

Academic event report

The Second National Conference on Historical Humour (II Ogólnopolska Konferencja “Komizm Historyczny”), 26-27 October 2017, Warsaw, Poland

The Second Conference on Historical Humour took place on October 26-27, 2017 at the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw (Poland). The conference was organised by its Department of Language History of the Institute of Polish Philology. The materials from the first meeting had been published as Krasowska & Korpysz (2016).

In this edition, over 30 Polish-language papers were submitted to the conference, embracing the fields of Polish and foreign studies (both linguistics and literary studies), cultural studies, art history, philosophy, and psychology. Eventually, 25 representatives of various research centers in Poland took part in the conference. The aim of the meeting was to deepen interest in humour in its historical dimension, as well as to reflect on the theory and methodology of research on this phenomenon in the past.

On the first day of the conference, participants listened to two inaugural speeches. Władysław Chłopicki in the paper “Humour studies in the melting pot of disciplines, cultures and values” pointed to the interdisciplinary character of the research subject itself, as well as its cultural and axiological conditions, and referred to the latest concepts and directions of research in international humour research. Agnieszka Libura, in her talk “What did cavemen laugh at?”, drew attention to the interest of researchers in the origin and evolution of humour in the history of mankind.

Later in the meeting, participants listened to lectures devoted to two main thematic circles: terminology and methodology of research on the comic, as well as manifestations of the comic in Polish texts from the old times until 1939.

Joanna Zaucha in the paper “Frivolous speaking in the light of semantics of selected verbs”, raised the question of the logical values of syntactic complements of entities such as *żartować, że_ i zażartować, że_ (joke that_)*, in statements designed by the meta-sender as speaking in *non-bona-fide* mode (see Raskin 1985). The aim of this analysis was to draw attention to the broader problem of distinguishing between ludic statements and serious speaking against the background of the theory of speech.

Two further texts were devoted to the theory of the comic. In the paper entitled *Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski as a wit theorist?*, Anna Krasowska proposed a new reading of the concept of the seventeenth-century Jesuit contained in the treatise *De acuto et arguto* (Sarbiewski 1623). Krasowska pointed out that the Polish theorist was a precursor to the contemporary semantic and psychological theories of humour. Anna Chudzik, on the other hand, discussed the humour-related considerations of Jan Stanisław Bystróż presented in the volume *Komizm* (1939), classical in Polish early research, as well as in various sociological and ethnographic texts of the author (see Bystróż 1924, 1932, 1947), comparing them to the contemporary semantic script theory of humour developed by Raskin (1985) and to the cognitive theory of humour.

Three further papers concerned linguistic humour in old Polish texts. Joanna Duska presented the lexical-semantic field of the comic based on Jan Kochanowski's *Fraszki* (1584, *Trifles*), comparing the poems to the lexical material contained in the specialised Jan Kochanowski Dictionary (Kucała 1994-2012) and the dictionary of the Polish language of the 16th century (Mayenowa & Peplowski 1966-1994, Mrowcewicz & Potoniec 1994-). Katarzyna Sornat, based on the typology of jokes proposed by Sarbiewski (1623), discussed various humorous functions of anthroponyms and ethnonyms and other epigrams from Waclaw Potocki's 17th century collection (Potocki 1987). Kinga Tutak, in turn, drew attention to examples of linguistic humor in dedication works of exponents of the Polish mischievous literature (known as 'Sowizdrzał literature'; see e.g. Grzeszczuk 1994, Brzozowska & Chłopicki 2012).

Two further papers were devoted to the issue of comic genres. Edyta Skoryna in her speech raised the question of the modality of forms and functions of the comic in the Enlightenment novel, in particular in selected works by Ignacy Krasicki (1776, 1778, 1784, 1803). Bartłomiej Cieśla devoted his presentation to the discussion of primarily and secondarily humorous genres in the pre-Second World War press. He drew attention to linguistic and content transformations resulting from the transfer of a genre pattern into a discursive space unusual for the given genre.

Tomasz Korpysz spoke about meta-comic reflection of Cyprian Norwid (1971-1976). In his talk, he raised the issue of how the Polish poet understood and described concepts such as the *comic*, *humour*, and the *joke*. The issue of the comic in folk art was also addressed by Małgorzata Ludwikowska in her paper entitled "Joyful talks on joyless problems in a *gawęda* talk from the Podhale region".

On the second day of the conference, participants listened to papers on ethnic humour, as well as presentations regarding European and non-European contexts of humor. In the paper "Poles and Ukrainians in caricatures. A satirical reciprocity", Helena Sojka-Masztalesz discussed the unique nature of Polish-Ukrainian contacts from a linguistic and cultural perspective, based on drawings published in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century (until 1939) satirical press.

Three subsequent presentations concerned comical works from the area of ancient Greece and the Roman Empire. In the paper entitled "To laugh or to cry?", Anna Bąk addressed the use of humour in selected comedies of Aristophanes. Piotr Osiński talked about the comic in Plutarch's *De vitando aere alieno*, whereas Anna Pająkowska-Bouallegui devoted her paper to the use of irony in the satire *Misopogon, or Beard-Hater* by the Emperor Julian the Apostate.

Furthermore, several presentations raised the issue of the role of the comic in overcoming medieval social and aesthetic patterns. In the paper "*Vis comica – vis obscena*. A model of generating the comic in parodic literature", Nadzieja Bąkowska drew attention to *obscenum* as an important component of medieval parody and grotesque. Julia Krauze discussed the issue of parodying the chivalry in Teofilo Folengo's macaronic literature, while Ewa Rybałt pointed to examples of the comic breaking the principle of *decorum* in Italian Renaissance painting.

Więnczysław Niemirowski spoke about the relationship between comical works and the restrictive state policy in the paper entitled "Whispered political joke in national-socialist Germany, 1933-1945".

Two more papers were dedicated to the problem of the comic in French performing arts. In his presentation, Sebastian Zacharow considered whether the comic opera is a hybrid form among the scenic genres, or rather an example of a harmonious synthesis of arts. Magdalena Juźwik, in turn, addressed the question of genre determinants of comical ballet on the example of *Coppélia*.

Non-European comical works were in the centre of interest of two papers. Grażyna Zając discussed the function of the comic as a tool for shaping social attitudes in Turkish playwright Ibrahim Şinasi's comedy entitled *The Wedding of a Poet* (2014). Agnieszka Brylak presented her preliminary research on how sixteenth-century Spanish monks described humour and laughter in the culture of Nahua Indians.

A lively discussion accompanying the presentations confirmed that the interest in the comic from a historical perspective is an important research trend requiring in-depth interdisciplinary studies. The opportunity to continue inquiring the field will appear soon, during the next meeting, planned for October 2019. The papers presented during the conference will be collected in a post-conference volume, to be released later in 2018.

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