



"Humor is a serious thing. I like to think of it as one of our greatest earliest natural resources, which must be preserved at all cost."

-James Thurber



OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE AMERICAN HUMOR STUDIES ASSOCIATION

Sponsored by: Department of English, Saint Louis University Graphic Design: Timmy Nelson Editor: Laurie Britt-Smith

Notes and News

SAVE THE DATE

*American Humor Studies Association
Mark Twain Circle of America
Quadrennial Conference 2014
December 4-7, 2014
Four Points Sheraton French Quarter*

The American Humor Studies Association, in conjunction with the Mark Twain Circle of America sends out this general call for papers on American humor. The topics below are suggestions for topics that we think will be of interest; other topics are welcome, and we welcome especially submissions of sessions of three papers or roundtables. The topics are broad in the hope that scholars will be able to find one that fits their current research. Submissions should be sent to Jan McIntire-Strasburg via email (mcintire@slu.edu). Please send your submissions by May 15, 2014.

Humor in Film
New Media Approaches to Humor
Nineteenth Century Southwestern Humor
Humor and Ethnicity
Contemporary Humor and the American Novel
Early American Humor and its European Roots
Humor and War
Contemporary Approaches to Irony and Satire
Teaching Humor

Announcing:
THE RED LION SYMPOSIUM ON HUMOR PUBLICATION
(A Joint Project of the Mark Twain Circle and the American Humor Studies Association)

Where: The Red Lion Inn, Stockbridge, Massachusetts
When: Thursday-Saturday February 20-22

Purpose: This working conference is intended to advance publication of work on American Humor, Mark Twain, and related work in progress. Individual's papers and group symposiums will be offered relating to work in progress which will be presented by participants and discussed and developed with the help of attending scholars.

Red Lion Inn is one of the grand old Inns of New England, featuring gourmet dining, luxury rooms, heated indoor-outdoor swimming year-round, and other amenities. Stockbridge is the home of the Norman Rockwell Museum and is easily reached from Bradley International Airport in Hartford/Springfield.

Registration: \$45.00. Rooms--reserved block of rooms to be reserved by individuals in advance at conference rate of \$109 Thursday and \$179 Friday and Saturday (plus tax).

For more information about the symposium, see the announcements page of our website: americanhumor.org. Registration and participant questions can be sent to David EE Sloane (dsloane@newhaven.edu)

Announcing:
THE JACK ROSEBALM PRIZE FOR SCHOLARSHIP IN AMERICAN HUMOR

Awarded to the best articles on American humor by a pre-tenure scholar, graduate student, adjunct professor, or independent scholar published in (or accepted for publication in) a peer-reviewed academic journal. (Details at americanhumor.org)

1st Prize: \$100; one-year membership in the AHSA; paid conference registration for 2014 AHSA conference in New Orleans

2nd Prize: \$50; one-year membership in the AHSA

3rd Prize: \$25; one-year membership in the AHSA

The award will be presented at the 2014 American Humor Studies Association Conference in New Orleans (December 4-7). Articles published in 2013 are eligible for the inaugural award. Please submit by 12/15/2013 to: ahsahumor@gmail.com

Special issue of *Studies in American Humor*, Fall 2014
MAD Magazine and Its Legacies
CALL FOR PAPERS

Since 1952, *MAD Magazine* has regaled humor lovers and inspired humor producers in many media. *Studies in American Humor*, the journal of the American Humor Studies Association, invites submission of scholarly papers devoted to *MAD Magazine* and its legacies for a special issue of the journal appearing in the fall of 2014, coedited by John Bird (Winthrop University) and Judith Yaross Lee (Ohio University).

Topics might include, but are not limited to:

- *humor, verbal and/or visual
- *subversive humor
- *satire (as technique, analysis of individual examples or themes, etc.)
- *parody (as technique, analysis of individual examples or themes, etc.)
- *individual artists and writers
- *regular and occasional features
- *one or more recurrent themes (politics, technology, parenthood, suburbia)
- *cultural impact and legacies
- *influence, general and specific (including direct influence on individuals and genres)
- *reception

Potential contributors should send queries and abstracts (500-750 words) by October 1, 2013 or complete manuscripts by June 1, 2014. Email queries and abstracts to studiesinamericanhumor@ohio.edu. General information on *Studies in American Humor* and submission guidelines are available at <http://studiesinamericanhumor.org/>.

If you are interested in reviewing books for *Studies in American Humor* or if you have a book you would like us to consider for review, please contact Tracy Wuster at: wustert@gmail.com

American Literature Association 25th Annual Conference
Washington, D.C. May 22-25 2013
CALL FOR PAPERS

The AHSa plans to sponsor three sessions at the 2014 national meeting. We seek cogent, provocative, well-researched papers on the following subjects:

1. **“Political Humor from Franklin to Colbert”**—Abstracts (300 words max.) are encouraged on the connections between political discourse and American humor. All periods and approaches—from literary texts to stand-up comedy—will be considered. Papers should address both a specific context and the more general context of the uses and limits of humor in political realms.
2. **“Teaching American Humor”**—Abstracts (300 words max.) are encouraged for a roundtable on the challenges and joys of teaching American humor. Each presenter will have 8-12 minutes (depending on the number of presenters chosen) to present their theoretical and/or practical approach to the teaching of American humor—whether focused on the general subject or on a specific topic. A decent amount of time will be given to discussion of the topic.
3. **“Graphic Humor in American Periodicals”**—Abstracts (300 words max.) are encouraged on subjects addressing “graphic

humor” in American periodicals. Subjects could range from cartoon strips to political cartoons to illustrations, and may include alternative interpretations of the term “graphic.” Papers should focus on the periodical context of the subject, as well as broader concerns of interpreting humor. Panel sponsored by the American Humor Studies Association and the Research Society for American Periodicals.

Please e-mail abstracts no later than January 10, 2013 to Tracy Wuster (wustert@gmail.com) with the subject line: “AHSa session, 2013 ALA.” Notifications will go out no later than January 20, 2013.

The Kurt Vonnegut Society: The Kurt Vonnegut Society invites papers for the 2014 ALA on any aspect of the author’s life and works. Send a 250 word abstract for a fifteen to twenty minute presentation and short vitae by January 4 to Greg Sumner at sumnergd@netzero.com by January 15, 2013.

Other Conferences and Organizations of Interest:

The 2014 International Society for Humor Studies Conference will be held from July 7 to July 11, 2014 on the campus of the University of Utrecht in the Netherlands. Information about this and other upcoming conferences and the ISHS can be found at www.hnu.edu/ishs.

Join us for the 27th Annual AATH Conference!
**“Healthy Humor: What is It, Where to Find It,
Who Needs It... and Why?”**

APRIL 3-6, 2014
VINCENNES, INDIANA

The Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor (AATH) is an international community of professionals who incorporate humor into their daily lives. AATH is the leader in providing evidence-based information about current research and practical applications of humor. If you love to laugh and learn, join our humor family at the Red Skelton Museum of American Comedy located on the campus of Vincennes University. Registration information will be found on line at <http://www.aath.org/> or call 1-888-747-2284 for more information.

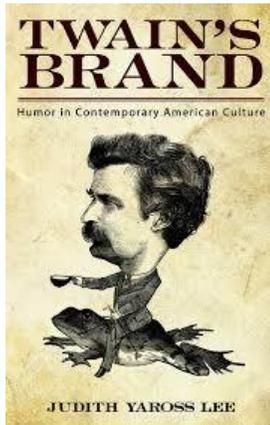
New Resource Alert

It seems like there is an App for everything, and humor is no exception to this technological blitz. There are several comedy apps available which could be used for research or pedagogical purposes, or just to give you a necessary break from grading papers or your “real” research. According to the folks at *Entertainment Weekly*, here are three of the best:

Spotify’s Official Comedy. (free; add-on to Spotify on desktop or mobile app) This app, which is a partnership with YouTube’s Official Comedy, is a vast collection of routines by classic (Bill Cosby, Richard Pryor, Eddie Murphy) and new (Kevin Hart, Aziz Ansari, Louis C.K.) comedians. The library is organized by linking bits by topic, which can result in some pretty random, but funny connections.

Comedy Central Stand-Up (free, iOS) Drawing from the archives of *Comedy Central Presents*, this very well crafted application offers a diverse series of video clips. Comics are linked by joke style or professional connections. Not surprisingly the best and most focused entries are for those comedians who have shows on the network, but considering who those folks are, that actually makes this App more helpful for those doing contemporary humor research.

Cracked (free for Android and iPad; \$0.99 for iPhone) The comedy site's endless lists are gathered in the *Cracked.com* and *Cracked Reader* apps (including *The Five Most Irresponsible Smart Phone Apps*.) The content is a bit limited, but what is here is top notch.



Authors' Note

Writing *Twain's Brand: Humor in Contemporary American Culture*

By Judith Yaross Lee (reprinted with permission)

Samuel L. Clemens lost the 1882 lawsuit declaring his exclusive right to use "Mark Twain" as a commercial trademark, but he succeeded in the marketplace, where synergy among his comic journalism, live performances, authorship, and entrepreneurship made "Mark Twain" the premier national and international brand of American humor in his day.

And so it remains in ours, because Mark Twain's humor not only expressed views of self and society well ahead of its time, but also anticipated ways in which humor and culture coalesce in today's postindustrial information economy--the global trade in media, performances, and other forms of intellectual property that began after the Civil War.

Twain's Brand highlights the modern relationships among humor, commerce, and culture that were first exploited by Mark Twain.

How it began... A dozen years ago, when humor seemed everywhere in American popular culture but marginal in the academy, despite the rise of cultural studies, I began thinking about ways to call attention to the role of humor in American culture. I wanted to show that humor matters not only as entertainment that expresses social values and media practices, but also as a political and economic force that operates in obvious and subtle ways.

In particular, I was puzzled by the list of winners of the Mark Twain Prize for American Humor, because it seemed to celebrate comedians whose links to Twain were more a matter of nationality than comic spirit. So I asked myself, "**What is Twain's legacy--broadly conceived--for contemporary American culture, including the stand-up comedy that the Twain Prize honors?**"

***Twain's Brand* became the answer**, probing how Mark Twain's modern mood anticipated a range of contemporary values and comic practices in stand-up comedy, literary humor, cartoons, and the business of humor.

As work progressed, I saw how Mark Twain's comic performances depended on a modern view of the self as constructed in performance and social interaction, an approach mirrored in the stand-up comedy of Margaret Cho, Jon Stewart, Garrison Keillor, and Jerry Seinfeld. In addition, I found while exploring Twain's vernacular satire in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* that its oppositional verbal rhetoric had counterparts in the visual comic strategies of the *The Simpsons*, Lynda Barry's alternative comics, and Aaron McGruder's newspaper strip *The Boondocks*. Likewise, Twain's ambivalence toward American innocence and exceptionalism in the comic clash of cultures depicted in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* anticipated modern attitudes toward America's role in the

world as portrayed in comic novels by Philip Roth. And, perhaps most important, I came to understand how Mark Twain's prescient brand management of himself and his intellectual property inaugurated the brand-name humor business of *The New Yorker*, Comedy Central, and the film industry today. Ultimately, in writing ***Twain's Brand***, I discovered that Mark Twain's humor, while just one strand of our comic tradition, shows that the boundary-blurring, commodification, globalization, and other processes associated with postmodernism began a century earlier than most scholars have thought. I hope that you will read and enjoy the book, and let me know at leej@ohio.edu what you think!

Twain's Brand: Humor in Contemporary American Culture is available through University Press of Mississippi. HARDCOVER ISBN 978-1-61703-643-9, \$55.00S EBOOK ISBN 978-1-61703-644-6, \$55

Pocket Book Reviews

By Kalman Goldstein

Thomas, Mike. *The Second City Unscripted*. New York: Villard. 2009. ISBN: 978-0-345-51422-6. 274 pages. Hardbound. \$26.00.

Since 1959 (joined by Second City TV in Toronto in 1976), the Chicago-based clubs have become the epitome of "long-form improvisation." Second City has helped train three generations of featured stand-up comics and improvisational actors. Thomas, a staff writer for the *Chicago Sun Times*, traces its history and impact through interviews with over 170 stars, supporting participants, and backstage personnel. Organized chronologically into 11 chapters, each opens with a detailed narrative, followed by comments of performers and directors about their work, and how the ensembles created and shaped sketches. There is very candid testimony about the pressures of "improv" fomenting tensions and even occasional violence, and lead frequently to substance abuse. Thomas also covers the business side, explaining management and franchising issues as well as how audience demographics and the spread of TV comedy channels affected performance norms.

Especially valuable is the author's analysis of differences between the Chicago and Toronto troupes in terms of comedic style: the Americans gravitated toward intellectual or political satire; the Canadians preferred societal humor or psychological sketches. Due to improvisation's very nature, few extended examples survive from earlier bits, but there are some scattered throughout the book which feature performers like Jim Belushi, Stephen Colbert, and Steve Carrell. Many of the participants react to each others' judgments, often contradicting them; certain stars, who are named, are deemed especially difficult to work with. The book is very frank about backstage contretemps; but, most striking among the interviews are those which recognize the impact of some powerful personalities who were not always the most conspicuously featured. Among these is Conan O'Brien's lengthy and thoughtful tribute to Second City TV's players.

Ah Words... Parting Thoughts

Show me a piano falling down a mineshaft and I'll show you A-flat miner.

When you've seen one shopping center you've seen a mall.

Those who get too big for their britches will be exposed in the end.



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American Humor Studies Association New and Renewal Membership Application

Membership in the American Humor Studies Association includes the semi-annual newsletter, *To Wit*, and the annual journal, *Studies in American Humor*, on an as-issued basis.

To join:

Send a \$25 check (\$30 for international; \$10 for student) to:

Joseph Alvarez, Secretary-Treasurer
900 Havel Court
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Or

Join electronically via ***Americanhumor.org***

Enroll / Renew me as a member in the American Humor Studies Association, please.

Name _____

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