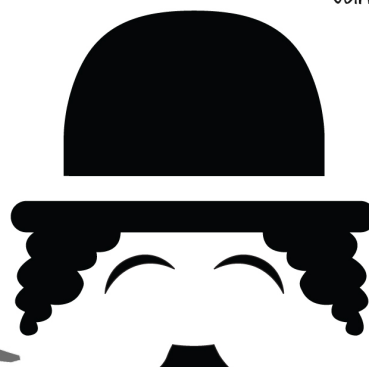


April 2016
New Series, 25:1



"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

From the Desk of the Director

News on the AHSA front: With sad regrets, we must say goodbye to our *To Wit* editor of several years, Laurie Britt-Smith. Fortunately for her, she has obtained a new position; unfortunately for us, this keeps her too busy to continue on as editor any longer. The newsletter comes out twice yearly in April and October, and attempts to cover news and reviews of interest to its members. Members who would like to take on the editorship of *To Wit* should contact either Jan McIntire-Strasburg at mcintire@slu.edu, or Tracy Wuster at wustert@gmail.com.

Conference Presentations of Note

Modern Language Association

~~Friday, 8 January 2017, 5:15-6:30~~

~~429. Keywords for American Humor~~

~~Presiding: Tracy Wuster, University of Texas Austin~~

~~Presenters: James Caron, University of Hawai'i Manoa (on satire), Jennifer Ann Hughes, Averett University, Peter Kunze, Univ. of Texas, Austin, John Wharton Lowe, Univ. of Georgia, Tracy Wuster, Univ. of Texas, Austin (on Humorists).~~

Boundaries: Humor Studies

Chair: Phil Scepanski, Vassar College

"Funny Talk: Interviews with Comedians and the Boundaries of Stand-Up," Dale Tracy, Royal Military College of Canada.

"Race, Humor, and Subversion in the Work of Five Artists," Jody Berman, The University of Florida.

"How Social Media is Ruining Comedy," Tara Friedman, Widener University.

American Literature Association **27th Annual Conference - San Francisco, California**

Session 11-B: Sketch Comedy: from Antebellum Periodicals to TV and New Media Forms

Organized by the American Humor Studies Association

Chair: Tracy Wuster, University of Texas, Austin

"Mixed Men in Black Hoodies: Race and New Media in *The Key and Peele Show*," Daniel Meyerend, Idaho State University

"A Feminist 'Boys' Club': The Feminism of *Saturday Night Live*'s Early Sketch Comedy, 1975-1978," Kathryn Kein, George Washington University

"Joseph C. Neal's *Charcoal Sketches*: Inventing the Comic Urban Frontier," David E. E. Sloane, University of New Haven

Session 12-H: Humorists, Satirists, Cultural Critique

Organized by the American Humor Studies Association

Chair and Respondent: James Caron, University of Hawai'i, Mānoa

"Woman, Machines, and the Politics of Humor in Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*," Hoi Na (Stephanie) Kung, Indiana University

"Curators of the Absurd: Contemporary Comedians as Prophets of Confrontation and Jesters of Delight," Chris Margrave, Texas State University, San Marcos

Sessions of Interest

Session 9-B: **Humor and Children's Literature**

Organized by the Children's Literature Society and the American Humor Studies Association

Chair: Jennifer Hughes, Averett University

"I Will Chomp You Buster!": Examining Contemporary Picture Book Storytelling and Humour," Natalie Schembri, University of British Columbia

"Humor for Children: Dav Pilkey's Literary Success in Challenging the Boundaries of Childhood Mischief," Eva Nwokah, Our Lady of the Lake University and Vanessa Lopez, Our Lady of the Lake University

"Going Sideways with George and Martha: James Marshall's Queer Comic Genius," Deirdre Baker, University of Toronto

Session 14-C: **Mark Twain's Bawdy 1601 and Other Dirty Works: Dramatic Readings, Critical Reactions, and Discussion**

Organized by the Mark Twain Circle of America

Chair: Lawrence Howe, Roosevelt University

This session will feature dramatic readings of two of Mark Twain's bawdy, scatological works, 1601 and "Some Remarks on the Science of Onanism," along with critical comment by Mark Twain, Van Wyck Brooks, and other critics, followed by a lively discussion.

Readings will be performed by the Mark Twain Players: Joseph A. Alvarez, independent scholar; John Bird, Winthrop University; Kerry Driscoll, University of Saint Joseph; Dennis Eddings, Western Oregon University; Ann Ryan, Le Moyne College; Kirin WachterGreene, New York University; Tracy Wuster, University of Texas-Austin; Zachary Tavlin, University of Washington; and Linda Morris, University of California-Davis.

Session 18-E: **Mark Twain in the Money**
Organized by the Mark Twain Circle of America
Chair: Kerry Driscoll, Saint Joseph University

"The Emulative Subject and the £100,000,000 Note," Howard Horwitz, University of Utah

"Mark Twain and Political Economy: Money, Rhetoric, and Satire," Lawrence Howe, Roosevelt University

"Paying the Shot": Mark Twain's Miller-Gun and the Idea of a Floating Currency," Henry Wonham, University of Oregon

Session 17-G: **Vonnegut and History**
Organized by the Kurt Vonnegut Society

Chair: Nicole Lowman, University at Buffalo

"American Fascism and Mother Night," Susan Farrell, College of Charleston

"From Good War to Bad: Vonnegut's Vietnam," Gregory Sumner, University of Detroit, Mercy

"Galápagos, or, Kurt Vonnegut in the Anthropocene," Gerry Canavan, Marquette University

"Vonnegut Without Kurt: Reading and Teaching after April 11, 2007," Tom Hertweck, University of Nevada, Reno

Upcoming Conference Presentations of Note FLOW Conference

The FLOW Conference, A critical forum on Television and Media culture, held in Austin TX September 15-17, 2016, has put out a call for papers which they hope will create "provocative and useful starting points for more deeply examining issues across television and media studies." The call and description of the conference is at <http://www.flowjournal.org/flow-conference-2016/flow-2016-panel-questions/>. They ask for a 150 word abstract. Upon acceptance, presenters will be asked to submit a 600-700 word paper by late in August.

SAMLA Call for Papers

The Mark Twain Circle of America is organizing a session for SAMLA 2016, November 4-6, 2016, in Jacksonville Florida. The session is entitled "Mark Twain in Heaven and Hell." This panel welcomes papers that deal with Mark Twain's life and/or work as it relates to the idea of heaven and hell, drawing on the biography, the autobiography, his fiction, or his nonfiction. By May 30, 2016, please send a 250-word proposal, brief bio, and A/V requirements to John Bird, Winthrop University, at birdj@winthrop.edu.

International Society for Humor Study

This conference takes place in Dublin, Ireland June 27-July 1 at Trinity College, Dublin. ISHS sponsors sessions on international humor, including American Humor. Its presenters cover all aspects of humor, including psychological and sociological applications of humor, therapeutic humor, and linguistic aspects of humor. While the call for papers is past at this point, a trip to Dublin this summer may be just what the doctor ordered.

Australasian Humor Studies Network

The Australasian Humour Studies Network (AHSN) focuses upon emerging research into humour and laughter and promotes links between humour scholars in different academic departments and geographical locations. It has grown from 40 members and 10 discipline areas in 1997 to over 200 scholars and practitioners in more than 25 different disciplines and professions across Australia, New Zealand and elsewhere.

The Network, now hosted by the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Sydney, supports isolated scholars researching humour-related topics by offering a program of annual Colloquia and other resources, including links to the International Society for Humor Studies (ISHS). Colloquium proposals are peer-reviewed for quality and to ensure wide participation from different perspectives, including practitioners as well as academic specialists. In researching humour and laughter, it has long been recognized that multi-disciplinary enquiry is the key to achieving significant insights into these complex forms of human behaviour.

The 22nd Annual Conference held from 6-8 February 2016 was themed "Unfunny: The Limits of Humor." Next year's 23rd Annual Conference will be held at Ballarat, Victoria in early February.

Early inquiries as to theme or exact dates can be sent to Angus McLachlan at a.mclaclan@federation.edu.au.

Jack Rosenbalm Prize

The winners of the Jack Rosenbalm Prize for American Humor Studies for 2014-2015. The prize is awarded for the best article 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 or book. The committee awarded the prize to Maggie Hennefeld's essay "Destructive Metamorphosis: The Comedy of Female Catastrophe and Feminist Film Historiography," which appeared in *Discourse: Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture* (Vol. 36: Iss. 2, Article 2). They also awarded an Honorable Mention to "Cuban Miami on the Air: Narratives of Cuba" by Albert Sergio Laguna, which appeared in the *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* (Vol. 23, Iss. 1, 2014).

If you have not read these pieces, I highly recommend you seek them out. We received a strong set of submissions, and I would like to thank everyone who submitted. I would also like to thank Linda Morris, James Caron, and David Sloane for their excellent work on the committee. Thanks also go to Tracy Wuster, AHSA President, for all of his hard work in getting the prize publicized, arranging for readers, and making the announcements.

Book Reviews

Macks, Jon. *Monologue: What Makes America Laugh...Before Bed*. New York, Blue Rider Press (Penguin), 2015. 234 pages. ISBN 978-0-399-17166-6, Hardcover. \$25.95

Jon Macks has enjoyed a very long and fruitful career as a TV comedy writer, having seven Emmy nominations, and written for multiple Academy Award, Golden Globe, and Tony Award shows, as well as twenty-two years experience as a writer for *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno*. In this entertaining little book, he highlights his career-making turns and what he has learned along the way.

The book has no formal structure, wandering through Macks' storied, and storytelling, life, punctuated by tidbits about how his jokes come to him, his techniques, and then the jokes themselves. There is much material to be mined here, if you can pay attention and not just skip to the pages of jokes that often interrupt, as well as inform, the flow of his narrative. He identifies which comedian delivered the lines, and it's fascinating to have side-by-side style comparisons of late night hosts, particularly Leno and Letterman, covering the same topics.

Macks addresses the cultural changes that have occurred with the advent of social media, showing more than a little frustration at the constant need to rethink everything because of the sensitivity of a sometime overly empowered few. It used to take a lot more effort to complain about a bad joke, now it's a few words, a click, and suddenly, if the mood hits the internet, a scandal is born.

The best moments in the book focus on the political, but unfortunately, political humor can have a very short shelf life, and the lines feel very familiar and dated. Then again, maybe that's because so many of Mack's lines became part of the conversation of each electoral cycle he had to cover. His chapter on why politicians need late night television should be required reading for anyone interested in humor studies, and well, voting. He includes a short postscript of the "2016ers" and where he

would start if he were writing about them. It's a mixed bag, but then again, so are the 2016ers.

Overall, a very interesting, informative little book; one that will have you giggling and groaning in equal measures. It's more history than contemporary though. We'll have to wait a little while to get a feel for what's going on in the writers' room of those who inherited the late night mantle. -- LBS

Meyerowitz, Rick. *Drunk Stoned Brilliant Dead: the Writers and Artists Who Made the National Lampoon Insanely Great*. New York, Abrams, 2010. 320 pages. ISBN 978-0-8109-8848-4. Hardcover. \$40.00.

The broader public best remembers *National Lampoon* for its movie *Animal House*. But from 1970-1990, lovers of satire who decided they had "outgrown" *Mad* were aficionados of the *Lampoon's* combination of post-adolescent bawdry, burlesque erudition, inventive parodies of wide-ranging genres, transgressive humor, and the exceptional quality of its photography. Even after it ceased monthly publication, anthologies or editions of classic issues re-appeared. Former writers like Tony Hendra and P. J. O'Rourke have written memoirs, and both Matty Simmons (1994) and Josh Karp (2006) produced chronicles. In this new, coffee-table sized book, Meyerowitz, who wrote, edited, took photos, and even designed its iconic "Mona Gorilla" logo, has produced a definitive reminder of its creativity and hilarity.

Meyerowitz includes samples by each significant writer, cartoonist, and art director, as well as thumbnail anecdotes about them and evaluations of their contributions. Some of the founders analyze and tell stories about each other, some of which are bittersweet. There are a plethora of issue covers, and extended work which underlines how many artists and writers, cartoonists in particular, went on to renowned careers. There is even a sidebar about the improbably endowed "Danielle", who appeared naked regularly in the magazine's "Foto Funnies."

In part, *National Lampoon* gave opportunity for young post-graduate intellectuals to thumb their noses at all and sundry, even themselves. As founder Michael O'Donohue put it, "Making people laugh is the lowest form of humor." But as well as shocking people with rants against unlikely targets (the Dutch), nude young women, or photomontages like "Hitler in Paradise", many features took on important issues. In particular, "Foto Funnies," and whole issues testified to either miscommunication between the sexes, or the stresses of raging hormones. Amid jocular caricatures and parodies were serious comments on government, politics, and contemporary culture. -- Kalman Goldstein

A few really silly parting puns and one liners.....

When two egotists meet, it's an I for an I.

The short fortuneteller who escaped from prison was a small medium at large.

Did you hear about the Buddhist who refused Novocain during a root canal? He wanted to transcend dental medication.

and a classic:

Time flies like an arrow. Fruit flies like a banana.



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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:

Dr. Jennifer Hughes
Averett University
420 W. Main
Danville, VA 24541

Or

Join electronically via Americanhumor.org

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

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