

The Humorous Times

Newsletter of the International Society for Humor Studies

Summer 2011

Ralph Mueller, Editor

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Editorial

From Ralph Müller, University of Fribourg, editor

Our conference in Boston showed that our society is capable of bringing together people from various cultures (disciplines & countries!). Indeed, humor studies and the ISHS have evolved into a multidisciplinary and international endeavor. This success poses challenges. How can we improve cohesion within such a diverse society? At the last board meeting we discussed (among other things) how the newsletter may contribute to the goal of improving communication among our members.

Some changes are superficial. As you can see on the right, we modified the table of contents, in order to provide a better overview of the actual items in the newsletter. In addition, there are two major changes. First of all, the newsletter editor will be supported by correspondents in various parts of the world. Those correspondents will seek news items for the newsletter and write own contributions. So far, we managed to secure the support of three correspondents, and we are currently soliciting further correspondents.

- Jessica Milner Davis (Oceania): jessica.davis@sydney.edu.au
- Sean Guillory (US): seanguillory1925@gmail.com
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- Chen Guohai (China): mypeer2002@hotmail.com

Finally, it turned out several members wished to have more information on recent publications. As a consequence, we will again mention **recent publications of articles**. We had given up this section two years ago, as it had become more complex and more arduous to collect articles in the multi-disciplinary field of humor. This time, however, we will not search actively for new items; we simply offer space to our members to announce articles of interest to our society. Moreover, we will accept **short reviews of books**. There is no intention to compete with the reviews of our journal *Humor*. Instead, we look for short informal and informational interviews and articles about recent books, which might be also written by persons who are anyway very well acquainted with author or book.

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Next Issue

Next issue is due in Fall 2011. Please send information, contributions and announcements before October 15, 2011

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23rd ISHS Conference in Boston

Boston University, Boston, Massachusetts, July 5–9, 2011

From Ralph Müller, Univ. of Fribourg (Switzerland)

This is my opportunity to say thank you to Patrice Oppliger and her team for a wonderful and interesting conference! The conference started with two pre-conference workshops: one on laughter yoga and another on funny Youtube videos. There I learned that humor on Youtube is frequently overrated. And it is true, Kevins Nalts' own video about our conference is not actually funny, but rather an informative video blog (watch it on http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cCw_2DzArgs).

Plenary talks took place in the Sleeper auditorium (no pun intended). ISHS president Elliott Oring talked about jokes as art, followed by the presentations of two Graduate Student Award Presentations by Tracey Platt

(Zurich) and Audrey Adams (Texas A&M Univ.-Commerce). Each GSA recipient received a \$250 stipend to reimburse their 2011 Conference registration and 2011 ISHS membership. Additional plenaries covered the topics of gender and humor and 911 humor which featured a lively debate. The Conference also featured more than 100 individual papers from psychology, linguistics, sociology, literature, education and many other fields of study and practice. It is difficult to give a sufficient overview of all events (although others have tried to do this. For instance, Joel Warner and Peter McGraw's blog gives a more personal view of the conference: <http://www.wired.com/underwire/2011/07/international-humor-conference/>). But I think that most will agree that a major highlight was the comedy night featuring a funny caption contest for pictures from past conferences ("Christie, read my lips: Kangaroooooo") and a hilarious standup comedy competition.

And this is what conference participants thought about the conference...



Julia Taylor, Purdue University

I started coming to the ISHS conferences in 2004, because I was interested in computers understanding humor. I met a number of prominent humor experts, and I just continued going to conferences ever since. I like exposure to different point of views about what humor should be or is. It first struck me as odd that there is still a lot of difference in the perception of even the basic core of what humor is supposed to be. But now I understand how difficult it is to achieve a precise notion of what all these human-related categories are.

Salvatore Attardo, Texas A&M University-Commerce

I always come to the ISHS, when I can. My field in humor is linguistics, and I am interested in Humor, because it is there all the time. I really laugh at jokes all the time. Humor is a constant presence. The most interesting paper I attended was on ovulation cycles and its effect on humor. A topic you don't often investigate.



Upcoming ISHS Elections

ISHS will hold elections this Fall for President and for two Executive Board Members-at-Large. For the Fall election, the Society will present two candidates for ISHS President, Paul Lewis (Boston College) and Willibald Ruch (University of Zurich) and eight candidates for ISHS Board Member-at-Large, Goh Abe (Oita University), Sammy Basu (Willamette University), Delia Chiaro (University of Bologna), Bruce Finlay (Swinburne University of Technology), Gil Greengross (University of New Mexico), Rene Proyer (University of Zurich), Graeme Ritchie (University of Aberdeen), and Moira Smith (Indiana University). The Fall issue of *The Humorous Times* will provide more election information.

Recent Events

11th International Summer School and Symposium on Humour and Laughter

Estonian Literary Museum, Estonia, August 15 to August 20, 2011

From Liisi Lainastete, Estonian Literary Museum, and Willibald Ruch, University of Zurich

This year's International Summer School on Humour and Laughter was attended by 28 participants and covered a variety of topics: psychology, linguistics, folklore, sociology and more. The program aimed to provide an overview of the interdisciplinary nature of humor research, by considering theory and empirical evidence, discussing methodological approaches, addressing special research issues, and evaluating the applications of humor and laughter. The participants, coming from Austria, Australia, Belgium, Denmark, England, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Malaysia, Norway, Poland, Russia, Switzerland, and USA, included undergraduates, postgraduate and postdoctoral researchers, and university faculty members, as well as professionals. The teaching faculty comprised thirteen speakers. This allowed a greater diversity in the topics covered. Lectures were given by Dr. Dorota Brzozowska (Polish Philology Dept., Opole Univ., Poland), Dr. Wladislaw Chlopicki (Inst. of English Philology, Jagiellonian Univ., Krakow, Poland), Professor Christie Davies (Dept. of Sociology, Univ. of Reading, UK), Professor Holger Kersten (Amerikanistik, Univ. Magdeburg, Germany), Professor Arvo

Krikmann (Dept. of Folkloristics, Estonian Literary Museum, Estonia), Professor Alexander Kozintsev (Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography, St. Petersburg, Russia), Professor Seppo Knuutila (Dept. of Folkloristics, Univ. of Joensuu, Finland), Dr. Sharon Lockyer (School of Social Sciences, Brunel Univ., London, UK), Professor John Morreall (Religious Studies, College of William and Mary, USA), Dr. Anu Realo (Dept. of Psychology, Univ. of Tartu, Estonia), Dr. Graeme Ritchie (Dept. of Computing Science, Univ. of Aberdeen, Scotland), Professor Willibald Ruch (Department of Psychology, Univ. of Zurich, Switzerland), and MA Clare Watters (Italian Studies, Univ. of Birmingham, UK).

The Power of Laughter and Humor in the Hardest Times

18th Annual Conference of the JSLHS, Kansai Univ. Osaka

By Goh Abe (Kagawa University)

The Japan Society for Laughter and Humor Studies (JSLHS, <http://www.nwgk.jp>), founded in 1994, held its 18th annual conference at the Department of Sports and Health Sciences, Kansai University, Osaka, Japan on July 23 and 24. JSLHS is a unique organization, because people from all walks of life can become a member. It has over 1000 members and 16 chapters across Japan. 263 people (180 members and 83 non-members) participated in the two days' conference. The keynote speech and symposium were on the theme of "The Power of Laughter and Humor in the Hardest Times" commemorating the natural disasters of 3/11, the earthquake and tsunami in northern Japan, and the unprecedented human disaster at the Fukushima nuclear power plant.

Mr. Kousuke Oomune, who founded the Japan Hospital Clini-Clowns Association, gave the keynote Address, saying he had feared his Clini-Clowns performances in the disaster-hit areas would be taken as very impolite by victims living in emergency quarters. But he found participants responded with relief. They were confined in temporary quarters with many using cardboard box partitions for each family space. After one performance at a temple precinct, a mother came up to him and said, "I would like to have a photo taken with you", adding cheerfully "But my camera is at the bottom of the sea!" The way in which the woman recounted such a sad matter impressed Mr. Oomune.

In the symposium, Mr. Joyu Akagawa, a Buddhist priest, who made 25 visits to the refugees as a humor and laughter therapist, talked about his work. At each site, first, he gave little talks designed to make the participants laugh heartily and the victims said that this was the first big laugh they had laughed since coming to emergency housing. Then, Mr. Akagawa introduced the Zen method of breathing, Yoga physical exercise and songs. Finally, his group volunteers (all Buddhist priests) listened to whatever the disaster victims wanted to tell about their sufferings, worries and complaints. Simple listening provided them with great relief, he said.

Hiroko Satoh of Kansai University, reported her study on jokes and laughter in the Nazi period. She interpreted about the meaning of German people's glances as they looked askance while talking to each other lest their talk was overheard. The exchange of political jokes at that time was not only entertaining but assisted people to cope with their constrained reality.

The writer, Goh Abe, discussed about the nuclear power plant disaster jokes stemming from 1979 TMI, Harrisburg (Pennsylvania) and 1986 Chernobyl (Ukraine) noting that no jokes have been recorded in Japan from past disasters (Shuttle disasters or 9/11). Why are there no disaster jokes in Japan? It seems it is very inappropriate and impolite to tell jokes in Japan at adverse moments. In Japan I noticed only indirect and subtle ways of the effects of the disaster on radio and in the newspapers. In contrast, in my talk I made up a word play on TEPCO, Tokyo Electric Power Company in the same way that the past disaster jokes played on the acronyms of organizations such as NASA. I termed it "Totally Evasive and Pitiless Comrades" based on its public explanatory TV conference where officials avoided responsibility and showed only incomprehension and coldness to people's suffering. But only a few laughed!

Hiroshi Inoue, a former president of JSHLS and Professor Emeritus of Kansai University, presented on the power of laughter and humor as a mechanism to relieve and empty one's inner states of minds (fear, anxiety and worry, etc.) and make one's mind empty allowing one to reinvent oneself with a new frame of mind. He called this process "the pumping effect of laughter."

This year almost every Japanese academic meeting held a session on how to make its own contribution to recovery from 3/11 and so did the JSLHS from its own perspective. The 2012 JSHLS annual conference will be held in one of the prefectures in the disaster-hit north, in the hope that its activities will assist in "gently calming" the feelings of the victims.

Upcoming Events

North East Texas Humor Research Conference

Texas A&M Univ. Commerce, September 30–October 1, 2011

The North East Texas Humor Research Conference, Fall 2011 will be held on the campus of Texas A&M University – Commerce. Papers on all aspects of humor research, in all disciplines, are solicited. Presentations will be either 20 minutes papers or (invited) plenaries. Panels can be proposed in blocks of 3 or 6 papers. Posters are also accepted. For information about size, etc. see the ARMADILLO web page, below.

250 word abstracts (a second page of references and tables may be attached) are due by **September 12th, 2011**, via e-mail to Colette_Newman@tamu-commerce.edu. Please attach the abstract to your e-mail as an MSword document. Notice of acceptance will arrive within a week of receipt of the abstract, on a rolling basis. Proposals for panels should come as one e-mail with 3 or 6 attachments (one for each paper). The \$50 registration fee can be paid at the conference in cash or with a check drawn from an US bank. Student rate \$25. The conference will be held at the same time as the ARMADILLO cognitive psychology conference. For further information please visit the Internet at <http://faculty.tamu-commerce.edu/sattardo/humorResearchConf.htm>

SPSP Psychology of Humor Pre-Conference

The San Diego Convention Center, San Diego, California, January 26, 2012

The Society for Personality and Social Psychology will hold a January 26 preconference on the psychology of humor before its annual meeting from January 27 to 29. This preconference will have sessions on humor and emotion regulation, laughter and its relationship to humor, and a discussion on the contemporary theories of humor. For more, visit the SPSP website at www.spspmeeting.org or contact Sean Guillory, Dartmouth University, at seanguillory1925@gmail.com.

24th ISHS conference

Jagellonian University, Krakow, June 25–29, 2012

If you are still sorry that you missed the great conference in Boston, you should start planning for the next year. The 24th ISHS conference will be held in Krakow, Poland in late June 2012. More detailed news will come with the next newsletters.

Barak Kushner Talk at University of Sydney

University of Sydney, December 13, 2011

Visiting Scholar Barak Kushner (Fellow of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge) will give a Guest Lecture for the Australasian Humour Studies Network (AHSN) and The Oriental Society of Australia (OSA) at the University of Sydney on 13 December 2011. His topic will be “Nothing to laugh at: Chinese humor and the image of Japan”. As a deep-seated barometer of social attitudes, humour is an informative historical set of values through which to examine the last century of Sino-Japan relations. Wartime and post-war layers of Chinese humour shaped an enduring motif of the guizi or “devil” image of Japanese soldiers. However, on the eve of the twenty-first century, these accumulated layers of representations of Japan have given rise to a marked change Japanese depicted not only as humorous “devils” but also as corruptible human entities.

Humor in the News

Centre for Comic Arts in Ernakulam, Kerala, India

By Jessica Milner Davis

Sundar Ramanathaiyer, AHSN member based in Sydney, Australia, has helped establish a Centre for Comic Arts in Ernakulam, Kerala, India. Well-known Australian cartoonist, Michael Leunig, had his work selected for a one-man exhibition on September 6, 2011, entitled, “Celebrations ~ Appreciating the little things in life” a poetic cartoon exhibition, and part of a Mental Health Campaign. Presentations on the exhibition were given by Gopul Gopalakrishnan, Trustee of the Centre for Comic Arts, and by Dr Chitra Venkateswaran, Clinical Director of the MEHAC Foundation for mental health in Kerala. For more information on the Centre, contact: Gopul at <http://centreforcomicart.wordpress.com> or e-mail: centreforcomicarts@gmail.com

Judges for a Chinese Cartooning Competition

By Jessica Milner Davis

Dr John Lent, Temple University (Philadelphia, Penn.) and Editor of “International Journal of Comic Art” (IJOCA), together with AHSN member and professional cartoonist Rolf Heimann (Melbourne), visited PRC China in August 2011 to act as judges for a Chinese cartooning competition.

New Blog on “Humor in America”

The blog “Humor in America” is a new publication dedicated to printing original and re-posted essays and other contributions on humor studies from an academic, yet informal, perspective. It is looking for contributions of various sorts, primarily on American subjects, but also on transnational subjects and humor studies more broadly. <http://humorinamerica.wordpress.com/about/>



Obituary: Lorient, aka Victor von Bülow

From Ralph Müller, University of Fribourg, Switzerland

Some lines of his sketches have become winged words in German: “Yodel diploma”, “Men and women simply do not fit together”, or “the duck stays outside!” Making serious and stiff characters say such blatant nonsense was typical for Lorient’s style. And nobody has ever better depicted the secret horrors of the German middle-class in the years after the Wirtschaftswunder in a funnier way. Lorient himself presented his sketches sitting on a big sofa in a pose of a grand seigneur, displaying the seriousness of an anchor man, mixed with his characteristic boyish cheekiness.

Vicco von Bülow (actually Bernhard-Victor Christoph Carl von Bülow) was born in 1923 in Brandenburg. After the war, which had interrupted his school career, he went to the school of arts in Hamburg, and started as a cartoonist in the 1950s drawing caricatures with characteristic big noses. In the late 1960s, Lorient started moderating humorous films on the German TV channel ARD, but soon he started to add his own productions: Sketches based on his drawings or played by actors. They produced famous TV parodies (“The talking dog”, “The stone louse”), and comedies of family life and marriage. His collaboration with his favorite companion Evelyn Hamann also culminated in their movies “Ödipussi” (1988) and “Pappa ante portas” (1991).

Lorient’s anarchic humor which never seemed to disturb his gentleman-like appearance made him the comedian of highest reputation in Germany—quite uncommon for comedians and Germans. When he died in Ammergau on August 22, 2011, he had already received many awards and signs of recognition in the last years of his life: honorary doctorate, honorary citizenship of various towns, and membership of two academies of arts.

Recent Publications

Book Review

The Pragmatics of Humour across Discourse Domains (Marta Dynel, Editor)

From Ralph Müller

The pragmatics of humor is not exactly a recent development of humor research. Just think of pragmatic studies of conversational humor by Neal R. Norrick (recently, Norrick & Chiaro (eds.), *Humor in Interaction*, 2009), Helga Kotthoff (e.g. *Spaß verstehen/undstanding fun*), or Salvatore Attardo’s analysis of non-bona-fide communication. What is special about this volume is that (1) that the discourse perspective allows in this case for a large variety of topics, (2) that there is only a small section on conversational humor (Dynel, Chovanec, Pullin), and that (3) neither Neal nor Salvatore are in it.

The volume contains 17 contributions which have been all listed in the “New Articles on Humor” section. There is a large stylistics part: The first three contributions focus on irony. Rachel Giora aims at further corroborating her well known Graded Salience Hypothesis in the context of irony. Again, she devotes a lot of text on attacking the rival hypothesis by Ray Gibbs’ (et al.) that figurative meaning in irony (and also metaphor) is typically retrieved directly. Giora’s experimental study is followed by two contributions which focus on the analysis of real discourse material: Both Paul Simpson and Eleni Kapogianni treat irony as a multifaceted phenomenon. Paul (who is mostly known for his research in stylistics and satire) proposes an eclectic account of analysing irony. Eleni Kapogianni offers rich material on the use of everyday surrealism. A second section of

this part is devoted to puns and wordplay (Seewoester; Adamczyk; Venour, Ritchie, Mellish), which provide another example of the fruitful interaction between stylistics and pragmatics.

The second part of the book focuses on jokes. Thielemann applies GTVH on Russian jokes and investigates gender with respect to script opposition, target and situation. Popescu analyzes a corpus of ethnic jokes from Romanian Internet sites. Litovkina explores sexual allusion in American parodies of proverbs. The contributions by Dynel, Chovanec, and Pullin correspond to what I would expect in a volume on the pragmatics of humor, as they discuss joking in conversation (respectively quasi-conversation in the case of Chovanec).

The last part – “Forms of humor in public discourse” – provides again broad range of topics: Monty Python sketches (Kaczowrowski), recipients’ roles in the sitcom *Friends* (Dynel2), humor in Woody Allen’s short stories (Ermida), the (often inconclusive) empirical results of the use of humor as persuasive device (Forabosco), and – last not least – the difficulties of translating humor (Chiaro).

Considering the topics of the articles this volume could also have been called *The Pragmatics of Humour across the media*. It demonstrates that “pragmatics” offers a useful umbrella term for various interests. At the same time it helps to explore the complex and fascinating breadth of humorous phenomena. In fact, I liked Giovannantonio Forabosco’s concluding remark: “When humour is at stake, complexity is normality”.

New Books on Humor

In the future, we will publish reviews of books (see “Editorial”). Books which get particular attention within this issue of the newsletter are marked with a little sun (☀).

Christie Davies: *Jokes and targets*. Indiana Univ. Press. ISBN 978-0253-22302-9

Jokes and Targets takes up an appealing and entertaining topic—the social and historical origins of jokes about familiar targets such as rustics, Jewish spouses, used car salesmen, and dumb blondes. Christie Davies explains why political jokes flourished in the Soviet Union, why Europeans tell jokes about American lawyers but not about their own lawyers, and why sex jokes often refer to France rather than to other countries. One of the world’s leading experts on the study of humor, Davies provides a wide-ranging and detailed study of the jokes that make up an important part of everyday conversation.

☀ Marta Dynel: *The Pragmatics of Humour across Discourse Domains*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: Benjamins, 2011 (Pragmatics and Beyond New Series). ISBN 978-90 272 5614 0/978-90 272 8522 5.

Christian Hoffstadt/Stefan Höltingen (Hrsg.): *Sick Humor*. Bochum: Projektverlag, 2011 (Komik und Gewalt / Comic and Violence / Comique et violence, vol. 1). ISBN 978-3897332324

This volume investigates Alan Dundee’s hypotheses about the cultural function of humor. Sick humor is a kind of humor that violates intentionally cultural taboos. Sick humor transgresses the borders of taboo and thereby differs from other forms of comedy like sarcasm or black humor. This first volume of the new series *Komik und Gewalt/Comic and Violence/ Comique et violence* investigates Alan Dundee’s assumption that sick humor cycles (e. g. jokes about the holocaust or jokes about dead babies, cf. *Cracking Jokes*, 1987) may be explained by the formula: Laughing to keep from crying. Comic relief preserves the tragic element and makes it easier to handle it for the members of the concerned societies. The authors of this book try to suspend the marginal position of the research topic sick humor and to elevate it to a key issue to get new points of view on this old topic. This will be achieved by crossing themes and theories of sick humor with established comedy theories.

New Articles on Humor

From now on, *The Humorous Times* will again mention articles which appeared in our journal or which have been published by researchers who have been active within the ISHS. Please inform us about your publications!

Adamczyk, Magdalena: Context-sensitive aspects of Shakespeare’s use of puns in comedies. An enquiry into clowns’ and page’s punning practices. In: Dynel (ed.).

Badarneh, Muhammad A.: Carnavalesque politics: A Bakhtinian case study of contemporary Arab political humor. In: Humor (2011).

Baum, Patrick: „Anyone for Tennis?“ Zeit und Körper im Slapstick-Film. In: Hoffstadt/Höltgen (eds.).

Bennett, David J.: The humor of Christ: A different methodological approach. In: Humor (2011).

Bippus, Amy M.; Stacy L. Young; Norah E. Dunbar: Humor in conflict discussions: Comparing partners’ perceptions. In: Humor (2011).

Birden, Lorene M.: “Frank and unconscious humor and narrative structure in Anne Brontë’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*”. In: Humor (2011).

Chiaro, Delia: Comic takeover or comic makeover? Notes on humour-translating, translation and (un)translatability. In: Dynel (ed.).

Chovanec, Jan: Humour in quasi-conversations. Constructing fun in online sports journalism. In: Dynel (ed.).

Davies, Christie: Der sick humor und die Farbenlehre des Humors – Eine Begriffsbestimmung. In: Hoffstadt/Höltgen (eds.).

Dynel, Marta: “I’ll be there for you!” On participation-based sitcom humour. In: Dynel (ed.).

Dynel, Marta: Joker in the pack. Towards determining the status of humorous framing in conversations. In: Dynel (ed.).

Ermida, Isabel: “Losers, poltroons and nudniks” in Woody Allen’s *Mere Anarchy*. A linguistic approach to comic failure. In: Dynel (ed.).

Forabosco, Giovannantonio: Notes on humour and persuasion in advertising and legal discourse. In: Dynel (ed.).

Giora, Rachel: Will anticipating irony facilitate it immediately? In: Dynel (ed.).

Hoffstadt, Christian: Als ob ein Rassist eine Beleidigung wäre ... Das Politische von Komik und Gewalt im Film *Adams Äpfel* (2005) von Anders Thomas Jensen. In: Hoffstadt/Höltgen (eds.).

Hoffstadt, Christian; Stefan Höltingen: Jokes about Disasters. A response to Tales Told on Television full of Hype and Fury. In: Hoffstadt/Höltgen (eds.).

- Höltgen, Stefan: I Kill Children – Sick Humor in Punkrock. In: Hoffstadt/Höltgen (eds.).
- Kaczorowski, Maciej: Parody in the light of the incongruity-resolution model. The case of political sketches by Monty Python's Flying Circus. In: Dynel (ed.).
- Kapogianni, Eleni: Irony via "surrealism". In: Dynel (ed.).
- Kazarian, Shahe S.: Humor in the collectivist Arab Middle East: The case of Lebanon. In: Humor (2011).
- Klotz, Alex: Gespielte Schadenfreude. In: Hoffstadt/Höltgen (eds.).
- Litovkina, Anna T.: Sexuality in Anglo-American anti-proverbs. In: Dynel (ed.).
- Popescu, Carmen: Understanding ethnic humour in Romanian jokes. In: Dynel (ed.).
- Pullin, Patricia: Humour and the integration of new staff in the workplace. An interaction study. In: Dynel (ed.).
- Seewoester, Sarah: The role of syllables and morpheme as mechanisms in humorous pun formation. In: Dynel (ed.).
- Simpson, Paul: "That's not ironic, that's just stupid": Towards a eclectic account of the discourse of irony. In: Dynel (ed.).
- Thielemann, Nadine: Displays of "new" gender arrangements in Russian jokes. In: Dynel (ed.).
- Venour, Chris; Greame Richie; Chris Mellish: Dimensions of incongruity in register humour. In: Dynel (ed.).



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