

Inaugural Editorial

Ephraim Nissan* and Arie Sover**

1. A New Refereed International Journal

Humour research has been in good health for many years. This is a thriving, vast, even far-flung area of research. Its growth in recent years had as corollary the establishment of new forums, supplementing the ones already in existence. The flagship of the domain, *HUMOR: International Journal of Humor Research*, has clearly established journal-publication standards for humour research in the Anglosphere and beyond. The present journal, the freely accessible, electronic, fully refereed *Israeli Journal of Humor Research: An International Journal*, is being inaugurated in 2012, twenty-five years after *HUMOR* was.

The present new journal has been extremely lucky in that the big names from an array of areas within humour studies, some of them holding senior positions in other periodicals in this field, have agreed to join the international advisory board. Without the alacrity of the anonymous referees, this journal would not have been possible.

We have tried to bring together, in the board, experts from a spectrum of disciplines who have contributed to humour studies. The range is so wide, that we deemed it useful to provide, for each member, a brief specification of research interests and major publications. Scholars in the domain will certainly recognise many of them.

We wish to commemorate Avner Ziv, the doyen of humour research in Israel, who joined the international advisory board, but did not live to see the publication of the inaugural issue.

We thank authors, referees, and members of the board, as well as publishers who have sent in books for review, as well as reviewers. In 2012, we are publishing the two issues of Vol. 1. Articles, once approved, are posted first, and they appear as a batch (that is, as the core of an issue), with book reviews to follow in the already posted issue as soon as they are becoming available.

2. The Context of the New Journal

A national-level Israeli journal, *Humor Mekuvvan: A Research Journal in Humor Studies*, was successfully launched in 2011. In France, the journal *Humoresques* has splendidly combined perspectives from the humanities and media studies with humour studies, and publishes two thematic issues every year (it was preceded by another periodical of CORHUM¹, the *Cahiers de recherche de CORHUM-CRIH*), whereas *Ridiculosa*, also in France, combines research into political cartoons and other fields, especially history. (*Ridiculosa*'s approach is different from that of *Target* in the U.S., which covers political cartoonists.)

* **Ephraim Nissan**, Department of Computing, Goldsmiths' College, London & Centre for Jewish Studies, University of Manchester, England, United Kingdom.

** **Arie Sover**, Ashkelon Academic College, Ashkelon & the Open University, Israel.

¹ CORHUM is the Association pour le développement des recherches sur le Comique, le Rire et l'Humour. It was established in 1987.

There exist specialist journals, such as *Studies in American Humor*, and *Thalia: Studies in Literary Humor*, as well as the *International Journal of Comic Art*. The year 1997 saw the launch of the *Australian Journal of Comedy*. There also exists (or existed) the periodical *Therapeutic Humor*. Let us also mention journals with a narrower scope, all of whose issues are relevant for humour studies, e.g., *Études Rabelaisiennes*.²

As to book series, Mouton de Gruyter has the veteran series in humour studies, in the same vein as the *HUMOR* journal, whereas Benjamins in Amsterdam has recently established the series *Topics in Humor Research*, after publishing relevant books in some other series of theirs.³ A great many publishers have been publishing books in humour research, without a special series however.

Of course, there are conferences and conference series,⁴ sometimes specialised per culture, e.g. the conference series of the International Society for Luso-Hispanic Humor Studies. In a separate essay in the present inaugural issue, we examine the spread of articles in humour studies in journals other than ones specialised in that domain or in any particular subdomain within it.

3. Kinds of Contributions Sought

Considering the vast spectrum of venues in which papers in humour studies have been appearing, it clearly makes sense to provide this new scholarly journal, and to make it freely accessible to an international audience. We are glad that the scholarly community has been supportive. Now it is up to authors to provide a flow of good-quality submissions, confident that competent referees will provide a fair and informative evaluation.

Proposals of thematic issues are welcome, and so is the possibility of a target paper with comment papers and a riposte. Articles can be even long, as unlike with printed journals, we don't have an upper limit on the annual page quota. Along with regular articles, we also admit short communications, which will also be refereed. Along with book reviews, we also envisage to publish on occasion review essays. These may be posted online later than the articles of a given issue.

² Published by Droz; it can also be considered a book series. We are also thinking of *Le Moliériste*, launched in 1879 and published in the 1880s. It often was rather interested in historical information about Molière, rather than in his humour in his comedies. For that matter, bear in mind that even though France's *mazarinades* emanating from the circles of the Fronde in the mid 17th century had typically the function of invective, they also often had humorous intent, but modern readers find many of them logorrhoeic and boring (as recognised by C. Jouhaud in his *Mazarinades: la Fronde des mots*, Paris: Aubier, 1985).

³ Transaction Publishers have a Humor Studies series, and there also exists the Humor in Life and Letters Series of Wayne State University Press.

⁴ In particular, WHIM international conferences were held between 1981 and 1987, on Don and Alleen Nilsen's initiative, at the Arizona State University. WHIM was established as an affiliate of the Workshop Library on World Humor. WHIM initially stood for "Western Humor and Irony Membership", and starting with the first international conference, for "World Humor and Irony Membership". Each conference was followed, on the next year, by the proceedings under the title of *Western Humor and Irony Membership Serial Yearbook (WHIMSY)*. In 1990, proceedings were published, edited by S.F.D. Hughes and V. Raskin, and entitled *At Last: The Last Whimsy VII*. It was a publication of the ISHS: the WHIM conference series grew indeed into the International Society for Humor Studies (ISHS). ISHS annual meetings are held outside of the United States in even-numbered years and in the United States in odd-numbered years.

The languages of this journal are English and, sometimes, French. We prefer footnotes to endnotes. We can accommodate either a bibliography at the end of the article (in which case, it should abide by this journal's style for bibliography), or bibliographical entries being incorporated in footnotes, as authors from the humanities often prefer the latter format.

4. Some General Considerations About the Inaugural Issue and the First Volume

The first volume comprises two issues. In the present first issue, this editorial is followed by an article in pragmatics, an article in literary studies, an article in psychology, an essay about the chronological evolution of the spread of humour studies among journals (it also contains a large bibliography, representative but far from exhaustive), and book reviews. A corollary to what said thus far is: just a few of the disciplines involved in humour studies are represented in this inaugural issue, nor could it be otherwise. The disciplinary representation in the articles — respectively in pragmatics, literary studies, and psychology — is supplemented with more disciplines with which the book reviews are affiliated.

Papers currently submitted or approved for the second issue (and which are either regular articles or short communications) come from the sociology of humour, from folklore studies, from the history of ideas in the 20th century, and from computational humour. More papers, on other subjects, are being refereed for the second volume, and of course, we call for new submissions.

It is our intention to first post in this e-journal, issue by issue, the particular issue's papers (whatever their kind: regular articles, short communications, target paper with comment papers and then the riposte by the author of the target paper). Subsequently, book reviews would be posted as soon as they become available. We are already adopting this *modus operandi* with this inaugural issue. Its articles are posted along with a first book review, on political humour, provided by Christie Davies. More book reviews are in preparation.

5. The Items in the Inaugural Issue, and in the First Volume

5.1. The Article in Pragmatics

Let us say something about the regular articles in the inaugural issue. The first article is Marta Dynel's "Garden paths, red lights and crossroads: On finding our way to understanding the cognitive mechanisms underlying jokes". Garden paths are such a mechanism, that "the incongruous punchline evokes a concealed sense of the preceding text, bringing to light its initially covert ambiguity". Further developing her scholarly engagement with garden paths in her book *Humorous Garden-Paths: A Pragmatic-Cognitive Study* (Newcastle upon Tyne, England: Cambridge Scholars, 2009), Dynel postulates a tripartite division of jokes according to three major incongruity-resolution mechanisms. "In all the three types, the incongruous punchline (or the switch, in the case of a shorter joke) ultimately invites the resolution": "In all the three cases, the punchline impels the interpreter to render any incongruity congruent according to an appropriate cognitive rule, which may pose an inferential challenge or may be practically effortless."

Unlike with garden-path jokes, in red-light jokes, the “joke ends with a surprising punchline which neither proves the set-up ambiguous nor invalidates any earlier inferences but brings an unexpectedly incongruous piece of information, which is then rendered congruent with the first part of the text.” And unlike both these categories, it is already in the set-up that the focal incongruity is included in the crossroads category of jokes.

Dynel argues that most well-entrenched frameworks fail to capture all the three mechanisms of jokes: SSTH and GTVH suit garden-path jokes, but she finds that these models do not serve well the other two categories. The same with the catastrophe model. Forced reinterpretation is only applicable to garden-path jokes. Sul’s I-R handles garden path jokes and red-light jokes, but not crossroad jokes. The same with the bisociation schema conflict, with the isotopy-disjunction model, with graded salience, and with the frame-structuring model. All three categories are captured instead by Wenzel’s frame structuring. “Whilst the garden-path and red-light mechanisms are usually included in the models, most frequently neglected is the crossroads mechanism. This is because the authors omit to observe that the central incongruity may appear before the punchline, preventing the hearer from construing a coherent meaning on the basis of the set-up.”

5.2. The Article in Literary Studies

The second article is Ephraim Nissan’s “The sweat of the (low) brow: New York immigrant life in Gerson Rosenzweig’s satire. Facets of his talmudic parody *Tractate America*”. The year 2011 was the sesquicentennial of the birth of Gerson Rosenzweig, an American Hebrew humorist who would deserve to be better known. That he is little known instead depends on his texts requiring, in order to be properly understood, the traditional talmudic schooling expected of at least the segment within the New York Jewish immigrant community that was more at home with Jewish texts. In the article about Rosenzweig, it is shown that once details are explained, any scholar in the humanities can be made to appreciate the dense web of intertextual references woven with a humorous intent by Rosenzweig. What is more, Rosenzweig was using a pastiche in the emulated form of a talmudic page, in order to drive in a precise, trenchant, yet good-hearted social critique. The talmudic parody, far from being an attack on talmudic culture, was instead means to defamiliarise an all too familiar social reality for the immigrants of the Lower east End of New York City.

Nissan’s article about Gerson Rosenzweig, in the inaugural issue, analyses Chapter 3 from Rosenzweig’s masterpiece, *Tractate America*, a chapter concerned with the grim realities of the labour market — the alternation of the busy season and slack, the dilemma of whether to join a trade union, the drama of strikes the individual worker hadn’t declared but whose effects at home he had to endure — along with crammed life in New York’s tenement houses, the toils of women, and child labour. It defies belief that Rosenzweig managed to depict such subjects by walking his readers through what looks and feels like a talmudic page. Virgil walked Dante through Hell and Purgatory, showing Dante situations, both terrible and awesome, in which several of the *dramatis personae* were individuals who while they were alive, were known to Dante personally, or about whom he had heard. Rosenzweig instead shows his readers the social realities in which they were living, through the humorously defamiliarising lens of a pseudo-talmudic page, with startlingly humorous effects of intertextuality and, often, puns or mock-etymologies.

5.3. The Article in Psychology

The next article is in clinical psychology, and concerns phobia: “Extreme fear of being laughed at: components of gelotophobia”, by Tracey Platt, Willibald Ruch, Jennifer Hofmann, and René T. Proyer. Ruch’s team has been leading the way in research into gelotophobia, the fear of being laughed at. There are several components that distinguish gelotophobes: “one component describes how strongly people overreact to having been laughed at (e.g., feeling paralyzed, growing stiff, long time to recover, being affected with the teaser in future interactions and also avoiding the place where teasing took place).” “Individuals not only relate laughter to themselves, they might even anticipate such ridicule and screen the environment for further potential attacks.” Sufferers resort to avoidance of social situations (avoidance is also typical of other phobias, not just social phobias), in order not to have to face anticipated social situations when they fear they would be laughed at.

The study is based on an assessment tool consisting of structured self-reporting, namely, hundreds of GELOPH<15> questionnaires. The article has three aims: firstly “the factor structure of the GELOPH<15> was determined in two samples with high scorers, which was then used to distinguish among subtypes of gelotophobia”; secondly, “hierarchical factor analysis was used to show the development of the factors at different stages in the hierarchy”; and thirdly, “correlations with socio-demographic variables were investigated for the subscales”. In both social anxiety in general and gelotophobia in particular, defensive coping with derision is by control, withdrawal, or internalising. In gelotophobia only instead, there is disproportionate negative responses to being laughed at, as well as paranoid sensitivity to anticipated ridicule. “These three factors” — namely, defensive coping with derision, and the gelotophobia-specific factors of disproportionate negative response and paranoid anticipation — “yielded different correlational patterns. Coping with ridicule was higher among females and among the older while there were no differences for the other two factors”. Reported experience of having suffered from bullying appears to make it more likely that an individual would suffer of gelotophobia: “people reporting having been bullied were higher in defensive coping with ridicule and had stronger disproportionate negative responses to being laughed at than those who were not bullied.”

5.4. An Essay Providing a Distillation from a Large Sample of the Literature, as to the Spread Among Journals by Year

The inaugural issue also comprises a long item under the rubric BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS. It is an essay by Nissan which provides a distillation from a representative bibliography. It is a discursive, qualitative, sampling probe into the worldwide literature of the sector, rather than quantitative study as would be expected in bibliometrics, but arguably, it is fit for purpose. Its aim is to make it palpable that humour studies have grown so big and far-flung, that the establishment of a refereed e-journal bringing together scholars from several disciplines is a necessary supplement to the extant forums, if we want that scholars working in this domain will have a chance to see who is doing what, in subdomains other than their own.