

EDITORIAL**Introducing the Volume of 2015, on Ethnic Humour (Jewish: Ancient through Modern), Humour in the Classics, 18th-Century French Theatre, and 19th-Century U.S. or Italian Political Cartoons****Ephraim Nissan**

The events in Paris in early January 2015 — a number of terror attacks which comprised a massacre on the premises of a satirical magazine as well as a massacre at a kosher supermarket — made this an *annus horribilis* for the organised production of humour. That is the case indeed, as the bloodshed in the offices of *Charlie hebdo* was in retaliation for contents published in that magazine, and that by itself (clearly exceeding the merits of the contents the weekly published, or for that matter, the stature of the magazine itself) constitutes an attack on civil freedoms we tend to take for granted. This is why the massacres in Paris in January 2015 are much more relevant for this journal, than the massacres that took place in Paris later in 2015, and which made many more victims, and which of course have touched us as world citizens. The year 2015 also saw a cartoonist tortured to death by a regime that does not recognise civil liberties.² It would be absurd if we did not take note of these things having happened in 2015. Fundamental research in mathematics can be done in a self-contained matter in the ivory tower, whereas humour studies instead must be very sensitive to social, historical, and cultural realities.

Accordingly, three commemorative items open this issue of *International Studies in Humour*, following this editorial. Two of the commemorations, as well as the first regular article, are in French. In fact, as well as studies in English, this journal also welcomes submissions in the French language. As in the past, the current volume, too, comprises several disciplinary compartments, but unlike previous volumes of this journal, this time the yearly volume is divided into three issues.

In Issue 1, the present editorial, which touches upon all three issues of the 2015 volume, is followed by a compartment entitled “Memorial Tributes”, and comprising three commemorations by two authors. This in turn is followed by a section comprising regular articles.

² The Syrian cartoonist Akram Raslan, arrested in 2012, was reported dead in late September 2015, even though his demise occurred shortly after he was detained. His cartoons were bitter and explicit, and his sarcasm was especially directed at the United Nations paying lip service while remaining noncommittal. In one cartoon, the U.N. are represented as a besuited character with the terrestrial globe, with meridians and parallels, for head, displaying a martial face, while mounted on a wooden rocking horse and brandishing a floppy sword, while observed by the dictator smiling scornfully while sitting on a heap of butchered flesh drenched in blood.



The first article is “Le choc entre geste et texte. L’humour dans le jeu des artistes forains au XVIII^e siècle”. It is in theatre studies, and is in French (rather aptly, coming after texts devoted to France). It is concerned with the dramatic strategies of the burlesque of stage performers in France in the early modern period. The focus is on focusing on early 18th-century French fair theatre, the Théâtre de la Foire.

The second article, “The Humor of Divine Discourse in the Hebrew Bible and Rabbinic Literature”, is squarely within religious studies, and provides plenty of examples that are discussed in turn. The texts drawn upon are in Hebrew or Aramaic, and whereas they used to be part of the traditional curriculum of Jewish education, modernity and cultural and linguistic dislocation has removed such textual *loci* (except, perhaps, in the Bible) from the notice of Jews and Gentiles alike.

Religious studies are also relevant for the third paper, the longest in the same issue, which is about how a trickster leads a gullible congregation in an inappropriate celebration of a major festival in the wrong season. Arguably, the main categories of the third article are folklore and the sociology of humour. It is entitled “On the Middle Eastern Jewish Versions of the Humorous Trickster Tale ‘Yom Kippur in Tammuz’ (Tale Type AT 1831 *C [IFA], ‘Ignorance of Holidays’): Perceived Peripherality and Ignorance, Evolved from a Stereotype of an Isolated Rural Congregation, into New World or South Asia Deprecation, or into Social Grievance”.

The social grievance can be seen in variants of the tale from Kurdistan, where storytelling reverses the telos of the tale, by showing that the congregants are not so much gullible, as overly kind to unscrupulous fundraisers (See Section 17, “The Other Edge of the Weapon: Use of the Tale in Zakho, Kurdistan, and the Variant from Tiberias. A Fund-Raiser’s Improper Behaviour vs. the Hospitable Congregation’s Virtuous Acquiescence”). Variants of the tale type are considered from as far east as Afghanistan, and as far west as Morocco, but the study has come across awareness of an Iraqi version concerning Iraqi Jewish expatriates to India, by a scholar based in Australia and whose family background is in both communities.

Also Ashkenazi versions of the tale type are discussed. Readers will also realise that parts of that study are also relevant for film studies, or for comparative literary studies. In fact, Robert Aldrich’s comedy film *The Frisco Kid* shows the stereotype in reverse. Whereas Old World traditional Jews considered ones who emigrated to the America to be likely to be deculturated, in Russian Jewry there was such a perception about those who moved to Odessa, and this was reflected in lore and literature about Odessa. In Eastern Europe, traditional Jewish communities perceived Germany as a place where religious reform or outright secularisation were dominant among Jews, and the study comes across Rumanian Jewish variants of that tale that are set in Germany indeed. Comparisons are drawn across denominational boundaries. For example, Section 22 is entitled “Yuletide in Summer: Rationales per Type of Occurrence”.

In the same study, comparative literary studies are the main category in which Sections 25 to 28 belong:

25. Contrasting “Yom Kippur in Tammuz” to the Incompetent Emigrants in *Tractate America* and *Nanetto Pipetta*
26. Dickens’ Disillusionment with America, Portrayed as Incompetent
27. A Self-Image of Limited Competence from Brazil: Lima Barreto’s *A Nova Califórnia*
28. A Parallel to *A Nova Califórnia*: Sholem Aleichem Makes the Man from America the Competent One, and the Old Country Townsfolk into Deluded Yokels

Thus Issue 1 of the volume of 2015 has the following foci:

- France: this focus is represented by the two commemorative texts for the slain staff of *Charlie Hebdo*, and then by an article in theatre studies, about the 18th-century Theatre of the Fair in Paris;
- Jewish humour, with two articles:
 - one of them (under the rubric “religious studies”) about one facet of humour in Jewish religious sources, especially the *Babylonian Talmud*, and
 - the other (under the double rubric “folklore/sociology of humour”) about the versions, from Islamic-majority lands, of an extended joke about a trickster and an ignorant community, and the different functions it took on — and reviews about two excellent recent books about Jewish humour: ancient, and modern;
- immigrants studies:
 - the longest study, the one about the trickster and the culturally incompetent community I already listed for Jewish humour, is quite relevant to immigrant studies indeed. It is about humorous perceptions of diminished competence in Jewish orthopraxy among communities of emigrants in the New Country.
 - Moreover, one of the sections in the same study is about the retention of communal cohesion provided by Catholic edification coloured by humour, among northern Italian immigrants in Brazil, in the Veneto-Brazilian novel *Ninnetto Pipetta* catering to a community of immigrants from northern, especially northeastern Italy; the volume of 2016, which is going to focus on Italian studies, is expected to also comprise a review essay concerning *Ninnetto Pipetta*.

As for the other two issues of the journal volume of 2015, they comprise substantial review or response articles, as well as several book reviews. In particular, the main theme of Issue 2 is “Humour in the Classics”. That issue comprises a long review article, a response article, as well as several book reviews about that subject. This is followed by a miscellaneous section of book reviews. The review article is entitled “Doing Justice to Plautus, a Master of Comedy, a Master of Wordplay”, whereas the response article (rather than review article, but the difference may be moot) is entitled “‘Hahaha’: Listening for Roman Laughter”.

Issue 3 consists of a book-length study of ethnic humour, “Modernity and the Geography of Jewish Humour”. It begins as a review article, but then proceeds to supplement the book it reviews (a very good book indeed) with such geographical areas or such facets that have in the main eluded the notice of Jewish humour scholarship, even though not the notice of folklorists or of specialists of other disciplines. Hopefully providing here a study in a compass fit for a bulky book would encourage better informed perspective in future research in Jewish humour. Appendix A is as long as a book itself. Entitled “A Survey of Jewish Active Role in Italy’s Humour”, it is ground-breaking. The study is by one author, but he was helped by many with advice in their respective areas of expertise.

There is one more theme, spread between Issues 2 and 3. It is political cartooning in the 19th century. In Issue 2, we find a long appendix entitled “The Progeny of Jean-Léon Gérôme’s 1861 Painting *Phryne before the Areopagus*: Bernhard Gillam’s and Joseph Keppler’s Tattooed Man 1884 Cartoons”. This is about a family of cartoons during the campaign for 1884 presidential elections in the United States. As for Issue 3, it comprises Appendix B, entitled “Looking into the Output of a Prolific Cartoonist of Italy’s National Movement, from 1848 on: Francesco Redenti (born Cesare Vienna)”. Redenti was a convert from Judaism, but (as he was a fierce anticlerical) he probably sought to emancipate himself from a burdensome group identity that in 1838 (the year of his conversion) was still subjected to *ancien régime* civil disabilities in his native Duchy of Parma. He became an influential cartoonist in Turin, perhaps the most powerful in town, in the years that led to or followed the unification of Italy under the crown of the House of Savoy. Redenti was a staunch supporter of the prime minister Cavour. We also see how he treated Jewish motifs.