

# Laughter and Humour in Latin Literature



# Laughter and Humour in Latin Literature:

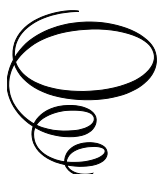
*(Not) Laugh Out Loud*

Edited by

Gabriel Evangelou

and George C. Paraskeviotis

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Laughter and Humour in Latin Literature: (Not) Laugh Out Loud

Edited by Gabriel Evangelou and George C. Paraskeviotis

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## ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations for Greek and Latin literature used throughout this volume follow the conventions of the *LSJ*, *OLD* and *OCD* or are given in a more explicit form.

Modern reference works referred to by abbreviation only are the following:

- AP***                      *Anthologia Palatina*
- FGrHist***                Jacoby, F. (ed.) 1923-1958, *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*. Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung.
- LSJ***                        Liddell, H.G. and Scott, R. and Jones, H.S. (eds) 1996, *A Greek-English Lexicon, Oxford 1940, with revised supplement ed. by P.G.W. Clare*, 9th edition. Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press.
- OLD***                        Glare, P.G.W. (ed.) 1968-1982. *Oxford Latin Dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press.

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We would also like to express our sincere gratitude to Cambridge Scholars Publishing for their commitment to this project and for providing the platform that brought it to completion. Their support and professional guidance throughout the process were invaluable.

Finally, we are especially thankful to our Commissioning Editor, Adam Rummens, for his patience, encouragement and trust, and to Amanda Millar and Sophie Edminson for their meticulous editorial and design work, which ensured the high quality of this book.

Gabriel Evangelou and George C. Paraskeviotis  
Corfu and Komotini, September 2025

## INTRODUCTION

# ROMAN LAUGHTER AND HUMOUR IN LATIN LITERATURE: CURRENT SCHOLARSHIP AND NEW HORIZONS

GABRIEL EVANGELOU  
AND GEORGE C. PARASKEVIOTIS

### **Rethinking Roman Laughter and Humour in Latin Literature**

This volume grew out of an open call for papers issued in 2019 that invited scholars to explore the many manifestations of laughter and humour in Latin literature, both within and beyond its traditional generic boundaries. Our aim was to bring together a broad range of voices, approaches and critical perspectives, from philology and literary theory to rhetoric, philosophy, linguistics and the cognitive sciences. While the initial call envisioned a diverse and interdisciplinary volume, the intellectual directions it ultimately took were shaped both by the contributions we received and by the wider challenges of the time. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic led to considerable delays, but it also provided space for more sustained reflection and dialogue among the contributors. What emerged is a collection that not only engages with familiar texts by authors such as Plautus, Terence and Martial but also sheds light on unexpected sources of humour in Lucretius, Tibullus, Seneca and beyond. Alongside newly commissioned chapters, we are especially pleased to include a reprinted essay by Vered Lev Kenaan, originally published in 2001, which offers a highly original reading of humour as a mode of concealment and revelation. Though overlooked in its time, it anticipates many of the concerns that animate this volume and serves as a fitting companion to the chapters that follow.

The phrase “laughing out loud,” now most often encountered in digital shorthand as “LOL,” once carried an unrestrained spontaneity, an audible, physical response to amusement. In recent decades, however, laughing out loud has come to signify something more fraught, even ambivalent. As Guignery has argued, laughter today may not only comfort or connect but also divide, deflect or disarm.<sup>1</sup> It can be unifying or anesthetising, rebellious or compliant, humanising or hollow. Jonathan Coe has poignantly asked whether “the age of the joke” is drawing to a close, as humour becomes increasingly coded, defensive and vulnerable to outrage.<sup>2</sup> In this shifting landscape, laughter is no longer easily reducible to catharsis, superiority or incongruity. It often straddles discomfort and release, critique and complicity. This volume takes its title not only as a reference to the joy and exuberance of Roman humour but also as an invitation to reflect on the cultural, emotional and political textures of laughter in Latin literature: to ask when and how the Romans laughed, what they found laughable and at what cost.

Laughter and humour are vital aspects of human nature and have been subjects of interest for both ancient and modern scholars.<sup>3</sup> In classical studies, scholars focus on laughter and humour, particularly the comic elements found in Greek and Latin literature. Emphasis has understandably been placed on Greek and, in the context of this volume, Roman Comedy, especially the works of Plautus and Terence. The humour in Plautine and Terentian plays has been extensively examined in various contexts: their language (including funny words, wordplay, double entendres, puns, obscenity, formulaic jokes, slapstick and banter),<sup>4</sup> their translation,<sup>5</sup> their relation to the *fabula Atellana* (“Atellan play”),<sup>6</sup> their stereotypical comic characters such as the *servus currens* (“running slave”) and the *miles gloriosus* (“braggart soldier”),<sup>7</sup> their audience,<sup>8</sup> their meta-theatrical

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<sup>1</sup> Guignery 2016.

<sup>2</sup> According to Coe 2015, “2015 might well go down in history as the year in which humanity lost its sense of humour and became more stupid as a result”.

<sup>3</sup> E.g. Spencer 1865, 194-209; Bergson 1900; Escarpit 1960; Giangrande 1972; Morreall 1983; Raskin 1985; Clarke 1991; Cameron 1993; Attardo 1994; Palmer 1994; Corbeill 1996; Bremmer-Roodenburg 1997; Ross 1998; Critchley 2002; Schulten 2002, 209-234; Billig 2005; Halliwell 2008 and Morreall 2009.

<sup>4</sup> Law 1978; Chiaro 1992; Duckworth 1994; Maltby 2000, 32-44; Albicker 2003; Cairns 2005; Fraenkel 2007 and Fontaine 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Gasti 2014, 15-26. See also Tromaras 2003, 47-58.

<sup>6</sup> Maltby 2014, 47-55.

<sup>7</sup> Rei 1998, 92-108. See also McCarthy 2000; Maltby 2000, 32-44 and Antonsen-Resch 2004.

<sup>8</sup> Beacham 1991. See also Moore 1998 and more recently Brown 2019, 654-671.

functions,<sup>9</sup> and their association with Donatus' commentary on Terence's humour.<sup>10</sup>

Nonetheless, laughter and humour are not just evident in comedy, since they can also be found in other literary genres. Lucretius' polemic against love (*DRN* 4.1058-1191) includes a humorous list that juxtaposes various Greek words with their Latin equivalents, a technique originating from Lucilius' *Satires*. In this context, humour is an unseemly or unbecoming feature that typically comes from satire or comedy, which Lucretius adapts to align with Epicurean philosophical doctrines.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, Vergil's *Eclogues* contain various humorous elements in terms of characters, subject and language (e.g. *Eclogue* 6).<sup>12</sup> In addition, *Georgics* 4, which combines Callimachean and anti-Callimachean elements (e.g. the tiny bees endowed with a heroic spirit and dedicated to elevated goals), contains a striking incongruity that can elicit laughter.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, Tibullus' 1.4 features the rustic and uneducated god Priapus, who incongruously assumes the role of a teacher (*praeceptor amoris*, "teacher of love") of the *ars amatoria* ("the art of love").<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, Horace's *Satire* 1.3 argues that character flaws attract irony and sarcasm, thus causing embarrassment and eliciting laughter.<sup>15</sup> Humour is also a significant and pervasive element throughout the Ovidian oeuvre, but its most prominent role and function appear in the *Metamorphoses*, where either Ovid as the narrator or internal narrators skilfully manipulate the humour.<sup>16</sup> Persius' *Satire* 1.1 and Juvenal's *Satire* 3 are also exemplary in reflecting the function of humour in Roman Satire, which is to criticise literary production and the corruption of public morals in the 1st and 2nd centuries CE.<sup>17</sup> Laughter and humour are certainly not absent from Petronius' *Satyricon*, where their role and function align with the literary work's goal to criticise the situations, individuals and beliefs of an unrestrained age.<sup>18</sup> What is more, humour permeates Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, particularly in the episode of Cupid and Psyche, where the narrative contains notable amusing elements that evoke laughter.<sup>19</sup> Martial

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<sup>9</sup> Knorr 2007, 167-174.

<sup>10</sup> Hilger 1970.

<sup>11</sup> Garani 2014, 77-84. See also Dudley 1965, 115-130.

<sup>12</sup> Paraskeviotis 2014, 279-293 and Paraskeviotis 2021, 229-242.

<sup>13</sup> Paschalis 2014, 85-90. See also Harrison 2007, 156-160.

<sup>14</sup> Papakosta 2014, 112-118. See also Littlewood 1983, 2128-2158.

<sup>15</sup> Vartzioti 2014, 100-111. See also Connor 1987 and Plaza 2006.

<sup>16</sup> Doblhofer 1960, 223-231; Albrecht 1982, 405-437; Arnaud 1968; Frécaut 1972; Galinsky 1975, 158-209; Paschalis 1984, 51-66 and Kirby 1989, 233-251.

<sup>17</sup> Plaza 2006.

<sup>18</sup> Smith 1975 and Sullivan 1981.

<sup>19</sup> Walsh 1970.

employs comic epigrams whose humour is primarily based on logical techniques inherent to witticisms, especially via *mimesis*, caricature and *aprosdoketon* (“unexpected”), which are recurring themes in the corpus.<sup>20</sup> Finally, the *Corpus Priapeorum*, a literary collection concerned with Roman sexual humour, contains various humorous examples (the sexual humour that runs through this collection is often used to express violent sexual and aggressive impulses).<sup>21</sup>

This brief—though by no means exhaustive—survey of laughter and humour, particularly the comic elements found in Latin literature from Plautus to the *Corpus Priapeorum*, demonstrates the Romans’ rich and diverse comic sensibilities. Their humour encompassed a wide spectrum, from light-hearted and playful to ironic, self-deprecating, caustic, sarcastic, and overtly sexual or obscene. It also underscores the fact that scholars often explore laughter and humour within Latin texts and cultural contexts. However, classical scholarship still lacks a cohesive, up-to-date and comprehensive volume devoted exclusively to the study of laughter and humour in Latin literature. This volume thus marks a significant contribution to classical studies by shedding light on the central role these comic elements play in Roman literary tradition and by deepening our understanding of their function within ancient Roman culture.

Nevertheless, this volume does not aim to offer a systematic or exhaustive theory of humour, nor does it seek to reduce the diverse range of comic expressions in Latin literature to a single interpretive model. Rather, it presents a rich and multifaceted exploration of laughter and humour as manifested across a broad spectrum of Latin texts, spanning various genres, periods and critical perspectives. To support this approach, the volume engages with three of the most widely recognised modern theories of humour—Superiority Theory, Relief/Release Theory and Incongruity Theory.<sup>22</sup> While these frameworks are modern in origin, their underlying principles can often be discerned in ancient sources, suggesting that Roman literary culture anticipated many of the questions these theories later sought to systematise.

Of the humour theories explicitly articulated in antiquity, all can be broadly classified under the Superiority Theory, which asserts that laughter arises from a sense of dominance over someone or something perceived as

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<sup>20</sup> Malnati 1985. On *aprosdoketon* in Martial, see esp. Sullivan 1990, 161-162; Wills 2008, 70; Vallat, 2020, 165 and Evangelou, 2022, 356 with n. 25.

<sup>21</sup> Richlin 1992 and Michalopoulos 2014, 142-149.

<sup>22</sup> For in-depth discussions of humour theories and their uses in Greek and Latin texts, see Raskin 1985, 30-41; Attardo 1994, 47-50; Morreall 2009, 4-23; Serafim 2021, 87-91; Paraskeviotis 2021, 229-232 and 238-240 with further bibliography.

inferior.<sup>23</sup> Plato is among the earliest thinkers to articulate this view, arguing that the laughable is a form of vice and that ignorance—especially when it goes unrecognised—is a source of malice, since we often laugh at the faults or shortcomings of others (*Phlb.* 49e-50a). He places particular emphasis on the ambivalent nature of humour, suggesting that the pleasure derived from laughter is inseparable from the pain caused by its malicious underpinnings. Furthermore, Plato links the ridiculous to the hateful, asserting that mild self-ignorance provokes laughter, while more severe forms elicit contempt or hostility. Consequently, he maintains that the guardians of the ideal state should avoid laughter, given its potential to incite disruptive emotions, and he advocates for the censorship of literature in which respectable characters are depicted as laughing (*Rep.* 388e).

On the other hand, Aristotle explains in a uniquely different way that the ridiculous is something ugly, which, however, does not cause pain (*Poet.* 1449a). Moreover, he argues that humour should be carried by a well-bred and educated man, suggesting that excessive humour is a feature of vulgar buffoons (*Eth. Nic.* 4.8), an observation that later had considerable influence on the Roman rhetorical tradition (Cic. *De Orat.* 2.235-290, *Orat.* 26.87-89; Quint. *Inst.* 6.3).

Cicero strongly believes that the ridiculous is something inferior that should not receive either great hate or great sympathy (*De Orat.* 2.238) and should be criticised in no inferior manner (*De Orat.* 2.236). However, the *De Oratore* is not a systematic theoretical study on humour; it is a practical guide concerned with the way in which the orator should use humour, thus explaining his choice not to deploy laughter in speeches (*De Orat.* 2.235). Nevertheless, Cicero refers to the kind of humour that is more appropriate for a gentleman and argues that illiberal humour, too, may cause laughter, although it is entirely inappropriate for the orator (*De Orat.* 2.236-237, *Off.* 1.104).

Quintilian similarly describes laughter as a cruel punishment for eccentric behaviour, arguing that what is said or done foolishly, angrily or fearfully is the object of laughter and therefore its origin is doubtful, since laughter is not far from mockery (*Inst.* 6.3.7). Moreover, he classifies jokes as joyful, bitter, malicious or mild (*Inst.* 6.3.27), thereby suggesting a contrast between a hurtful and a harmless speaker (*De Orat.* 2.254). However, he also observes that the most careful orator will avoid the

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<sup>23</sup> Humour originates from an act of aggression that stirs ill-natured laughter at the wrongdoings of other individuals considered morally inferior and thus bestows a sense of superiority. See Hobbes 1994, 43, who said that humour arises from a “sudden glory” felt when we recognise our supremacy over others.

ridiculous, especially when the ridiculous lays emphasis on a serious issue or a subject that demands extreme compassion (*De Orat.* 2.258-259).

The Release/Relief Theory was first introduced by Spencer and later developed more fully by Freud,<sup>24</sup> who was significantly influenced by Spencer's ideas. At its core, the theory posits that the experience of the ridiculous allows for the release of repressed or accumulated psychic energy, which is discharged through laughter. Beyond its psychological foundations, the Release/Relief Theory has also found extensive application in Freudian literary criticism. Despite its modern articulation, traces of this conception of humour can be identified in ancient literary sources, suggesting that similar insights into the tension-releasing function of laughter were already present in Roman thought.

Plato's most relevant anticipation of the Release/Relief Theory appears in the *Philebus*, where he asserts that pleasure cannot be properly understood apart from pain, claiming that pleasure arises when pain is removed (*Phlb.* 32a-b). In this sense, Plato prefigures the theory by emphasising how the resolution of emotional or psychological tension generates pleasure.<sup>25</sup> Although the Release/Relief Theory is modern in formulation, such ancient insights reflect a similar understanding of laughter's function.

Further evidence may be found in attempts to reconstruct Aristotle's lost *Poetics* 2—believed to have addressed comedy—which survives only in fragments.<sup>26</sup> According to Cooper, Aristotle's approach likely emphasised the physiological and psychological effects of humour, implying that comedy, like tragedy, produces catharsis.<sup>27</sup> Aristotle's suggestion that audiences undergo an emotional transformation when watching tragedy also supports the notion that he considered the emotional dimensions of comedy. This view is reinforced by fragmentary passages suggesting that comedy is associated with a calm and relaxed emotional state.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, Aristotle argues that tragedy purges negative emotions through their dramatic representation, implying that both tragedy and comedy enable emotional release by replacing distress with pleasurable or balanced affective states (*Rhet.* 2.3.12-13).<sup>29</sup>

Quintilian offers the clearest articulation of the relationship between humour and emotion. He contends that orators can effectively use jokes to

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<sup>24</sup> Spencer 1865, 194-209.

<sup>25</sup> Perks 2012, 125.

<sup>26</sup> Cooper 1924 and Janko 1984.

<sup>27</sup> Cooper 1924, 61 and 69

<sup>28</sup> Cooper 1924, 69.

<sup>29</sup> Cooper 1924, 69.

advance their arguments and foster a friendly, receptive atmosphere among the audience. Moreover, Quintilian observes that laughter dispels negative emotions and revitalises the mind, especially when listeners become bored or fatigued during lengthy court cases (*Inst.* 6.3.1). By emphasising humour's capacity to alleviate negative feelings, he underscores its power as a persuasive and psychologically restorative tool (*Inst.* 6.3.9).

The Incongruity Theory—traces of which are readily identifiable in Greek and Roman literature—posits that humour arises from a clash or mismatch between two or more elements of an object, event, idea, or social expectation. In Plato's *Republic*, the dialogue between Socrates and Glaucon on gender equality associates laughter with incongruity, suggesting that people laugh at what is novel or inconsistent with their established beliefs, even in contexts typically hostile to intellectual discourse (*Rep.* 5.452b). Similarly, Aristotle notes that a speaker provokes laughter by disrupting the audience's expectations with an unexpected statement whose truth or validity is then acknowledged (*Rhet.* 3.11.6).

Moreover, Cicero argues that one of the most common forms of humour arises when a speaker's words subvert the audience's expectations (*De Orat.* 2.255). He introduces the term *dissimulatio* ("dissimulation") to describe the rhetorical practice of saying something contrary to one's true thoughts—when a speaker maintains a tone of serious jest throughout a speech, the content may, in fact, differ from the literal meaning of the words (*De Orat.* 2.269). Quintilian builds upon this concept, distinguishing more precisely between *dissimulatio* (see Lev Kenaan's chapter), understood as a feigned misunderstanding of another's intention, and *simulatio* ("simulation"), which refers to pretending to hold an opinion one does not actually possess (*Inst.* 6.3.85). For Quintilian, irony constitutes a form of allegory in which the intended meaning is diametrically opposed to the literal expression (*Inst.* 8.6.54). He further notes that irony is especially effective when delivered with a serious tone, since this contrast enhances the comic impact (*Inst.* 6.3.68).

Taken together, these observations provide compelling evidence that, although the Superiority, Relief/Release and Incongruity Theories are modern theoretical constructs, their core principles can clearly be traced in ancient texts. Many Roman authors—in both their literary works and rhetorical treatises—demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of humour that anticipates these later theoretical developments.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> For the ancient roots of the three humour theories, see Perks 2012, 119-132.

## **Laughter and Humour in Latin Literature: New Directions**

This volume, comprising thirteen chapters in addition to the introduction, does not aim to provide a systematic or exhaustive definition of ancient humour or its features. Instead, it seeks to advance the growing scholarly appreciation of laughter and humour across a wide array of texts and contexts in Latin literature. Encompassing diverse genres—including didactic epic, pastoral, epistolography, mime, comedy, satire, comic dialogue, epigram and philosophical discourse—the chapters explore laughter, smiles, banter, jokes, mime-jokes, comic misunderstandings, laughingstocks, satirical targets, humorous characterisations and the reception of humour. This breadth of material opens new perspectives on the role of humour within Roman literary culture and points towards fruitful avenues for future research.

Beyond its thematic scope, the volume adopts an interdisciplinary approach, drawing on theoretical frameworks from outside classical studies. These include modern humour theories—Superiority, Relief/Release and Incongruity—as well as several influential linguistic and pragmatic models that have shaped contemporary understandings of humour. Many of these are particularly relevant to the study of Roman literary Comedy and Satire. Raskin's Script-Based Semantic Theory of Humour suggests that humour arises when a text activates two incompatible semantic scripts—such as real/unreal or normal/abnormal—producing a comic effect through their opposition. Building on this, Attardo's General Theory of Verbal Humour introduces six interrelated “knowledge resources”—script opposition, logical mechanism, situation, target, narrative strategy and language—offering a more nuanced framework for analysing humour. Common Ground Theory, as articulated by Clark (see Iurescia's chapter), emphasises the importance of shared assumptions between speaker and audience, showing how humour often relies on—or subverts—this mutual understanding. The Benign Violation Theory posits that humour occurs when a social or moral norm is violated in a way that is simultaneously perceived as non-threatening. From a discourse-analytic perspective, Conversation Analysis, outlined by Sidnell (see Berger's chapter), treats humour as an interactional achievement that emerges through timing, turn-taking and collaborative construction. More recently, Attardo has incorporated sociopragmatic and multimodal approaches, exploring humour's role in social bonding, identity negotiation and its expression through both verbal

and non-verbal cues.<sup>31</sup> This interdisciplinary perspective is evident throughout the volume's exploration of language, performance and communication, all of which shape how humour is generated and perceived. By situating Latin humour within broader theoretical discourses, the volume invites dialogue with related fields such as communication studies, psychology, sociology and cognitive science, encouraging reflection on how ancient techniques of laughter both anticipate and differ from those in other cultures.

The volume is organised into five thematic sections, each highlighting a distinct dimension of humour across a range of genres and interpretive frameworks. While avoiding rigid thematic uniformity, the chapters share a common concern with the mechanisms, functions and cultural significance of humour in Roman literature. This structure balances genre-specific studies—on epic, comedy, satire and epistolography—with broader conceptual approaches related to poetics, rhetoric, philosophical discourse and reception. Grouping contributions under flexible rubrics enhances accessibility and showcases the diversity of comic expression in Latin texts.

Part I, “The Poetics of Laughter: Beauty, Flattery and Philosophy in Roman Literature,” is made up of three chapters that examine how laughter engages with themes such as praise, aesthetics and philosophical thought. In Chapter 1, “On the Nature of Laughter in Lucretius’ *De Rerum Natura*”, Caleb M.X. Dance explores how Lucretius integrates laughter into his didactic Epicureanism. Far from polemical, laughter in *De Rerum Natura* is aligned with friendly, instructive contexts and portrayed as a natural element, like air or water, emphasising its role in a harmonious Epicurean worldview.

Chapter 2, “Laughing/Smiling Human Characters in Calpurnius Siculus” by George C. Paraskeviotis, analyses the function of laughter in *Eclogues* 4 and 6. Here, laughter often arises from flattery or physical attraction, especially in relation to the emperor. Through careful lexical play and metapoetic gestures, Calpurnius transforms laughter into a poetological tool, aligning his work with imperial favour and the broader tradition of pastoral revival.

In Chapter 3, “Banter in the Letter Exchange between Fronto and Marcus Aurelius”, Peter Barrios Lech examines the use of humour in their epistolary exchanges. Marcus Aurelius displays more frequent and sophisticated humour, reflecting his social superiority, while Fronto's cautious tone signals his subordinate position. The chapter reveals how

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<sup>31</sup> For linguistic theories, including the Common Ground Theory, see Raskin 1985; Attardo 1994; Clark 1996; McGraw and Warren 2010, 1141-1149; Sidnell 2010 and Attardo 2017 with further bibliography.

humour negotiates power dynamics and personal bonds within elite Roman correspondence.

Part II, “Jokes and Inside Jokes”, comprises three chapters examining the mechanisms and cultural settings of jokes in Latin literature. Chapter 4, “Self-Repair Jokes in Plautus” by Łukasz Berger, uses Conversation Analysis to explore a dialogic joke pattern involving formulation, clarification and punchline. The chapter highlights how Plautus adapts this routine to the rhythmic constraints of comedic verse, enhancing its comic timing and effect.

In Chapter 5, “Misunderstandings in Roman Comedy”, Federica Iurescia applies Common Ground Theory to Roman comic misunderstandings. By analysing how breakdowns in shared knowledge function in Roman Comedy and contrasting them with tragic misunderstandings, she contributes to both cognitive linguistics and the study of Roman theatre. Her approach breaks new ground by linking cognitive frameworks to comic performance.

Chapter 6, “Missing Romans, Broken Promises and Laughing Greeks in Lucian’s *Macrobioi*” by Nicholas Wilshere, argues that this ostensibly dry list of long-lived men subtly mocks Roman readers through narrative sleights and unmet metatextual promises. The text’s incongruities—such as the absence of promised Roman figures—evoke Lucian’s trademark satire, parody and play with reader expectations.

Part III, “Insults and Comebacks”, features three chapters exploring sharper, often aggressive modes of humour. In Chapter 7, “Making Fun in Roman Comedy”, Hans Bork discusses how Plautus transforms themes such as slavery or violence into comedic material. Insults are not simply offensive but serve as dramatic tools whose performance demands precise timing and delivery. Bork argues that insult scenes reflect genre expectations, not sociological realities, helping audiences laugh rather than recoil.

In Chapter 8, “No Joke: The Laughingstock in Roman Comedy”, Ruth Caston interrogates the term *ludibrium* (“laughingstock”) and the social dynamics of mockery in plays by Plautus and Terence. While invoking Superiority Theory, Caston also considers how ridicule can be reciprocal, revealing vulnerability in both the mocked and the mocker. These dynamics open the possibility of empathy and reconciliation within a comic framework.

Chapter 9, “Going for the Jocular: Elicitation of *Fastidium* in Martial” by Gabriel Evangelou, focuses on Martial’s epigrams, where humour derives from disgust and social superiority. The use of *fastidium* (“disgust”) allows readers to feel morally and socially elevated, aligning their laughter

with Roman norms. Martial's humour thus combines entertainment with moral commentary and social reinforcement.

Part IV, "From Stage to Society: Humour's Reception in Everyday Life and Literature", is comprised of three chapters examining how comedic elements transition from theatrical performance to broader cultural contexts. In Chapter 10, "Truth and Appearance in Roman Comedy: Plautus' *Miles Gloriosus*", Vered Lev Kenaan explores how Plautus subverts ideals of sincerity and authenticity. The comic critique of the *uir honestus* ("honourable man") reveals the performative nature of Roman moral values and invites deeper reflection on identity and social norms.

Chapter 11, "The *fatuus* in Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis* as a Comic Character and a Moralising Vehicle" by Paulo Ferreira, reads Claudius through the lens of comic types, particularly the *fatuus* ("foolish") and *miles gloriosus* ("braggard soldier"). Drawing on a variety of traditions, this chapter shows how Seneca uses comedy to moralise, presenting Claudius as both a satirical figure and a mirror of societal vice.

In Chapter 12, "*Humanus est deridere uitam quam deplorare*: Seneca on Comedy", Christopher Trinacty analyses Seneca's engagement with comic tradition, especially New Comedy. Through intertextual references to Plautus, Terence and Menander, Seneca integrates comic devices into his philosophical and rhetorical strategies, enriching his texts with humour and irony while affirming his literary sophistication.

Finally, Part V, "Human Minds in Animal Bodies: Incongruity and Humour in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*", turns explicitly to conceptual questions. In Chapter 13, Maria Leventi examines incongruity in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* through the lens of humans transformed into self-aware animals. These figures think as humans while behaving like animals, creating a humorous tension between cognition and action. Their implausible focalisation further contrasts with the poem's realistic narration, generating narrative incongruity. Rather than resolving these tensions, readers are encouraged to embrace them, in line with Schopenhauer's theory of humour. This sustained incongruity ultimately gestures towards a fragmented yet suggestive understanding of the human condition.

While the thematic organisation of the volume provides a framework for navigating the material, the chapters themselves often transcend these boundaries. Some essays pursue more conventional literary or rhetorical analyses; others, such as Lev Kenaan's philosophical meditation on *(dis)simulatio* or Leventi's exploration of comic hybridity in Ovid, venture into less-travelled theoretical terrain. Taken together, they reflect the volume's commitment to intellectual openness and methodological diversity. We are deeply grateful to all the contributors for their thought-

provoking work, as well as for the patience, generosity and collegial spirit they showed throughout the editorial process. Our thanks also go to the many scholars and readers whose advice, support and good humour appropriately helped bring this project to life.

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