Packing a Punch: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Humour and Power

St Hugh's College
University of Oxford

Is it ever just a joke? Laughter can legitimise authority, unsettle hierarchies, forge collective identities, expose the limits of power. Humour can ignite debate, foster apathy, solidify 'in' and 'out' groups. It can evoke a whole host of emotional responses beyond amusement: joy, harmony, relief, but also scorn, discomfort, fear. In short, the meanings in and of humour are far from straightforward. There is power in humour and humour in power, too.

This interdisciplinary conference—timed to coincide with the exhibition *Between Laughter and Tears: The Political Cartoons of Ella Baron* (White Box, Schwarzman Centre for the Humanities)—aims to examine the complex relationships between humour and power across academic disciplines, historical periods, cultural contexts, and media forms.

Preliminary Programme

Friday, 5 February 2026

10:00-10:30 Welcome Coffee and Introduction

10:30-12:30 **PANEL 1: HUMOUR & POLITICAL CRISIS**

Better than the copy: the politics of humour in 1980s Italy
Andrea Brondino – University of Manchester

Behold a Wonder! Armando Ianucci's Pandemic Poetics
Margaret Kean – University of Oxford

Memeing the Dictator: Ridicule, Reappropriation, and the Postdigital Public Sphere of Bangladesh's July Uprising
Shanjida Nowshin Chowdhury – North South University

"I Like My ICE CRUSHED": The Meme-ification of US Protest Signs in the Age of Algorithms
Emily Brady – University of Oxford

12:30-1:30 Lunch

1:30-3:00 **PANEL 2: HUMOUR & RACE**

Satirical Engagements with Black Bodily Value and British Slave Compensation in the Nineteenth Century
Klarke Stricklen – University of Oxford

Humour, Power, and the Testimony of Slavery in the Federal Writers' Project Interviews with Formerly Enslaved People
Luke de Lisle – University of Oxford

Tactical Frivolity and Race in Victorian Women's Writing
Lindsey N. Chappell – Georgia Southern University

3:00-3:30 Coffee

3:30-5:00 **PANEL 3: HUMOUR & LANGUAGE**

Double echolalia. Rhetorical implications of satire: Italian examples
Serena Vandi – Trinity College Dublin

Translating the Comic Turk: Humour, Power and Cultural Representation in Molière's *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*
Yalçin Aydın – Hacettepe University

Irony Lost… in Translation? Humour, Language and Power in the French Dubbing and Subtitling of Blackadder
Paola Scarpini – University of Warwick

5:00-6:30 Visit exhibition **"Between Laughter and Tears: The Political Cartoons of Ella Baron"** (White Box, Schwarzman Centre for the Humanities)

6:30-8:00 **KEYNOTE PANEL** (Theatre, Schwarzman Centre for the Humanities)

Speakers TBC.

Saturday, 6 February 2026

9:00-11:00 **PANEL 4: HUMOUR & IDENTITY**

Humour, Comedy and Social Identity: Towards a Theoretical Understanding
Sharon Lockyer and Simon Weaver – Brunel University

Who Gets to be "Just a Comedian"? Gender Identity and the Politics of Political Stand-Up Comedy
Amber Kempynck – Ghent University

Laughing Ourselves into Being: Situated Humour, Collective Self-Governance, and the Making of Modern National Identity
Shafag Dadashova – ADA University

Who Gets to be Funny? Humour, Reputation and Political Power
Viktorija Völker – Universität Tübingen

11:00-11:30 Coffee

11:30-1:00 **PANEL 5: HUMOUR & PERFORMANCE**

"Here is our Rector": Humour, Reputation, and Authority in Early Modern Venetian Crete
Marco Pakas – University of Oxford

The Double-Take Fake: Parody, Power, and Laughter in Late-Nineteenth-Century France
Jessica Wardhaugh – University of Warwick

Giving Satire a Face: Fictional Persona and Satirical Performance, from Bickerstaff to Binface
Adam James Smith – York St John University

1:00-2:00 Lunch

2:00-3:30 **PANEL 6: HUMOUR & STAND-UP**

The Precarious Microphone: Disability Humour and Comic Authority
Melina Malli – University of Oxford

On Those Who Found the Words: Stand-Up Comedy in Wartime Russia
Daria Ganzenko – ZZF Potsdam

The Market Just Can't Take a Joke: Comic Labour, Cancel Culture and the Contradictions of Market Dependence
Alex Sutton – Oxford Brookes

3:30-3:45 Conclusion