

# Translating “English Humour” into modern English: An 18th-century perspective

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HOP 2017 - TRANSLATING AND ADAPTING  
HUMOURS OF THE PAST: FROM PRACTICE TO THEORY

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# AIMS

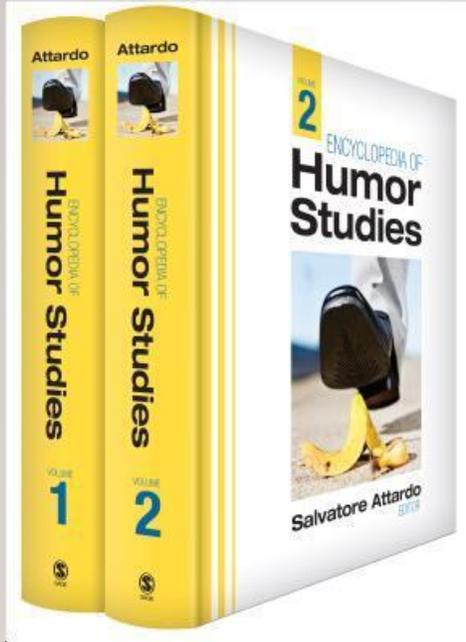
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- How can we improve our understanding of humour(s) of the past, including humour terms/concepts from the past?
- How can this type of understanding be applied to to the study of humour more broadly:
  - across linguistic and cultural boundaries?
  - across disciplinary boundaries (inside/outside field of humour studies)?
- How do we negotiate between broad/generic and culture-bound/historicised versions of terms/concepts like “humour”?
  - [New Historicist approaches (e.g. Greenblatt 1980, 1988; Pfister 2002; Halsall 2002)]
  - [Reception theories (e.g. Iser 1989)]
  - Translation/“translation”, foreignizing vs. domesticating (cf. Venuti 1995)

# THE (BROADER) PROBLEM

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- Humo[u]r studies as a maturing/mature field:
  - Established and growing body of academic literature, research communities
  - Recent publications as flagships for the field, e.g. *Primer of Humor Research* (2008), *Sage Encyclopedia of Humor Studies* (2014); book series (Mouton, Benjamins...), thematic and/or chronological collections on comedy/humour topics
- But (beyond “defining humour”) exchange among scholars can be problematic:
  - (Increasingly recognised?) lack of standardised terminology between fields
  - Difficulty negotiating between languages, and between scholarly traditions
  - General versus specific usage: does our broad use of “humo[u]r” erase potentially valuable cultural and historical specificities?
- Need to find a way to bring the past to bear on the present!



“In fact, there are so many terms, synonyms, partial synonyms, and overlapping definitions of humor and humor-related subjects [...] that a common understanding has been reached in the field of using the word *humor* as an umbrella term to cover all the synonyms. The word itself comes from the medieval theory of humors [...] but that is irrelevant in the technical sense just discussed.”

Attardo, introduction to  
*Sage Encyclopedia of Humor Studies* (2014)

“What in my view the encyclopedia lacks is a glossary of major terms giving pithy definitions, but since neither Raskin nor Attardo have so far attempted this, maybe it has not been feasible.”

Chlopicki, review of *Sage Encyclopedia of Humor Studies* (2015)

# WHY 18TH-CENTURY HUMOUR?

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- Gradual drift in usage of “Humour” in English, from Elizabethan times:
  - Humoral imbalance > Character trait/Mood > Voluntary eccentricity > Stimulus for laughter
- Gradual development of association with laughter/ridicule and wit
- Influence of (a “domesticated” vision of?) select 18<sup>th</sup>-century thinkers over more recent theories of humour, e.g.:
  - Shaftesbury, *Sensus Communis*: read as response to Hobbes’s “superiority” theory, and thus (in a domesticating reading) as precursor of modern “incongruity” and “relief” theories
  - Hutcheson, *Reflections upon Laughter*: “the bringing together of images which have contrary additional ideas” read as precursor of modern “incongruity” theories
  - But need to remember (cf. Billig 2005) that it’s anachronistic to talk about “humour theory” in the modern sense, and that aggressive/cruel laughter (cf. Dickie 2011) is alive and well.
  - In what sense are we using the term “humour” here?

# SO WHAT IS “ENGLISH HUMOUR”?

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- Evolution (and domestication?) of “humour” in English has tended to erase conceptual and historical specificities...
- “English humour” easier to categorise in French:
  - Voltaire, 1761 « *ces saillies qui échappent à un homme sans qu’il s’en doute* » : older usage, but highlights debate over perceived « Englishness » of the term/concept (cf. Hölzle 2014, Minois 2000, Gifford 1980)
  - Mme de Staël, 1800 « *cette gaîté qui est une disposition du sang presque autant que de l’esprit ; elle tient à la nature du climat et aux moeurs nationales ; elle seroit tout-à-fait inimitable là où les mêmes causes ne développeroient pas. Quelques écrits de Fielding et de Swift, Peregrin Pickle, Roderick Random, mais sur-tout les ouvrages de Sterne, donnent l’idée complète du genre appelé *humour*. »*

# SO WHAT IS “ENGLISH HUMOUR”?

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- More recent tradition of *humour anglais* in French corresponding to “Shandean” definition, combining elements of reflexivity, generosity and eccentricity:
  - *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française; 1932-35: « Mot emprunté de l'anglais. Forme d'ironie à la fois plaisante et sérieuse, sentimentale et satirique, qui paraît appartenir particulièrement à l'esprit anglais. »*
  - Escarpit (1960): « *humour* » and « *self-consciousness* »
  - Desproges (1992): « *L'humour anglais souligne avec amertume et désespoir l'absurdité du monde. L'humour français rit de ma belle-mère. »*
  - Minois (2000): « *faut il réserver le mot et la chose, comme une appellation contrôlée, à l'Angleterre depuis le XVIIIe siècle? »*
- Growing recognition of problem among humour scholars working in English (cf. Beermann 2009, 2014), but relatively few attempts to historicise the concept (cf. Wickberg 1998).

# PROPOSED VOLUME ON *HUMOUR IN 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY LITERATURE AND CULTURE* (WITH R. PHIDDIAN)

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## Aims

- A readable account of 18<sup>th</sup> century forms and genres of humour, mainly in France and Britain, aimed at native and non-native speakers of English
- Explore history of term/concept in English
  - “Domesticating” vs. “foreignising” approaches
  - Emphasis on how the period has influenced modern usage and concepts
- Explore/interrogate categories discussed: contrasting examples, groups of texts
- Reconcile historical, literary/cultural approach with an interdisciplinary humour studies framework

# PROPOSED VOLUME ON *HUMOUR IN 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY LITERATURE AND CULTURE* (WITH R. PHIDDIAN)

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## PART 1: 18TH-CENTURY HUMOUR: HISTORY, THEORY AND DEVELOPMENT

1. Cultural and philosophical context
2. From “humours” to “humour”
3. Humour and Englishness
4. Humour and the Enlightenment

## PART 2 : SATIRE TO SENTIMENT? CASE STUDIES IN 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY HUMOUR.

5. Broadsides, pamphlets and the press
6. Satire and the Scriblerians
7. Philosophical tales: *Candide* and *Rasselas*
8. The rise of the novel
9. The rise of the anti-novel
10. Drama, performance, ballad opera
11. Graphic humour

12. Humour and taste, influences on the Romantic/realist traditions

# TOWARDS A TERMINOLOGY OF HUMOUR?

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**New project: set up a multilingual, multi/interdisciplinary and transhistorical terminology resource**

Need to determine:

- Aims and approach (primary/secondary corpus; analyse for relationships, particularities, inconsistencies)?
- Scope (disciplines, languages, periods: “Humour studies of the past”...)?
- Methodology (corpus building > terminology extraction > termbase building)?
- Interface and modes of interaction for authors/contributors and end users?
- Who might be interested!

# IS A MULTILINGUAL TERMBASE THE SOLUTION?

## Concept

> concept info

Index (language)

> index info

Term

> term info (definition/s)

> term info (usage)

> term info (discipline/s)

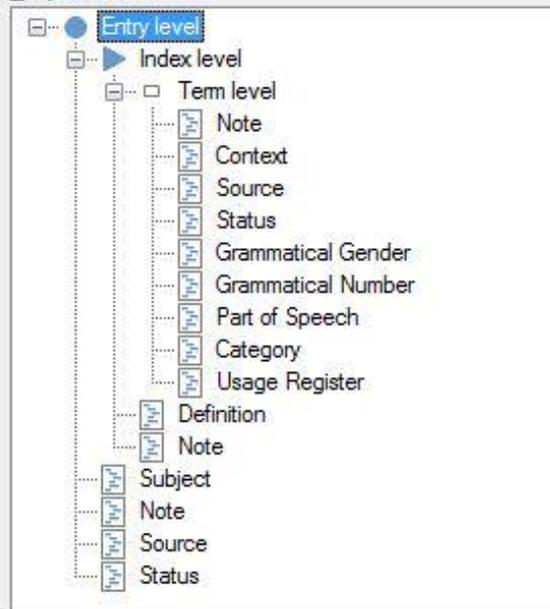
> **term info (period)**

> (etc)

## Entry Structure

Create an entry structure for your termbase entries by specifying the level at which descriptive fields are used. Specify field settings if required.

Entry structure:



Available descriptive fields:

Category  
Context  
Definition  
Discipline  
Etymology  
Grammatical Gender  
Grammatical Number  
Note  
Part of Speech  
Source  
Status  
Subject  
Usage Register

<< Add

Remove >>

Field settings

Mandatory

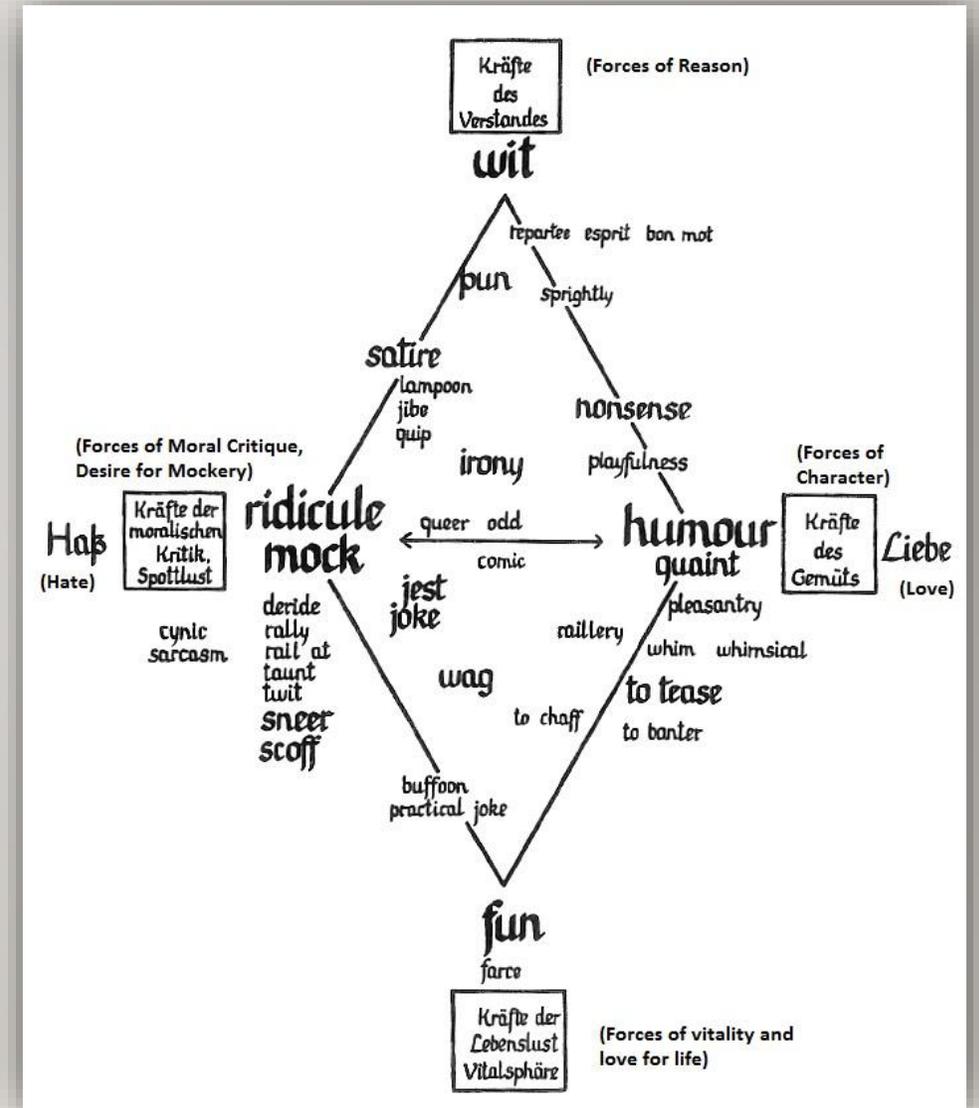
Multiple

Screenshot: SDL MultiTerm 2015

# HOW MUCH HUMOUR IS THERE IN *TRISTRAM SHANDY* ?

- HUMOUR WORD CHART CF. SCHMIDT-HIDDING (1963)
- BASIC FREQUENCY/CONCORDANCE ANALYSIS OF E-TEXT
- DIGITAL TEXTS AS A SPUR TO NEW ANALYSES OF HISTORICAL HUMOUR WORDS (CF. LAVIE 2014)
- WHERE TO DRAW THE BORDER BETWEEN “PRIMARY” AND “SECONDARY” SOURCES?

banter	1	joke	2	repartee	1
bon mot	1	mock (trial)	1	ridicul*	8
chaff	2	nonsens*	15	satir*	8
farc*	4	odd	14	smil*	35
fun	0	pleasant*	8	sneer	1
gay*	7	pun	3	tease	0
irony	1	quaint	3	whim*	11
jest	8	rail*/rally	3	wit*	41



## “HUMO[U]R” AND DERIVATIVES IN STERNE’S *TRISTRAM SHANDY*: A RANGE OF MEANINGS...

### Humo[u]r (49 occurrences)

44 of/his whole house might take their turn from the **humour**s and dispositions/which were then uppermost  
83 bones, marrow, brains, glands, genitals,/**humour**, and articulations;--is a Being of as much  
123 concerns you.//It is in pure compliance with this **humour** of theirs, and from a/backwardness in my nature  
464 less scruple in/bantering the extravagance of his **humour**,--instead of giving the true/cause,--he chose  
476 spirits.//At different times he would give fifty **humorous** and apposite reasons for/riding a meek-spirited  
646 cold phlegm and exact regularity of sense and **humour**s, you would/have looked for, in one so extracted  
694 to be enlivened throughout with some drollery or/**humour** of expression, it gave wings to Yorick's indiscretion  
698 in life, of scattering his wit and his/**humour**,--his gibes and his jests about him.--They were  
722 from an honesty of mind, and a mere jocundity of **humour**, they/would all of them be cross'd out in course  
1032 into the country, in but a pettish kind of a **humour**. The first twenty/or five-and-twenty miles he  
1053 a little by vexation,/he would give so many **humorous** and provoking descriptions,--and place/his  
1164 from the mass of corrupted matter and ulcerated **humour**s in/our constitution, which he hoped was not  
1487 things, has got so strongly into our habit and/**humour**,--and so wholly intent are we upon satisfying  
1642 knocking/the ashes out of his tobacco-pipe.//His **humour** was of that particular species, which does honour  
1747 Truth is my/sister.//This contrariety of **humour**s betwixt my father and my uncle, was the/source  
2020 And in this, Sir, I am/of so nice and singular a **humour**, that if I thought you was able to form/the  
2527 should persist to the very last in this obstinate/**humour** of hers, in trusting the life of my child, who  
2914 and in the little ebullitions of this subacid/**humour** towards others, but particularly towards my  
2934 beg thy/pardon;--forgive, I pray thee, this rash **humour** which my mother gave/me.--My dear, dear brother  
3078 //Trim's reason put his audience into good **humour**,--all but Dr. Slop, who/turning his head about  
4269 Nature been in one of/her nimble moods, and in **humour** for such a contest--and she and Dr. Slop/both  
4356 --They serve, continued my father,/to stir the **humour**s--but carry off none of their acrimony:--for  
4361 endeavour to proportion the vent given to these **humour**s, not only to the/degree of them stirring within  
4640 wherefore.//Great Apollo! if thou art in a giving **humour**--give me--I ask no more,/but one stroke of native  
4641 me--I ask no more,/but one stroke of native **humour**, with a single spark of thy own fire/along with  
4873 be wished for! and/the petulancy of my father's **humour**, in putting a stop to it as he did,/was a robbery  
5013

humour

en > fr (domain: Any domain, type of search: All)

Medical science [COM]

EN aqueous humour

FR humeur aqueuse

Medical science [COM]

EN aqueous humor

FR humeur aqueuse

Medical science [COM]

EN aqueous fluid

aqueous humor

FR humeur aqueuse

Medical science [COM]

EN vitreous humour

FR corps vitré

Medical science [COM]

EN vitreous humor

FR humeur vitrée

Medical science [COM]

EN cardinal humours

FR humeurs cardinales

Other languages: [DA](#) [DE](#) [EL](#) [ES](#) [ET](#) [GA](#) [IT](#) [LT](#) [LV](#) [MT](#) [NL](#) [PL](#) [PT](#) [RO](#) [SL](#) [All](#)

[Feedback](#)

**Domain**

Medical science

**en**

**Definition**

the clear, watery fluid which fills the anterior and posterior chambers of the eye

*Definition Ref.*

Max Schapero, David Cline, Henry W. Hofstetter. Dictionary of Visual Science. Chilton Book Company, 1968

**Term**

**aqueous humour**

*Reliability*

3 (Reliable)

*Term Ref.*

Max Schapero, David Cline, Henry W. Hofstetter. Dictionary of Visual Science. Chilton Book Company, 1968

*Date*

24/09/2003

**fr**

**Definition**

liquide transparent contenu dans les chambres de l'oeil, de part et d'autre de l'iris

*Definition Ref.*

Reallex Med

**Term**

**humeur aqueuse**

*Reliability*

3 (Reliable)

*Term Ref.*

Reallex Med;DF: Bien-être et Santé, octobre 1997

*Date*

24/09/2003



## FICHE TERMINOLOGIQUE



TAILLE DU TEXTE

[« Retour aux résultats de la recherche](#)  
[« Retour à la page d'accueil](#)

humour

CHERCHER



Préférences de recherche 



### humour



[Anglais \[EN\]](#)



**Domaine** publicité

**Auteur** Dubuc, Robert, 1991

#### Définition

Biais comique introduit dans une annonce.

#### Terme

humour n. m.

# A MODEST (GRANT APPLICATION) PROPOSAL:

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One suggestion: apply for EU COST Action ([www.cost.eu](http://www.cost.eu)) funding for research networking

- 4 year networking funding, as prelude to research funding proper
- Minimum participation of 7 COST network states, other international partners possible
- **A good opportunity to develop a multilingual, interdisciplinary and tranhistorcial framework for a future resource?**
- **Next call deadline: 7 September 2017 (!)**
- **Interested researchers please contact [will.noonan@u-bourgogne.fr](mailto:will.noonan@u-bourgogne.fr)**