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Jorge Figueroa-Dorrego and Cristina Larkin-Galiñanes
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A Source Book of Literary and Philosophical
Writings about Humour and Laughter:
The Seventy-Five Essential Texts
from Antiquity to Modern Times
Lewiston, et. al: Edwin Mellen.

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Jorge Figueroa-Dorrego and Cristina Larkin-Galiñanes have
done humour researchers and teachers of comedy studies a great
service in the compilation of this rich and wide-ranging anthology,
the first of its kind for almost a quarter of a century, and
undoubtedly the most exhaustive.

Featuring a generous selection of texts – many of which are not
readily in print – the anthology aims to present the reader with the
key discussions of humour and laughter from Plato to Henri
Bergson, arranging the sections within three broadly-defined
periods: antiquity and the middle ages; the early modern period; and
what they term the “late modern” period. The anthology collects
works from authors as varied as Aristotle, Descartes, Coleridge,
Herbert Spencer and Charles Baudelaire, and from fields as diverse
as literary criticism, philosophy, theology, experimental psychology,
medical theory, political science, and conduct literature. As such, the
form of the book serves to make an important point about one of the
perennial problems of humour studies: how are we to define such
overlapping and profligate terms, and to which discipline or
disciplines do they properly belong? This is a question that Larkin-
Galiñanes takes up in her helpful introduction, acknowledging the
mobility of humour’s terminology and the difficulty inherent in
trying to determine the object of study in any definitive sense. To aid
the reader, therefore, the editors offer a substantial and authoritative essay at the beginning of each section that seeks to locate the texts within their historical contexts and offer a gloss on the place of humour and laughter within their respective eras. This is, of course, a significant undertaking, but one that is accomplished admirably.

All of the texts that one would expect to be here are in evidence: Sir Philip Sidney on Elizabethan comedy, Thomas Hobbes’ famous remark on laughter as a sign of “pusillanimity,” and George Meredith on the socially-corrective purpose of the comic spirit. The stand-out sections, however, are the earliest texts, primarily because they are the hardest to find in reliable modern editions. These selections include the enigmatic and fragmentary *Tractatus Coisilianus* (anecdotally believed by some to present the blueprint for Aristotle’s lost *Poetics* of comedy), and handily-excerpted selections from Cicero and Quintilian on the utility of laughter in rhetorical arguments. Also particularly welcome is the section on the early Christian tradition, reprinting the Bible’s sparse comments on laughter alongside those of Church Fathers such as Basil of Caesarea, Clement of Alexandria, and John Chrysostom. The Christian tradition is central to western concepts of humour, but often overlooked in favour of a secular, literary tradition that runs from Roman New Comedy through renaissance humanism and into eighteenth century debates about the proper use of wit. This narrative can now be re-evaluated thanks to the material being made once-again accessible.

Omission is, of course, the necessary evil of all anthologizing, and there are some notable gaps – the inclusion of only a single text by a woman (George Eliot), for example, no Erasmus’ *Praise of Folly*, or Asper’s speech on humour in Ben Jonson’s *Every Man Out of His Humour*, despite of the acknowledgment of Jonson’s centrality in the General Introduction. The absence of some texts, such as the stanzas on comedy in Spenser’s *Tears of the Muses*, George Puttenham’s thoughts on comedy in the *Arte of English Poesie*, and the Congreve-Collier controversy of 1698, are rendered untroubling by coverage elsewhere. Others, such as the glaring nonappearance of Sigmund Freud, are surely explained by copyright issues beyond the editors’ influence. One does wonder, however, why the selection stops so abruptly at 1900 when the subtitle promises us material up to “modern times” – surely a sufficiently capacious term to include
writers such as Francis Cornford, Mary Douglas, James Agee, Mikhail Bakhtin, Northrop Frye, C.L. Barber, Theodor Adorno, and the Cambridge Ritualists, among others. Similarly, there is a large body of poststructuralist and postmodern work on humour and playfulness now sufficiently entrenched within the academy to be anthologized. Again, the dual nuisances of copyright and clearance no doubt present an obstacle to extending the work far beyond its present form, but it does make one hope that the editors have the enthusiasm to produce a second volume. There is certainly an appetite for it, and it would be greatly appreciated. An invaluable source-book indeed.

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These texts, seen intuitively and collectively as a second or third class sub-genre of the novel as a whole, and normally categorised as “light” entertainment and hardly (in general and save for certain very notable exceptions) as “good” literature, are characterised by certain marked communicative conventions which stem, obviously, from those of verbal humour in general. Stereotypes are, as Apte points out, crucial to humour and its appreciation because within any specific culture. Downing, writing about the humour of Tom Sharpe, points out the existence of two levels of incongruity in his novels: incongruity of content and incongruity of realisation.
There has long been a need for a source book of classical writings on the nature of humor and laughter. The Morreall book fills this long-standing need. In what other single book can one find out what made Hobbes, Descartes, Kant, and Schopenhauer laugh? And in what other book can one learn what they (and many other philosophers) believed to be the essence of laughter?

Transitions from Late Antiquity to Byzantium, and from Byzantium to the Renaissance, form focal points from which contributors look backwards, forwards and sideways. Highlights the variety, audacity and quality of the finest Byzantine works and the extent to which they anticipated the renaissance.

In so doing, they have combed the sources looking for tangible evidence of humour or jokes, either verbal or practical. Other modern variants of the argument attempt to ground theistic belief in patterns of reasoning that are characteristic of the natural sciences, appealing to simplicity and economy of explanation of the order and regularity of the universe. Perhaps the most sophisticated and challenging argument for the existence of God is the ontological argument, propounded by Anselm of Canterbury.

Kant explained laughter at humor as a response to an “absurdity.”[17] We first have an expectation about the world, but that expectation is then disappointed or “disappears into nothing.” Our response to humor consists in a “play with thoughts.” In section 54 of Critique of Judgment, Kant told three jokes to explain his theory.

Language (LA) “...contains all the information necessary for the verbalization of a text.”[41][42] Nevertheless, both the listed Knowledge Resources in the GTVH and their relationship to each other has proven to be fertile ground in the further investigation of what exactly makes humor funny.[43].

Literary and Philosophical Essays. Guyenne, where he had among his teachers, the great Scottish Latinist, George Buchanan. The first two books of his Essays appeared in 1588; the third in 1588; and four years later he died. These are the main external facts of Montaigne’s life; of the man himself the portrait is to be found in his book.
Literary devices are specific techniques that allow a writer to convey a deeper meaning that goes beyond what’s on the page. Literary devices work alongside plot and characters to elevate a story and prompt reflection on life, society, and what it means to be human. Literary devices are specific techniques that allow a writer to convey a deeper meaning that goes beyond what’s on the page. Literary devices work alongside plot and characters to elevate a story and prompt reflection on life, society, and what it means to be human.
Three traditional theories of laughter and humor are examined, along with the theory that humor evolved from mock-aggressive play in apes. Understanding humor as play helps counter the traditional objections to it and reveals some of its benefits, including those it shares with philosophy itself. 1. Humor’s Bad Reputation. Martian anthropologists comparing the amount of philosophical writing on humor with what has been written on, say, justice, or even on Rawls’ Veil of Ignorance, might well conclude that humor could be left out of human life without much loss. The second surprising thing is how negative most philosophers have been in their assessments of humor. A similar explanation of laughter from the same time is found in Descartes’ Passions of the Soul. Another essential concept in this study is the concept of humour. Literary and cultural theories are often said to originate from the birth of modern linguistics, which in turn emerges from the work of Ferdinand de Saussure. (Allen 2000: 8). The beginning of the 20th century was characterised by de Saussure’s structuralist views. Structuralism, a critical, philosophical and cultural movement based on the notions of Saussure’s semiology aimed to achieve a redescription of human culture in terms of sign-systems modelled on Saussure’s redefinitions of sign and linguistic structure. This reformation in thought, which has been called the linguistic turn in the human sciences, can be seen as one of the starting points for the theory of intertextuality. A Source Book of Literary and Philosophical Writings about Humor and Laughter: The Seventy-Five Essential Texts from Antiquity to Modern Times. Información General. Autores: Jorge Figueroa Dorrego (ed. lit.), Cristina Larkin Galiñanes (ed. lit.)