

Funny Women. An International Symposium.

February 25-27, 2021, JGU Mainz

For the longest time, humor in the literary and cultural production in the English-speaking world since the Renaissance was dominated by male voices. The canon of English literary history knows few funny women before the twentieth century apart from Aphra Behn, Elizabeth Inchbald, or Jane Austen. The common prejudice that men are funnier than women – more so, that they *have* to be funny, whereas women are not allowed to be funny – has persisted to this day, although it is impossible in 2020 to ignore that comedy is no longer just a men’s game: the output of writers and performers like Tina Fey, Julia Davis, Phoebe Waller-Bridge and many more is widely received on both sides of the Atlantic, *Netflix* has considerably diversified the list of its prestigious comedy specials to include new voices like Michelle Wolf and Fortune Feimster, and when Hannah Gadsby proposes the end of self-deprecating humor for women, the world listens. In short, “funny women” are everywhere, but it is worth taking a closer look at what they do and how they impact literary and cultural production.

This symposium offers a space to consider the construction and representation of funny women, on the one hand, and women’s creative comedic work, on the other. Across a broad variety of genres and media, from literature to the stage, the screen, and the online world, it seeks to highlight how women have been active creators of humor and shapers of the comedy scene. In *All Joking Aside*, for example, Rebecca Krefting suggests that “charged humor”—a form of humor that “offers strategies and solutions for combating cultural and legal exclusion” (3)—is very often produced by women, although “women comics who use charged humor will struggle to rival the success of their male counterparts” (7). We take such assessments as a cue to investigate the role that women have (had) in the comedy industry, questions of power and representation, and forms of resistance as well as complicity.

We ask, for example: how do funny women picture and write funny women? What makes a funny woman a funny woman, and can a funny woman create humor without reference to her own gender? Is humor always gendered, or is this only the case when the comedian is female? Can we look beyond gender to appreciate comedy? And if women use and produce a kind of humor that challenges hegemonic narratives and comedic practices, how does this relate to humor produced by other groups? How have men written funny women in the past and how do they do so now? Is female laughter always subversive? Are male representations of funny women always oppressive? What does women’s comedy look like in times of #MeToo? Is there a potential for “humor alliances” by women across borders? Do, and if so, *how* do, white women profit from the comedic labor of people of color? And how do women use humor along political lines?

We invite papers dedicated (but not limited) to the following topics:

- funny women in literary and cultural production
- women and/in the comedy industry (writer’s rooms, production, hosts, ...)
- women’s humor across genres (from literature to screen to stage to web)
- case studies of individual performers

- intersectional perspectives on race, class, gender, disability, etc. and comedy
- queer identities, queer comics (LOL Word collective, ...)
- humor alliancing
- women's humor and comedy as feminist practice
- women's comedy and #MeToo
- women's comedy and corporeality of performance

Please send abstracts of 300 words and a short biographical note to Dr. Nele Sawallisch at sawallis@uni-mainz.de. Submission **deadline: May 1, 2020**

Organizers: Nele Sawallisch (JGU Mainz), Wieland Schwanebeck (TU Dresden)