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Book review

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ABSTRACT

EN This review introduces readers to *Gender and Humor: Interdisciplinary and International Perspectives*, a collection of essays from various disciplines and topics in the field of humor and gender studies, encompassing different countries and languages.

Key words: HUMOR, GENDER STUDIES

ES Esta reseña presenta el volumen editado *Gender and Humor: Interdisciplinary and International Perspectives*, una colección de trabajos que abarca diferentes disciplinas, temas, países y lenguas en el ámbito de los estudios de género del humor.

Palabras clave: HUMOR, ESTUDIOS DE GÉNERO

IT Questa recensione presenta il volume *Gender and Humor: Interdisciplinary and International Perspectives*, una collezione di saggi in diverse discipline, lingue, paesi e temi nell'ambito degli studi di genere del comico.

Parole chiave: COMICO, STUDI DI GENERE

As the subtitle of the book makes clear, this is a collection of 20 essays (including the introduction) from various disciplines, and the topics encompass several countries and languages. As such, the various chapters will likely be more or less interesting to the individual reader on the basis of personal interest, and only very few readers will be interested in all the chapters. In this review, I focus unapologetically on those chapters that I found most interesting, either because they presented novel ideas or because they made points that strike me as important. Obviously, other reviewers will find other areas to emphasize.

The most interesting chapter is Rod Martin's authoritative synthesis of psychological research on gender differences in humor. Martin reviews a significant number of studies, from a variety of approaches, and concludes that "we find more similarities than differences between men and women" (p. 144). One consistent difference is that men report using more aggressive humor, both directed toward others and the self. Martin's conclusions are nuanced and rich with interesting details that would be too complex to summarize here. The book is worth having for this chapter alone.

The opening chapter by Bing and Scheibman discusses the application of blending theory to humor. This is not a novel idea, but the authors take a novel approach, exploring the world-building aspect of blends by emphasizing that each blend in a joke creates a (mini-)world composed of the properties of the two scripts involved in the blend. This is an original idea within humor studies, and it deserves more attention. In particular, as Bing and Scheibman themselves observe, it may be interesting to distinguish between those blends that are humorous and those that are not, as well as those that are "subversive" (i.e., do not buy in to gender-stereotyping ideologies) and those that are not.

Milner Davis' chapter on female roles in farces ends with the rather unexpected conclusion that while farces "necessarily reflect the gendered roles of their times ..." nevertheless they all depend on an essential egalitarianism between the sexes (. . .) men and women are co-equals in sexual matters, in aggression, in general intelligence, and in the ability to get things done (. . .) [and] equally lacking in insight, equally self-preoccupied, and equally unable to see the impact of their behavior on others" (p. 49).

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The sixth chapter, on lesbian humor, by Kulick wins the funny-when-taken-out-of-context award with the sentence, here quoted in its entirety: "I am particularly interested in lesbians" (p. 85). The runner-up, also by Kulick, is "Germans are an interesting kind of parallel case to lesbians" (p. 90). Disappointingly, what lesbians and Germans turn out to have in common is that they are both stereotyped as humorless. In all seriousness, however, Kulick's chapter presents an engaging discussion of cultural history on how the myth of the humorless lesbian arose.

In Chapter 13, Lockyer considers two characters in the *Catherine Tate Show*, a British sketch comedy show that aired on the BBC between 2004 and 2007. The interest in this chapter, in my view, lies in the fact that the characters represented are distinguished by social class and age, two topics that often do not get much coverage in humor studies.

A group of three chapters, respectively by Coates (Chapter 9), Holmes and Schnurr (Chapter 10), and Huy (Chapter 11), is focused on gender differences in conversational humor. For those familiar with the literature on discourse and conversation analysis of humor, the novelty here is Huy's work on Chinese (Cantonese) data. Given that he very usefully provides a quantitative breakdown of his observations, it is possible to check some of the conclusions he draws. One conclusion which may be worth reconsidering is that his data support the superiority theory of humor (conceptualized here as "higher status individuals initiate more humor;" [p. 192]) since the highest status family member (the father) is not involved in much humor (p. 192) and initiates no instances of in-group humor. It is too bad that Huy did not provide the original Cantonese and a transliteration for the examples. Nonetheless, and despite the usual limitations on the sample size and how generalizable the data is, this is a very good paper that broadens the field significantly.

Three chapters deal with film: Finney (Chapter 14), on the U.S. indie film *Little Miss Sunshine* (2006); Senzani (Chapter 16), on Italian-Australian director Monica Pellizzari; and Gardaphè (Chapter 15), on the portrayal of Italian-American male gender roles in *Goodfellas* (1990). The volume is rounded out by other chapters on feminist fiction (Wagner-Lawlor, Chapter 4), post-ward British film comedy (Gray, Chapter 5), Japanese humor and its relationship with gender roles in Japan (Bouchetoux, chapter 7), female designers' humor (Klein, Chapter 12), grotesque humor in three contemporary Italian writers (Maher, Chapter 17), a well-documented chapter on queer humor (Emig, Chapter 18), and a discussion of feminist comedian Judy Tenuta (Del Negro, Chapter 19).

The final chapter is a "virtual" round table discussion among some of the authors. The general conclusion is that more research on humor and gender is needed and that simplistic male/female labels need to be problematized. While the four page index is underwhelming, the general bibliography common to all the articles in the book is a valuable research tool.

Overall, this is a valuable contribution to the field, which definitely belongs in research libraries and on the bookshelves of serious scholars of gender and humor.

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- EN** | **Salvatore Attardo** holds degrees from Università Cattolica of Milan and Purdue University. He has published extensively on pragmatics, semantics, and the linguistics of humor, primarily on issues relating to implicatures, irony, and on neo-Gricean pragmatics. He was the Editor in Chief of *HUMOR: International Journal of Humor Research* for 10 years and has recently edited the *Encyclopedia of Humor Studies* (SAGE, 2014) and *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Humor* (2017).
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