



"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

### A Note of Introduction

Hello to all from the campus of the University of Detroit Mercy. I am excited to join the "mirth masters" of AHSA as the new editor of "To Wit" and promise to do my best to bring you what's new and what's news in humor studies. I am currently an assistant professor of English and the director of the writing program and center at UDM. I received my PhD from Saint Louis University where our dedicated AHSA director, Jan McIntire-Strasburg, was one of my esteemed mentors. Prior to my time at SLU, I was lucky enough to do some of my Master's work at Western Michigan University with John Cooley, a name that should be familiar you Twain scholars. I was in his final Twain class and wrote my Master's capstone essay under his guidance, just before he retired; however, I would like to stress that I was not the reason *why* he retired. Between the two of them, I was destined to find my way into to this association of scholars. My interests in humor intersect with my work in public discourse/rhetoric and spirituality. In addition to my dabbling in Mark Twain's world, I have presented and written on contemporary, non-fiction writer Anne Lamott, and for the upcoming ALA conference will be turning my attention to religious satire aimed at the figure of the Catholic priest.

You can send any future items of interest to the AHSA community to me at [lbrittsm@udmercy.edu](mailto:lbrittsm@udmercy.edu). That would include CFPs for conferences, publishing opportunities, research opportunities, notices about newly published books or articles, new research resources available, book reviews, etc. I appreciate any feedback and suggestions on ways to improve the newsletter. I started by hiring one of my students to redesign the logo. I hope you like the new look and find the information in this and future issues informative for your scholarship and helpful in keeping the conversation of the community vital and evolving.

All Best,

Laurie Britt-Smith

### AHSA Remembers a Dear Colleague

In Memoriam, Louis J. Budd 1921-2010 by John Bird

Louis J. Budd, noted professor and Mark Twain Scholar, passed away December 20, 2010 in Patagonia, AZ at the age of 89. Some of his many contributions to Mark Twain scholarship include *Mark Twain: Social Philosopher* (1962; rpt. University of Missouri Press, 2001); *Our Mark Twain* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983); *Mark Twain: Collected Tales, Sketches, Speeches, and Essays* (2 vols., Library of America, 1992); *Mark Twain: The Contemporary Reviews* (Cambridge University Press, 1999); and, co-edited with Peter Messent, *A Companion to Mark Twain* (Blackwell, 2005). Louis Budd served as managing editor of *American Literature* and on the editorial board of *Studies in American Humor*, among many other academic journals. He was also an early recipient of a Charlie Award from the American Humor Studies Association and one of the first winners of the Mark Twain Circle of America Award. He retired in 1991 (but continued to teach for five more years) from Duke University, where he was James B. Duke Professor of English.

Such a partial listing of his impressive scholarly achievements does not begin to capture the spirit of Lou Budd, as his friends and colleagues affectionately called him. Lou served as inspiration and mentor to several generations of Mark Twain scholars. Even though he would invariably be the most eminent Twainian in a gathering of Twainians, Lou always took notice of others, especially young and emerging scholars, giving his time and attention to advise and praise, both privately and publicly. Like the writer whose life and work he knew perhaps better than anyone else, Lou Budd had a lively sense of humor and could effortlessly craft a witty line. But also like Mark Twain, Lou's humor tapped into a deep vein of substance and seriousness. "Two weeks ago I celebrated my 89<sup>th</sup> birthday," he wrote to a

correspondent he had mentored and inspired. He added, "I have no earthly idea why." His students, friends, and colleagues certainly knew why, and they celebrate that this earth held him for so long.

Those wishing to memorialize Louis J. Budd may follow his last wishes and contribute to his most recent favorite cause, the local library in the small town where he spent his final years. Any checks may be made payable to the following address:

Friends of the Library  
Patagonia Public Library  
P.O. Box 415  
Patagonia, AZ 85624

**The 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Conference on American Literature**  
May 26 -29 In Boston at the Westin Copley Place, with Thursday sessions to be held at the Marriot Copley Place Hotel.

#### **Humoring Genre**

##### **Session 2-A Thursday, May 26 10:30-11:50**

Organized by the American Humor Studies Association  
Chair: Janice McIntire-Strasburg, St. Louis University

"This Time for Sure": Rocky and Bullwinkle and the Limits of Genre, John Bird, Winthrop University  
"The Tom Lehrer Legacy," Joe Alvarez, Charlotte, NC.  
Richard Wilbur at Ninety: The Heresies of Literary Wit, Bruce Michelson, University of Illinois.

#### **Satire and Reflexivity**

##### **Session 5-K Thursday, May 26 3:00-4:20**

Organized by the American Humor Studies Association  
Chair: Bruce Michelson, University of Illinois

"Humor as Truth in *Everything is Illuminated* and *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*," Victoria M. Bryan, University of Mississippi  
The Roman Catholic Priest as Contemporary Satiric Target, Laurie Britt-Smith, University of Detroit Mercy.  
Postmodernity, Humor, and Horror: Genre Bending in the *Scream* Trilogy, Janice McIntire-Strasburg, Saint Louis University

#### **Business Meeting: American Humor Studies Association**

##### **Session 18-M Saturday, May 29 12:30 – 1:50**

#### **Reassessments of Mark Twain**

##### **Session 1-A Thursday, May 26 9:00-10:20**

Organized by the Mark Twain Circle of America  
Chair: James S. Leonard, The Citadel

Pay no attention to that man behind the curtain': Mark Twain's Autobiography and the Wizard of Misdirection, Michael Kiskis, Elmira College  
When Did Susy Become Mark Twain's Favorite Daughter?, Linda Morris, University of California, Davis  
Real Property and Fictional Land: The Fact and the Fiction of the Tennessee Land, Larry Howe, Roosevelt University

#### **Mark Twain Abroad**

##### **Session 4-A Thursday, May 26 1:30-2:50**

Organized by the Mark Twain Circle of America  
Chair: Linda Morris, University of California, Davis

Mark Twain and the French, Paula Harrington, Colby College  
Mapping Race and Caste in *Huckleberry Finn* and *Godan*, Seema Sharma, University of Mumbai, India  
Mark Twain and Cannibalism in Modern Chinese Fiction, Xilao Li, Harper College

#### **Mark Twain and Societal Values**

##### **Session 6-A Thursday, May 26 4:30-5:00**

Organized by the Mark Twain Circle of America  
Chair: Sharon McCoy, University of Georgia

*Beneath Pitifulness'*: Twain's Anti-Gallows Sentiment, 1861-1885, Jarrod Roark, University of Missouri-Kansas City  
The Average Man, the Half a Man, and the Three-Fifths of a Man: The Colonel Sherburn Episode in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Frank P. Fury, Monmouth University  
*The Hidden Hand* in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Catherine Kuncze, University of Colorado, Boulder

#### **Business Meeting: Mark Twain Circle**

##### **Session 2-M Thursday, May 26, 10:30-11:50**

#### **Other Conferences and Organizations of Interest:**

#### **The 2011 International Society for Humor Studies Conference**

will be held from July 5 to July 9, 2011 on the campus of Boston University. Registration is now open. The 2012 conference will be held in Krakow Poland, with a tentative date of June 25-29. Information for the conferences and the ISHS can be found at [www.hnu.edu/ishs](http://www.hnu.edu/ishs)

The **Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor** is holding their 24<sup>th</sup> annual conference April 7-10, 2011 at the Buena Vista Palace and Hotel and Spa in Orlando this year.

AATH welcomes anyone who is interested in learning more about the application and benefits of therapeutic humor. It was created to educate health care, business, and education professionals about the values and therapeutic uses of humor and laughter, and to promote conduct, and identify the need for research that further investigates the roles humor and laughter play in well-being. In addition to their annual conference, AATH also has a Humor Academy Program that serves as a "as a dynamic resource for the AATH community interested in the theory, rational, and scientific research of therapeutic humor and in the applications of therapeutic humor in occupationally diverse fields." Information on AATH and the HA programs can be found at [www.aath.org](http://www.aath.org). Questions about the Humor Academy can be sent directly to Mary Kay Morrison [marykay@questforhumor.com](mailto:marykay@questforhumor.com) or you can contact the AATH office at 888-747-AATH (2284).

## Research Resource

Cylinder Preservation and Digitization Project - Archive of Sound Cylinders at UC Santa Barbara  
<http://cylinders.library.ucsb.edu/browse.php>

Sound cylinders, the first commercially produced sound recordings, provide scholars and collectors insight into popular culture around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. (The majority of the recordings date from 1904 to 1929.) In addition to information about the cylinder format, this collection holds over 8000 thousand digitally preserved musical and spoken word recordings available in streaming or Mp3 format. Because of the age and condition of some of the cylinders they can be difficult to hear, but the popping and crackle quality of the recordings add to the aesthetic experience of listening to these artifacts. The site features a user friendly search interface, or one can browse the collection by genre which includes sections on ethnic humor, humorous recitations, Minstrel music, and Vaudeville.

One of the classic recordings available includes a 1909 version of "The Arkansas Traveler" routine where a city slicker and country bumpkin trade slightly barbed jokes at each other until they are finally united by the realization that they both know the same fiddle tune. Typical banter: City question, "Say, where does this road go?" Country answer, "It don't go no wheres. It stays right where 'tis."

This site is an incredibly rich resource for cultural studies scholars and holds great fascination for any history buff. If nothing else, you can find out just how old that old joke you like to tell really is.

## Pocket Book Reviews

By Kalman Goldstein

Brecher, Irving (as told to Hank Rosenfeld). The Wicked Wit of the West. Teaneck, N.J., Ben Yehuda Press, 2009. 330 pages. ISBN 978-1-934730-32-4. Softcover. \$25.00.

A respected comedy writer for vaudeville, radio, television, and movies for over 30 years, Brecher created material for two generations of great comedians from Milton Berle, the Marx Brothers, and Jack Benny, to Jackie Gleason and Dick Van Dyke. He produced a pioneer blue-collar sitcom, The Life of Riley for three different mediums. Brecher wrote two Marx Brothers movies by himself, and Fred Astaire and Judy Garland musicals. Through the 40s and 50s he wrote for George Burns, Jackie Gleason, and Henny Youngman, and directed Lucille Ball and Ernie Kovacs comedies. He even created "dialogue" for a talking dog in a mid-50s sitcom. His last great screenplay was Bye Bye Birdie in 1962. According to Groucho Marx and S. J. Perelman, Brecher was one of the premier impromptu jesters. After his career in movies and television, Brecher turned to stand-up routines in his 60s.

"As told to" books are subjective; the subject always has the last word. But as Brecher cracked, "I don't like to quote myself but unfortunately everybody I know who should be quoting me is dead." Interviews extend from Brecher's 88<sup>th</sup> to 94<sup>th</sup> year,

Rosenfeld recording anecdotes and assessments of comics and comedians past and present. Brecher was a winning raconteur, with intimate stories about Berle, Groucho, Harpo, Gleason, and William Bendix; he also threw in a funny account of an unpaid job done for cowboy actor Hoot Gibson 70 years earlier.

Brecher was always "on" while with Rosenfeld, but always candid. He also allowed reproduction of recordings of his work on stage and at roasts of fellow Hollywood jokers. A primary source for movie, radio, and TV comedy from the 1930s through the 1960s, Brecher was also a fount of humorous non-sequitur. He kept joking when illnesses turned his stand-up into "sit-down" routines, and was still entertaining nurses on his deathbed.

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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. But 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 both 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 all the jocular caricatures and parodies were serious comments on government, politics, and contemporary culture.



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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:

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

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