

Anglistentag 2019

## **Sektion ‘Funny Men’: Masculinities and Ridicule in Anglophone Cultures**

*“The premise of all comedy is a man in trouble.” (Jerry Lewis)*

While “men in trouble” are always good for a laugh in comedy and beyond, scholarly perspectives on the relation between masculinity and humour are lagging behind. Humour studies have only recently engaged with the category of masculinity (Attardo 2014; Wirth 2017). By the same token, the field of Masculinity Studies has only seldom investigated humour, laughter, and comedy: Amongst the various encyclopaedias in the field of Masculinity Studies that have appeared in the last 15 years, very few (Flood et al. 2007; Horlacher et al. 2016) include reflections on humour or address topics like the uses of masculine humour in patriarchal cultures and the sociology of laughter as part of male bonding scenarios (Kuipers 2006).

Recent debates address women comedians and their ‘funny bones’, thus revealing once more that men’s presence in comedy remains an invisible (and all the more powerful) norm. Likewise, renewed interest in the importance of a ‘sense of humour’ for British and American national identities revisits transatlantic genealogies, but sidetracks the normalisation of masculinity at the heart of the connection between self and laughter (Wickberg 2015), while narratology offers a broadening of semantic humour theories with regard to longer and shorter narrative texts but neglects the question of who tells (Attardo 2014). Last but not least, as ‘monolithic’ masculinities are on the rise in the political arena all over the world, laughter once again provides a powerful tool: it subjects (political) bodies to denigration, but also serves as a social glue that creates temporary communities of laughter, united in their shared acknowledgement of unspoken norms—see for instance the comedic gesturing used by Donald Trump during his bid for the Republican candidacy in the 2016 elections (Hall et al. 2016), or UKIP leader Nigel Farage’s constant grinning, which earned him comparisons to the Cheshire Cat or the Grinch.

By its very nature, laughter is an ambivalent force, forever torn between transgressive critique and restorative tendencies. This is as true of politics as it is of cultural production, from Shakespearean comedy to cringeworthy ‘comedies of discomfort’, the work of controversial stand-up comedians like Ricky Gervais, Doc Brown, or Eddie Izzard (whose queer persona makes the challenging of established gender norms part of the stage experience), or the mocking of crisis-ridden middle-aged masculinity in contemporary film and television.

This panel seeks to examine the uses of masculine/ist humour in Anglophone cultures past and present. We would like to ask, for instance, how funny men (re)configure the performance of

masculinities, how the allegedly rigid male body is loosened up and carnivalised as a comic effect, and how laughter and ridicule (re)write masculinist myths and narratives.

The section invites analyses on a variety of topics, including (but not limited to):

- laughter and masculinity across diverse genres and media, including performance (stand-up comedy, sketch comedy, jokes, TV series, YouTube videos), narrative (novels, travelogues, auto/biographies), and print cultures (periodicals, almanacs, pamphlets, ephemeral texts),
- laughter and masculinity in public and private settings (e.g. the political arena, the corporate world, or the family),
- the politics of laughter pertaining to masculinity and (post-)colonialism, (trans-)nationalisms and regionalisms,
- performative aspects of laughter and the comic (drag, crossdressing, cross-gender casting),
- the gendering of traditional comic tropes (e.g. the buffoon, the *miles gloriosus*, the fool, the henpecked husband),
- intersectional approaches to masculinity and laughter at the intersections of class, ethnicity, race, religion, age, and disability,
- masculinity in relation to cringe humour, comedy of embarrassment, shaming,
- the intersection between laughter and homosociality.

Please mail your abstracts to [stefanie.ste.schaefer@fau.de](mailto:stefanie.ste.schaefer@fau.de) and [wieland.schwanebeck@tu-dresden.de](mailto:wieland.schwanebeck@tu-dresden.de) by Jan. 15, 2019.

### Works Cited

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