

## Book review

Litovkina, A. T., Sollosy, J., Medgyes, P. & Brzozowska, D. (eds.) (2012). *Hungarian Humour*. Krakow: Tertium. 384 pp.

The studies included in *Hungarian Humour*, the third volume of the series *Humour and Culture* edited by Władysław Chłopicki, investigate the relationship between humour and Hungarian culture both synchronically and diachronically. The multidisciplinary approach chosen by the editors, Anna T. Litovkina, Judith Sollosy, Péter Medgyes and Dorota Brzozowska, is indicative of the diversity of humour research in contemporary Hungary (also underlined –at the end of the volume– by the presentation of two Hungarian National Interdisciplinary Humour Conferences and of the International Symposium “Humour and Linguistics/Folklore”) and stimulates other similar studies on humour in the context of a specific culture or cross-cultural studies on humour.

The various perspectives from which the twenty-four authors analyse Hungarian humour in twenty-two chapters are grouped in nine sections: *Humour in Literature and the Arts*, *Humour in the Media*, *Ethnic Humour*, *Gender and Sexuality*, *Political Humour*, *Education and Psychology*, *Anti-Proverbs*, *Funny Names*. As the editors suggest in the “Preface” to the volume, this organisation might seem rather arbitrary, but, in our opinion, is reader-friendly.

In the first part of the volume, *Humour in Literature and the Arts*, Attila L. Nemesi refers to the humorous language used by “Two masters of playing with conversational maxims”, the prose-writer Dezső Kosztolányi and the comedian Gyula Kabos. The author draws attention to the verbal humour used by Kosztolányi in a collection of stories, *Kornél Esti*, and by Kabos in a series of film roles from the 1930s, which he considers a representative part of 20<sup>th</sup> century Hungarian culture. In this approach, Attila L. Nemesi takes into account the way in which deviations from Grice’s cooperation model and from Leech’s politeness maxims can result in humorous situations and he indicates the strong and weak points of the conversational-maxim approach developed by Grice and Leech.

In the second chapter of Part I, “Humour in Early Hungarian Literature”, Judit Bogár offers a most instructive overview of humour in early Hungarian literature, up to the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. She focuses upon *The Venus of Murány in Converse with Mars* by István Gyöngyösi and on *Letters from Turkey* by Kelemen Mikes. Judit Bogár’s conclusion suggests a direction of research which might prove to be fruitful if it is extrapolated to other cultures: the author points out the difference between what is considered to be humorous in contemporary Hungary and what was humorous for Hungarian people in the past.

The third chapter of Part I, “Humour, Text Formation, and Baroque Sermons in Hungary”, is dedicated to a textual analysis of Baroque sermons allowing Ibolya Maczák to reconstitute the old writing tradition which can be rediscovered in a contemporary material titled *Best of Zamárdi*, containing a collection created by Árpád Illés. In her scrupulous study,

Ibolya Maczák claims that the analysis of cento- and quodlibet-type texts could illustrate the role of humour in early literature.

In the fourth chapter of Part I, “Esterházy and the Games He Plays: Language, Humour and Translation”, Judith Sollosy reveals the numerous author-to-translator games played by Peter Esterházy, showing that Esterházy’s surprising “linguistic pyrotechnics” (p.69), characterised by the frequent use of puns, is a serious challenge for his translators who should concentrate on the communicative equivalence, not on the formal one. Judith Sollosy’s study, based on her own experience as a translator of Esterházy’s novels, illustrates the complex process of transmission of humour from one culture to another.

In Part II, *Humour in the Media*, Anita Schirm uses pragmatics and discourse analysis in order to examine linguistic and visual humour in ARC posters, by identifying various humorous devices (e.g. homonymy, polysemy, personification) used in this cultural-type posters in order to make the audience reflect upon certain social issues. Anita Schirm emphasises the difference between ARC posters and advertising posters, which express different messages and have different aims, and she explains that ARC posters can be considered interactive, because they require a greater hermeneutic effort on the part of the audience. This detailed investigation of visual humour elements is a welcome contribution to a research field which has been scarcely explored and it could be a source of inspiration for studies on cartoons. In the second chapter of this part, “The First Hundred Years of Hungarian Stand-up Comedy”, Miklós Gábor Kövesdi aims to present the history of stand-up comedy in Hungary. He shows that contemporary stand-up comedy in Hungary has its roots in the “old” cabaré, influenced by the French café concert and the German cabaret. He argues that this form of entertainment was not imported from America in Hungarian culture, but, on the contrary, it has a long tradition in Hungarian culture. Stand-up comedy, as a form of entertainment and as a phenomenon characteristic of contemporary culture, could be understood better if Miklós Gábor Kövesdi’s study was considered an invitation to similar diachronic investigations in the context of other cultures.

In Part III, dedicated to *Ethnic Humour*, Richárd Papp’s article, titled “Three Hungarians: There is No Such Thing...’: Humour in a Budapest Jewish Community”, analyses the effects of assimilation processes on the use of live humour in a Budapest Jewish community, the Bethlen Square Synagogue. By focusing on jokes and witty stories circulating in the Bethlen Square community, the author examines the place of Hungarian Jewish identity in society and he points out the fact that humour has a liberating and integrative function, being an important factor of cohesion in this micro-community.

In her study “Talmudic Wit and Assimilation: Sources of Jewish Humour in Fin-de-siècle Hungary”, Katalin Fenyves investigates the cultural significance of self-reflective Jewish humour. In her opinion, this type of humour was the only way to articulate Jewish otherness in the nationalistic atmosphere characterising fin-de-siècle Hungary, and functioned as a “barometer” not only for what was Jewish at the time, but also for the balance between tradition and assimilation achieved by the Jewish community.

The following studies of Part III examine the way in which stereotypes influence the understanding of humour. In the paper titled “Why Can’t We Laugh Together?: Perceived Cultural Differences in Interpreting Roma Humour”, Natália Kiss presents the results of a qualitative research carried out in a village primary school, which has showed that negative stereotypes may prevent teachers from understanding when and why Roma children or parents use humour. After a rigorous introductory section in which she focuses on the relationship between humour and culture, Natália Kiss presents the research background and

the cultural, socio-cultural and psycho-cultural filters influencing the understanding of humour used by Roma parents and children.

In the chapter “Changing Stereotypes of National Minority Groups”, Ágnes Tamás minutely investigates the way in which the humorous depiction of national minority groups (Croats, Serbs, Romanians, Saxons, Ruthenians, Slovaks, Czechs) in Hungarian comic weeklies led to the intensification of nationalism during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In order to illustrate the huge variety of devices used in order to make fun of national minority groups during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Ágnes Tamás refers to several figures, tropes and caricatures whose analysis facilitates the understanding of the status of national minority groups at the time.

The two studies included in the fourth part of the volume, *Gender and Sexuality*, written by Györgyi Géro and Peter Barta, show that humour is an important source of social and cultural information. Györgyi Géro examines “The ‘Dumb Blonde’ in a Hungarian Context”. After mentioning that “blonde jokes” are among the most popular jokes in Hungary, she defines the “dumb blonde” and the blonde joke and she presents the social function of blonde jokes and the evolution of the female image in Hungarian folklore. Györgyi Géro argues that the blonde female appearing in jokes has become a Europe-wide phenomenon not only because of the Internet, which has been intensifying the dissemination of jokes, but also because of the archetypal character of this image.

In “Love on the Other Side of the Fence: Hungarian Jokes on Marital Infidelity”, Péter Barta underlines the fact that, unlike short epical genres of Hungarian folklore, jokes have been investigated only by a few researchers. The author considers that marital infidelity is a widespread phenomenon, but it has a culture-specific interpretation. Péter Barta’s concluding remarks, in which he suggests that cross-cultural analyses of jokes (of marital infidelity jokes in this case) could facilitate the understanding of the relationship between humour and culture, can be extrapolated to the whole field of humour research.

Part V, *Political Humour*, has only one chapter, “The Hungarian Revolutions and Counterrevolution of 1919 in Jokes and Caricatures”, in which Boldizsár Vörös concentrates on the historical-cultural tradition inserted in caricatures and jokes produced around 1919. The exemplary detailed analysis of several caricatures in this study demonstrates that caricatures can function as documents for certain historical events.

In Part VI, *Education and Psychology*, in her article titled “Hungarian Teachers’ Use of Humour in the Business Classroom”, Judit Háhn establishes a productive taxonomy of the strategies which can be applied by teachers using humour in order to enhance learning in universities, and she underlines the fact that further research would be necessary in order to examine the students’ reception of university teachers’ humour.

Zsuzsanna Schnell’s study titled “The Development of Humour Competence in Hungarian Children: A Cognitive Approach”, emphasising the essential role of mentalization, and the following study, “Humour, Irony and Social Cognition”, by Zsuzsanna Schnell and Eszter Varga, investigating the distinct cognitive strategies required by irony and humour, illuminate each other. Zsuzsanna Schnell explores the pragmatic competence of Hungarian preschool children from a developmental and cognitive perspective and she compares their idiom and humour comprehension. After analysing the results of a test applied to 43 preschool children, she argues that humour comprehension is more difficult than idiom comprehension, not only because humour comprehension possibly requires cultural, social skills which appear later in development, but also because the resolution of humour-generated implicatures requires a higher-level mentalising skill. In their novel investigation, Zsuzsanna Schnell and Eszter Varga show that humour and irony involve different categories of processing.

In their study “The Fear of Being Laughed at in Hungary: Assessing Gelotophobia”, Judit Boda-Ujlaky, René Proyer and Willibald Ruch assess gelotophobia in Hungary, and aim at stimulating other similar studies in Hungary, by describing the adaptation of GELOPH <15>, a 15-item questionnaire used for the assessment of gelotophobia, in Hungarian. After presenting the causes and consequences of gelotophobia, the authors describe the method of assessment and its results. In their conclusions, they point out that gelotophobia is a relevant phenomenon in Hungary and that the effectiveness of the Hungarian version of GELOPH <15> as an instrument used for the assessment of the fear of being laughed at proves that many questions should be addressed in the future.

Part VII is dedicated to *Anti-Proverbs*, a research field which has gradually developed in the last few years, because transformed proverbs are becoming more and more popular: Anna T. Litovkina and Katalin Vargha, who have recorded a rich corpus of over 7000 Hungarian anti-proverbs, explore “Common Types of Alteration in Hungarian Anti-Proverbs”, by illustrating and discussing the mechanisms of variation in Hungarian anti-proverbs. In the second chapter of Part VII, Anna T. Litovkina, Katalin Vargha and Dóra Boronkai present the results of two recent sociolinguistic surveys on anti-proverbs: a survey investigating some popular views of the anti-proverb and its role in contemporary Hungarian society and a survey investigating the way in which humour is appreciated in Hungarian anti-proverbs. The significance of these studies on Hungarian anti-proverbs would be emphasised by comparative approaches in other cultures.

Part VIII includes two studies on names: “Names and Hungarian Humour” by Tamás Farkas and “The Aim of Naming in Parody” by Mariann Slíz. Tamás Farkas uses various Hungarian sources (cartoons, anecdotes, jokes, fiction) in order to demonstrate that the activation of the humorous potential of proper names depends on their linguistic and cultural environment. Mariann Slíz presents several methods and linguistic devices used by authors to create proper names in parodies, and insists on the names appearing in some parodies based on the novels published by a contemporary Hungarian writer under the pseudonym Leslie L. Lawrence. Both chapters indicate the high potential of a research field which should be explored more in literary studies.

In conclusion, the editors and the authors of this volume highlighting the relationship between humour and culture in a Hungarian context have made a very precious contribution to the field of humour research. Many of the various perspectives from which humour is analysed here stimulate cross-cultural studies. The volume is highly recommended not only to researchers interested in the elaboration of operational tools which can be used in the analysis of humour, but also to all those who would like to discover and understand Hungarian culture through the prism of humour. The publication of the volume in the same series edited by Władysław Chłopicki, after *Humour and Culture 1, Linguistic Shots of Humour* (edited by A. T. Litovkina, P. Barta, M. Daczi) and *Humour and Culture 2, Polish Humour* (edited by D. Brzozowska and W. Chłopicki), suggests that the first volume of the series represented “the beginning of a beautiful friendship” which has been inspiring for many researchers studying humour.

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