

**Chapter 1 : Wit and Humor of the Stage**

*In the following pages some attempt has been made to cull the best examples of stage wit and humor, not, of course, by way of quotation from comedy or burlesque, but by collating the actual humorous sayings and doings of theatre folk, by narrating examples of ludicrous happenings here and there.*

Philosophers are concerned with what is important in life, so two things are surprising about what they have said about humor. The first is how little they have said. From ancient times to the 20th century, the most that any notable philosopher wrote about laughter or humor was an essay, and only a few lesser-known thinkers such as Frances Hutcheson and James Beattie wrote that much. The word humor was not used in its current sense of funniness until the 18th century, we should note, and so traditional discussions were about laughter or comedy. The most that major philosophers like Plato, Hobbes, and Kant wrote about laughter or humor was a few paragraphs within a discussion of another topic. The second surprising thing is how negative most philosophers have been in their assessments of humor. From ancient Greece until the 20th century, the vast majority of philosophical comments on laughter and humor focused on scornful or mocking laughter, or on laughter that overpowers people, rather than on comedy, wit, or joking. Plato, the most influential critic of laughter, treated it as an emotion that overrides rational self-control. In *Philebus* 48a-50, he analyzes the enjoyment of comedy as a form of scorn. In laughing at them, we take delight in something evil—their self-ignorance—and that malice is morally objectionable. Because of these objections to laughter and humor, Plato says that in the ideal state, comedy should be tightly controlled. No free person, whether woman or man, shall be found taking lessons in them. Greek thinkers after Plato had similarly negative comments about laughter and humor. Though Aristotle considered wit a valuable part of conversation *Nicomachean Ethics* 4, 8, he agreed with Plato that laughter expresses scorn. Wit, he says in the *Rhetoric* 2, 12, is educated insolence. These objections to laughter and humor influenced early Christian thinkers, and through them later European culture. They were reinforced by negative representations of laughter and humor in the Bible, the vast majority of which are linked to hostility. The only way God is described as laughing in the Bible is with hostility: The kings of the earth stand ready, and the rulers conspire together against the Lord and his anointed king. The Lord who sits enthroned in heaven laughs them to scorn; then he rebukes them in anger, he threatens them in his wrath *Psalm 2*: In the Bible, mockery is so offensive that it may deserve death, as when a group of children laugh at the prophet Elisha for his baldness: Sometimes what they criticized was laughter in which the person loses self-control. Other times they linked laughter with idleness, irresponsibility, lust, or anger. John Chrysostom, for example, warned that Laughter often gives birth to foul discourse, and foul discourse to actions still more foul. Often from words and laughter proceed railing and insult; and from railing and insult, blows and wounds; and from blows and wounds, slaughter and murder. If, then, you would take good counsel for yourself, avoid not merely foul words and foul deeds, or blows and wounds and murders, but unseasonable laughter itself in Schaff, Not surprisingly, the Christian institution that most emphasized self-control—the monastery—was harsh in condemning laughter. One of the earliest monastic orders, of Pachom of Egypt, forbade joking *Adkin*, The Rule of St. The monastery of St. Columbanus Hibernus had these punishments: The Christian European rejection of laughter and humor continued through the Middle Ages, and whatever the Reformers reformed, it did not include the traditional assessment of humor. Among the strongest condemnations came from the Puritans, who wrote tracts against laughter and comedy. One by William Prynne encouraged Christians to live sober, serious lives. That makes us alert to signs that we are winning or losing. The former make us feel good and the latter bad. If our perception of some sign that we are superior comes over us quickly, our good feelings are likely to issue in laughter. In Part I, ch. And it is incident most to them, that are conscious of the fewest abilities in themselves; who are forced to keep themselves in their own favor by observing the imperfections of other men. And therefore much laughter at the defects of others, is a sign of pusillanimity. For of great minds, one of the proper works is, to help and free others from scorn; and to compare themselves only with the most able. He says that laughter accompanies three of the six basic emotions—wonder, love, mild hatred, desire, joy, and sadness. Derision or scorn is a

sort of joy mingled with hatred, which proceeds from our perceiving some small evil in a person whom we consider to be deserving of it; we have hatred for this evil, we have joy in seeing it in him who is deserving of it; and when that comes upon us unexpectedly, the surprise of wonder is the cause of our bursting into laughter. And we notice that people with very obvious defects such as those who are lame, blind of an eye, hunched-backed, or who have received some public insult, are specially given to mockery; for, desiring to see all others held in as low estimation as themselves, they are truly rejoiced at the evils that befall them, and they hold them deserving of these art. The Superiority Theory With these comments of Hobbes and Descartes, we have a sketchy psychological theory articulating the view of laughter that started in Plato and the Bible and dominated Western thinking about laughter for two millennia. In the 20th century, this idea was called the Superiority Theory. Simply put, our laughter expresses feelings of superiority over other people or over a former state of ourselves. Feelings of superiority, Hutcheson argued, are neither necessary nor sufficient for laughter. In laughing, we may not be comparing ourselves with anyone, as when we laugh at odd figures of speech like those in this poem about a sunrise: If self-comparison and sudden glory are not necessary for laughter, neither are they sufficient for laughter. A gentleman riding in a coach who sees ragged beggars in the street, for example, will feel that he is better off than they, but such feelings are unlikely to amuse him. Sometimes we laugh when a comic character shows surprising skills that we lack. In the silent movies of Charlie Chaplin, Harold Lloyd, and Buster Keaton, the hero is often trapped in a situation where he looks doomed. But then he escapes with a clever acrobatic stunt that we would not have thought of, much less been able to perform. Laughing at such scenes does not seem to require that we compare ourselves with the hero; and if we do make such a comparison, we do not find ourselves superior. At least some people, too, laugh at themselves—not a former state of themselves, but what is happening now. If I search high and low for my eyeglasses only to find them on my head, the Superiority Theory seems unable to explain my laughter at myself. While these examples involve persons with whom we might compare ourselves, there are other cases of laughter where no personal comparisons seem involved. In experiments by Lambert Deckers, subjects were asked to lift a series of apparently identical weights. The first several weights turned out to be identical, and that strengthened the expectation that the remaining weights would be the same. But then subjects picked up a weight that was much heavier or lighter than the others. The Relief Theory Further weakening the dominance of the Superiority Theory in the 18th century were two new accounts of laughter which are now called the Relief Theory and the Incongruity Theory. Neither even mentions feelings of superiority. The Relief Theory is an hydraulic explanation in which laughter does in the nervous system what a pressure-relief valve does in a steam boiler. John Locke, Book 3, ch. The natural free spirits of ingenious men, if imprisoned or controlled, will find out other ways of motion to relieve themselves in their constraint; and whether it be in burlesque, mimicry, or buffoonery, they will be glad at any rate to vent themselves, and be revenged upon their constrainers. Over the next two centuries, as the nervous system came to be better understood, thinkers such as Herbert Spencer and Sigmund Freud revised the biology behind the Relief Theory but kept the idea that laughter relieves pent-up nervous energy. When we are angry, for example, nervous energy produces small aggressive movements such as clenching our fists; and if the energy reaches a certain level, we attack the offending person. In fear, the energy produces small-scale movements in preparation for fleeing; and if the fear gets strong enough, we flee. The movements associated with emotions, then, discharge or release the built-up nervous energy. Laughter releases nervous energy, too, Spencer says, but with this important difference: Unlike emotions, laughter does not involve the motivation to do anything. The nervous energy relieved through laughter, according to Spencer, is the energy of emotions that have been found to be inappropriate. Reading the first three lines, we might feel pity for the bereaved nephew writing the poem. But the last line makes us reinterpret those lines. Far from being a loving nephew in mourning, he turns out to be an insensitive cheapskate. So the nervous energy of our pity, now superfluous, is released in laughter. If still more energy needs to be relieved, it spills over to the muscles connected with breathing, and if the movements of those muscles do not release all the energy, the remainder moves the arms, legs, and other muscle groups. In the 20th century, John Dewey In his *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* [], Freud analyzes three laughter situations: In der Witz, that superfluous energy is energy used to repress feelings; in the comic it is

energy used to think, and in humor it is the energy of feeling emotions. *Der Witz* includes telling prepared fictional jokes, making spontaneous witty comments, and repartee. In *der Witz*, Freud says, the psychic energy released is the energy that would have repressed the emotions that are being expressed as the person laughs. According to Freud, the emotions which are most repressed are sexual desire and hostility, and so most jokes and witty remarks are about sex, hostility, or both. In telling a sexual joke or listening to one, we bypass our internal censor and give vent to our libido. In telling or listening to a joke that puts down an individual or group we dislike, similarly, we let out the hostility we usually repress. In both cases, the psychic energy normally used to do the repressing becomes superfluous, and is released in laughter. Here it is the energy normally devoted to thinking. An example is laughter at the clumsy actions of a clown. Our laughter at the clown is our venting of that surplus energy. These two possibilities in my imagination amount to a comparison between the observed movement and my own. The pleasure of humor is at the cost of a release of affect that does not occur: His example is a story told by Mark Twain in which his brother was building a road when a charge of dynamite went off prematurely, blowing him high into the sky. Having sketched several versions of the Relief Theory, we can note that today almost no scholar in philosophy or psychology explains laughter or humor as a process of releasing pent-up nervous energy. There is, of course, a connection between laughter and the expenditure of energy. Hearty laughter involves many muscle groups and several areas of the nervous system. Laughing hard gives our lungs a workout, too, as we take in far more oxygen than usual. But few contemporary scholars defend the claims of Spencer and Freud that the energy expended in laughter is the energy of feeling emotions, the energy of repressing emotions, or the energy of thinking, which have built up and require venting. Funny things and situations may evoke emotions, but many seem not to. These do not seem to vent emotions that had built up before we read them, and they do not seem to evoke emotions and then render them superfluous.

### Chapter 2 : History, humor and wit come to the stage - The Echo News

*Wit and humor of the stage; a collection from various sources clasified under appropriate subject headings Item Preview remove-circle Share or Embed This Item.*

First Election to the Legislature. Fourth Election to the Legislature. Birth of Edward Baker Lincoln, March 10th. De- feated for the United States Senate. Wilkes Booth, April 14th. Remains Interred at Springfield, Illinois, May 4th. Before Lincoln was ever heard of as a lawyer or politician, he was famous as a story teller. As a politician, he always had a story to fit the other side; as a lawyer, he won many cases by telling the jury a story which showed them the justice of his side better than any argument could have done. They contain lessons that could be taught so well in no other way. Every one of them is a sermon. Lincoln, like the Man of Galilee, spoke to the people in parables. Nothing that can be written about Lincoln can show his character in such a true light as the yarns and stories he was so fond of telling, and at which he would laugh as heartily as anyone. For a man whose life was so full of great responsibilities, 7 Lincoln had many hours of laughter when the humorous, fun-loving side of his great nature asserted itself. Every person to keep healthy ought to have one good hearty laugh every day. Lincoln did, and the stories at which he laughed will continue to furnish laughter to all who appreciate good humor, with a moral point and spiced with that true philosophy bred in those who live close to nature and to the people around them. Of all the Presidents of the United States, and indeed of all the great statesmen who have made their indelible impress upon the policy of the Republic, Abraham Lincoln stands out single and alone in his individual qualities. He had little experience in statesmanship when he was called to the Presidency. He had only a few years of service in the State Legislature of Illinois, and a single term in Congress ending twelve years before he became President, but he had to grapple with the gravest problems ever presented to the statesmanship of the nation for solution, and he met each and all of them in turn with the most consistent mastery, and settled them so successfully that all have stood unquestioned until the present time, and are certain to endure while the Republic lives. In this he surprised not only his own cabinet and the leaders of his party who had little confidence in him when he first became President, but equally surprised the country and the world. He was patient, tireless and usually silent when great conflicts raged about him to solve the appalling problems which were presented at various stages of the war for determination, and when he reached his conclusion 7 he was inexorable. The wrangles of faction and the jostling of ambition were compelled to bow when Lincoln had determined upon his line of duty. He was much more than a statesman; he was one of the most sagacious politicians, although he was entirely unschooled in the machinery by which political results are achieved. His judgment of men was next to unerring, and when results were to be attained he knew the men who should be assigned to the task, and he rarely made a mistake.

### Chapter 3 : Wit-Silver Spring Stage- Theatre In DC

*Theater uses actors or actresses to represent the experience of a real or imagined event in front of a live audience, most often on a stage. Experiences are communicated through gestures, speech, song, music, and / or dance.*

### Chapter 4 : Wit “ Atlantic Stage

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**Chapter 6 : Philosophy of Humor (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)**

*Wit and Hu mor of the Stage CHAPTER I Stor ies of the Star s T HE number of more or less witty anecdotes recounted of the shining lights of stage-land seemsto increase with the popularity and the vogue Of.*