

## Book review

Brzozowska, D., Chłopicki, W. (eds). (2012). *Polish Humour. Humour and Culture 2*. Kraków: Tertium. 681 pp.

The book *Polish Humour* (edited by Dorota Brzozowska and Władysław Chłopicki) contains 33 chapters by 26 authors and deals with the traditions of Polish humour across time zones and space, as well as along national and ethnic boundaries. This comprehensive monographic study of Polish humour consists of papers collected over a period of 4 years and is the first extensive work in this area on the Polish market. The list of authors includes linguists, sociologists, historians, literary scholars, experts in cultural studies, folklorists, art historians, rhetoricians, and psychologists. There is a common goal to acquaint the readers with Polish humour, and so the content is illustrated with a variety of examples. The volume is divided into three parts; the first part includes a broad perspective on humour genres.

The range of topics covered in the first part (*Genres of Polish humour*) includes the use of humour in prose and poetry and the selection of papers include comedy use in satire, cabaret, the press, as well as the media such as film, radio, television and the Internet. The specific forms of humour covered in this part embrace the use of proverbs, aphorisms, posters, caricature, satirical drawings, cabaret songs, political humour, ethnic and regional humour (Jewish, Russniak, Roma, and Silesian), as well as gender and children's humour. The first chapter written by Natalia Lemann 'Humour in prose literature from the Middle Ages to 1918' discusses how authors over successive periods in history provide an account of the contemporary sense of humour in the tradition of 800 years of the nation's literature. An account is given of how the genres apply humour to provide a story of the Polish way of thinking about the nation's difficult history. The second chapter by Paweł Kamocki 'The comic spirit of Old Poland in literature' offers an overview of the tradition of comic literature in Poland from the 15th till the end of the 18th century. Numerous examples are included to illustrate how the grotesque and comedy are used at the level of style, language, characters and plot from early Polish literary works through to Kochanowski's trifles to the anticlerical inclination in the writing of Krasicki. Maria Wojtak, in her paper 'Comic effects in the stage works of Aleksander Fredro', discusses the diverse style represented by the comedies of one of the best Polish humorous writers, Aleksander Fredro, in the context of the Polish tradition. This paper contains a range of examples which serve to emphasise the diversity of the humour and the light character of the writing. The fourth essay by Izabela Curyło-Klag, 'Laughing at life's lowest abominations with Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz' presents elements of comedy and seriousness in the writing talent represented by the plays of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century artist and playwright also known as Witkacy. The variety of humour in his texts is reflected in the use of riotous, surreal and effusive elements, and by the constant surprises which he perceived as the essential monstrosity of existence. The fifth chapter, 'Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński's Little Theatre of the Green Goose' by Michał Palmowski, discusses the use of humour in a series of miniature plays from the 1940s, published under the title "Little Theatre of the Green Goose". The chapter focuses on how irony, nonsense and parody are combined with political correctness, in a large collection of short texts. The chapter by Jerzy Jarniewicz 'Subversive

tomfoolery: Humour in poetry after 1989' deals with the changes that occurred in Polish humour after the political transformations in 1989. It illustrates how poetry started to include various new senses of humour, especially ones used to respond to the new social and economic order, mass culture and the resulting contrasts. The seventh chapter, 'Humour in contemporary literature' by Natalia Lemann & Katarzyna Gucio, offers an overview of the characteristics of humour in Polish prose over the last century. Special focus is placed on the development of grotesque, nonsensical and surrealist humour, as well as on moral satire aimed at the new professions. The eighth chapter by Natalia Lemann 'An orphan in prison, or humour in fantasy literature' discusses the origin and diversity of the fantasy genre following the distinction between low fantasy style, based on rationale, and the deliberately intertextually allusive and allegorical high style, based on the fictional rewriting of a specific historical epoch. The ninth chapter 'Satire and satirists in twentieth-century Poland' by Izabela Mikrut takes up the subject of didactic satire and satirists throughout the 20th century. The names of satirists are given and their common themes are discussed. The following chapter 'Cabaret in Poland – Polish cabaret' by Łukasz Bład gives an account of the history of the Polish tradition of cabaret from the Jewish humour in the early 1900s to stand-up and the improvisational groups of the post-communist era. This paper lists the prominent cabarets in the last 100 years of Polish history and contains numerous examples of their comedy style. The eleventh paper, 'Humour in the contemporary press' by Maria Wojtak, investigates various components of the comic discourse used in the press (in papers and magazines), such as pastiche-parodist stylisation, use of ridicule and mocking existing conventions and word play, with an additional commentary on its use in social and political context. The next paper 'Polish film comedies' by Marta Dynel offers an overview of Polish comedy films released after the 1970s. An account is given of the comedy genres in Polish cinema and the types of comic effects achieved in them, including conversational and situational humour as well as witticisms.

The chapters that follow are concerned with the various media which have contributed to and play a role in spreading and developing the modern style of humour. The paper by Beata Grochala and Iwona Dembowska-Wosik, 'All we hear is radio Poland' gives an overview of selected humour and entertainment programs of two Polish radio broadcasters in the past 50 years, public Channel 3 and commercial RMF FM. In addition, this chapter includes examples of unintentional sources of humour derived from slips of the tongue and word play. The next chapter 'Television humour' written by Grzegorz Grzegorzczyk takes on the ambitious task of reviewing the years of humorous television programs corresponding to the communist rule in Poland and contains a list of the most outstanding comedians and selected means used to relate the style in the programs to the communist time. 'Humour in the global network' by Beata Grochala & Iwona Dembowska-Wosik focuses on the diversity of humour present on the Internet, including instant messaging, websites, forums, chats as well as blogs. Examples are provided on how new Internet media are inspired by age-old traditions of humour.

As the editors have put it, the second part of the book (*Forms of Polish Humour*) discusses more specific forms of humour. More particularly, the chapters in this part discuss how various media maintain and/or transform the tradition of humour. The first chapter in this part, 'Winged words – contemporary proverbs and aphorisms' by Grzegorz Grzegorzczyk, offers an extensive look at the history of funny sayings, adages, proverbs, remarks and quotations derived from films, politics, television and other sources. It illustrates how these sayings (called *eptonyms*) are used as commentary to reflect Polish society and start to form a part of the Polish linguistic tradition of the past 15 years. The next chapter 'Humour in poster' by Agnieszka Libura & Amelia Kielbawska analyses humour in Polish artistic posters from its origins in the 19th century. This chapter contains numerous copies of original posters. An

interesting section I found in this paper was the part concerned with the expression of humour in posters addressing the themes of culture, politics, social problems and health and safety. Maria Załęska's chapter 'Polish caricature' gives an account of how caricature in Polish history from the Middle Ages to the present has evolved to include a complex interplay of overt and covert messages. A considerable part of the text is concerned with the use of caricature during the communist period and its social and political relevance at the time. The chapter by Agnieszka Libura 'Images from post-war Poland in the mirror of satirical drawings' gives an overview of satirical drawings of the most influential Polish cartoonists of the last 60 years. Special emphasis is placed on how this type of art reflects the events and social problems of contemporary times. The chapter 'The cabaret song' by Izabela Mikrut & Łukasz Błąd focuses on the historical aspect of cabaret songs in Poland in the last 100 years. The authors indicate the impact politics and social matters had on the themes chosen in the songs. In her chapter 'Political humour in the period of the People's Republic of Poland' Maria Świątkiewicz-Mośny undertakes the task of analysing humorous political material from the period of the communist rule. The discussion is based on books of jokes and sources from the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN) and collected on websites. The next chapter, 'Contemporary political humour' by Marta Dynel, addresses the issues of the use of jokes in relation with politics and in political events, and describes the function humour plays nowadays in political life, such as personal defence and mockery. The paper by Dorota Brzozowska, 'Ethnic jokes', gives an account of how references to various nations (Germans, Russians, Jews, Americans) are found in Polish jokes, and how references to nationalities in humour correspond to both fiction and history, stereotypes and facts. The paper by Agnieszka Uścińska, 'The Jewish szmonces 1918–1939' describes the history and characteristics brought to light in a cabaret genre called *szmonces*. The discussion focuses on common subjects and use of humour in reference to Polish-Jewish history over the interwar period. The next paper, 'Humour of the Ruszniak (Lemko) people' by Andrzej Ksenicz gives an account of the origins and common topics in the humour of the inhabitants of the Low Beskids in the south-eastern part of Poland. Based partly on personal experience, he shows how this type of humour is derived from everyday life and culture of a light-hearted community with a difficult history. The next paper written by Anna Lubecka 'The image of the Roma in Polish jokes' reflects on how themes in Polish (and a few international) jokes and humour about Roma people reveal the attitudes, relations as well as characteristics associated with this nationality. The three final chapters in this part are shorter and deal with various areas in humour studies. The chapter 'Regional humour of Upper Silesia' by Maria Świątkiewicz-Mośny focuses on the definition, origins and themes of jokes from one region in southern Poland. The next chapter 'Manly banks and high-heeled bank accounts: Gender humour in advertising' by Monika Kostro describes the role of a variety of the uses of gender humour in Polish advertising, based on examples of several advertising campaigns from international banks based in Poland. The chapter 'Well begun is half done: The sense of humour of children and adolescents' by Beata Grochala & Iwona Dembowska-Wosik analyse the development of a sense of humour in children, the reception of humour by them and the reception of such humour by adults.

The third part of the book (*Humour Research in Poland*) contains an overview of Polish humour research in philosophy, literary studies, linguistics, folklore and psychology. The first chapter in this part 'Between philosophy, literature and linguistics of humour in Poland: An overview' by Władysław Chłopicki undertakes an analysis of various perspectives taken on in the studies of humour in Poland in the last century. This study in particular presents how various scholars combine linguistic, sociological and cognitive aspects in humour research. The next chapter 'Folklore studies on humour' by Janina Hajduk-Nijakowska gives an account of works written by several Polish folklorists who provided the

foundations for studies of communities of humour. This account in particular concerns insights into research provided by Dorota Simonides and Karol Kadłubiec. The chapter 'Researching the psychology of humour' by Anna Radomska offers a comprehensive look at the psychological aspects of humour research in the last century. Much of the content in this chapter reports on the cognitive, individual and personality related determinants of humorous style, as well as the relationships between gender, emotions and value system of individuals and their style of humour. The last chapter written by Joanna Olejarczyk gives an account of the history and origins of Polish cabaret, its tradition and sources, as well as conferences and events promoting the topic of humour in Poland.

In short, this book provides a very diverse and wide treatment of topics in humour, yet the editors managed to keep it specifically on topic. A great advantage of this volume is associated with a wide number of approaches presented in the papers and a number of examples which make it easy for the reader to follow the contents. It is a valuable resource for all scholars interested in the subject of humour and a great source of inspiration for anyone interested in seeking guidelines for the new research. It is also interesting to note that the book has now appeared in the Polish version and is available from Tertium publishers under the title *Humor polski* (2014).

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