

The  
UNESCO

A window open on the world

# Courier

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the world  
of humour

or

**THE**  
**IMPORTANCE**  
**OF NOT**  
**BEING**  
**EARNEST**

APRIL 1976 29TH YEAR

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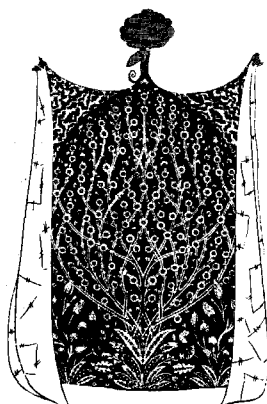
Deadpan man with a skin of clay (Ecuador)

**Cover**

This issue of the "Unesco Courier" is devoted to "World Humour — and the Importance of NOT Being Earnest". The intriguing figure on our cover, opening his patched robe to reveal a decor of startling magnificence, is one of history's great pranksters, Nasrudin Hodja, comic folk hero of the Muslim world since early medieval times. To the question very often posed: Is humour international? Nasrudin has supplied the answer. His anecdotes have girdled the earth with people holding their sides or rolling in the aisles all the way from China to Europe and from America to Africa and the Middle East.

Drawing by Richard Williams and Errol le Cain, from "The Plesantries of the Incredible Mulla Nasrudin" by Idries Shah © 1968 Mulla Nasrudin Enterprises Ltd., published by Jonathan Cape Ltd., London.

**Back cover:** photo Maltete © Rapho, Paris



# NASRUDIN HODJA THE MAN WHO RODE HIS ASS BACKWARDS

the legendary hero  
of Muslim humour  
whose wit and jocular wisdom  
have the world splitting its sides  
with laughter

by Ivan Sop

**F**EW comic folk heroes in world literature rival Nasrudin Hodja, the author of innumerable pranks and the subject of waggish stories which amuse and delight people from Morocco to the frontiers of China and from Siberia to the Arabian Peninsula. Stories by Nasrudin or about him are found in some forty languages.

For centuries the name of Nasrudin Hodja (Hodja is a term of respect, meaning teacher) has been associated with tales that are amusing, somewhat naive, ribald, and yet imbued with profound folk-wisdom. These stories also exemplify the use of wit and irony as weapons against brutal force and oppression.

But who was Nasrudin?

Some think he never existed and that he is part of the inexhaustible

**IVAN SOP**, Yugoslav writer and literary critic, is an authority on the humour of the international folk hero Nasrudin Hodja. He has written a doctoral thesis on this subject for the University of Belgrade and is the author of "The Metamorphoses of Nasrudin", a book published in 1973. He is currently working with the Belgrade Institute of Literature and Arts.

fund of popular legend. Others are convinced that he was a man who actually lived and was born in Turkey, but many countries claim to be his place of birth.

According to tradition Nasrudin was born about eight centuries ago in Turkey, in the little village of Harto near the township of Bivrihisar (to the west of Ankara). For over a century scholars have been trying to discover where he really came from. In Akcheir, another town in Turkey which claims him as a son, a festival is held periodically in his honour. This is where he is supposed to be buried and an inscription on the wall of his mausoleum suggests that he died some time before 1392. But there is no means of proving these assertions and theories.

According to legend, his tomb was surrounded by columns but was without any railings and merely had a massive door with a padlock and no key. This was said to be an example of the wisdom of Nasrudin who used to say that the doors were "closed for his friends and open for his enemies"

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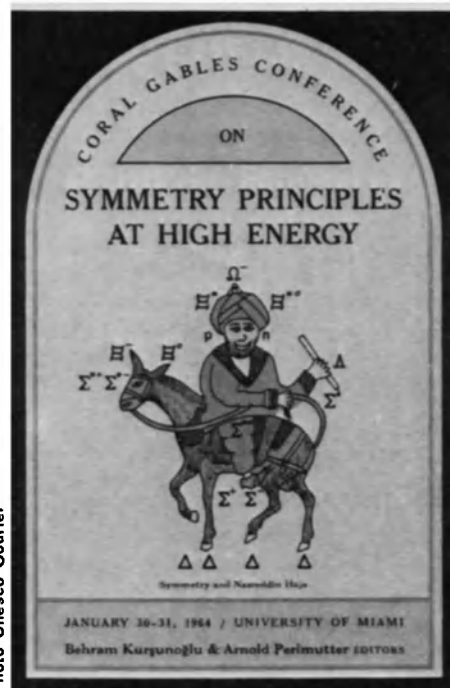


Photo Unesco Courier

## THE GLOBE-TROTTER

Nasrudin Hodja is often depicted sitting backwards astride his donkey. He explained to his students why he did this: "If I rode facing ahead", he said, "you would be behind me. If on the other hand you were to walk in front, you would turn your backs on me. I think therefore that to ride this way solves all these problems and besides it's far more polite!" In Turkey, Nasrudin has been represented in many ways: right, 18th-century miniature in the Topkapi Museum, Istanbul; below, cover of an illustrated book of 200 tales of Nasrudin by Alfred Mörer, published in French, Istanbul 1975. This picture has also been used as a postcard in Turkey. Nasrudin and his donkey have even crossed the Atlantic. Above, they figure on the cover of a collection of studies presented at a conference on high energy physics held at the University of Miami, U.S.A. (Symmetry Principles at High Energy, published by W.H. Freeman and Co., San Francisco and London, 1965.) Anecdotes and aphorisms of Nasrudin are scattered throughout the texts.



Photo Unesco Courier





### WHERE THERE'S LIGHT THERE'S HOPE

Someone saw Nasrudin searching for something on the ground. "What have you lost, Mulla?" he asked. "My key", said the Mulla. So they both went down on their knees and looked for it. After a time the other man asked: "Where exactly did you drop it?" "In my own house." "Then why are you looking here?" "There is more light here than inside my own house."

From "The Exploits of the Incomparable Mulla Nasrudin", by Idris Shah, illustrations by Richard Williams © 1966, Mulla Nasrudin Enterprises Ltd, published by Jonathan Cape Ltd, London

### A MAN OF HIS WORD

Nasrudin had some good news for the King, and after a great deal of difficulty managed to gain an audience —although by tradition every subject theoretically had the right of immediate access to the Court. The King was pleased with what he had been told. "Choose your own reward", he said. "Fifty lashes", said Nasrudin. Puzzled, the King ordered that Nasrudin be beaten. When twenty-five strokes had been administered, Nasrudin called: "Stop!" "Now", he said, "bring in my partner, and give him the other half of the reward. The chamberlain, Your Majesty, would not allow me to see you unless I would give him exactly half of anything that I got for my good news."

From "The Pleasantries of the Incredible Mulla Nasrudin", by Idris Shah, illustrations by Richard Williams and Errol le Cain © 1968, Mulla Nasrudin Enterprises Ltd., published by Jonathan Cape Ltd., London



### ART OF IMPARTIAL JUDGEMENT

When the Mulla was a judge in his village, a dishevelled figure ran into his court-room, demanding justice. "I have been ambushed and robbed", he cried, "just outside this village. Someone from here must have done it. I demand that you find the culprit. He took my robe, sword, even my boots." "Let me see", said the Mulla, "did he not take your undershirt, which I see you are still wearing?" "No he did not." "In that case, he was not from this village. Things are done thoroughly here. I cannot investigate your case."



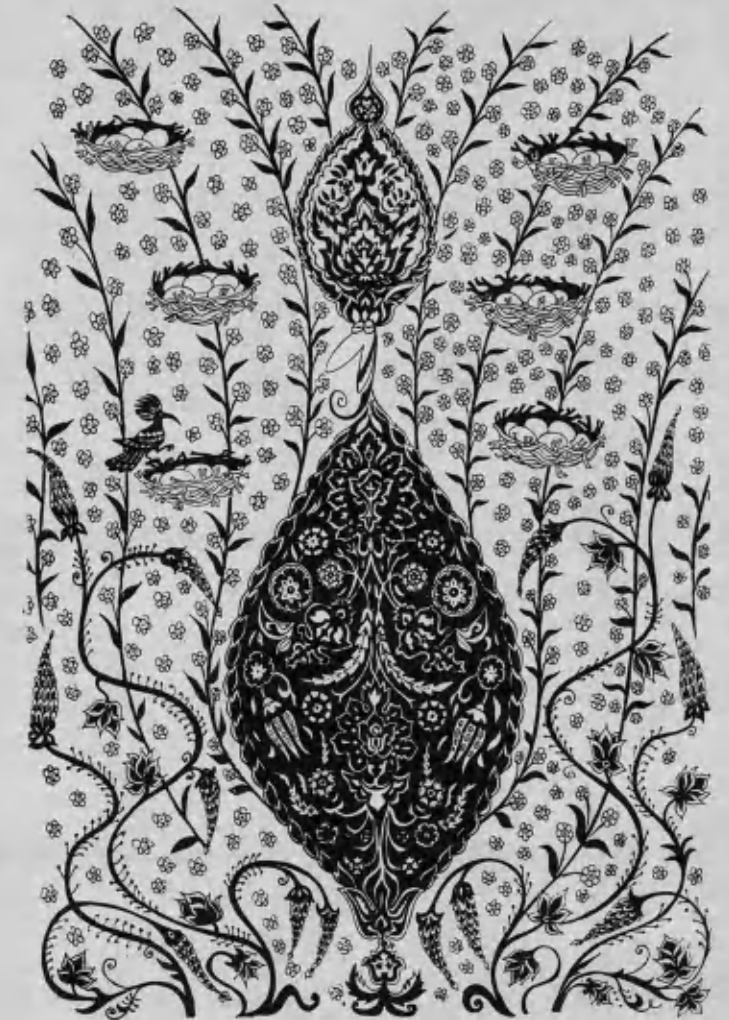
From "The Exploits of the Incomparable Mulla Nasrudin", by Idris Shah, illustrations by Richard Williams © 1966, Mulla Nasrudin Enterprises Ltd., published by Jonathan Cape Ltd., London

## THE THOUSAND AND ONE PRANKS OF MULLA NASRUDIN

Nasrudin Hodja, the great comic folk hero of the Muslim world, whose origins go back to medieval times, has become an international character of universal appeal. The anecdotes of Nasrudin are enjoyed for their exhilarating humour and admired for their jocular wisdom.

"Good enough for Nasrudin" is the hallmark of a rib-tickling story in Turkey, Egypt, Syria, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Greece, Iran, Pakistan and India, and he is increasingly read in many other countries ranging from the U.S.S.R. and U.K. to the U.S.A. and China. A Soviet film has also been made depicting Nasrudin as a people's hero.

The stories and witty drawings on this double page and our cover are from two collections of Nasrudin tales told by Idris Shah, a writer born in India from an Afghan family, and published by Jonathan Cape Ltd., London: "The Exploits of the Incomparable Mulla Nasrudin" (1966) illustrated by Richard Williams and "The Pleasantries of the Incredible Mulla Nasrudin" (1968) illustrated by Richard Williams and Errol le Cain (see also front cover). A third book, "The Subtleties of the Inimitable Mulla Nasrudin", illustrated by Richard Williams and Richard Purdum was published by Jonathan Cape in 1973.



### LAST YEAR'S NESTS

"What are you doing in that tree, Mulla?" "Looking for eggs." "But those are last year's nests!" "Well, if you were a bird, and wanted a safe place to lay, would you build a new nest, with everyone watching?"

From "The Pleasantries of the Incredible Mulla Nasrudin", by Idris Shah, illustrations by Richard Williams and Errol le Cain © 1968, Mulla Nasrudin Enterprises Ltd., published by Jonathan Cape Ltd., London

### WHICH WAY ROUND ?

A man who had studied at many metaphysical schools came to Nasrudin. In order to show that he could be accepted for discipleship he described in detail where he had been and what he had studied. "I hope that you will accept me, or at least tell me your ideas", he said, "because I have spent so much of my time in studying at these schools." "Alas!" said Nasrudin, "you have studied the teachers and their teachings. What should have happened is that the teachers and the teachings should have studied you. Then we would have had something worthwhile."

From "The Pleasantries of the Incredible Mulla Nasrudin", by Idris Shah, illustrations by Richard Williams and Errol le Cain © 1968, Mulla Nasrudin Enterprises Ltd., published by Jonathan Cape Ltd., London



### SEE WHAT I MEAN ?

Nasrudin's tomb was fronted by an immense wooden door, barred and padlocked. Nobody could get into it, at least through the door. As his last joke, the Mulla decreed that the tomb should have no walls around it ... The date inscribed on the tombstone was 386. Translating this into letters by substitution, a common device on Sufi tombs, we find the word SHWF. This is a form of the word "seeing", especially for making a person see. Perhaps it is for this reason that for many years the dust from the tomb was considered to be effective in curing eye troubles ...



From "The Pleasantries of the Incredible Mulla Nasrudin", by Idris Shah, illustrations by Richard Williams and Errol le Cain © 1968, Mulla Nasrudin Enterprises Ltd., published by Jonathan Cape Ltd., London

He is always popularly represented as an old man with a white beard wearing an outsize turban, simply dressed and sitting backwards astride his donkey so as to be sure that he is always facing in the right direction for, as he says: "whatever I tell my donkey to do, he does the opposite."

The character of Nasrudin, an astonishing blend of wisdom and native wit, has long since gone beyond the frontiers of popular Turkish literature. He is part of the folklore of the Balkan peoples, the Serbians, the Croatians, the Macedonians, the Bosnian Muslims, the Bulgarians and the Albanians. His stories are also current in Iran, Armenia, Georgia, the Caucasus, Turkestan, and in many other countries.

Nasrudin exemplifies the humour that is deeply rooted in oral folk traditions, so it is hardly surprising that so many of his "brothers" are to be found all round the Mediterranean.

The Arabs know him as Djuha, Djoha, Djuhi or Goha, the Berbers as Si Djeha or simply as Djeha, the Maltese as Djahan, the Sicilians as Giufa, the Calabrians as Hioha or Jovani.

In reality, Nasrudin is something of an anti-hero, a parody of the epic hero; he is poor, dirty, shabbily dressed and uses coarse language. He steals without hesitation when he has the opportunity.

One day when he was singing while washing himself, Nasrudin decided that he had a very pleasant voice. When he emerged from the bath house he rushed to the top of the minaret of the mosque and, although it was noon, he called the faithful to evening prayer. Someone shouted up from below: "Fool. With such a horrible voice you should be ashamed to give the call to evening prayer when it's midday." Nasrudin leant over and shouted back, "If some kind person had built a bathhouse on top of the minaret you would see what a fine voice I have."

Innumerable stories illustrate his character and behaviour. When his wife died Nasrudin did not seem very upset. Shortly afterwards his donkey died and he wept bitterly. Someone said to him, "The death of your donkey seems to have upset you more than the death of your wife." Nasrudin replied: "That's quite easy to explain. When my wife died my friends told me, 'We'll find you an even more beautiful wife.' But when I lost my donkey nobody said to me, 'Don't worry, we'll buy you a stronger donkey. Surely I've every reason to mourn my donkey.'"

One day, Nasrudin was throwing fermented milk into Lake Akshir. A passerby called to him, "What on earth are you doing? 'I'm making yoghurt.' 'Do you think it'll take?' asked the man in astonishment. 'I'm quite sure it won't', answered Nasrudin, "but just supposing it did!"

Since folklore is a valuable well-spring of literature, anecdotes about Nasrudin have served as an inspiration for poets and authors of many nationalities. Russian, Ukrainian, Romanian, German, Serbian and Turkish among others. In some cases one adaptation influences another. The Yugoslav writer Slovko Micanovic used a book about Nasrudin by the Soviet author Leonid Golovyov as a model, in writing his novel "Nasrudin Hodja in Istanbul".

Nasrudin appears to have been everywhere as we learn from ubiquitous legends about his life. According to one such story Nasrudin was a sage living in Baghdad around the tenth century, at the time of the Abbasid Dynasty. Having been accused of heresy during a period of religious strife, he is said to have feigned madness in order to save himself from the scaffold.

Other accounts say he lived in Asia Minor, in Anatolia, in the 13th or 14th centuries. Tradition also has it that he lived at the time of Sultan Bayezit and his wars with Tamerlane—in the late 14th and early 15th centuries. And an entire cycle of tales about him and Tamerlane exists in Turkish folklore.

Some stories about Nasrudin and Tamerlane reflect the spontaneous popular resistance to the Mongol conqueror. In the following stories, for example, the dialogue between Nasrudin and Tamerlane initially seems to be merely an exchange of ideas but then a sudden flash of Nasrudin's wit makes Tamerlane seem ridiculous.

Tamerlane said to Nasrudin, "All the Abbasid Caliphs are known by a nickname. Al-Mustansir means 'dependent on God's help', al-Mu'tasim means 'seeking protection in God' and al-Mutawakkil means 'trusting in God'. What would you have nicknamed me if I had been one of them?" Straight away Nasrudin replied, "Tamerlane God-help-us."

One day Tamerlane invited Nasrudin to the bathhouse and asked him, "If I had been a slave what do you think I would be worth?" "Fifty pence" replied Nasrudin. Tamerlane was offended: "Don't you realize that the loin cloth I am wearing is alone worth that?" "Yes, of course", replied Nasrudin smiling, "That's my offer for the lot!"

One day when Nasrudin was with Tamerlane in his palace, a platinum mirror was brought to the conqueror as a gift. Tamerlane looked at himself in the mirror and a few tears came into his eyes. Noticing this, Nasrudin in his turn began to weep. Soon Tamerlane recovered his composure whereas Nasrudin was still sobbing.

"Nasrudin" said Tamerlane, "when I saw how ugly I was in the mirror, I was a bit upset. Knowing how fond you are of me I wasn't surprised to see that you shared my sorrow, and I thank you. But, tell me, why are you still crying now that I

Nasrudin Hodja is known by the name of Goha in Egypt where many anecdotes are told about him. "I saw your wife at the market!" a neighbour remarked to Goha. "That's right," Goha replied. "As it's her fortieth birthday today, I propose to barter her for two twenty-year-olds!" Widely popular, Goha figures in a series of Egyptian children's books, "Stories of Goha" by Kamel Kilani, published by Dar Maktabat al-Atfal, Cairo. Drawing below is from one of them, "The Sack of Dinars".



have got over it?" "Sire", said Nasrudin, drying his tears, "seeing your face for a moment in the mirror upset you for quite a time. I see you all day long. It's only right that I should weep a little longer.

Variants of these stories occur in which ordinary people get the better of the powerful and in which the "adversary" who is made a fool of is not Tamerlane but a bey or a pasha.

However Nasrudin's witticisms sometimes have quite a different character, as in the following story. A man said to Nasrudin, "Look at that goose running over there." "And what's that to do with me?" Nasrudin replied. "But it's just gone into your house", the man said. "And what's that to do with you?" retorted Nasrudin.

Nasrudin, one of the poorest of men, also stands up for a certain standard of human dignity and moral integrity although it is the comic vein which prevails, as in the following tale.

One day Nasrudin was a guest at dinner and turned up wearing threadbare clothing. Everyone ignored him. Feeling his pride hurt, he slipped out of a side door, hurried home, changed into suitable clothing, put on a beautiful fur-lined cloak and returned to the palace. This time he was welcomed at the door with great ceremony and was ushered to a place at the principal table. He was offered the best dishes and every attention was lavished upon him. After enjoying all his favourite foods, Nasrudin took hold of the fur on the ample sleeve of his cloak, leant towards it and pushed it affectionately towards a well-filled plate saying "Eat, eat, my furl"

The other guests were intrigued by this prank. "Nasrudin, what are you doing?" "With his customary good humour, he described what sort of welcome he had been given on his first arrival and the reception that had been accorded him when he returned a second time. "As it is my fur that has received the honour", he concluded, "it too should share in the feast".

The humour of Nasrudin is not only social satire, it is also a way of looking at life which was obviously not always in agreement with the ideology and ruling powers of the time.

The character of Nasrudin is a product of anonymous creators: craftsmen, peasants, shopkeepers, donkey drivers, carters, beggars, shrewd townsmen and countrymen, dreamers, all those who felt social injustice more clearly than they understood the reason behind it, and who expressed their human predicament in stories, tales, jokes and quips.

Nasrudin's stories have a value which is universal: always using the same effect, that of comedy, their approach and sometimes even rival the great works of world literature.

■ Ivan Sop

Drawing from "Politikin Zabavnik", Belgrade



**STROKE OF LUCK**

Nasrudin Hodja lost his donkey and began to look for it crying "Thanks be to God, thanks be to God". "Why are you thanking God?" people asked him. "I'm thanking him because I wasn't on the donkey when it got lost, otherwise I should have got lost with it."

Drawing by Aleksandar Klas, Belgrade



**ONION MYSTERY**

One day when Nasrudin Hodja was stealing onions in a field he was caught by the owner, who asked what he was up to. "I was blown here by the wind", replied Nasrudin unabashed. "And who uprooted the onions?" "I caught hold of them to stop myself being blown away." "And how did they get in the sack?" "That's just what I was wondering when you interrupted me."



**A** happy April Fools' Day to all our readers! Even if this issue didn't coincide with International Laughter Day, I would still wish you a happy April Fools' Day because for people who like to laugh, the first day of April lasts all year round. And since one of the Specialized Agencies of the United Nations and its magazine are showing an interest in laughter, this is just the moment to wish the whole world a happy April Fools' Day.

What does the world have to do with laughter and what is laughter to the modern world? And what does laughter have to do with Unesco?

I think it is all to do with the nature of humour and its broad social relevance. As an organization dealing with education, science and culture, Unesco strives to express in its work the moral awareness of mankind. Laughter, by asserting the high ideals of goodness and humanism, favours the development and heightening of this awareness and promotes the growth of the ideals which guide it.

The dictionary tells us that to laugh means "to give audible expression to an emotion by the expulsion of air from the lungs..." This is true as far as it goes, but if laughter were only the expulsion of air, it would not be much good for anything but blowing down houses of cards.

Actually, as the great Russian satirist Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin has pointed out, laughter is a very powerful weapon, for nothing so discourages a vice as the knowledge that it will be perceived and ridiculed by others. The laughter of the great French philosopher Voltaire strikes and sears like a flash of lightning. Laughter knocks down idols. Wit was the favourite weapon of Vladimir Mayakovsky, the greatest revolutionary poet of the 20th century. Charles Chaplin holds that humour is today's antidote to hate and fear—it clears the fog of suspicion and anxiety that envelopes the world.

All panegyrics of laughter extol it as a powerful weapon. But, unlike other weapons, laughter is extremely selective in its choice of targets. A bullet does not care who stops it but laughter always homes in on scoundrels.

# THE WORLD WILL NEVER DIE IF IT DIES LAUGHING

by Yuri B. Boryev

We are talking here, of course, about satire, for humour is always harmless, though not toothless. Satire is indignant laughter, aimed against the vices of mankind. Humour is friendly laughter, aimed against the defects that are the other side of our better qualities, laughter aimed at friends and at things that correspond to our ideals.

In the nuclear age, laughter is the only weapon that may be praised without violating humanitarian principles, for laughter is a creative, not a destructive weapon, in other words, an anti-weapon. Incidentally, everything there is to say about creative laughter was said long ago by the ancient Egyptians, who envisaged the creation of the world like this: God laughed, and the seven gods who rule the world were born. After the first burst of laughter there was light, after the second, water, and so on until, finally, after the seventh and last peal of laughter, the soul was born.

This notion that laughter was the source of the world's creation is in keeping with a saying popular in the Bulgarian town of Gabrovo: "The world has not perished because it has always laughed!" (see article page 9).

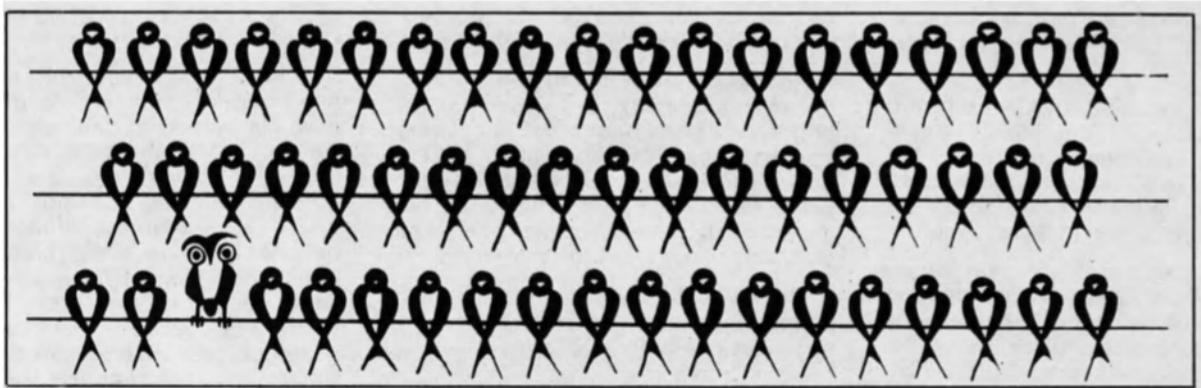
Humour and satire by their very nature are democratic. Laughter is very much a collective phenomenon, tied up with a sense of community. Henri Bergson, the great French philosopher, quotes an interesting example in his book, *Le Rire*. During an exceptionally inspired sermon by a well-known local preacher, only one man failed to react in any way, being moved neither to tears nor laughter. When asked why, he replied, "I don't belong to this parish." Laughter is a social reaction, it has a collective nature: "Laugh and the world laughs with you, weep and you weep alone."

Satire is a special kind of social criticism designed to organize public opinion and orientate it aesthetically. By its nature, therefore, satire is linked to democratic traditions.

I am not, of course, suggesting that humour and satire do not exist in undemocratic societies, but that laughter is part of the richest fabric of a people's life. Democracy provides the most favourable conditions for the art of comedy, showing tolerance towards even the most caustic satire.

**YURI B. BORYEV**, Soviet writer and literary critic, is a senior research associate at the U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences' Institute of World Literature. He participated in the 1975 international symposium on humour and satire in Gabrovo, Bulgaria (see article page 9). He is the author of over 250 articles and 10 books. His works have been published in 17 languages.





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The very fact that laughter is addressed to public opinion and not to officialdom shows its democratic nature.

Even the most ancient examples of satire show its democratic origins and character. Aristotle claimed that comedy had its beginnings in ancient Greece in the democratic period following the banishment of the tyrant Theagenes. Only a democracy could tolerate the frank personal nature of the comedies of antiquity.

When the tyrant Dionysius wanted to get to know Athens, Plato sent him Aristophanes' comedies, saying, "If he understands these comedies, he will understand the Athenian State." Born of and nurtured by democracy, comedy has always been a grateful child and repaid its mother's kindness.

"If subordinates were allowed to laugh in the presence of their superiors, then we could say farewell to subservience," wrote the great 19th-century Russian democrat and revolutionary Alexander Herzen. This characteristic, the social function of laughter, is what gives Andersen's marvellous tale "The Emperor's New Clothes" its satirical point. The emperor is an emperor only so long as those around him maintain their servile attitude towards him. But when the people believed their eyes and realized that the emperor had no clothes on, it was indeed good-bye to subservience—the people began to laugh.

As time goes by, the democratic role of satire grows. In the future, it will no doubt be satire that will replace the present agencies and methods for the prevention of anti-social behaviour. The disturber of the established social order will be punished by public ridicule, which will be a more effective and perhaps an even more severe kind of lesson and punishment than the coercive measures hitherto taken by society.

Powerful though the effect of laughter in society may be, let us not overestimate its possibilities. Ten years after the publication of *Gulliver's Travels*, Jonathan Swift expressed his amazement that toadying, stupidity in high places, harebrained scheming, vain ambitions and other human vices could still exist after he had so harshly and convincingly ridiculed them. Laughter can be effective only in conjunction with other means, including action in the fields of politics, economics and culture in general.

This is the right moment to recall the Bulgarian town of Gabrovo I mentioned earlier.

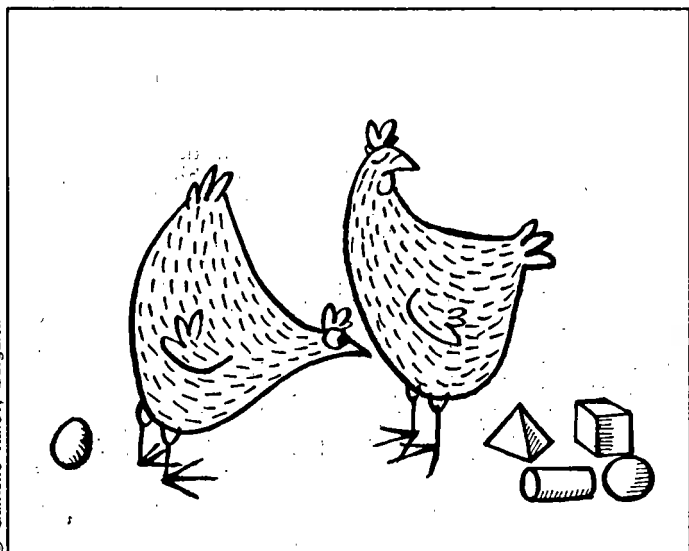
When, in the spring of 1975, I arrived from warm and sunny Moscow in cloudy, rainy Gabrovo, and when the next morning, wanting to shave, I spent an hour searching for the shaver-plug and finally found it, of all places, under the table, I realized that I was in the humour capital of the world and that this was merely an example of a Gabrovian practical joke.

Yet nowhere in the town did I find a monument to Aristophanes, or a street named after Gogol, or a Mark Twain Square, or a Yelin Pelin Way, or a Rabelais Avenue, or even a dead-end named after the theoretician of laughter, Yuri Boryev. However, I did find the wonderful "House of Laughter", where I saw a widely representative and well-presented international exhibition of cartoons.

Some cities are built on oil, like Abadan, or on coal, like Donetsk. Gabrovo's mineral resource is the pure gold of folk humour. What a good thing it is that this resource is beginning to benefit the whole world. Festivals of humour have become a tradition in Gabrovo. The Gabrovo carnival is colourful, witty and full of folk humour and the spectacle attracts people from all over Bulgaria and abroad.

And it is good to know that the idea has been taken up elsewhere. The Soviet city of Odessa, famous not only for its courage during the Second World War, but also for the quick wit of its inhabitants, has started to hold an annual Spring Festival of Humour. The main theme of a recent Odessa carnival was: "What have you done to bring the population of your city up to a million?"

But then there are also Tarascon in France, birthplace of the famous Tartarin, and Windsor in England, with its merry wives, immortalized by Shakespeare, and many other towns



© Gantcho Raliev, Bulgaria



© Joseph G. Farris, from Saturday Review, New York, U.S.A.

throughout the world that are famous, or worthy of being famous for their wit.

It is worth recalling that even in the darkest periods of the Middle Ages, every European spent a quarter of his life at carnivals, since the high days and holidays of those times added up to three months out of every year!

At one time, each of the seven cities of ancient Greece contended for the honour of being the birthplace of Homer, incontestable proof that all of Greece claimed the Iliad as its own. For centuries, at least six cities of the Middle East and Central Asia have claimed and still claim to be the burial-place of Nasrudin Hodja. If the "disturber of complacency," as Nasrudin Hodja is known, has six different burial places in six different cities, that means that he never died and never will die. He, like all heroes of folk humour, is immortal (see article page 16).

Humour is national and international—national in its form but in its content common to all mankind. Springing from the depths of a people's life, and drawing upon the incomparable wealth of experience, humour in its highest classical forms of expression always becomes international property. Universality is of the very essence of humour.

Every people has its own favourite quick-witted hero who embodies all its joys and sorrows, all its skill, cunning, common sense and resourcefulness, in short, everything necessary to live in a hard world among the strong and the all-powerful, whom one must deceive and outwit if one is to survive. Much can be said about each of these heroes of folk humour.

**I** VANUSHKA - DURACHOK—Ivan the Fool—for instance, is a favourite of Russian folk stories. He enjoys neither wealth nor station, he suffers many trials and tribulations, the high and mighty of this world look down upon him with disdain and take him for a fool, and Ivan himself is not averse to posing as a fool.

But he is always ready to come to the aid of a friend or of any good, deserving person in need of a helping hand, and finally all the troubles that he encounters end up bouncing off him. He conquers the strong, outwits the clever, surmounts misfortunes and hardships, and copes successfully with even the most hopeless and insoluble problems, usually with some gain for himself.

Nesterko is a hero of Byelorussian folk tales who is too lazy to work and not bold enough to beg, and so lives by his wits and the bold inventiveness of his artful dodges.

The cheerful rogue Pácalá is a hero of Moldavian tales who is charac-

terized by the quality of "dor"—a mixture of hopefulness and nostalgia.

Arllecchino, (Harlequin) the hero of Italian folk comedy, is a country lad—bright, naive and direct. He is not very practical and does everything on impulse, for which he is rewarded with cuffs and blows. But this does not diminish his gaiety or his open and childishly naive view of the world.

The favourite character of the French puppet theatre, Polichinelle, is a jolly hunchback, a bully and a mocker.

Nasrudin, the hero of Eastern humour, goes by many names: the Azerbaijanians call him Mulla Nasrudin, the Tajiks—Mulla Mushfiki, the Turkomans—Nasrudin Hodja, the Tatars—Ahmed Akai, the Kazakhs and Kirghiz—Aldar-Kose. He is a convivial fellow, a man of wit and wisdom, a rebel and a protector of the weak.

**A**LL these national heroes of folk humour are basically similar in that they stand up for the downtrodden and abused, are optimistic and cheerful by nature, witty, cunning, resilient and able to overcome any obstacle. But they are as different as the national characters of the peoples who created them.

And how instructive, significant and relevant for the modern world are the heroes of the great classics of comedy: Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn, Khlestakov and Chichikov, Falstaff and Monsieur Jourdain, Don Quixote and Sancho Panzal

Cervantes' two heroes, for instance, though opposites in many ways, share a wonderful and rare human quality—unselfishness. Because of this quality we are ready to forgive them their eccentricities, follies, shortcomings and foolishness. Sancho Panza, the realist, is no less unselfish than Don Quixote, the dreamer. He abandons his position of power, of which he has grown weary, taking only some oats for his ass and half a loaf for himself—the only profit derived from his governorship. Yet his "laws" stand and are known as the "Decrees of the Great Administrator, Sancho Panza".

Don Quixote and Sancho Panza are not of this world, because they are too good for it. We may measure the world by their standards of humanity, unselfishness and wisdom. In the crazy world of these characters, there is so much freedom and poetry lost by people in their everyday lives that in the final analysis the mad Don Quixote turns out to be more sane than the "normal" people, who are consumed by greed and the lust for power.

We would like to believe that the happy day will eventually come when the wisdom embodied in the images of these and other immortal comic heroes will become popular not only among the citizens but also among the leaders

of the countries represented in the United Nations.

Humour and satire represent the two poles of laughter. In between is a whole world of different tonalities: Aesop's merry and bitter mockery, Rabelais' rollicking fun, Swift's biting, sardonic humour, Erasmus of Rotterdam's refined irony, Voltaire's wise ridicule, Béranger's alternatively care-free and satirical laughter, Beaumarchais' sparkling wit, Daumier's caricatures, Goya's horribly cruel world of grotesques, the barbed romantic irony of Heinrich Heine, Anatole France's scepticism, Mark Twain's gaiety, Shaw's ironic humour, Jaroslav Hasek's mischievous wry comedy, Gogol's laughter through tears, Saltykov-Shchedrin's wrathful, scourging, scalding, scathing sarcasm, Chekhov's soulful, sad lyrical humour, Mayakovsky's triumphant laugh, Gorky's optimistic satire, and the irrepressible humour of Tvardovsky's hero, Vasily Terkin.

What riches! Aristophanes, Juvenal, Shakespeare, Molière, Lope de Vega, Goldoni, La Fontaine, Krylov, Griboyedov, Dickens, Fredro, Chalupka, Caragiale, and Delavrancea—all masters in using the multi-coloured pallet of laughter.

True laughter is rich in different hues and glows with the most diverse emotions. This was beautifully expressed by Leonardo da Vinci in his Mona Lisa. What an inspired smile on her beautiful countenance, at once mocking, mischievous, tender, pensive, sceptical and melancholic and expressing many other deep and contradictory emotions.

**T**O live aright, one must laugh, and to laugh one must know what laughter is and what laws govern it. I therefore suggest to you, dear readers, that you get hold of a copy of my book, *Comedy, or How Laughter Castigates the World's Shortcomings, Purifies and Reforms Man and Asserts the Joy of Living (1)* and keep it by your bedside—you will never suffer from insomnia. But before you fall asleep please think about whether or not your town is worthy of staging a carnival of humour in its turn. And when you awake in the morning, don't forget to smile and wish everyone a happy April Fools' Day.

In the world of laughter and in the laughter of the world lies one of the hopes for peace on earth. The citizens of Gabrovo are right: the world will never perish so long as it can laugh!

In other words, the world will never die, if it dies laughing.

■ **Yuri Boryev**

(1) It has been published in Russian, Bulgarian, and German, and I hope that all the "Courier's" readers understand one of these languages, at least in their dreams.

# THE POLITICAL AND SATIRICAL CARTOON

stepping in where angels dread to fear

by Ivan Tubau

**H**ARDLY anybody in this exciting and contradictory century would deny the importance of the cartoons that appear in the press. The cartoon is important as a historical document, as an x-ray of society and politics and as a form of artistic and literary expression.

What essential differences are there between cartoon humour and oral or literary humour?

According to Freud, humour is a first step to liberation. "It is a triumph of gaiety, and represents the victory of the pleasure principle". But this victory must be considered as resulting from frustration: "Dreams become ingenious and amusing because more direct and comfortable channels for the expression of our feelings are blocked". In the same way, we crack jokes when other, more directly aggressive forms of activity are denied us.

In line with this reasoning, it is sometimes argued that a joke involves at least three persons: the author, the reader (or listener) and the "victim". This proposition may be more or less valid for oral or written jokes, but does not seem to apply to cartoons and humorous drawings. Some of the best cartoons produced this century—and here one inevitably thinks of the brilliant Saul Steinberg—have no victim.

A much more acceptable definition of most of today's cartoon humour is this one of Kuno Fischer's describing humour in general: "Humour is an unbiased judgement". According to Fischer, "Aesthetic freedom is the detached observation of things". "It may be", he adds, "that this aesthetic freedom gives rise to a distinctive type of judgement... which because of its origin we will call detached judgement". And he affirms: "Freedom produces humour and humour is simply a game with ideas".

One could apply this definition to the cartoon and call it a game with ideas,

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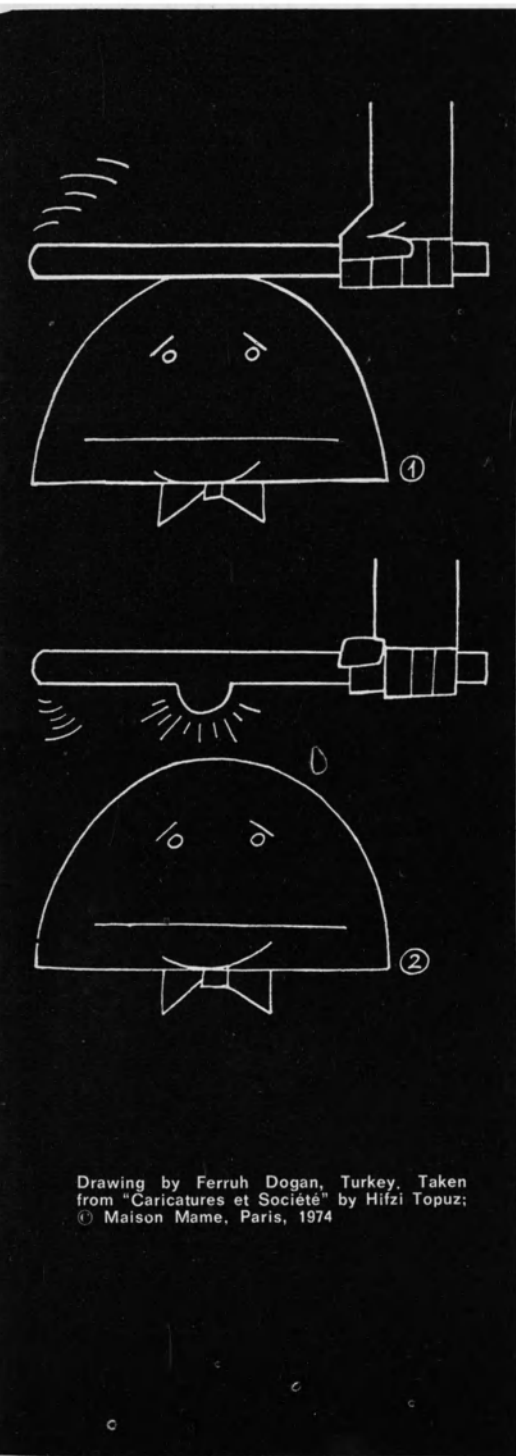
Drawing by Vazquez de Sola Spain Taken from "Caricatures", © Editions Albin Michel, Paris, 1975

expressed in a drawing with or without the assistance of words. However, the concept of "detached judgement" does not apply to the majority of cartoons appearing in the press. On the contrary, the most effective of them imply a definite and categorical judgement based on a real situation.

I have already used the word "freedom" several times, and with good reason. Without a certain degree of freedom, the political cartoon and the social caricature could not exist—at least not in a legally authorized publication.

And yet the cartoon often emerges from conditions of "relative freedom", as a substitute for more direct forms of expression which cannot be used openly. On this score the Spanish essayist Carlos Castilla del Pino has written: "The distinctive characteristic of a joke is that by laughing at a problem, one avoids the opposite down-to-earth and serious approach. Thus, for instance, the political joke shows critical awareness, but it cannot replace active, direct criticism, which is ruled out by either external or self-imposed censorship.

The cartoon requires of its creator a minimum of dexterity in drawing and a



Drawing by Ferruh Dogan, Turkey. Taken from "Caricatures et Société" by Hifzi Topuz; © Maison Mame, Paris, 1974

minimum of aesthetic judgement, two characteristics which can only exist when a certain level of culture has been reached. An illiterate person may be able to draw because he has inherited a natural cultural sensibility.

However, the cartoon—in the opinion of the Spanish humorist Maximo, which I share—is a literary form. Although expressed fundamentally through drawing, it is much closer to the narrative form of expression than the plastic arts. One might say (even of work like Steinberg's which would seem to suggest the contrary) that in humorous drawings the aesthetic treatment always takes second place and the idea is always of primary importance.

**O**NCE we accept the status of the cartoon as a literary form, it seems logical to point out that the development of the cartoon is closely linked to the development of printing techniques. Even if some scholars claim to have found traces of graphic humour in the contexts of prehistoric times, Ancient Egypt, Classical Greece and the Middle Ages, the cartoon as such was born when printing allowed it to be widely circulated.

Vases have been found in Apulia, Campania and Sicily which, like the paintings of Cranach, Breughel, Bosch or Teniers, provide examples of a caricaturist's outlook on the world, bordering on the humorous. Other artists, such as the English painter Hogarth or the Spaniard Goya, can be seen as genuine humorists.

But the development of the cartoon went hand in hand with the rise of periodical publications: in Germany and the Netherlands during the religious wars; in England with the growth of journals of opinion; and in France under the Bourbon monarchy and during the Revolution, until Napoleon and his rigid censorship of the press cut short its development.

The spread of lithography brought the cartoon a wider audience during the 19th century. This was particularly striking in France in publications like *La Caricature* (1825) and *Le Journal pour Rire* (1848) both founded by Charles Philipon, and in *Charivari* (1832). This last magazine numbered among its contributors the great caricaturist Honoré Daumier. Almost every great French caricaturist of the age appeared in Philipon's magazines: Paul Gavarni, Gustave Doré, Grandville, Bertall and André Gill.

In Spain, however, few printed cartoons were produced during the religious wars in Europe. "Spain itself was a caricature", commented the 19th-century thinker Jacinto Octavio Picon. Then during the war of independence the country found an effective pioneer in Leonardo Alenza.

In the mid-19th century, satirical publications began to proliferate in Spain: Gil Blas (1864), *El Fisgón* (1865), Doña Manuela (1865), *El Sainete* (1867), La Gorda (1868), Jeremias (1869), La Flaca (1871). In the majority of them we find the work of the prolific Francisco Ortego, the most important cartoonist of 19th-century Spain, whose work was to some extent carried on by José Luis Pellicer (*El Cohete*, 1872).

In Spain, as elsewhere in the world, the history of graphic humour, which began about 150 years ago, has been a checkered one. But in general terms we can follow the evolution of cartoon humour from the viewpoints of aesthetics, expression, content and diffusion.

From an aesthetic viewpoint, the general tendency in cartoon-drawing has been towards progressive economy of line. Even though the immense amount of detail shown by contemporary cartoonists such as Topor rivals the work of Bertall, in the 19th century, the majority of today's cartoonists have opted for a simplification of forms, a rigorous visual synthesis and an economy of detail which in the last century already characterized the work of French illustrators such as Doré and Caran d'Ache.

If attempts to separate content and form are regarded today as arbitrary and controversial, then to try to separate the purely aesthetic aspect of a cartoon from the idea it seeks to express would be the very height of absurdity.

The aesthetic evolution of the cartoon has therefore been accompanied by changes in its form of expression, which have also become more simplified. Texts or captions, where present, have become shorter and more cryptic, the drawings less concerned with detail except where necessary.

Most important of all, however, is the fact that the drawing has thus gained complete autonomy and its own power as a means of expression. Even the best humorous drawings of the last century were almost always illustrations—often excellent, but ultimately no more than illustrations—of a given text which was often a play on words or a literary joke; a text, in short, which could have stood alone without the image.

But although cartoons of this type are still published today, they are no longer considered to qualify as genuine graphic humour if the drawing can be suppressed leaving the words on their own. Only when the text, title or caption have no meaning without the image are we looking at a genuine cartoon. Purists go even further: only the "mute" joke, the cartoon with no words, is for them the genuine article.

However, even without making this sort of demand for absolute purity—almost impossible in political or topical cartoons—a close interdependence between text and image is today considered indispensable in graphic humour. And if we are now thoroughly aware of this new dimension of humour, it is very largely due to the cartoonists and humorists of North America: they "invented" modern cartoons, as they "invented" the silent movie comedies. This conclusion in no way detracts from the merit of their European forerunners, such as Méliès or Max Linder in the cinema, and Caran d'Ache in cartoons.

It is almost axiomatic that in talking about American influence, we tend to consider as American both the Rumanian Saul Steinberg—the greatest cartoonist of all time—and Charles Chaplin, who is an Englishman. But in addition to Steinberg other artists working in America have had a strong influence at a number of different levels: Peter Arno, James Thurber, Charles Adams, among others. The New Yorker and

Britain's *Punch*, with its extraordinary Ronald Searle, have incubated the best of modern humour.

Yet Spain too has made its own very important contribution to graphic humour in the form of "gratuitous humour" or what I have called "Codornicesco" (1). It has sometimes been suggested erroneously that this is an imitation of the humour that in Italy under Mussolini appeared in publications such as Bertoldo. The simple fact is that Spaniards and Italians made similar discoveries at about the same time. It is inevitable that periods of censorship which prohibit critical humour foster development of cartoonists specializing in allusive humour, particularly in the field of the verbally absurd, where both the Spanish and the Italians have reached standards that are difficult to match.

When it comes to the problem of content, evolution has been much more blurred and contradictory. One widespread idea is that humour (critical humour, since drawings such as Steinberg's by their nature lie on the periphery of this argument) has mainly concentrated, during the last century and a good part of the present one, on poking fun at anything new, from new means of transport to political theories.

This idea demands a closer look. In general terms, one can say that cartoons have been moving from "right" to "left"—nobody would consider the French cartoonist Siné as a conservative, for example—though it is equally true that progressive tendencies were also expressed during the last century.

Even if it is true that Cham, Bertall and Doré were clearly reactionaries (Doré took refuge in Versailles when the Commune took over Paris during the Franco-Prussian war), and that Forain and Caran d'Ache were violently anti-semitic, it is no less true that Daumier (who refused the Legion of Honour offered him by the Second Empire) displayed a distinctly critical and progressive attitude in his work.

**A**T an international level, the fact that some critical humour seems to have moved towards non-conservative and sometimes even revolutionary standpoints is due to its circulation among a much wider and more varied public.

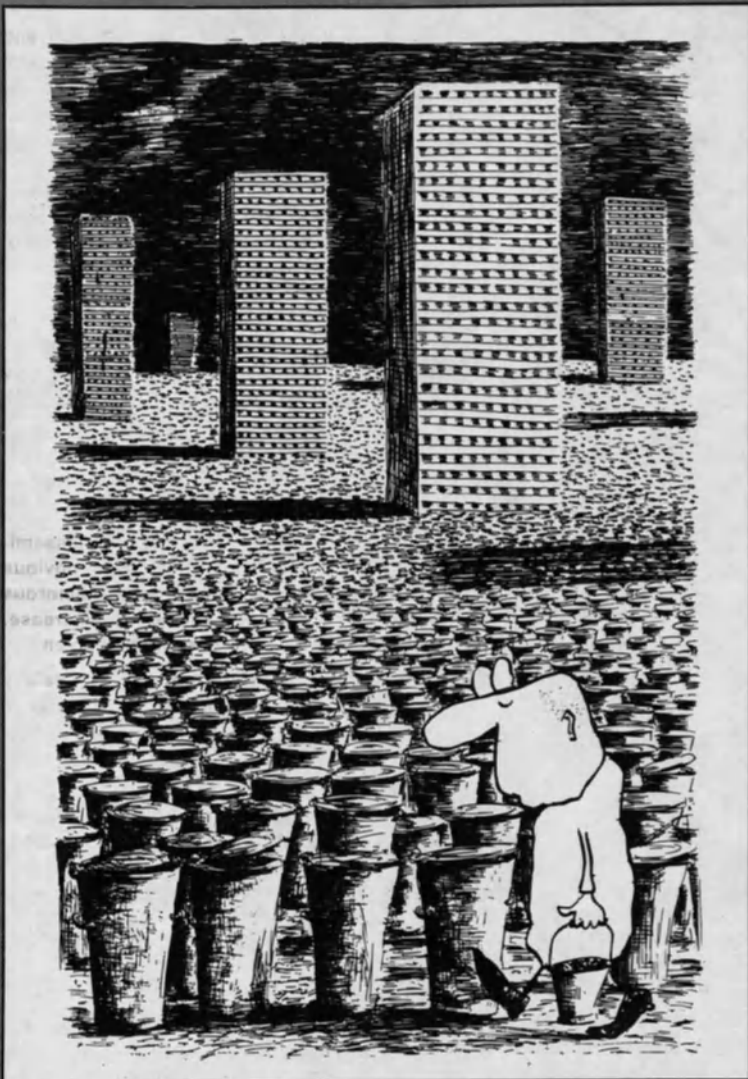
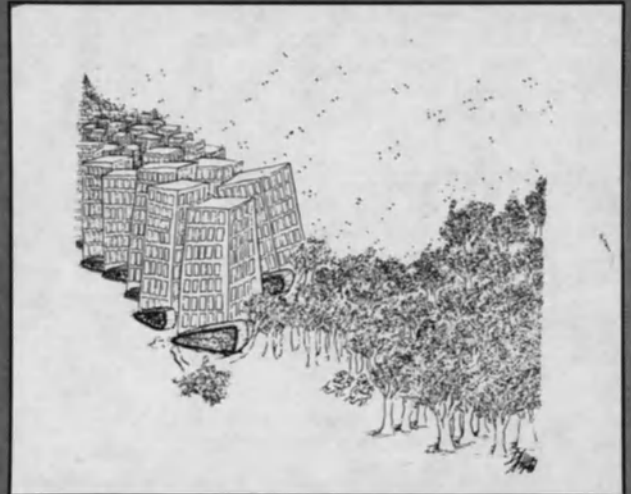
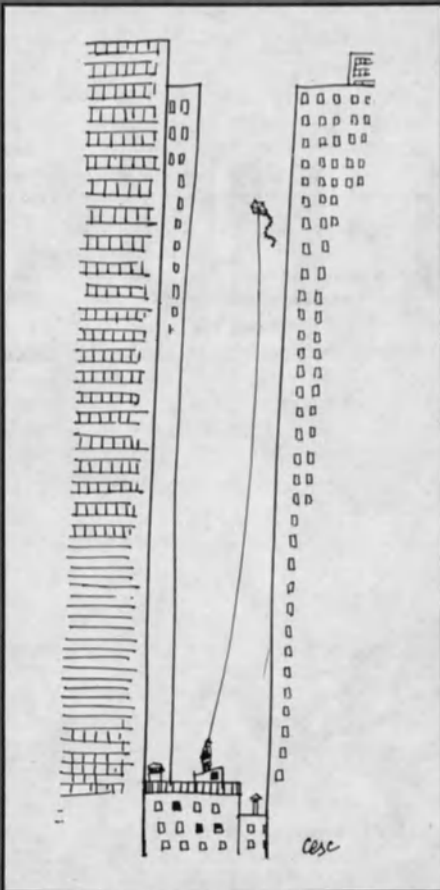
This brings us to consider the dissemination of humour generally. It is obvious that the number and circulation of humorous publications have continued to increase, even if their growth has been uneven.

Cartoons have also moved successfully into the general information field—after a long period of finding the door shut in their face—and have won a better-placed and wider showing in the daily press.

Most significant of all, the importance of the cartoon is now almost universally recognized. Today cartoons are not used simply to fill up space. They occupy a privileged place in the best pages, next to the main editorial or the articles of leading contributors.

■ *Ivan Tubau*

1) Codornicesco: form of humour found in the Spanish satirical weekly *La Codorniz*.



the Chinese  
have a word  
for (w)it

# HSIAO-HUA

by *Kristofer M. Schipper*

**A** seventy-year-old scholar became the father of a son, and he proudly decided to call the child 'Age'. The following year, another son was born and, since the new-born baby looked intelligent, the father decided to call him 'Study'. A year passed, and yet a third son came into the world. The old scholar laughed and said, 'Three sons, at my age! This is getting to be funny!' So he called his last-born 'Humour' (*Hsiao-hua*).

"The children grew up, and one day they went up into the mountains to gather wood for their father. On their return, the old scholar asked his wife, 'Which of my three sons has brought back the most wood?' His wife replied, 'Age gathered a handful; Study nothing at all; but Humour has brought home a whole pile!'"

This ancient tale is a good illustration of popular Chinese wisdom, which holds that a little humour in life can be more profitable than either experience or education. The philosophers of ancient China were well aware of this, for they often quoted witty stories in support of their theories. Mencius, the ancient sage-philosopher, writing in the 4th century B.C., tells the story of a villager who, distressed to see that his crops were not growing, tugged on the stalks with his hands so as to coax them into growing more rapidly. He returned home at the end of the day sighing, "I'm worn out; I've spent the whole day helping the crops to

**KRISTOFER M. SCHIPPER**, born in Sweden, is Professor of Chinese Studies at the *Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes (Sciences of Religion Section)*, University of Paris. He is also Secretary of the newly-founded European Association of Chinese Studies. He is an authority on Taoist traditions of China and the author of *L'Empereur Wou des Han dans la Légende Taoïste (Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty in Taoist Legend)* 1965, and *Le Feng-teng, Rituel Taoïste (Feng-teng, Taoist Ritual)* 1975, both published by *l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient, Paris*. He has published many reference works as research aids in the little explored field of Chinese Taoist ritual on which he is at present preparing a long monograph. Professor Schipper is currently also at work on a new French translation of the writings of the Chinese Taoist philosopher, *Chuang-tzu*.



Photo © Société Asiatique de Paris Collection, Chavannes bequest

# 笑话

The Chinese ideogram reproduced above says *hsiao-hua*, meaning "joke" or "funny story". A literary genre in its own right, the *hsiao-hua* has enjoyed wide popularity since ancient times in China, where the God of Joy (Hsi-shen) here depicted on a 19th-century engraving (left) was traditionally revered. Right, watercolour by Li-Ts'an (17th century) shows the Immortal, Chung-li Ch'üan, riding his donkey backwards, like Nasrudin Hodja (see page 16). The other figure is the famed Taoist philosopher Chuang-tzu floating (frontwards!) on a huge gourd.



Photo © Almasy, Kristofer M. Schipper Collection, Paris

growl!" His sons ran to the field to see what he had done, only to find that the stalks had already dried up... The moral of the story lent added point to Mencius' belief that we should cultivate ourselves with care and patience.

The Chinese call this kind of anecdote *hsiao-hua* which literally means "Laugh-talk" or "stories to make you laugh". The example just quoted is one of the oldest examples of this kind of humour in the world.

Though laughter is as old as humanity, or perhaps even older, the rôle of humour changes from one culture to the next. What is characteristic of China's own particular brand of humour is that the *hsiao-hua*, whose origins were undoubtedly popular, was incorporated into the classical written tradition at a very early date.

Another very ancient form of humour in China is known as *ku-chi* which literally means "a side-swipe," and is now used for sarcastic and satirical humour. Significantly, the first examples of this were handed down by a Taoist author named Chuang-tzu (who lived in the 4th century B.C.). As opposed to Confucianism, Taoism embodied the individual's aspirations to freedom and the throwing-off of social, political and ideological constraints.

Chuang-tzu uses humour to fight prejudice and dogmatism. For instance, he shows us Confucius acting as a sort of Chinese Don Quixote, attempting to teach his moral precepts to a highwayman known as Ch'i-the-bandit. But the brigand turns out to be just as eloquent as the Master, and even manages to tie the latter up in knots with his own arguments, concluding with the parting shot, "Since people call me Ch'i-the-bandit, why don't they call you (who are only a hypocrite after all) Confucius-the-bandit?"

We later come across specialists in this kind of satirical repartee at the court of the emperors, and they were referred to by this same term,

*ku-chi*. Tung-fang Shuo was one celebrated *ku-chi*; he was a courtier of the Emperor Wu, during the Han dynasty (141-187 A.D.). One day, Tung-fang Shuo drank a magic potion intended for the Emperor, and which was supposed to make the latter immortal. The emperor was furious when he found out, and decided to execute the impertinent courtier forthwith. But the latter argued, "Your majesty, if the elixir works, then I am immortal and you cannot put me to death. If, on the other hand, the potion does not work, then what crime have I committed?" The emperor had to laugh, and he pardoned the *ku-chi*.

Tung-fang Shuo subsequently became one of the patron saints of laughter in Chinese folklore. Other clowns later came to be canonized in China, such as the two Buddhist monks Han Shan and Shih Te (8th century), so frequently represented in popular art. The figure of the laughing sage, perfectly conscious of the truth, meanwhile became a familiar one in Taoism. It is thought that it was this Taoist tradition that influenced Chinese sculptors when carving their first representations of the Buddha. In the Buddhist grottoes at Yun-k'ang the late fifth-century Buddhas wear a mystical smile to be found neither in Indian nor in Central Asian art.

The fondness of the Chinese for laughter meant that the *hsiao-hua* very soon became a literary genre in their own right, and more than 70 anthologies of anecdotes of all kinds have been compiled over the centuries. The oldest of these is called the *Hsiao-lin* (*The Forest of Laughter*). Written by a scholar named Han-t'an Ch'un (c. 132-222), the *Hsiao-lin's* amusing tales are perfectly harmless. They are innocent jests told in a gently mocking tone. Here is an example:

"In the course of a dispute, a man bit off his adversary's nose. The judge wanted to condemn the man, despite the accused's claim that the victim himself had bitten his nose off. The judge tried to reason with him, 'But the nose is placed higher than the mouth, so how could he pos-

sibly have got up there to bite it off?' 'He stood on his bed' came the prompt retort."

As we said earlier, the *hsiao-hua* were popular in origin, and yet they were mostly written down in classical language. This anomaly can be accounted for by the fact that the highly concentrated style of classical Chinese is ideally suited to sketching a situation with a few light touches and to rendering swift repartee. Where we possess two versions of an anecdote in Chinese literature, one written in classical Chinese, the other in spoken Chinese, the latter often turns out to be two or three times as long as the former.

But the scholars did not confine themselves merely to transcribing popular anecdotes. They also made up their own *hsiao-hua*. One of the more noteworthy features of these last is their "historical" character, in that they refer to named people, usually famous scholars, situated in their appropriate historical period.

This genre first made its appearance at about the same time as the *Hsiao-lin* quoted above, among a group of cultivated and eccentric aristocrats, the best known of whom have gone down in history as the "Seven Sages of the Bamboo Forest". These sages enjoyed thinking up fresh witticisms to pin down a person or a situation. Their behaviour was often eccentric and openly defiant of etiquette. Their witticisms and jests were written down in a famous anthology entitled *Shih-shuo Hsin-Yü* (*Contemporary Short Stories*).

But, as was to be expected, only people of their own time and milieu could hope to understand fully the sense of humour of these eccentric scholars. Their jokes have lost all meaning for us, though some academics are striving obstinately to fathom them out—an activity that might have brought a smile to the lips of the sages themselves!

A good many other anthologies in a similar vein have made their appearance since. Some of the anecdotes



Photo © Société Asiatique de Paris Collection, Chevannes bequest

## FROM MAGISTRATE PAO'S CASEBOOK

Nineteenth-century Chinese polychrome engraving of an episode from a 16th-century comic novel entitled *Five Rats up to No Good in the Eastern Capital*. It depicts the marriage of a rat which is later eaten by the watchful cat. In the novel, Pao Kung, a character based on a famous 11th-century magistrate-detective of the same name, unravels a tangled web of criminal intrigue. The detective story as a literary genre was actually born in China. A collection of detection tales (*The Strange Cases of Magistrate Pao*) was published by Panther Books, London, in 1970.

► have retained their meaning, but they are too deeply rooted in the rather special milieu that gave birth to them to be translatable without pages and pages of explanatory footnotes.

Humour of this sort really cannot be said to cross all frontiers. In this respect, though, the frontiers were not only national ones, for even inside China a deep gulf came to divide scholars from the ordinary people over the centuries. The coming of the modern era and the arrival of Western civilization did little to attenuate this lack of communication.

Around the 1920s and 1930s one came across Chinese writers so ignorant of their own popular traditions they even claimed the Chinese had never had a sense of humour. Eager to introduce this wonderful Western discovery into their own country, they invented a new Chinese word for it, "Yu-mou", which is simply a transliteration of the English word "humour", using two monosyllabic Chinese characters which, taken separately, mean "dark" and "silent"!

Fortunately, scholarly culture notwithstanding, popular humour has come down through the ages and across frontiers unscathed. A great popular story-teller and poet, long unknown to scholars, Feng Meng-lung (1574-1645) was also the author of an anthology of genuine *hsiao-hua* entitled *Hsiao-fu* (*Thesaurus of Laughter*).

This collection of stories enjoyed tremendous success not only in China,

but also in other Far-Eastern countries, and especially in Japan. Some of the anecdotes in *Hsiao-fu* directly influenced seventeenth-century Japanese burlesque theatre (*Kyôgen*).

The original edition of *Hsiao-fu* contained 722 anecdotes, classified according to theme. The kind of subject that amused the ordinary folk of China three hundred years ago included: "Ancient luxury" (the rich); "Dilapidated elegance" (Confucian scholars); "Not to be mentioned" (the poor); "Eccentrics and misers"; "The height of vulgarity" (debauchees and sharp-tongued women); "Inside the women's quarters" (naughty stories).

As one can see from these themes, the Chinese used humour—as do others—as a critical means of expression in a world of exploitation and oppression. Rich persons and officials were favourite targets. For example:

"A freshly qualified mandarin arrived to take up his first post. He asked his subordinates how things were done in the place. The answer came, 'In the first year, you're supposed to stay honest; in the second, half honest; but in the third year you can really go to with a will!' 'Shall I ever have the patience to wait three years?' sighed the mandarin."

"The mandarin's birthday was due soon. On hearing that he was born in the year of the mouse, one of his subordinates made a gold collection and offered him a model of the animal made from this precious metal. The

mandarin was delighted with the present and added, 'Did you know it'll soon be my wife's birthday? She was born in the year of the cow...'"

The Japanese have a modified version of this last story: "A samurai, accompanied by his servant, spied a dead mouse lying in the road. 'Pick it up for me!' 'But it's dead.' 'I can see that, but you know perfectly well I was born in the year of the mouse!' 'Yes, my lord, and I'm glad it wasn't the year of the cow.'"

Professor André Lévy, who translated these three last stories, shows how the Japanese adaptations of Chinese *hsiao-hua* tended to bowdlerize the sarcastic tone of the original Chinese. According to R.H. Blyth, in his book *Oriental Humour*, the difference between Chinese humour and Japanese humour can be compared to the difference between the music of Handel and Mozart.

In traditional China, amusing stories often served to enliven the atmosphere at gatherings and especially banquets. It was considered bad manners to embark upon long discussions at a banquet; the conversation was supposed to be light-hearted and gay, and to avoid distracting the guests from their main occupation, namely eating. So, to pass the time, guests would play games, make up verses or tell *hsiao-hua*.

Even today, on the occasion of feasts, each person is expected to do a little act, sing a song or tell a story.



Certain authors of anthologies made allowance for this kind of usage and included instructions as to how the stories should be told so as to be sure of making a successful impact. Here is an example:

"A father was out walking with his son. A stranger noticed the son and asked, 'Who is he?' The father answered, 'this is the son-in-law of the granddaughter nine generations removed of the direct grandson by marriage of a president of the Chan-cellery, who was a great favourite of one of the emperors of the present dynasty; in other words, my son!' *Shih Ch'eng-chün*, the author of the collection of stories entitled *A Good Laugh (Hsiao-ti-hao)* published in 1739, in which this story figures, adds, "One should assume the air of a man obsessed with his own self-importance, and the answer should be blurted out in one breath."

But the author of this collection was not merely concerned to make his public laugh; he also regarded humour as a means to educate the masses. His attitude is summed up in a brief poem published as a frontispiece to his book:

"People want *hsiao-hua* so as to  
[have a good laugh,  
But I use *hsiao-hua* so as to wake  
[them up...  
One can jest about the mysteries of  
[religion,  
But laughter is still a sure road to  
[salvation!"

Consequently, the stories contained in the *Hsiao-Ti-hao* are less satirical than those to be found in the *Hsiao-fu*. Most of them, moreover, are drawn from the everyday life of the people.

"A master of the *ch'in* (classical Chinese lute) was playing in the market (in the hope of attracting a few pupils). The people in the marketplace at first thought he was playing a *p'i-pa* or a *samisen* (instruments for light music) and crowded round to listen to him. But when they heard the calm, pure sounds of the *ch'in* they were disappointed and little by little the crowd drifted away. Finally, only one listener remained. The master of the *ch'in* was delighted and exclaimed, "Well, at least one connoisseur appreciates good *ch'in* playing." The man answered him, 'If the table your *ch'in* is standing on didn't belong to me, and if I didn't have to wait for you to finish your performance to get it back, I'd have been gone ages ago.'"

"Two brothers bought a pair of shoes, saying they'd take turns to wear them. But when they got home, the younger brother wore them all day long. The older brother was most unhappy, as the only chance he got to wear them was at night, when at last he could go out for a walk. The result was that he never got any sleep. The shoes were soon worn out, and the younger brother said to the older brother, 'Let's go and buy a new pair.' The older brother frowned and said, 'Let's not buy any more shoes; I'd rather get some sleep at night.'"

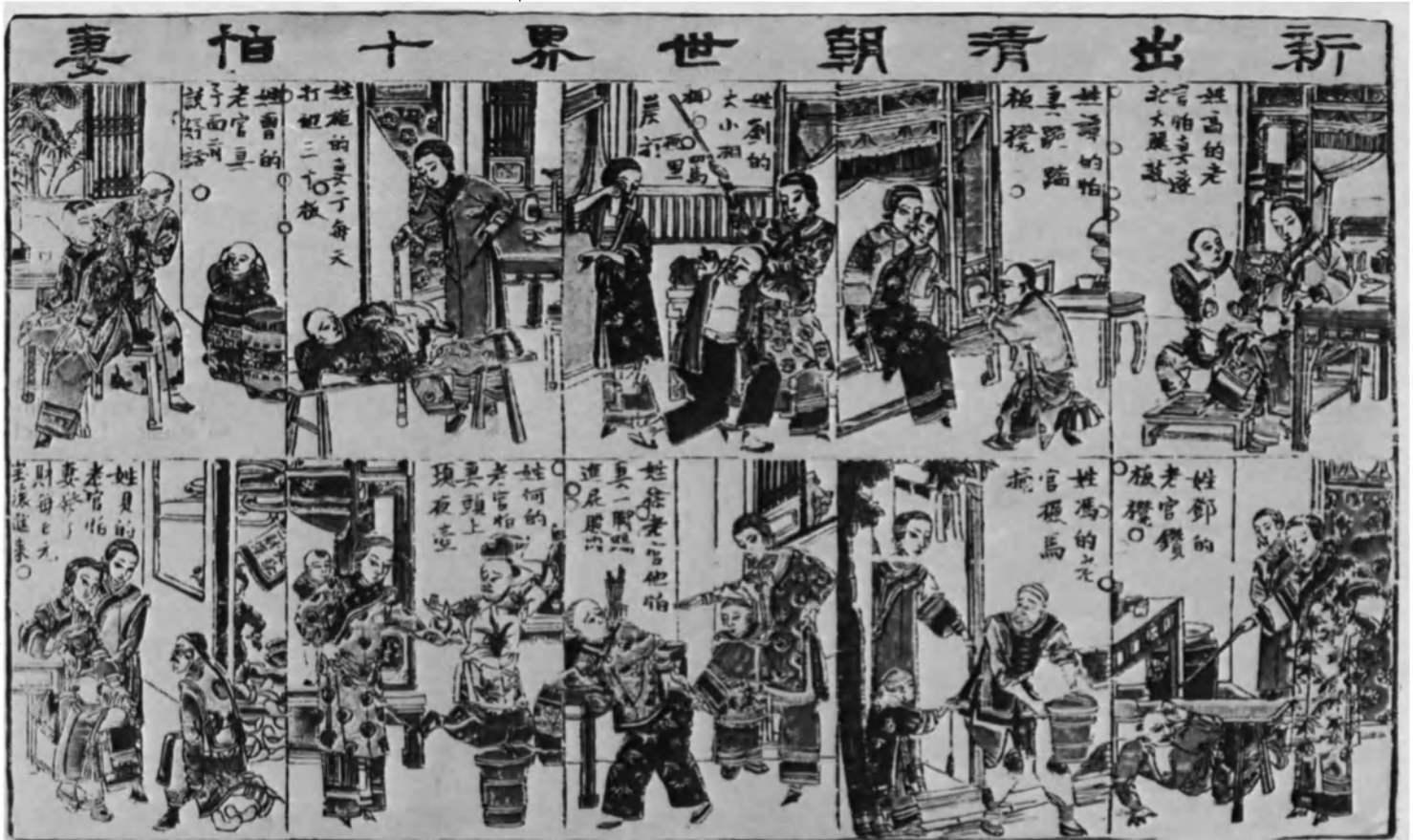
"A half-witted constable was ordered to bring a monk who had committed a crime to the court for trial. Afraid of forgetting something, he drew up a precise list before setting out, 'Baggage, umbrella, cangue [large wooden collar worn by prisoners] documents, monk and me.' All along the road he kept on muttering these two phrases. The monk rapidly gathered the constable was stupid. So one night he got his gaoler drunk, shaved his head, and locked the cangue about his neck before making off. When the constable awoke, he said to himself, 'Let's see now: baggage, umbrella... yes, they're here.' Then he felt about his neck and said, 'Here's the cangue.' Then the documents, 'Ah, here they are.' Then, all of a sudden, he grew frightened, 'Ayeee! But where's the monk got to?' He stroked his skull with his hand, 'Thank heaven, the monk's still here! But in that case, where am I?'"

In this last example, in particular, the naively amusing surface conceals a much deeper meaning. It shows us man caught in the tangle of obligations and possessions to the point where he loses his own identity. This story is familiar beyond the confines of China, though, for we come across it in a slightly different form in Central Europe. Which just goes to show that, cultural differences notwithstanding, man's condition is universal.

■ Kristofer M. Schipper

## HENPECKED BUT HAPPY

This 19th-century engraving presents ten scenes of husbands being tormented in various ways by their cantankerous wives. According to Chinese tradition few men boasted that they were not afraid of their wives. There is a Chinese saying that to succeed in life and become rich, a man must fear his wife.





**NOT  
A LEG  
TO  
STAND ON**