



Symposium

Political Humor in Great Britain and the United States

Political Humor in American Culture: Forms, Functions, Limits

17. November 2018, 10 - 15 Uhr
Steintor Campus, Adam-Kuckhoff-Str. 35
SR 1 (E 0.6)

Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik
Prof. Dr. Holger Kersten



MARTIN-LUTHER
UNIVERSITÄT
HALLE-WITTENBERG

Program

- 10:00-10:15** **Opening Remarks**
Holger Kersten
- 10:15-10:45** **“Political Humour and Politics in Humour –
An Investigation into British TV Comedies”**
*Alexander Brock (Martin-Luther-Universität
Halle)*
- 10:45-11:15** **“Politicians in Underwear: The Politics of
Brown Humour”**
Delia Chiaro (University of Bologna)
- 11:15-11:30** **Coffee Break**
- 11:30-12:00** **"Brother Jonathan Runs for President: Ver-
nacular Values and Spoof Campaigns"**
Judith Y. Lee (Ohio University Athens)
- 12:00-12:30** **“Satirizing Mr. Trump: Political Humor be-
tween High and Popular Culture”**
Carsten Junker (TU Dresden)
- 12:30-13:00** **“The Fear of Being Laughed at (Gelotophobia)
in Politics: A Psychological Perspective”**
*Kay Brauer and René Proyer (Martin-Luther-
Universität Halle)*

“The Fear of Being Laughed at (Gelotophobia) in Politics: A Psychological Perspective”

Kay Brauer and René Proyer (Martin-Luther-Universität Halle)

The fear of being laughed at (gelotophobia) is an individual differences variable at the subclinical level (i.e., people differ in their fear from low to high expression). Those on the high end do not appreciate laughter as something positive, but as a mean to put them down. They display an almost paranoid sensitivity towards being laughed at and relate laughter to themselves even if it was not directed at them. Earlier research has shown that the fear of being laughed at is robustly associated with certain personality traits, the role in bullying-type of situations, how people behave in romantic relationships, or how they express humor—to name but a few. We will use a recent article published in *The Week* entitled “Trump's pathological obsession with being laughed at” (Waldmann, 2017) as a starting point for a discussion of the role of interindividual differences in how people (and politicians in particular) deal with laughter and ridicule.



Kay Brauer is a research associate at the division of psychological assessment and personality psychology at the Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg. He received his master's degree in psychology in 2015 and is currently pursuing his PhD studies. In his doctoral thesis he examines how individual differences towards ridicule and being laughed at affect social life (e.g., their role in romantic relationships). His other research interests include the study of adult playfulness, psychological assessment and test development.

René Proyer is a full professor at the division of psychological assessment and personality psychology at the Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg since 2018. Prof. Proyer received his PhD from the University of Zurich in 2006 where he also conducted his post-doc studies. His research interests include humor, playfulness, positive psychology, and psychological assessment. In addition to his studies in the field of humor and how people deal with ridicule and laughter, he provided editorial contributions for scientific journals in the field of humor such as *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research*, *Frontiers in Psychology* and *The European Journal of Humor Research*.

“Satirizing Mr. Trump: Political Humor between High and Popular Culture”

Carsten Junker (TU Dresden)

The contribution interrogates the representational politics of the satirical film *Donald Trump’s The Art of the Deal: The Movie*. This satire, released in February 2016 and featuring a performance by Johnny Depp as Donald Trump, aimed at ridiculing Trump’s authority as potential future president by mocking his 1980s self-made businessman image. The film is based on and mimics the 1987 memoirs *Trump: The Art of the Deal*, which had been co-written by Trump and his ghostwriter Tony Schwartz. The film seeks to elicit humorous responses from its audience by poking fun at Trump’s role not only as supposed singular author of a book about his personal business accomplishments but also as future political leader who could shape the fate of U.S. and world politics. The opening credits of the film feature Trump as producer, actor, screenwriter, composer, and editor, as well as director: Trump the omnipresent, solitary artistic agent. I ask how the film, as contemporary political satire, straddles the line between high and popular culture. As I argue, the film, by ridiculing the purportedly singular authorship of Trump’s memoirs, in counter-intuitive effect reinstates high-culture notions of singular, genius authorship as a norm.



Carsten Junker is currently deputy head of the chair of North American Literature at the TU Dresden. Previously, he was visiting professor of American Literature at Leipzig University and assistant professor (wiss. Mitarbeiter) of English-speaking Cultures/American Studies at the University of Bremen. He obtained his habilitation at the University of Bremen in 2015 and received his PhD from the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin in 2009.

13:00-14:00

Lunch Break

14:00-14:45

Student Forum – Questions and Discussion

14:45-15:00

Closing Remarks

19:00 - open end

Informal Get-Together at *Hallesches Brauhaus, Große Nikolaistr. 2* City Center

“Political Humour and Politics in Humour – An Investigation into British TV Comedies”

Alexander Brock (Martin-Luther-Universität Halle)

In British TV comedies, connections to politics can be found in many varieties and constellations – from occasional political comments in comedy panel shows to satirical news-type programmes and sitcoms which are situated at the heart of the political system. In my talk, I would like to introduce several examples a) to outline the spectrum of British political humour, and b) to use them in an investigation into the respective construction of political humour. Among others, the following questions will be pursued: What is the real/fictitious situation in which the political comment takes place? Who are the participants in this event, i.e. the initiator and the victim(s) of political humour? What are content and tendency of the humour, e.g. hostile or educational? What techniques are used?



Alexander Brock is a professor for English linguistics at the English department of Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg. He studied Russian and English at Leipzig, Voronezh and Leeds Universities. He wrote a thesis on the study of natural conversation, and the monograph *Blackadder, Monty Python und Red Dwarf – eine linguistische Untersuchung britischer Fernsehkomödien*. His research interests in-

clude text linguistics, pragmatics, humour studies and media linguistics. He is co-editor of the series "Language and Text Studies" at Peter Lang.

"Politicians in Underwear: The Politics of Brown Humour"

Delia Chiaro (University of Bologna)

The political arena of the 21st century has witnessed a massive resurgence of what I would like to label "brown humour" namely a form of verbal humour anchored within visual texts in which toilets, urine, colons, anuses, farts, and excreta are used as weapons of satire to ridicule the major actors on the world's political stage. Old and new media mix and merge as both traditional cartoonists (e.g. Steve Bell, Martin Rowson, Putney Political Cartoon Gallery etc.) and members of digital tribes through image macros (see Facebook groups such as "Meme Armory") display a marked preference for this kind of humour. Typically, Donald Trump is portrayed in dirty diapers, Theresa May wearing a necklace made out of urinal cakes and Jacob Zuma with a shower head sticking out of his skull. This talk will attempt to rationalise why popular culture has decided to portray important leaders with their underwear around their feet and explain the reasons behind the choice of this type of humour, at the same time highlighting the link with populism and its reappearance.



Since 2001 Delia Chiaro holds the position of Professor for English Language and Translation and Director of the Master's Program in Screen Translation at the University of Bologna, Italy. In the past she held the position of Associate Professor at the University of Bologna and at the Faculty of Economics of the University of Salerno. Among other locations, she held lectures and seminars at the University of Aberdeen (UK), in Taiwan, and New Zealand. She holds degrees from the Universities of Liverpool, Birmingham and *L'Università degli Studi, Federico II*, Naples. Her research interests include Screen Translation, Humor Studies, and Intercultural Communication. From 2015 – 2017, Delia Chiaro was elected President of the International Society of Humor Studies.

"Brother Jonathan Runs for President: Vernacular Values and Spoof Campaigns"

Judith Y. Lee (Ohio University Athens)

America's two-hundred-year history of comic campaigns for fictitious and mock candidates highlights the nation's long flirtation with candidates whose lack of any conventional preparation for the presidency is more than offset by a stereotypical ordinariness that simultaneously affirms and challenges the idea that any American can grow up to be president. This multi-media presentation traces the enduring values represented spoof campaigns for the fictitious Jack Downing (1833), Pogo Possum (1952, 1956), and Alfred E. Neuman (Mad magazine, quadrennially since 1956), and for celebrity mock candidates Will Rogers (1928), Gracie Allen (1940), and Pat Paulsen (1968) and their role in contemporary American politics.



Judith Y. Lee serves Ohio University as Distinguished Professor of Communication Studies, Charles E. Zumkehr Professor of Speech Communication, and Director of the Central Region Humanities Center. An interdisciplinary Americanist educated at Oberlin College (A.B.) and the University of Chicago (A.M., Ph.D.), she studies popular rhetorics at the intersection of media, social, political, and intellectual history. Her work reflects a transnational view of American culture as a site of ideological contention born of contrast with other places, especially in Europe. As an expert on American literary humor from Mark Twain to the present, Lee also has expertise in historical and contemporary rhetorics of popular science and technology, including electronic media, as well as in American graphic, radio, and performance humor.

