

without attribution considerably tempers the study's utility for scholars interested in following Smith's lead. So too does her weak engagement with the historiographical context necessary to ground the book's analysis. Major works on the dissolution of the East German state, on the peculiarity of Berlin's scarred topography, or on West Germany's persistent culture of localism in the late twentieth century, for example, are missing from her notes. She thus leaves the reader uncertain where the book's precise intervention lies. This remove from the existing historiography also leads Smith to overstate her argument at important junctures. She claims, in one instance, that a series of grassroots urban development campaigns in the late 1990s "marked a departure from the socially engaged work of the 1980s, which was largely limited to artist circles" (219). Here, Smith ignores the contributions of that broad swath of activism since the 1970s subsumed under the banner of the "new social movements." The peace movement, the anti-nuclear movement, the environmental movement, the women's movement (including the Afro-German women's movement), and the queer movement, among others, each expressed similar social investments and engaged both similar publics and similar methods to the artists whose work Smith analyzes. Smith missed an important opportunity to contextualize those similarities and to assess the degree to which these artists simply participated in larger trends or, rather, played an instrumental role in creating the vernaculars, imaginaries, and conditions of possibility that structured the activism of the late twentieth century and, indeed, the new Germany that emerged from it.

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## Haunted Laughter: Representations of Adolf Hitler, the Third Reich, and the Holocaust in Comedic Film and Television

**By Jonathan C. Friedman. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2022. Pp. 233. Hardcover \$105.00. ISBN: 978-1793640154.**

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Jonathan C. Friedman's new book offers another way into the current conversation about Holocaust humor. Ferne Pearlstein's 2016 documentary film *The Last Laugh* ignited new interest within humor studies about the growth of Holocaust humor. Although comedic representations of Hitler and the Nazis have existed (as Friedman demonstrates) since the war, the twenty-first century has seen a rise in humor about the Holocaust itself, or its victims, in ways that were once considered taboo. Comedy such as the 2004 episode of *Curb Your Enthusiasm* called "The Survivor" or the 2010 final episode of *The Sarah Silverman Program* titled "Wowschwitz" (both of which Friedman discusses) signaled a change in the way comedians approached the question of whether it was still "too soon" regarding Holocaust humor. Friedman's book, therefore, stands alongside other recent works such as *Laughter After* (edited by David Slucki, Avinoam Patt, and Gabriel Finder [2020]) and *Is it Okay to Laugh About It?* (Liat Steir-Livny [2020]) in wading into the theoretical discussion surrounding the uptick in examples of Holocaust humor.

To some extent, that uptick and Friedman's apparent interest in it make his opening question seem out of step with the aims of the book. Friedman begins by stating that, "the

purpose of this book is to address the question: Is it ever appropriate to engage the Holocaust through the medium of comedy" (1). Luckily, however, that is not what the book ends up asking or doing. Friedman, like others before him, has established that engaging the Holocaust through the medium of comedy has happened, is happening, and will continue to happen. What his book does so well is offer a nearly encyclopedic collection of comedic films and television shows that have used the Holocaust, so asking the question of whether or not that material is appropriate seems to be at cross-purposes to the book itself. People *are* engaging with the Holocaust through comedy, and will continue to do so as long as the Holocaust is relevant. A "yes" or "no" to the question of appropriateness is neither very interesting nor very useful in the face of the huge quantity of material Friedman shows us already exists, so it is only to the good that Friedman himself largely abandons the stated aim of passing judgement on the appropriateness of the enterprise. He answers his own question when he argues that "comedy can serve as a way of engaging in a discourse about memory" and that comedy can be "therapy for despair." He calls it "a way to confront memory and work through trauma" as well as "a warning sign or commentary about contemporary society" (10) These are all excellent reasons for the existence of Holocaust humor and represent only a fraction of the reasons why such comedy exists. Thus Friedman establishes a motivation for his collecting this material into one volume.

The structure of the book is straightforward, to its own detriment at times. As mentioned, the book's strongest element and the thing that will serve other scholars the best is Friedman's dedication to collecting nearly every example of Holocaust humor. The extent of his material, however, makes it difficult to organize according to neat or discrete categories. Chapter 1 is "Famous Comedies from *The Great Dictator* to *Jojo Rabbit*," which is the right place to start as it grounds the volume in some of the most well-known material. Chapter 2, on the other hand, is "Comedy Films and TV Shows about Hitler," and by definition that chapter is going to cover a lot of the same ground as chapter 1 because *The Producers*, *Jojo Rabbit*, *The Great Dictator*, *Inglorious Basterds*, and most of the other "famous comedies" are also about Hitler. Chapter 2 is, therefore, really a chapter about television, and the distinction between the two chapters might have been clearer if the author had divided them based on format and not renown. This media conflict recurs throughout the book, as the focus seems to be solely on film and television (which is probably the most coherent approach), but the introduction also promises to cover performance art, which never materializes beyond a discussion of *Borat*. "Performance art" is a phrase that conjures a particular thing in the reader's mind, so a definition of the term might have been helpful here. The inclusion of performance art would have offered fascinating opportunities for discourse about other artistic disciplines, but in the end its exclusion probably made for a better volume, even if it is a disappointment to those who were interested in the topic.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 are thematic: "Contesting the Nazis and their Systems of Terror through Humor," "Memory, Trauma, and Comedy," and "Humor and Social Criticism." Chapter 4 has a particularly strong concept, as memory and trauma are excellent ways of thinking about Holocaust humor. The circular structure of the book remains a problem throughout, however, so where something like *Inglorious Basterds* would have been excellent in the conversation about revenge films, it is already covered in chapter 1, so it is not included here. Friedman set himself a very difficult task in trying to bring so much material together and then organize it in anything beyond a chronological fashion. That was always going to create problems with the porous boundaries between some of these categories, and while Friedman does well to make a structure and stick to it, the overall effect can be slightly dizzying for the reader.

Friedman covers such an extensive array of concepts and titles that there are bound to be some disciplines and fields in which his research is stronger than others. He does a very good job of situating his analysis in humor theory, including classics such as D. H. Monro and Henri Bergson, but also including Wikipedia entries, which do not offer the reader a stable citation from which to work. He is less well-grounded in fields like gender and sexuality

studies, and that results in some significant mistakes such a misgendering and misnaming both characters in the media he is discussing and the creators of such media. Smaller mistakes also detract from the volume's use as a trustworthy secondary source for researchers, such as misnaming The Three Stooges' "You Nazty Spy" throughout the volume, or incorrectly referring to alternative history as a new genre only two decades old. Many of these are issues that can perhaps be laid at the feet of the publisher for not engaging with robust-enough copyediting, but they all contribute to making what should be an exhaustive and peerless consolidation of titles into a source that has some value as a reference but cannot be confidently used by most researchers.

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