

Inaugural Editorial

It is with pleasure that we publish the inaugural issue of *Humor Mekuivan: A Research Journal in Humor Studies*. There are two reasons to rejoice: this is the first Israeli periodical in humour studies, and this particular issue is the first one providing a forum primarily to Israeli scholars. The inaugural issue contains seven articles, spanning among them various themes and disciplines within humour studies. Five of those articles are in Hebrew, whereas two are in English.

Daniella Keidar's article is concerned with an emerging area in humour studies, namely, the connection of emotional intelligence to humour. Human beings are able to relate thought and feelings to effective personal and interpersonal behaviour and self-management. The ability to conduct oneself with a smiling attitude in the social environment is according to emotional intelligence, a sublime cultural behaviour rendering good service to the human mind. This scholarly approach touches upon an innovative domain: positive psychology. The two compartments of knowledge — emotional intelligence and positive psychology — resulted from lines of research that already yielded outcomes which found expression in humour studies at a much earlier period, beginning toward the end of the nineteenth century with the studies of Henri Bergson and Sigmund Freud, and later on with Viktor Frankl and his therapeutic method, i.e., logotherapy.

The second article in the Hebrew part of the issue is by Arie Sover, and is concerned with the mechanism underlying verbal humour. The method relies upon the study of patterns and genres of verbal humour, as well as upon the cognitive aspects beneath those patterns. Sover's article draws a distinction between verbal and visual humour, and claims that verbal humour is more demanding of the perceiver, in terms of intellectual and cognitive abilities, than visual humour is. (This claim may be challenged, but the very debate would be fruitful.) Moreover, the appreciation of verbal humour, as well as of humour in general, is culture-bound as well as affected by further factors, pertaining to personality and to the environment.

The third article is by Dror Kastel, who is concerned with the transgression of Grice's conversational maxims and with ambivalent information in Hebrew comedy. In his article, Kastel examines verbal humour in such comedy sketches that are intended to generate a sustained comical effect. That is to say, humorous states are more numerous than in mere jokes. A joke is short, and its structure allows for just one humorous state. Kastel emphasises incongruity theory, one of the leading classes of approaches within humour studies. He also underscores the verbal comical pattern of a thwarted expectation. We first come across that theory in Kant, who marked the beginning of humour studies from the psychological and cognitive viewpoints. Kastel's article enumerates various genres within verbal humour, including double sense, abundance, and the absurd.

The fourth article in the Hebrew part of the inaugural issue is by Lydia Amir. It is in the philosophy of humour. The Hebrew title plays upon "redemption from redemptions", or "release from releases". Amir asks whether humour solves problems, or rather enables to elude problem-solving. Amir's approach refutes, up to a point, the positive conception of humour in relation to emotional intelligence, a conception expressed in Keidar's article. Amir is sceptical about humour being conducive to a better world, and in this she perhaps partakes of the company of other philosophers, Plato and Hobbs, who considered laughter stemming from situational

humour to be nothing more than deriving pleasure from the plight of others. Or then perhaps Amir's stance may be somewhat likened to Baudelaire's dubbing a laughing response to human conditions, *the flowers of evil*. Both approaches, the one well-disposed towards humour-induced laughter, and the other approach, which considers it negatively, still have followers.

Lea Baratz's is the fifth paper in the Hebrew part of the issue. She discusses an anthology, *Bat Yayin (Daughter of the Wine)*, by the poetess Bracha Serri. Baratz maintains that it is possible to read Serri's poems from that anthology in different manners: a gender-based reading, a subversive reading, an autobiographical one, or then a lyric one, as agreeing with the eye of the beholder. Serri's poetry moreover lends itself to be read in different ways: linguistic, psychological, and social. The focus of Baratz's article is on the linguistic aspect of the poems, while considering its components within psychological, personality, and social contexts. Baratz's analysis uncovers both overt and hidden compartments within Bracha Serri's poetry. Humour, according to Baratz, enables a suitable perspective for seeing what the universe undergoes under Serri's wand or under her witty tongue.

Let us turn to the English part of the inaugural issue. The first English paper is by Ephraim Nissan. It is a long paper in folklore studies. It analyses three humorous stories that were told in Baghdadi Judaeo-Arabic. These tales are considered within the communal cultural context, as well as within both international and Jewish folklore worldwide. A comparison is drawn with tales from the Israel Folklore Archives. The the first Baghdadi tale, a compulsive liar who asked to be healed is made to stir diluted yoghurt with dung, and when he complains about the smell, he is told that as he said the truth, he is healed. This is simply a local variant of a clearly identifiable international tale type. Not so the other two tales introduced in this article. The tale about the prankster rabbi Zambartut can only be placed among the many *Predigtschwänke* from around the world known to folklore studies, but his particular trick in this tale — causing the congregants to call out like ravens, when he deliberately misreads in public a word from the biblical prohibition of tattooing, thus prompting them to correct him — eludes classification. Clearly his victims are not morons. It is precisely the competence of the congregants that causes them to fall into his trap, and this is rather like tales about a trickster who win an astute opponent.

The third tale, about the dog Mithlu (Such a One), is even more elusive, when it comes to classifying it. The dog owner, who was bathing, runs into the street in order to recover her dog, does not notice she is holding an empty frame while trying to cover herself, and when asking the people in the street whether they saw Such a One, they equivocate. This tale does partake in a motif, but not in a tale type. There exist tales about a trickster who has himself called Such a One, or Nobody (like Ulysses when he outsmarts the blinded giant Polyphemus), and so forth. The name causes equivocation, when the victim of the prank then looks for the bearer of that name. In contrast, the dog Such a One just ran away, and is no trickster at all. His owner then suffers indignities caused by the dog's ambiguous name.

Thus, in a sense all three tales are stories about somebody duped, but only the first two have a prankster, as in the third tale the prankster from the international tale type that shares the motif is demoted into a dog (who may be at least as hare-brained as his owner). Clearly the most Judaised tale is the one about Rabbi Zambartut, whereas the story about the dog that ran away is totally un-Judaised, and was actually told in 1965 in Tel-Aviv.

The second English paper (the seventh and last article in the inaugural issue) is by Roman Rozengurt. It surveys the main theoretical frameworks which apply neuroscience to research into humour. The subject is neural processing of humour in the brain. This paper thus completes the multidisciplinary panoply in this journal issue. Complex processes occur in the brain and in the neural system in general during the perception of humour states on the part of an individual, with the cognitive and emotional aspects associated with that perception. The survey refers to studies of humor in patients with localised brain damage, as well as studies of normal subjects using neuroimaging techniques and electrophysiological studies. Progress in measurement techniques has enabled an increasing role of neuroscience within humour studies.

The Hebrew part of the inaugural issue also comprises three texts which discuss a new book, Shmuel Tsesler's *Illustrated Poems for Children, in Yiddish and Hebrew*. In the book, the Yiddish original poems are accompanied with a Hebrew translation. The book was published in collaboration by the Chair of Yiddish and the Dov Sadan project at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and constitutes an important contribution to the preservation of Yiddish cultural riches. Hebrew readers get exposure to the Jewish humour which is inseparable from Yiddish culture. Translating poetry is difficult. Doing so with works of humour is a much bigger challenge. We surmise how difficult it must have been. The quality is excellent, and leaves you with a smile. Also David Hall's enchanting illustrations are humorous. The three contributions concerned with Shmuel Tsesler's book are by the members of the team that prepared it for publication, namely, Yechiel Szeintuch (Chair of Yiddish at the Hebrew University), Adina Bar-El, the book's editor, and Ruth Zakovitz, the translator.

We conclude by thanking those collaborating in publishing the inaugural issue of this journal: Avivit Gera for editing the Hebrew text, Marianna Palucik, also in relation to desk-editing, and Michal Avigdor for the pagination of the issue and as website administrator. We are grateful as well to the anonymous referees who contributed their time, competence, and efforts, and whose role was crucial. Sometimes a referee also reviewed a paper again, upon revision. In order to preserve the anonymity of these referees, for the time being we are not going to list their names, waiting for a cumulative list only to appear once enough has been published to make the connection between referees and articles untraceable.

We hope that reader satisfaction will reward the efforts invested in this journal. May our audience derive both professional growth and personal pleasure from this diverse offering. We would like as well to announce that within 2011, we also expect the inaugural issue of our *Israeli Journal of Humor Research: An International Journal* to appear. That other forum will publish articles and book reviews in English, and possibly French. Its international advisory board includes prominent scholars from all over the world. The combined experience of developing both journals will hopefully be reflected in a high quality of the output in both forums.

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