

Abstracts

Fabrizio Cambi: The Joke, Humour and Comicality in Jean Paul's Work and Aesthetics

In his paratext (1818/1819) to his autobiography *Wahrheit aus Jean Pauls Leben* (posthumously published in 1826) Jean Paul refers to two aesthetic and existential categories central to his convoluted narrative work: ridiculousness and pleasantry. The paper not only examines humour in general, but also investigates whether what was funny in his time still is today. Moreover, it draws on Jean Paul's *Vorschule der Ästhetik* (1804), where philosophical concepts of the ridiculous up to Kant and Schiller are discussed and where the futile and ridiculous is opposed to the sublime. Examples from Jean Paul's novels illustrate how the Romantic notion of the comical subverts the concept of the idyllic – unlike in Weimar Classicism – by resorting to proto-realistic devices and how it aims at an alternative theodicy. Jean Paul's aesthetic programme closes with the joke as the culmination and completion of a poetic and literary programme whose central elements were adopted by Freud, among others: the unexpected convergence of disparate elements, brevity and a sudden epiphanic revelation. Jean Paul's reflections on humour and (Romantic) irony as a means of obtaining knowledge and freedom would later become instrumental in shaping an entire era.

Alessandro Fambrini: "Es ist jeder sein eigener Teufel". Humour and Irony in the Short Stories of Kurd Laßwitz

Based on the dichotomy between "seriousness" and "joke", which Karl Heinz Bohrer has shown to be the result of a historico-cultural process, the paper studies short stories by Kurd Laßwitz, an almost forgotten Silesian author. Both influenced by, and simultaneously critical of positivism, this "German Jules Verne" became one of the precursors of science fiction. On the one hand, following the tradition of Romantic irony, he mocked his time's belief in science, and on the other, he appreciated its rationalism, which he saw as the driving force behind scientific progress for being stimulated by an ironic attitude. A scientific optimist, Laßwitz draws both on Kant and the unorthodox thinker Gustav Fechner. Ironically, while the advancement of knowledge undermines previous findings, it cannot count as final in itself. Covering a selection of essays and short stories, the paper examines both the consequences of the failure of an absolute criterion of truth and the relativity of knowledge associated with it, as well as the relation of metaphysics and physics found in contemporary scientific problems.

Marco Serio: Irony, Satire and Parody in the Novellas of Gustav Meyrink

Drawing on three of Gustav Meyrink's novellas published in the magazine *Simplicissimus*, the paper discusses three central issues regarding literary parody: first, whether it is relevant to know the model for the parody as well as its structural and context-related characteristics; consequently, what devices of deformation are used regarding meaning, structure, and style; and finally, whether the novellas are intended as "critical" or "comical" treatments – i.e., whether they are "serious" or "trivial" parodies. After outlining both *Simplicissimus* as their contextual medium and the development of speculative fiction, the paper gives a detailed analysis of the novellas *Der heiße Soldat*, *Das Präparat*, and *Die Pflanzen des Dr. Cinderella*. Meyrink's satire is revealed to be an acute literary device acting as a critique of ideology against the blind faith in technological progress and its prospects, which, through the fantastic and irrational, counters the world view determined by positivism in order to shake the readers out of their comfort.

Magdalena Gronau: “New Atheism” vs. “The Gods of Greece”. Romantic Irony in Erwin Chargaff’s Essay *Wehklage über das Verschwinden der Dryaden*

After outlining New Atheism on the basis of secularistic and rationalistic concepts as propagated with missionary zeal by Richard Dawkins and others who rely on their authority as renowned scientists, the paper studies how religious themes lend themselves to comical treatment – particularly when current examples show that they can lead to violent indignation even in secularized societies. Moreover, although polemics and irony are often used in the critique of religion in order to ridicule an opponent, the opposite has been rarely known to happen. A Karl Kraus enthusiast, the successful and renowned biochemist Erwin Chargaff criticizes the fundamentalist and apodictic belief in science and gradually evolves from a critic of science into an art critic and writer. In a detailed analysis of Chargaff’s essay the paper accurately shows how he polemicalizes against the scientists’ monopoly of explanation and what ironic devices he uses to ridicule the quantum physicist Steven Weinberg as the protagonist of his essay. The reference to Greek mythology and its belief in the “truth of the paradoxical” is shown to be inherently linked to Romantic irony.

Wolfgang Hackl: Transformations of *La Ronde*: Helmut Qualtinger’s Parodies and Werner Schwab’s Farce

Arthur Schnitzler’s *La Ronde* (*Reigen*), an “accurate counter discourse” ridiculing official fin de siècle sexual morals, has caused a multitude of parodies and adaptations to emerge. From this abundance of offshoots the paper selects and studies examples of Austrian *Kabarett* of the 1950s featuring Helmut Qualtinger on the one hand, and *Der REIZENDE REIGEN nach dem Reigen des REIZENDEN HERRN ARTHUR SCHNITZLER* by Werner Schwab on the other. Stimulated by Max Ophüls’ film *La Ronde* (1950), the group around Helmut Qualtinger, a “*Kabarett* without a name”, produced the parody *Reigen 51* and placed the play in a restorative society between post-war trauma and economic reconstruction. The satire against the excesses of rapid economic growth is harsher in *Reigen-Express* (1955), especially against tourism and sport, while *Askulap-Reigen* (1983), a transposition into the hospital world, turns out to be noticeably more trivial. Schwab’s “cover drama”, however, although not a satire in the usual sense, keeps strictly to its model, but performs a substantial change of perspective by focusing on language and its determining function; thus transformation turns into the deconstruction of the regulation of language and is turned against the social regulation of sexuality.

Erika Wimmer: Provocative – Otto Grünmandl and Markus Koschuh as Representatives of Tyrolean *Kabarett*

Acknowledging the definition of *Kabarett* as “a multimedia expression”, an often neglected literary genre which is inherently and particularly founded on the joke as its basic poetological constituent, the paper studies contemporary Tyrolean *Kabarett*. It reveals the different approaches to political issues made by the humorists Otto Grünmandl (in the last third of the 20th century) and Markus Koschuh (in the present) and studies similarities specific to *Kabarett* as well as divergences regarding epoch and personality. On the one hand, there is the “classic” humorist of the cabaret (*Kleinkunst*) scene, firmly established regionally and appreciated supra-regionally: one who sees himself as an entertainer and humorist playing with language; on the other, a much younger comedian whose roots lie in the poetry slam scene: one who discusses current controversial political themes on stage and thus causes indignation. The analysis shows that despite their disparate means their acts present similarities in their use of language. The political dimension is an element shared by their respective programmes as well, although Grünmandl follows the internal logic and language of his impersonation, whereas Koschuh attacks the shortcomings of *realpolitik* with mockery and moral accusations, but also addresses them with constructive concern.

Klaus Amann: Irony in the Service of Political Agitation.

Walther von der Vogelweide's 'Opferstock'-Stanza and the Satirical Poem *Spottgedicht auf Kaiser Ludwig den Bayern* (1346/47)

Drawing on two fundamentally distinct texts, the paper attempts to understand how irony markers can be identified in texts preserved exclusively in written form and what role irony plays in the political disputes of the medieval period. The device primarily used to set markers of irony, both in Walther's *Sangspruch* and the *Spottgedicht auf Kaiser Ludwig den Bayern* by an anonymous author, is the "fictitious scene". Moreover, both authors have to rely on the fact that their readers share the scope of their respective knowledge as well as their values. To reconstruct these conditions today is not always easy and requires a close examination of (literary) history. It appears that irony is not necessarily used to propagate a controversial political opinion but rather to strengthen one's own circle of supporters – particularly, when one's own position is inferior in an ongoing political conflict.

Fulvio Ferrari: *Der Pfaffe Amis* and the Ambiguity of Comicality

In Der Stricker's tale *Der Pfaffe Amis* the reader repeatedly comes across contradictions and ambiguities. On the one hand, the protagonist is identified by the narrator as the most commendable, generous and ingenious man who ever lived, on the other, he is tainted as the originator of lies and deception. Furthermore, in order to procure money he then courteously redistributes, this contradictory hero commits increasingly brutal crimes in the course of the various episodes he experiences, before dying as the highly respected abbot of a monastery. Research has attempted to tackle these discrepancies and incoherencies in various ways. The paper first suggests interpreting the novel within the context of the complete Strickerian oeuvre, where both courtly generosity and empathic as well as diplomatic ingenuity play important parts. Moreover, it sees the novel and particularly the narrator's comments as a reflection on the "sins of the tongue" (i.e., lies and deception), which were discussed at length by the theologians of the era.

Davide Bertagnolli: Laughter for Laughter's Sake? On Comicality in *Der Dieb von Brügge*

The paper questions Jürgen Meier's thesis that dismisses *Der Dieb von Brügge*, a 15th century middle low German verse narrative from an urban milieu, as pure entertainment literature merely aimed at providing amusement. Although the intention to entertain cannot be denied, at least two further functions of comicality can be identified: one didactic, the other social. The didactic aspect warns the reader of too much pride that comes before the fall, the social aspect aims at denigrating and deriding courtly society, which is mocked in the form of a knight and even the king and his daughter. This mockery serves the purpose of strengthening the cohesion of the urban merchant elites of commercial towns like Bruges and of demarcating themselves from the nobility.

Elisabeth Christensen: *Den pfaffen und das weib wolt effen*: The Clergy and Comicality in Hans Rosenplüt's Tales

Drawing on four of Hans Rosenplüt's tales, which are analyzed following Hanns Fischer's theory of the German medieval tale, the paper studies the comical function of the figure of the cleric in late medieval tales. Because of the precept of celibacy the figure of the priest is best suited for the representation of sexual misconduct (particularly adultery), since the transgression of a particular rigid moral norm always produces a comical effect. However, this figure is also used for pillorying other wrongdoings. The tale *Der fünfmal getötete Pfaffe* goes through the complete catalogue of the seven so-called cardinal sins, as exemplified – by means of a both ludicrous and gruesome exaggeration – by the corpse of a priest passed around and repeatedly "killed"

by various characters. In this case, the figure of the cleric functions less as an object of direct mockery than as a means of criticizing the violation of religious rules.

Federica Ricci Garotti: Irony as a Commenting Device in Scholarly Papers

By drawing on approaches ranging from rhetoric and semantics to pragmatics and the theory of communication, the paper first sheds light upon the history of the linguistic terminology of irony, which – within the context of speech act theory – results in a new methodological approach to the interpretation of irony. Elements of irony are read as verbal and contextual information which can only be understood within a certain communicative situation. Focusing on scholarly papers, ironic utterances are examined as a textual commentary, considering their correlation on the lexical, syntactic, textual and contextual level. By way of a concrete example the paper illustrates how irony as an intentional speech act is used as a very economical and transparent commenting device in scholarly papers: it enables speakers to implicitly voice their disapproval or approval on certain topics and thus to structure the paper without having to provide the listeners with clues on the meta-level.

Manuela Caterina Moroni: Irony and Intonation in Private Conversation

Recent research on interactional prosody has shown that, as a rule, pitch contours in languages relying on intonation such as German co-occur with certain communicative situations. Therefore, they can act as contextualization cues in Gumperz's sense in a specific communicative situation. The focus of the paper lies on the role intonation plays as a means of contextualization regarding irony in spoken German. A regional variety of Alemannic from the Stuttgart area provides an example of private conversation by several participants, where the rising-falling pitch contour can contribute to contextualizing ironic sequences. The paper argues that this use can be explained by the basic meaning of pitch contour, which is defined by the categories structuring the information of sentences.

Daniel Pfurtscheller: Joking with Image and Text. Media Images and Media Design Used in Humouristic Contexts

Based on the assumption that comicality is the result of a communicative and interactive game, an interpretation further developed by approaching the issue from the perspective of media linguistics, the paper examines structural patterns in humorous visual communication in the media. It demonstrates that the formal characteristics of images do not determine their aptitude as an element of a humorous contribution: comicality results from the interplay of images originally created in non-comical contexts and texts that are later added. The device is not new; it emerged together with photomontage in the early 20th century. Due to the easily accessible treatment of images, recent times have seen a downright explosive (“viral”) spreading of this type of humorous communication on the internet. In order to understand the meaning of satirical or humouristic contributions the relevant visual and textual elements must correlate. Formal characteristics are less significant for satire and jokes than the way in which the original elements were initially intended and the function they have in the context of the new contribution.

Heike Ortner: “We are all guinea pigs ;)”. Gallows Humour in Online Communication about Chronic Diseases

Drawing on a corpus of 60 chat sequences about the chronic diseases multiple sclerosis and diabetes, the paper addresses the question of how gallows humour, understood as humour resulting from a difficult or hopeless,

though not immediately life threatening situation, is used in online communication. It can be established that this form of humorous communication is rather uncommon and that its success depends on various factors, while humour itself can have a therapeutic effect. On the one hand, it appears that gallows humour, a specific form of irony, is used as a critique of medication, health insurance, and pharmaceutical companies, and on the other, as an effective strategy for the reduction of negative feelings like fear, frustration and powerlessness, and particularly anger and hate. The most important function of gallows humour lies in establishing good relations within a group, its members thus supporting each other and partly demarcating themselves from the outside world.