

Editorial

Humour research: A European perspective in an international context

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After more than forty years of existence, the field of humour research is flourishing. It seems that now more than ever the time is right for the study of humour in general. But how do we facilitate progress in our field? As Willibald Ruch rightly pointed out, “(...) as academics we don’t only have the obligation to conduct research and further our understanding of humour and laughter. We also have the obligation to teach our knowledge to those who want to learn and also to inform the public about what we know and what we don’t know in this area” (Ruch 2003: 5).

Now that the field is mature and the work of researchers has moved into the mainstream of scholarly dialogue, the establishment of new alternative forums is the path to follow. Consequently, the present journal aims at promoting diversity in the field and providing a meaningful arena for discussion. Moreover, given that humour research spreads across many different journals and author or edited volumes, it is in our best interest, as an academic community, to be able to provide a new freely accessible scholarly journal that addresses the humour research community at large. Thus, the *European Journal of Humour Research* is an open-access multidisciplinary forum which is complementary to the leading *HUMOUR: International Journal of Humour Research* or the newly-born yet already acknowledged *Israeli Journal of Humour Research: An International Journal*.

The editorial team

The three editors-in-chief intend to leave perhaps more than the usual amount of steering to the editorial board and external reviewers. Besides benefiting from their high academic

expertise, we hope they will also give impulses from time to time through inviting special issues dedicated to intriguing topics of research, new theories and methodologies.

The editorial board is made up of more than twenty members. Coming from many points on the globe, they also represent a wide spread of disciplinary perspectives: linguistics, philosophy, political studies, psychology, and sociology, to name but a few. The center of gravity lies though in social sciences and humanities. There are members who focus on large-scale quantitative studies and there are those who specialise in the humanistic study of humour phenomenon. Also, there are board members who represent a variety of methodological and theoretical approaches in this field. There are those who have in-depth competence with a particular approach and there are those who contribute using a variety of approaches. Finally, to complete this equilibrium, there are both accomplished scientists of world renown, as well as younger researchers who have already contributed to the field in significant ways. In order to retain this balance in all its dimensions we shall continue to dynamically shape the editorial board of this journal in the future.

Another tool for raising awareness for promoting existing research in this academic field is the book review section. We are grateful that Villy Tsakona, an outstanding colleague from Democritus University of Thrace, Greece, has agreed to serve as review editor for the *European Journal of Humour Research*.

A final central element for the journal is the Online Journal System, which is part of the Public Knowledge Project (for details see <http://pkp.sfu.ca>). This open-access platform provides us with infrastructure and support throughout the whole editing process from peer review up to production and publication. We would not have been able to handle these ourselves. Thus, special thanks go to Kevin Stranack from Simon Fraser University Library, for his patience in technically assisting the online publication of a new journal. It is also worth pointing out here that by not being a commercial product, the *European Journal of Humour Research* is freely accessible to all individuals and institutions around the globe. And although it is an online journal, it aspires to become a leading open-access e-publication in its field and hence it adheres to the highest academic standards.

Online contributions

The *European Journal of Humour Research* will be published quarterly beginning with 2013. Diachronically, the journal is designed to respond to the important changes that have affected the study of humour, but particular predominance is given to the past events and current developments in Europe. Synchronically, it covers the full range of work being done on all aspects of humour phenomenon.

There are two distinct yet equally relevant categories of contributions that are particularly welcome: full-length original research articles and shorter commentary pieces, which critically examine and provide a reflective discussion on the literature and research direction of a particular topic of interest related to humour in the European context and/or from a European perspective. Contrastive contributions that take the European element as one of the main issues involved will also be included in our publication.

Concomitantly, the present e-journal will publish research notes that come as brief articles which detail new research projects in terms of aims, objectives, methods and outcomes, but will also welcome occasional invited guest articles. For consistency reasons, all contributions submitted should be in English.

It is worth pointing out here that the present journal has a special focus on supporting PhD students and early career researchers by providing them with a forum within which to disseminate their work alongside established scholars and practitioners.

A multidisciplinary first issue

The first issue was conceived as a collective call for papers. The present issue includes only six of the received contributions. Recent submissions that were not included in the first issue of this quarterly online journal will be included in the following three issues from volume one, 2013. We would like to formally thank the scholarly community for being supportive.

We start out with a wide range of contributions on humour phenomenon from a European perspective and/or in the European context that come from various disciplines and which rely on either a diachronic or synchronic approach. Thus, the present issue challenges the accepted view on the humour-philosophy relation, sheds some light on the humorous phenomena in dramatic discourse, discusses humorous poetry in late medieval Scotland, highlights translation strategies and adaptation of Aristophanes' humour for the modern Greek stage, evaluates the well-being of playful adults, and last but not least, investigates facial features of four types of laughter in historic illustrations.

To be more precise, the discussion is opened with Lydia Amir's inciting piece on the 'Philosophy's attitude towards the comic. A reevaluation'. Amir's article argues that, contrary to common opinion, philosophy's relation with the comic is not an inimical one. The antagonistic relationship between philosophy and the comic rests, Amir suggests, on two ancient laughter traditions, namely the laughless philosopher (Pythagoras) and the mocking sophist (Gorgias), which, isolated from the rest of the traditions, were taken conjointly to represent philosophy's relation with the comic. To illustrate the direct connection between the two above-mentioned concepts, Amir draws a ten-point list of potential conceptualisations of the philosophic approach to the comic, among which she includes 'philosophy is comedic', 'wit is a virtue', 'laughter is epistemologically and ontologically valuable', to name but a few. After a thorough reevaluation of the accepted view on the relationship between the comic and philosophy, Amir's paper concludes that philosophy has always abounded and still does in practices and views of it being essentially related to the comic. To put it in a nutshell, Amir shows that "Philosophy begins by criticizing laughter and ends by indicating a new way of laughing."

Marta Dynel's 'Humorous phenomena in dramatic discourse' gives insight into the types of humour prevalent in dramatic discourse, based on examples extracted from the famous medical drama series *House*. Dynel argues that in dramatic discourse, conversational humour manifests itself in rhetorical figures and pragmatic types. All humour forms identified by Dynel in dramatic discourse are then analysed from the perspective of the incongruity-resolution model that is coupled with superiority theory to further refine the discussion of disaffiliative humour. Interestingly, the incongruity-resolution model was argued to be applicable in the analysis of all the humour categories. Further on, Dynel claims that the manifestations of humour in dramatic discourse may be expected to differ from those in comedy discourse, where the goal is only to amuse the recipient, even if the code of realism should be affected. However, "film and real-life discourses permeate each other" since on the one hand, scriptwriters tend to create characters' conversations capitalising on real-life communicative norms and rules and, on the other, viewers tend to borrow lines from films and reuse them as stock witticisms, interweaving them into their conversations.

Janet Hadley Williams' 'Humorous poetry in late medieval Scots and Latin (c. 1450-1550). An Overview' attempts at taking a brief look into the humorous poetry of late medieval Scotland. However, as the author herself notes, such an overview is challenging. The drinking song, farce, parody, burlesque, elrich fantasy and satiric invective are all genres that Hadley Williams indicates as relevant illustrations. Moreover, she argues that the brief overview of humorous early Scottish poetry reveals a dependence on literary tradition and, even though "over five hundred years later it is not always easy to be sure of the intended tone of these works, the verbal artistry and technical skill, demonstrated in many of them are undeniable."

Vicky Manteli's 'Translating Aristophanes' humour for the modern Greek stage: The *Acharnians* at the national Theatre of Greece (1961-2005) and the State Theatre of Northern Greece (1991-2010)' explores the reception of Aristophanes' first extant comedy *The Acharnians* in post-war Greek modern theatre by the two Greek government-sponsored theatre institutions, the National Theatre of Greece (NTG) and the National Theatre of Northern Greece (NTNG). Manteli's study shows that, in the performances of the NTG and the NTNG, Aristophanes becomes accessible through intralingual translation strategies, such as cultural relocation, which is further enhanced by compensation and acculturation/domestication. Modern Greek translators, Manteli argues, had to resort to these strategies that rely on more accessible linguistic and cultural referents in order to be appreciated by large Modern Greek audiences.

In his paper, 'The well-being of playful adults: adult playfulness, subjective well-being, physical well-being, and the pursuit of enjoyable activities', Rene Proyer investigates the way in which playfulness in adults relates to physical and psychological well-being and/or the pursuit of enjoyable activities. The results of the present study support the existence of a positive association between playfulness and different indicators of well-being. An interesting finding is that, according to Proyer, there seems to be an interaction between physical activity and vitality and the relation between a person's level of playfulness and satisfaction with life. Moreover, the study discusses in more detail a few findings related to life satisfaction. For instance, life satisfaction is associated with both greater self-related physical and psychological status. Furthermore, it is positively related to the overall health-related type of behaviors

'Investigating facial features of four types of laughter in historical illustrations' by Willibald Ruch, Jennifer Hofmann and Tracy Platt is a research paper that relies on two distinct studies. While the former examines the encoding of facial features in 18 illustrations by the Facial Action Coding System, the latter relies on the decoding by laypeople. Although several conceptually types of laughter were proposed in the historic literature, only four types were represented in visual and verbal illustrations: joyful, intense, schadenfreude laughter and grinning. Interestingly, so far only Duchenne Display could be reliably morphologically differentiated and recognized since illustrations of laughter involving it were perceived as joyful irrespective of their initial classification. Conversely, schadenfreude and grinning did not have high recognition rates. However, the present study clearly indicates that there might be further morphologically different types of laughter and therefore, it is essential for future empirical studies to clarify how many types of laughter can be distinguished at a morphological level.

The first issue ends with a book review which brings to our attention Christie Davies's most recent contribution to the academic study of humour. Davies's book *Jokes and Targets* concerns once again the rules that govern target choice in folkloric jokes. Special thanks go to Liisi Laineste for her prompt contribution.

We wish to welcome you to the *European Journal of Humour Research* and to reassure you that even though the e-journal is geographically-oriented towards the *old continent*, the European perspective aims at an international readership and contributors.

Finally, the *European Journal of Humour Research* is committed to the theoretical openness characterised by the intent to publish a wide range of critical approaches, alongside the encouragement and development of innovative work that contains a multidisciplinary and cross-disciplinary approach.

References

Ruch, Willibald (2003). 'Teaching humour as a science'. *Antares* 4, pp. 4-7.