

an
interdisciplinary workshop
bringing together researchers and
performers from Canada,
the United States,
and Europe



WOMEN AND COMEDY:
HISTORY, THEORY, PRACTICE

4-6 August 2011

at Simon Fraser University's
Harbour Centre
515 W Hastings, Vancouver, BC

discussion
and debate about
women as authors,
performers, subjects, and
audiences of comedy from the
Classical period to the present

SFU

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
THINKING OF THE WORLD



Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en
sciences humaines du Canada

Canada

organized by members
of SFU's Department of English
www.english.sfu.ca

THE WORKSHOP

In most theories of comedy, from classic treatises by Sigmund Freud and Henri Bergson to recent polemics by Christopher Hitchens, women are figured as neither agents nor audiences of comedy, merely its targets. Only relatively recently have scholarly study and popular culture alike begun to recognize and historicize **women's active contributions to comedy**.

Women and Comedy: History, Theory, Practice brings together leading researchers from Canada, the United States, and Europe in an interdisciplinary workshop format to highlight the breadth of current scholarship on gender and comedy. This scholarship spans centuries of literary and cultural production, a diversity of critical methodologies, and a range of popular and political applications.

The workshop has **three primary objectives**: to advance research in humor, gender, performance, film, rhetoric, communication, and literary criticism by way of participants' shared interest in the topic of women and comedy; to develop out of the workshop presentations a collection of essays that will bring into productive dialogue the interdisciplinarity which characterizes research on this subject; and to engage undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in cognate courses taught by members of the organizing committee in hands-on experiential learning on the subject. In so doing, the workshop will address the following research issues:

1. It will respond to the **historical** marginalization and/or trivialization of both women and comedy. Through a reconsideration of literary and cultural texts from the Classical period to the present, the workshop will assert the importance of recognizing the role of women and comedy in order to understand these texts and their historical contexts.
2. It will analyze the topic of women and comedy through a diversity of **theoretical** and methodological approaches. Given comedy's unpredictable and irreverent character, these acts of analysis will allow for opportunities to reevaluate the theoretical approaches themselves.
3. It will ground these theoretical analyses in the actual **practice** of comedy, and in the experiences of audiences encountering different genres of comedic texts and performances. Acknowledging the performer's role in this encounter, the workshop will conclude with a roundtable in which performers from different disciplines will share aspects of their craft with the attending scholars. In this way, the workshop seeks to bridge research, performance, and reception.

Generous **financial support** for this workshop has been provided by: the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada; the Department of English, SFU; the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, SFU; and the Office of the Vice-President, Academic, SFU.

Members of the workshop **organizing committee** include: Sarah Creel; Peter Dickinson; Alana Gerecke; Anne Higgins; Paul Matthew St. Pierre; Diana Solomon; and Sean Zwagerman.

THE PROGRAM

Day 1, Thursday, August 4th: Histories, Politics, and Forms—Labatt Hall, Harbour Centre

8:45-9:15 am Coffee, muffins, and welcoming remarks (Peter Dickinson)

9:15-10:45 am Panel 1: Gender and Jest in Classical Greece and Rome

1. Laurie O’Higgins, Bates College: “Ares and Aphrodite: Whose Joke?”
2. Barbara Gold, Hamilton College: “Comedy in Ancient Greece and Rome: What Was Funny, Whose Humor Was It, and How Do We Explain the Jokes without Killing Them?”

10:45-11:15 am Break

11:15-12:45 pm Panel 2: Humour, Parody, and Women in the Middle Ages

1. Anne Higgins, Simon Fraser University: “Mary and her Sisters”
2. Lisa Perfetti, Muhlenberg College: “Feminist Humor without Women: The Challenge of Reading (in) the Middle Ages”

12:45-1:45 pm Lunch

1:45-3:15 pm Panel 3: Women Actors, Women's Relations: New Approaches to Early Modern Comedy

1. Pamela Brown, University of Connecticut: “Have Wit Will Travel: Female Tricksters in the Italian *Commedia dell'arte* and English Comedy”
2. Julie Crawford, Columbia University: “Female Friendship, Marriage, and the Structures of Shakespearean Comedy”

3:15-3:45 pm Break

3:45-5:15 pm Panel 4: The Transatlantic Contexts of 18th- and 19th-Century Women’s Humour

1. Linda Morris, UC Davis: “Domestic Manners of the Americans: A Transatlantic Endeavor”
2. Diana Solomon, Simon Fraser University: “The Amazon and the weakling: Comic Figures in Margaret Cavendish’s closet dramas”

5:30-8 pm Reception and Performance by Margaret Leng Tan—Segal Centre (HC 1400)

Day 2, Friday, August 5th: Approaches, Texts, and Audiences—Terasen Cinema, Harbour Centre

9-9:30 am Coffee and muffins

9:30-11 am Panel 1: The Rhetoric of Women's Humour

1. Tarez Graban, Indiana University: "Humoring the Female Pol: Irony, Consciousness-Raising, and 'Third-Culture' Discourse"
2. Sean Zwagerman, Simon Fraser University: "A Cautionary Tale: Ann Coulter and the Failure of Humor"

11-11:30 am Break

11:30-1 pm Panel 2: The Golden Age of Burlesque in London and New York, 1850-1950

1. Jacky Bratton, Royal Holloway, University of London: "Burlesque at the Strand Theatre"
2. Joanna Mansbridge, St. Francis Xavier: "'Chicks and Chuckles': The Body and Voice of 20th Century Burlesque"

1-2 pm Lunch

2-3:30 pm Panel 3: MF/FF: Gendered Double Acts in Film and on Stage

1. Kay Young, UC Santa Barbara: "'I'm Daphne': The Pleasures of Metamorphosis"
2. Paul St. Pierre, Simon Fraser University: "Elsie and Doris Waters and the Female Double-Act in British Music Hall and Variety"

3:30-4 pm Break

4-5:45 pm Panel 4: Comedy, Autobiography, and Female Performance

1. Kirsty Johnston, University of British Columbia: "Disability, Comedy and Autobiographical Performance"
2. Gilli Bush-Bailey, Royal Holloway, University of London: "Performing HerSelf"

7-10 pm Banquet for Presenters and Guests—Shebeen Whisk(e)y House, 210 Carrall Street

Featuring a special stand-up performance by Jan Derbyshire

Day 3, Saturday, August 6th: Comedic Topics, Theories, and Practices—Terasen Cinema, Harbour Centre

9-9:30 am Coffee and Muffins

9:30-11 am Panel 1: Comedic Subjects/Comic Identities

1. Joanne Gilbert, Alma College: “Performing Marginality: Lesbian Stand-Up Comics and the Politics of Laughter”
2. Shannon Hengen, Laurentian University: “A Canadian Naïf”

11-11:30 am Break

11:30-1 pm Panel 2: Women and Comedy: Theory, Practice, Prospects

1. Regina Barreca, University of Connecticut: “Sex is Funny (When Handled by Women)”
2. Lisa Colletta, American University of Rome: “Postmodernity and the Gendered Uses of Satire”

1-2 pm Lunch

2-3:30 pm Panel 3: Performers’ Roundtable

1. Gilli Bush-Bailey
2. Jan Derbyshire
3. Margaret Leng Tan

3:30-4 pm Closing remarks and workshop wrap-up (Peter Dickinson)