ate or not. Persons liking earthy and sick humor also seem to be less conformist and less agreeable. Sick jokes are, however, not a homogeneous group and appreciation for different kinds of jokes may differ.

There are diverse views on the motivations for and psychological functions of sick jokes. While many scholars and researchers refer to the use of sick humor as a means of coping with the subject that is joked about, to speak the unspeakable, to show Schadenfreude, or to deal with a somewhat disturbed mind (e.g., a hidden wish to kill), other researchers state that a joke in and of itself cannot have any implication as to its morality or motivation. These scholars emphasize that what makes the crucial difference to interpretations and implications of jokes, in particular sick ones, is the context in which the joke is told, that is, the cultural or social environment, who the joke tellers and their audience are, and factors such as tone of voice and introduction of the joke.

Ursula Beermann

See also Aggressive and Harmless Humor; Coping Mechanism; Doggerel; Gallows Humor; Insult and Invective; Jest, Jestbooks, and Jesters; Joke Cycles; Jokes; Obscenity; Philologos; Play and Humor; Satire; Scatology; Targets of Humor; Travesty

Further Readings


J. C. Gieben.


SIMPLE FORM

Simple forms (SFs) refers to a concept of folk literature as the expression of elementary cognitive attitudes (mental dispositions, modes of thought) and provides a theoretical umbrella term to systematically cover various verbal folklore genres. As a term, SF is the English translation of Einfache Formen (EF), a book published in 1930 by art historian and literary scholar André Jolles, which has continued to give theoretical impulses as well as reason for confusion and critique. This book was never translated into English, but it continues to be published in German and remains influential.

Jolles was born in 1874 in the Netherlands. After school, as a poet and promoter of the symbolist movement, he founded and contributed to various literary and cultural journals. Studying in Italy, France, the Netherlands, and Germany, he finished archeology and history at Freiburg University. In 1907, Jolles became a university teacher, moving to Berlin in 1908. After receiving German citizenship (1914), Jolles volunteered in World War I until 1916, then becoming professor of archeology and art history in German-occupied Ghent (Belgium). In 1918, he was appointed professor of Flemish and Dutch at Leipzig University, becoming professor of comparative literature in 1923. From 1933 on, Jolles was a supporter of Nazi ideology and a party member, who after the war admitted only academic consultation with the regime concerning the history
and symbolism of 18th-century Freemasonry. Joles became an emeritus professor in 1941 but remained at the university until the end of the war, where he taught seminars on the psychology of races and cultures. He was one of the last honorees to receive the renowned Goethe-Medaille für Kunst und Wissenschaft (Goethe Medal for Art and Science) in 1944. Joles died in 1946, before making a decision about whether to return to the Netherlands.

Based on various pre-studies from the 1920s, Joles attempted to define specifically and systematically what had before been termed Naturpoesie (natural poetry) by Jacob Grimm in the early 19th century. Grimm characterized natural poetry as divinely inspired and spontaneous, as opposed to Kunstpoesie (artistic poetry), the result of individual acts of creation. In contrast to literary scholarship focusing the individual genius (Genieästhetik), Joles postulated the "determination of form" (Formbestimmung) and the "interpretation of pattern" (Gestaltung) as central morphological tasks. Referring to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, he defined this task with regard to poetry as a whole, asking if the various patterns form a common, internally coherent and ordered whole, a system.

With special focus on folk literature, Joles anticipated German morphological literary approaches of the 1940s (Emil Staiger, Gunther Mueller, Horst Oppel); he did not, however, concentrate on individual texts: His rather phenomenological approach is far from being structuralist in orientation, and his interests in morphology must by no means be confounded with early structuralist ideas as, for example, Vladimir Propp's Morphology of the Russian Folk-Tale (1928). Joles's approach, though similar in inclination, also differs from ideas simultaneously propagated by Roman Jakobson and Petr Bogatyrev. In their 1929 seminal essay "Folklore as a Special Form of Artistic Creation," these authors attempted to determine similarities and differences of folklore and literature, favoring a functional view, introducing the notion of "preventive censorship of the community," and assuming that only the forms operating in a given community will survive in folklore.

Thus, at a time when in Russia formalist approaches to literature were already converting into structuralism, Joles adhered to a Romantic concept of language as an "anthropomorphic deity" and "Goddess language," as early reviews phrased it.

In order to identify the patterns of this allegedly closed system of simple forms, Joles referred to so-called mental occupations (Geistesbeschäftigungen) underlying them. A summary of these simple forms and their corresponding mental occupations follows: legend (Legende)—imitation; saga (Sage)—family, or tribe; myth (Mythe)—knowledge; riddle (Rätsel)—knowledge; saying (Spruch)—experience; case (Kasus)—norm; memorabilia (Memorabili) —real/actual; folk-tale (Märchen)—marvelous; joke (Witz)—comic.

Joles excluded transitions between SFs or derivations from one SF to another. Although, for example, both myth and riddle are related to "knowledge," emphasizing question and answer, the riddle for him is a question asked in the present to be answered in the future, whereas the myth is a question from the past answered in the present. Joles refused to identify SFs with concrete genres (and even less with specific texts). Rather, in analogy to the Saussurean opposition of langue (language) and parole (speech) in linguistics, Joles saw an SF to exist only potentially (potentiäler); only when (re-)produced in oral or written form does it come into being actually (actualiter). When Joles therefore juxtaposed a "pure" SF (Reine EP) to an "actual(ized)" SF (Aktuelle, Vergegenwärtigte EF), he had in mind some kind of archetypes, referring to the modern genotext—phenotext concept (based on the well-known genotype-phenotype distinction in genetics), one might adequately use the terms genogenre versus phenogenre to refer to Joles's idea. Joles could thus interpret Ancient Greek victory odes (epimikia) as well as modern sport reports to be actualizations of the legend. For the joke, Joles considered relief or discharge as characteristic, when something bound is released or (dis)solved—what allows for a comparison with other concepts of humor. Depending on historical, geographical, and other factors, the pure SF joke may thus be actualized in concrete genres such as the pun; Joles here even referred to the swank, seeing its essence in the derision of individual characters or typical figures. Pure and actual(ized) SFs must not be confounded with what Joles called an analogical, related, or derived SF, that is, individually authored texts, literary creations, based on or even pretending to be SFs, as for example, literary tales, riddles, or even novels.

Modern concepts have elaborated the concept of SF and (re-)interpreted it from different theoretical perspectives, including structuralist approaches (e.g., those of Elii König-Marianda and Pierre Maranda, and of Grigorij L. Permiakov), concentrating on analogies between SFs and processes of elaboration or condensation, and semiotic attempts
considering SFs as prototypes of more elaborated (“higher”) literary genres and cultural prototypes. Historical-diachronical studies have demonstrated interrelations between SFs, for example, myth and riddle, originally being related by specific rituals. Conceptually integrating cultural processes of stepwise profanation (desecularization) and ridiculization, or the process of making something ridiculous, might well help explain the evolution of individual SFs (sacred riddle → everyday riddle → joke riddle → meta-linguistic riddle) and evolutionary transitions between SFs (e.g., myth → folktale → schwank → joke).

Peter Grzybek

See also Folklore; Jokes; Puns; Riddle; Schwank; Witz

Further Readings


**SITCOMS**

Sitcoms, or situational comedies, are one of the dominant forms of television and radio comedy in the world, with a history aligned with that of global broadcasting and a wealth of programming from multiple nations. This entry outlines the key characteristics of the majority of sitcoms, and examines how the humor within commonly functions.

**Defining Sitcoms**

The most fruitful way to think of sitcoms is television and radio genre. Genres are forms of expression that have characteristics in common but can be concretely defined to the point that what belongs in such a category is beyond question; deciding what is and is not a sitcom is always up for debate. That said, there are characteristics that can be seen to recur often across the genre and that are commonly understood to be indicative of sitcoms.

Sitcoms are a serial form of television and radio, made up of many episodes (sometimes into the hundreds) often across many years. This serial format is common in broadcasting, where the regular nature of the schedule encourages program making episodic. This distinguishes sitcoms from other media because, unlike the theater, film, or the novel, sitcoms are not predicated on getting to the end of the narrative. While individual episodes may have self-contained stories, the ongoing, episodic nature of sitcoms means that the overall end is repeatedly delayed, and, therefore, only the portion of the story is presented to the audience. This fact has caused many problems for the use of traditional comedy analysis when one studies sitcoms because most of those frameworks argue that comedy can be defined by its happy ending. Analysis of sitcoms has, therefore, had to develop new models that acknowledge the genre's episodic structure.

This episodic structure accounts for the kinds of settings that recur in sitcoms, as a program needs to have a setup that can facilitate multiple characters and many episodes. Many sitcoms are set in the home, where the main characters are a family and the comedy centers on familial relationships and misunderstandings. Similarly, sitcoms are often set in workplaces, where multiple characters repeatedly interact in a restricted setting. The idea of place is key to sitcoms, and it is common for them to have very few sets. Location shooting has traditionally been rare in sitcoms; sitcoms are usually considered a studio-bound genre.

Most sitcoms are 30 minutes long in broadcast time and, in commercial broadcasting systems, must include narrative breaks in order to accommodate advertising. For many decades, the dominant way in which sitcoms were filmed was in front of a live studio audience, whose laughter was recorded and broadcast...