

***“LAUGHING MATTERS?: HUMOR IN AMERICAN
THEATRE AND DRAMA”***

5th INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON AMERICAN THEATRE AND DRAMA

Málaga, Spain. May 25-27, 2016

Humor in its various forms, as well as the effort to contain it, has been present from the very first traces of a theatrical tradition in America, which opens with an attempt to perform a farce being promptly suppressed by the authorities. Entertainment has always been a key function of American theatre, and humor has been among the most recurrent mechanisms when it came to getting an audience to laugh heartily and send it home in a hopeful, light mood, sure of its values and world-view, and conveniently “humored.” Music, vaudeville routines, slapstick, and countless other manifestations of so-called lowbrow theatrical culture (whether mistakenly or not) were often thought to pose no threat whatsoever to the status quo and the deep-seated convictions of audiences. However, the repeated struggle to repress and control even supposedly innocent forms of entertainment suggests that, in spite of appearances, humor and comedy have been seen as no laughing matters, and have been used in potentially subversive ways to mirror, satirize and criticize the manners and foibles of society in the U.S.

The 5th International Conference on American Theatre and Drama, a collaborative venture between three Spanish universities (Málaga, Cádiz, Seville) and the ATDS, is the continuation of a series of conferences which have brought together hundreds of American drama and theatre scholars from all over the world, and will be held in Málaga in 2016.

For this event we would like to build on the possibilities opened up by the title to invite participants to look at the uses, purposes, kinds, and effects of humor and laughter as deployed by American playwrights over the years, both in entertaining and pleasing audiences, and in proving that laughing –at what or whom, when, where, how, and for what reason-- certainly matters.

The Conference can thus address, among many other topics, the origins and development of an ample variety of forms of entertainment and light comedy in the USA, examining such issues as the vaudeville, the musical, the romantic comedy, or the convention of the happy ending, as well as the transformation of such entertainment into a characteristic Broadway product and its later adaptations by Hollywood and the mass media. Conversely, it can consider why the playwrights often thought of as contributing most to the American theatrical tradition are those who have refused to treat many issues as simply “laughing matters,” and have not given audiences what they expected or demanded, either because they have not incorporated humor, or because they incorporated it in unexpected, challenging, unsettling ways. We are also interested in the work of the dramatists or theater professionals who have consistently refused to simply entertain America, and in why they have chosen to do so. The dialectic springing from the aims of authors keen on unsettling certain sensibilities and the eventual resistance of audiences can similarly yield fascinating insights sure to enrich the conference.

Presentations are invited on topics including, but not limited to, the following areas:

-Particular forms and genres: conventions, uses, transformations, adaptations. This might include farce, slapstick, romantic comedy, the musical, physical comedy, stand-up comedians...

-The functions of humor: Entertainment, comic relief, satire, sarcasm, irony...

-Humor as a therapeutic tool.

-Humor and the criticism of American culture, society and politics.

-Pleasing/confronting American audiences.

-The limits of humor: censorship, political correctness, audience reactions

- Audience reception: how does humor work from a cognitive perspective?

- Humor and the critics: revisiting how critics have tended to prioritize tragedy over comedy

- Transatlantic laughter: are there particular forms of American humor that simply do not work when staged abroad?

-Translating humor: linguistic, social and/or cultural elements

-Adapting laughter between genres: from dramatic text to film script

-The use of comedy as a feminist tool

-Humor and language: word play, signifyin', sarcasm, etc.

-Camp as a specific tradition: parody, performance, identity

-Humor and minorities: Is there a specific Jewish-American/African-American/Mexican-American/homosexual/lesbian... sense of humor?

To submit your proposal, please write a brief e-mail stating its title and including a 5-7 line resume, attach a 450 -word abstract, and send it to humor2016@uma.es by **September 30, 2015**. Proposals will be carefully considered, and feedback will be provided within 45 days.