

Editor's Introduction

Lydia Amir*

This issue of the *Israeli Journal of Humor Research* offers innovative research, from a variety of disciplines and by authors from Spain, Macedonia, Germany, Nigeria, and Israel.

In “Dualities in Humor: Incongruity Meets Ridicule,” Amadeu Viana argues in favor of a fruitful assembling of traditional dualities observed in humour, such as disparagement versus incongruity and positive versus critical aspects. After reviewing misogelastical or denigrating and carnivalesque or enthusiastic positions, he classifies and explains both the historical alternatives and their contemporary counterparts. Dealing particularly with the social versus the cognitive divide, he argues that social and cognitive dimensions must be approached in an entangled way, as part of a social semiotics. Viana considers that Reversal theory approaches have captured the essential complication in humour, that is, the playful mode present in interaction plus the asymmetry implied in interpretation. He argues that both the social sides of sanction and solidarity in humorous practices and the incongruous and derisive aspects of cognitive humorous triggers show *grid effects* (the combination of ridicule and incongruity both with humorous and less humorous counterparts). Moreover, the basic duality of the social (with its disciplinary or rebellious aspects) and the cognitive (having an abrupt imbalance at its core) presumably responds to the origin of social rules, through embarrassment and shame, on the one hand, as well as to the original conditions of the human mind, working on extended connectivity and figuration, on the other hand, as two complementary sides of social semiotics.

In “The Changing Style of Jewish Humor in the Second Half of the 20th Century,” Arie Melnik and Yuval Nov follow the development of Jewish humor in the 20th century. They argue that in the shift of Jewish centers, from the Polish “shtetels” to urban centers in the US, Jewish humor changed in two ways. Acquiring a more general tone, Jewish humor saw a change in the thematic subjects of jokes: Jewish related jokes were omitted but jokes on general subjects remained. And, the structure of jokes changed in the first half of the 20th century with the shift from vaudeville to the Catskills and to the radio and TV shows and to comedy clubs: the size of the

* **Lydia Amir**, Visiting Professor, Department of Philosophy, Tufts University, USA
lydamir@mail.com

stories was reduced and punchlines were emphasized. While the emphasis on general subjects and fast-pace moving punchlines created a Jewish humor style, Melnik and Nov focus on the changes in content and in length of standard jokes originating in the second half of the 20th century. Using statistical analysis to compare a sample of 800 jokes delivered by professional comedians in the second half of the century with an older set, they compare the length of new jokes to the length and subject matter that were commonly used at the beginning of the 20th century.

In “Development and Initial Validation of the Single-Item Wittiness Scale: A Preliminary Study,” Filip Sulejmanov and Karl-Heinz Renner aim to construct and initially validate the Single-Item Wittiness Scale (SIWS). They define wittiness as a specific type of humor production, which includes two separate processes: production fluency and production success. The single item (SIWS) constructed reflects both of these processes. They report administering it to a total sample of 83 high school students (30 male and 53 female), together with the As-if-Scale (Renner et al., 2008) and katagelasticism subscale of the PhoPhiKat (Ruch & Proyer, 2009). Their results show that, first, self and peer-rated wittiness were positively associated. Second, males tend to have higher scores on peer-rated wittiness. Next, histrionic self-presentation style correlated positively with both self and peer ratings of wittiness. Finally, (active) katagelasticism was not associated with either self or peer-rated wittiness. Sulejmanov and Renner conclude that the construct validity of the SIWS was partially confirmed.

In “‘Here Comes the Philosopher!’ Elements of Humor in *Alien Love* by Asher Barash,” Ofra Matzov-Cohen analyzes the manifestations of humor in the novel *Alien Love* (1930) by Asher Barash. This novel portrays the relationship between Peretz Segal, a young Galician Jew returning from military service, and Frania Kinsky, the daughter of his gentile neighbors. Matzov-Cohen contrasts the idyllic atmosphere in which the plot takes place with the underlying social tensions characteristic of intercultural relations between Jews and non-Jews. She further compares the joy and humor which are an integral part of the basic set of beliefs of the Jewish Hassidic community with the laughter and ridicule generated by the gentile characters. She concludes that these tactics serve sometimes to ease the rising tensions and at other times are an indirect subtle way of expressing a certain truism.

Finally, in “Politics of Humour and Political Humour in Nigerian Stand-Up Comedy,” Ibukun Filani examines how stand-up comedy performance in Nigeria

deploys politics in order to characterise political humour in Nigerian stand-up comedy. Based on data derived from the routines of three Nigerian stand-up comedians, which were purposively selected, he highlights how the performances of Nigerian stand-up comedians amount to political acts. He finds two kinds of political humor in Nigerian stand-up comedy: humor targeted at politicians and humor targeted at government policies. He argues that political humour functions as a meta-pragmatic act in the context of stand-up performance in that the stand-up comedians use it to recycle and reinforce the dominant view of politics in the wider society. At the discourse level, this humor projects how the stand-up participants construe political reality and it borders on their social identities.

This issue ends with Arthur Asa Berger's review of Francisco Yus' *Humor and Relevance* (Amsterdam: John Benjamin's, 2016).

I hope you will enjoy reading yet another exciting issue of the *Israeli Journal of Humor Research*.

Lydia Amir
Editor of IJHR