, and Mirth in Contemporary Islamic Contexts*. Bristol: Bristol University Press.

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Toying with ISIS' recruitment of women in 'the West': 'The Real Housewives of ISIS'

Ridiculing the ISIS soldiers' twisted ideologies and militarized practices: 'Daesh'

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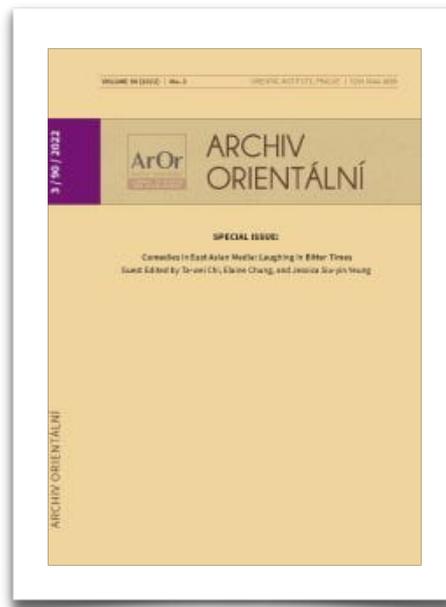
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New Journal Special Issue on Comedy in East Asia



Comedies in East Asian Media: Laughing in Bitter Times. 2022. Special issue of *Archiv orientální*, eds. Ta-wei Chi, Elaine Chung and Jessica Siu-yin Yeung. *Archiv orientální* 90 (3). <https://aror.orient.cas.cz/index.php/ArOr>

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Laughter Suspended: Japanese Surreal Comedy and the Ends of Progress / David Humphrey
Neoliberal Subjectivities and Cynicism in China: Feng Xiaogang’s Dream-play Comedies / Yung-Hang Bruce Lai
A Tale of Two Dragons: Politics of the Comedic Kung Fu Body in Chinese Cinema / Wayne Wong
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A Brief History of Taiwanese Comedy Cinema / George Chun Han Wang

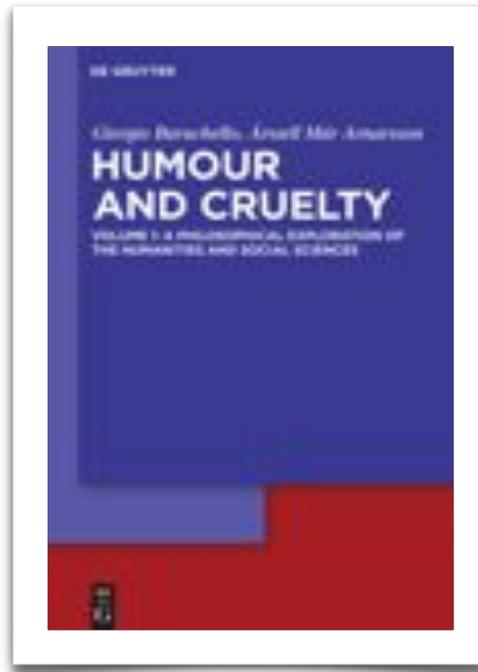
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New Book on Humour and Cruelty



Giorgio Baruchello and Ársæll Már Arnarsson, eds. 2022. *Humour and Cruelty, Vol. 1: A Philosophical Exploration of the Humanities and Social Sciences*. De Gruyter Studies in Philosophy of Humor. Berlin and Boston MA: De Gruyter. ISBN:9783110759839; 9783110759761 <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110759839>

About this book

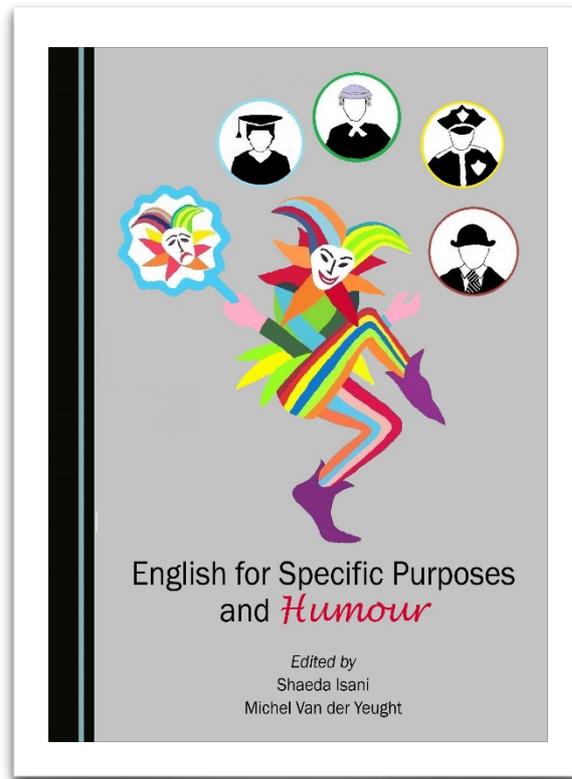
Humor has been praised by philosophers and poets as a balm to soothe the sorrows that outrageous fortune's slings and arrows cause inevitably, if not incessantly, to each and every one of us. In mundane life, having a sense of humor is seen not only as a positive trait of character, but as a social prerequisite, without which a person's career and mating prospects are severely diminished, if not annihilated. However, humor is much more than this, and so much else. In particular, humor can accompany cruelty, inform it, sustain it, and exemplify it. Therefore, in this book, we provide a comprehensive, reasoned exploration of the vast literature on the concepts of humor and cruelty, as these have been tackled in Western philosophy, humanities, and social sciences, especially psychology. Also, the apparent cacophony of extant interpretations of these two concepts is explained as the inevitable and even useful result of the polysemy inherent to all common-sense concepts, in line with the understanding of concepts developed by M. Polanyi in the 20th century. Thus, a thorough, nuanced grasp of their complex mutual relationship is established, and many platitudes affecting today's received views, and scholarship, are cast aside.

Author information:

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New Book on Humour and English for Specific Purposes (ESP)



Shaeda Isani and Michel Van Der Yeught, eds. 2023. *English for specific purposes and humour*. Newcastle-Upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 335pp. ISBN: 1-5275-9205-7; ISBN13: 978-1-5275-9205-6

<https://www.cambridgescholars.com/product/978-1-5275-9205-6>

Publisher's Description

This volume investigates the mechanisms and psychosocial aspects of humour related to specialised work environments, and foregrounds its role as one of the building blocks that shape the discourse, culture and identity of specialised communities. Through a cross-disciplinary approach, the book brings together an international team of authors using state-of-the art research to analyse the varieties, characteristics and functions of humour in and across a wide range of specialised fields, including law, policing, banking, marketing, and mental health, among many others.

English for specific purposes (ESP) researchers will appreciate the rich, multi-faceted explorations of the volume and the new insights it offers with regard to various fields of investigation. ESP teachers and learners will find the abundant examples of specialised workplace humour a valuable teaching and learning support to help access the ethos of specialised domains and enrich, and stimulate the dynamics of classroom practices.

Contributors

Belinda Crawford Camiciottoli
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Audrey Cartron
Isabel Espinosa-Zaragoza
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Editors' bionotes

Shaeda Isani works in English for specific purposes (ESP) teaching and research. She created the first research centre in France devoted to multilingual studies in the language, discourse and culture of specialised communities. Her main research interest lies in English for legal purposes, and, in 2011, she contributed a chapter in this field to the edited volume *Researching Specialized Languages*, which was awarded the triannual Enrique Alcaraz Prize for best publication in the field of ESP in English, German, Spanish, French or Portuguese. She has also published in the areas of the specialised languages of oenology, journalism and the "sin industries".

Michel Van der Yeught is currently Professor Emeritus at Aix-Marseille University, France. He works in English for specific purposes (ESP) teaching and research, and his main scientific interests focus on financial English and on theorising the study of specialised languages. He has published widely on the English of the stock market, writing the first history of Wall Street in French (*Une histoire de Wall Street*, 2009). From 2013 to 2019, he was president of GERAS, the leading learned society for ESP in France.

New Issue of *European Journal of Humour Research* Vol. 10 No. 4 (2022)

<https://europeanjournalofhumour.org/ejhr/issue/current>

Editorial

Dorota Brzozowska, Wladyslaw Chlopicki, Villy Tsakona, Joao Pedro Rosa Ferreira, Anastasiya Fiadotava, Paavo Kerkkänen, Aziz Kholmatov, Liisi Laineste, Gabriella Maestrini, Vicky Manteli, Vittorio Marone, Marit Piirman, Ghaleb Rababah, [Scrapbook for the 10th anniversary of the European Journal of Humour Research](#) 1-18

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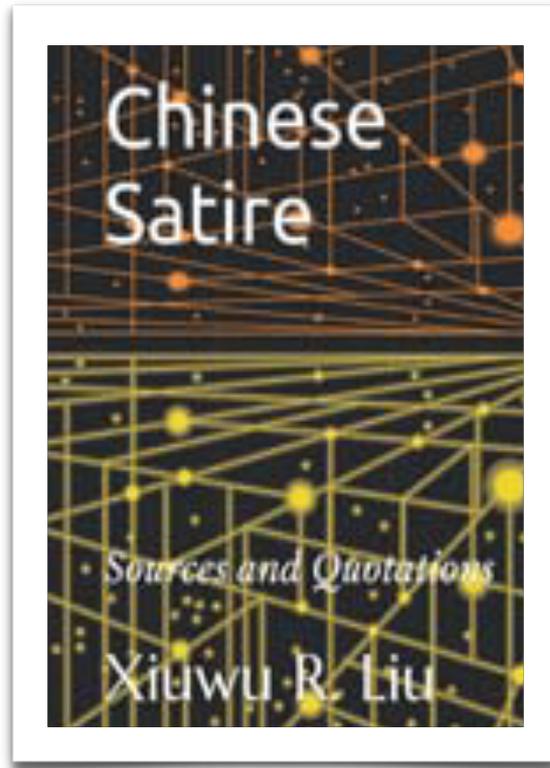
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Władysław Chłopicki, [Book review: Attardo, Salvatore \(2020\). The Linguistics of Humor. An Introduction. Oxford: Oxford University Press](#) 245-249

New Book on Chinese Satire



Xiuwu R. LIU. 2022. *Chinese satire*. Oxford OH: Hermit Studio. 129 pp. ISBN-13: 979-8987005545

About this book from the author:

This resource was compiled for a course in Chinese satire at Miami University. Meanwhile, other readers interested in China or satire may also find it useful. The quotations were selected from my larger collection, *Deflating human beings: Sources and quotations from around the world*. The new appendix includes the sources I've saved over the years as well as most of those introduced in sixteen histories of and reference works in Chinese literature in English (including in translation). If a Chinese text is available online, a link is given.

New Book Review Editor for the AHSN Digest

Dr Beatriz Carbajal-Carrera is a Lecturer in Spanish and Latin American Studies at the University of Sydney. Her research examines humour from discourse analysis and pragmatic approaches mainly in Spanish-speaking contexts. Her research interests lie in discourse framed as humorous, multimodality, the pragmatics of emotions, the socio-cognitive approach to pragmatics and critical literacy. Her current project focuses on social and epistemic relations in the analysis of digital humour.

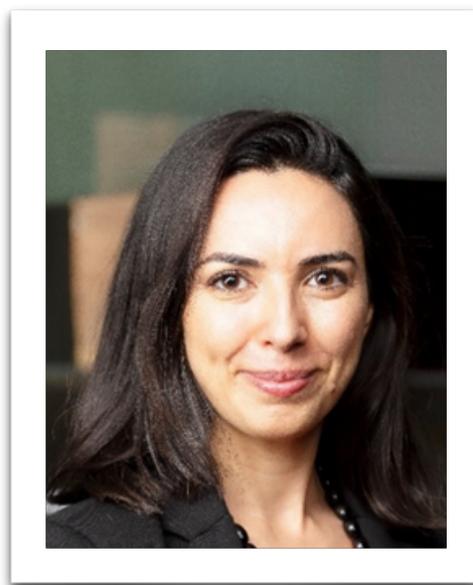
She has collaborated with the *Real Academia Española de la Lengua Española* on a project of language diversity as well as with Spanish-Government funded projects on language and emotions. Her work has been published in journals such as *Critical Discourse Studies*, *The European Journal of Cultural Studies*, *System*, *The European Journal of Humour Research* and *Pragmalingüística*. Her article “Subverting superhero and *meiga* imaginaries in street art narrative *Fenómenos do rural*” was awarded the 2021 USYD School of Languages and Cultures Early Career Researcher Journal Publication Prize.

She first joined the AHSN in 2013 during the 19th conference on “Humour and Creativity” held at the University of Newcastle. She has since participated in the AHSN annual conference at Wellington (2014), Adelaide (2015) and more recently in Sydney (2023), as well as in webinars and events organized by the network. During the latest AHSN conference, she enjoyed reconnecting with fellow AHSN members in person and getting to know new members. Her personal highlights from the event can be found [here](#).

Beatriz looks forward to hearing from AHSN members about their book publications. Please keep her informed about your book publications so that they can be shared with colleagues via the AHSN Digest, together with the book synopsis and bibliographical information.

Feel free to also recommend new books not authored by you that you would like to share with readers of the Digest. Beatriz will continue selectively commissioning book reviews as previous book review editors did. There are more to come in the pipeline and all previous reviews can be found at <https://ahsnhumourstudies.org/book-reviews/>

You can get in touch with Beatriz at: beatriz.carbajal@sydney.edu.au



Beatriz Carbajal-Carrera

The Eds: A warm welcome to Beatriz and thanks for taking on this important role for the Digest.

Book Review of AHSN Member's New Book

Michael Ewans, ed. 2020. *A Cultural History of Comedy in Antiquity*. Vol. 1 in *A Cultural History of Comedy*, eds. Andrew Stott and Eric Weitz. London: Bloomsbury Academic. 227pp. ISBN (hardcover): 978-1-3500-0071-1; ISBN (hardcover set): 978-1-3500-0082-7

Reviewed by Helen Musa

In this suite of eight essays by nine scholars, editor Michael Ewans questions the purposes and functions of Greek and Roman comedy written and performed in the period from 500 BCE to 1000 CE. It is the first in a series that spans a discussion of comedy and the comic form from classical to modern times and is expertly prepared and edited.

General editors Andrew McConnell Stott and Eric Weitz assert that the volumes in the series are accessible to “more than a strictly academic readership” (xi), but all the authors selected by Ewans are respected classical scholars, although not all write in the same lively style as Ewans himself. This particular collection is likely to have a mixed impact on readers, with specialist scholars of humour finding interest in the chapters on theory and laughter, theatre-lovers and practitioners going straight to the sections on praxis and body, and contemporary current affairs readers turning to the discussion of politics and ethics.

Ewans' introductory essay set out the proviso that because of the fragmentary nature of the source material available, genuine textual analysis is only possible in the case of Aristophanes, Menander (to a degree) Plautus and Terence, whose plays are extant (1).

He also gives an overview of the evolution of stage comedy from the first competitive comedy at the Dionysia festival in 486 BCE (3). Inevitably, in a multi-authored work, his references to the gradual abandoning of the choros, the increasing domesticity of subject matter, the emergence of stock characters and their influence on later European drama are repeated in subsequent chapters.

The eight following chapters are devoted respectively to Form, Theory, Praxis, Identities, The Body, Politics and Power, Laughter and Ethics.

In Chapter 1, *Form*, Gesine Manuwald, looks at the various forms of comedy in roughly chronological order, canvassing ancient views that comedy, unlike tragedy, deals with characters of lower status through fictional stories (21). She argues that changes from Old to Middle and New Comedy were more likely to have been gradual (24) and notes that the plays of Hellenistic Greece were not exactly realistic but rather “theatrical constructs” involving situations relevant to their audiences (26). Turning to Rome, she notes the debts to Greek plays (28) but also the introduction of localised characters like craftsmen and hairdressers (31), added to the familiar stock characters of earlier comedy. Her descriptions of other Roman forms, including mime, fabula togata and fabula Atellana are perceptive and she traces the decline of comedy in Imperial and Christian Rome (34-5).

In Chapter 2, *Theory*, Caleb MC Dance moves away from the stage comedies into reflections on the moral desirability or otherwise of comedy. Looking at concepts of comedy as articulated by ancient commentators like Plato, Socrates, Aristotle, Cicero, Julius Caesar Strabo and Horace, he focuses on the question of whether comedy involves pain and whether if proven, this is an argument for banning performances. Drawing analogies from Aristotle theories of tragedy, (44) he quotes the document *Tractatus Coislinianus* which proposes a definition of Comedy to parallel Aristotle's famous catharsis theory, and concludes that that "Comedy... harnesses the laughable ... to edify its audience, exercise their emotions and provoke laughter and pleasure" (57).

Chapter 3, *Praxis* by Ewans, brings the subject of comedy back to the practical side of the theatre. Stage directions being scant, the play texts of Aristophanes, Menander, Plautus and Terence are his main sources. He contrasts the *teatron* (seeing place) of Greece and *auditorium* (hearing place) of Rome and brings the reader up to detail with current views about Greek staging techniques (62-3) and actor-audience relationships (64-5). Ewans' predilection for Old Comedy is evident when he contrasts the perceived durability of Aristophanes into modern times with the fact that Terence, and through him, Menander, have been superseded by forms like Rom-com and soap opera (77).

In Chapter 4, *Identities*, Natalia Tsoumpra's analysis of class, nationhood, and language comic typology make for lively reading (79). She opens by looking at accents identifying characters as lower-class, rural yokels or foreigners, then challenges the idea that stock characters began with Middle and New Comedy, tracing several of them back to Old Comedy (89). In her treatment of pederasty, homosexuality, crossdressing and rape, she admits that modern perspectives are hard to avoid (94-96).

In Chapter 5, *Body*, Louise Peacock looks at the way the way the body of the actor is used to generate physical comedy. Noting that costumes and masks are used as a source of comedy, she looks at padding on natural bodies, the use of artificial phalluses, the ludicrous exaggeration of breasts and the emphasis on grotesqueness and carnality in Old Comedy, seen in illustrations of statuettes from Crete, Greece and Rome. While Aristophanes and Plautus focus on sex as a source of comedy (109), most of the plays under consideration feature bullying, whipping, pushing, punching, mistaken identity and eavesdropping with "a remarkable consistency" in techniques which are also used by playwrights and screenwriters today (117).

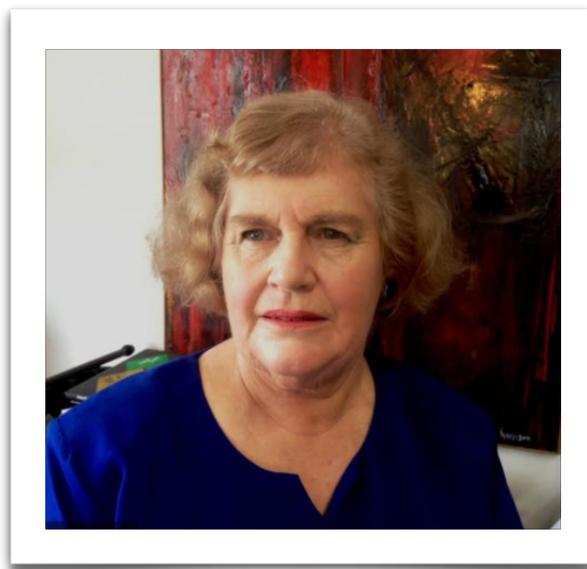
In Chapter 6, *Politics and Power*, Isabel Ruffell argues that the institutionalisation of comedy first expressed civic pride and democratic assertion (120). But in Aristophanes' plays, unflattering portraits of real-life personalities like Cleon and Socrates may have undermined that. Plato claimed Aristophanes' caricature of Socrates in "The Clouds" prejudiced the philosopher's trial (125) but, while Ruffell looks for evidence that Aristophanes was right-leaning, she cannot find it. She also believes evidence is scant for the belief that Middle Comedy shifts away from political comedy (128-9). Noting that no permanent theatre was built in Rome until 55 BCE, well after the great playwrights, she suggests that theatre was always suspected, as it still is, of "the danger of becoming a focus for the expression of public opinion" (136).

In Chapter 7, *Laughter*, Marcel Lysgaard Lech uses the textual evidence of two Greek words, *gelan* (to laugh) and *meidian* (to smile) to speculate on whether laughter was elicited or not (139), especially in Menander's comedies, where one critic found "smiles rather than laughter" (144). After looking at Roman words for laughter, including *ridere* (to laugh) and its noun *risus*, he returns to Plato's argument that the laughter elicited in satirical comedies can cause pain, a position rejected by Aristotle. I was less comfortable with the writer's search for evidence in the scripts of "the pure, physical and sonic laugh" (151) written as "(Ha)hahae", words used to show character, but not, he believes, as a cue for the audience to laugh (155).

The book concludes on an unmistakably contemporary note with Chapter 8, *Ethics*. Opening with an essay on Greek comedy, Valeria Cinaglia argues that some fundamental ethical themes remain consistent throughout Greek comedy. But in the new comedy of Menander, she perceives a specific interest in the ethical progression of the characters (164). Turning to Roman comedy, Serena S. Witzke, looks at the way Plautus and Terence, both of them “noncitizen outsiders” (165), went beyond slapstick to scrutinise the world of the Roman citizen elite. Plautus put slaves and non-citizens in dominant positions, but allowed his critique to be “comfortably veiled” by riotous comedy, whereas Terence’s plays, with their forced marriages and cruel fathers, represented a darker world with no truly happy endings (166). But the fact that their shared concerns with slavery, torture, and rape and sexual exploitation are not necessary to the plots, she argues, indicates the clear intention to highlight the failings of Roman society.

Reviewer’s Bionote

Helen Musa is an arts and cultural journalist. Trained in the history of theatre and drama at the University of New South Wales and the National Institute of Dramatic Art, she spent many years teaching in colleges and universities in Australia and in Malaysia, where she lectured at the Science University of Malaysia and directed eight plays for the University Theatre, all in the Malay language. During her years as an arts journalist, first as Editor of Canberra’s monthly cultural magazine *Muse* from 1990 to 1996 and then as Arts Editor of *The Canberra Times* from 1996 to 2007, she expanded her focus from theatre to the visual arts, including the art of Southeast Asia. She is now Arts Editor for *Citynews* in Canberra, Convener of the Canberra Critics’ Circle and continues to critique drama and opera.



Helen Musa

AHSN Digest Book Review Editor Passes the Baton

Outgoing Book Review Editor Dr Reza Arab has passed the baton to his successor, **Dr Beatriz Carbajal-Carrera** (see next item). During Reza's time, book reviews have increased their visibility and six are now posted on the AHSN website for permanent references as well as being distributed via the Digest, with more to come (see separate items, two new reviews). In case you missed some, here is the present online list:

Benjamin Nickl. 2021. Turkish German Muslims and Comedy Entertainment: Settling into Mainstream Culture in the 21st Century. Leuven: Leuven University Press. 215 pp. ISBN (Paperback): 9789462702387. ISBN (ePDF): 9789461663412. ISBN (ePUB): 9789461663429. DOI: 10.11116/9789461663412. [Reviewed by Massih Zekavat](#), May 2022.

Huw Marsh. 2020. The Comic Turn in Contemporary English Fiction: Who's Laughing Now? London: Bloomsbury. 256pp. ISBN (Hardcover): 9781474293037 ISBN (Paperback): 9781350249387 (eBook): 9781474293044. [Reviewed by Til Knowles](#), November 2021.

Madelijn Strick and Thomas E. Ford, eds. 2021. The Social Psychology of Humor: Current Issues in Social Psychology. London and New York: Routledge. ISBN (Hardcover): 9780367487195 ISBN (Paperback): 9780367487188 ISBN (eBook): 9781003042440. [Reviewed by David Rawlings](#), October 2021.

John Rucynski Jr. and Caleb Prichard, eds. 2020. Bridging the Humor Barrier: Humor Competency Training in English Language Teaching. London: Lexington Books. 300 pp. ISBN (Hardcover): 9781498592000 ISBN (Paperback): 9781498592024 ISBN (eBook): 9781498592017. [Reviewed by Kerry Mullan](#), October 2021.

Marcus Tullius Cicero and Michael Fontaine (trans). 2021. How to Tell a Joke: An Ancient Guide to the Art of Humor. Ancient Wisdom for Modern Readers Series. Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press. 328pp. ISBN (Hardcover): 9780691206165 ISBN (eBook): 9780691211077 DOI: 10.2307/j.ctv160btp8. [Reviewed by Michael Ewans](#), August 2021.

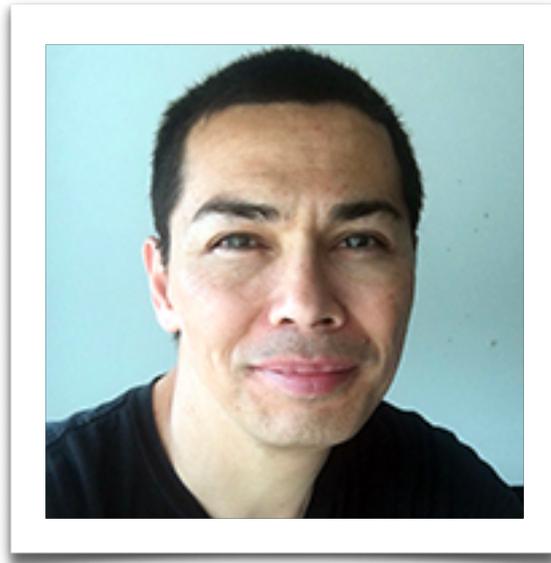
Frederick Luis Aldama, ed. 2018. Comics Studies Here and Now. New York, Abingdon: Routledge. 364+pp. 36 figures. ISBN (Hardback): 9781138498976 ISBN (Paperback): 9780367590703 ISBN (eBook): 9781351015271. DOI: 10.4324/9781351015271. [Reviewed by Richard Scully](#), August 2021.

The Editors would like to thank Reza for his painstaking and detailed work as BRed for the Digest, wish him well in his new roles for AHSN, and extend a warm welcome to Beatriz in his stead (see next item).

A Hearty Welcome to the New Editor of the AHSN Humour Studies Digest: Dr Lucien Leon

Lucien Leon is a member of the AHSN Review Panel and an independent scholar who is interested in political cartoons and online political satire. His most recent publication is 'Memes, Gifs and Videos' (2020), in Marian Sawyer (ed.), Morrison's Miracle: Analysing the 2019 Australian Federal Election (Canberra: ANU Press). He was a judge and catalogue essayist in the 2021 and 2022 iterations of the Museum of Australian Democracy's annual 'Behind The Lines' exhibitions, while his upcoming publications include (with AHSN colleague Richard Scully, in press), 'Talking Pictures (and cartoons, memes and videos and more besides)', in Marian Simms (ed.), The 2022 Australian Federal Election (Canberra: ANU Press) and 'In Memes We Trust: Co-option or Democratisation of Graphic Political Satire', in Benjamin Nickl and Mark Rolfe (eds.), Post-Moral Humour in a World of Gods and Old Monsters (in press, Tampere University Press, Finland).

Lucien kindly stepped in during 2022 at very short notice to assist the long-standing Digest Editor, Dr Michael Meany (University of Newcastle), during his recuperation, and has recently been appointed by the AHSN Board as new Digest Editor.



Lucien Leon

From Jessica Milner Davis, AHSN Co-ordinator: Welcome and many thanks, Lucien! And best wishes to Michael during his continued recovery.

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