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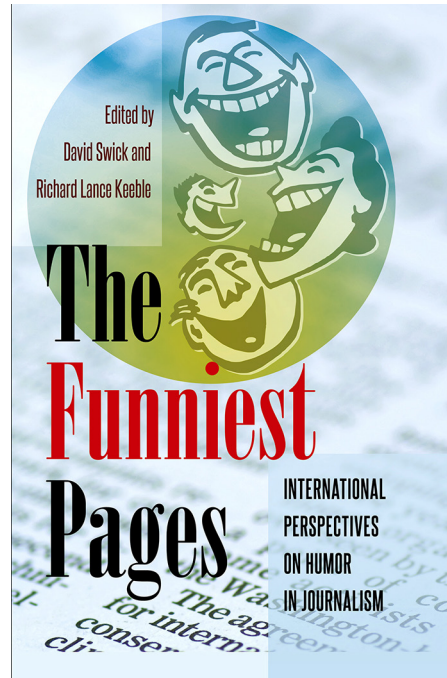
Humour cuts through to the truth

The Funniest Pages: International Perspectives on Humor in Journalism, edited by David Swick and Richard Lance Keeble. New York: Peter Lang. 2017. 288 pages. ISBN 978-1-4331-3099-1 (hardcover); ISBN 978-1-4539-1781-7 (e-book)

SOME of my most treasured moments in journalism have come, not through some painstaking excoriation of the powerful and corrupt, but thumbing the pages of *Private Eye*, or watching John Clarke take down the vanity of politicians across the ditch. Satire, humour and the cartoon page are as much journalism as investigative exposés; they're the foam on the beer of journalism, the froth that stops us gagging on the otherwise relentless wholesomeness.

Often, they cut through to a truth that can't be told in more obvious ways. So why is it that journalistic humour is almost entirely absent from university journalism programmes? And so understudied in the academy? This is one of the questions posed by this important and long overdue study of humour in journalism.

Divided into four sections, the first has eight chapters surveying the deployment of humour in journalism



up to the present day. Beginning with some of the first uses of satire, in the English Civil War, it moves on with a scholarly, if strangely humourless account of Addison and Steele's founding role in journalistic satire through the creation of *The Spectator* and *Tatler*. Dickens, James Cameron and Hunter S. Thompson are there, as well as *The Clinic*'s role in post-Pinochet Chile.

The second section looks at the way columnists such as Clive James and John Clarke have invented new comic genres within journalism. Section Three explores sports humour; Dermot Heaney examines the use of humour in live text cricket coverage. Section Four brings us into the 21st century, with Sue Joseph on Australian female comedy and others on the transformation of humour by millennials and the online world.

Some of the best chapters are by writers who are not academics: Blake Lambert explores the central role of Twitter in the renaissance of black humour, suggesting it has complemented the work of traditional journalists, still bound by the 'myth of objectivity' and publishers' reluctance to challenge. It has allowed journalists to speak truth to power, using incision and wit and ridicule to make connections that they cannot do in other forms. One of the best examples he gives is #Presidentobiang, a parody of the hideous tyrant of Equatorial Guinea; 'To my Twitter followers, you may follow me, but my security forces will always follow you #AFCON2015'

'Is it wrong to give 36,000 hectares of public land to one's 24-year-old son to start a lucrative timber business? Asking for a friend' (p. 239). Lambert argues that 'Through its commitment to free speech and to identifiable parodies, Twitter has reinvigorated black humor and turned it into a social good. Outrageous lies and questionable practices by politicians merit scepticism and hard questions. For years, these duties exclusively belonged to journalists. Twitter, with its black humor, demonstrates that the definition of who and what is a journalist has changed.' (p. 243).

Although at times one yearns for a few more jokes to leaven the analysis, this is serious and useful survey of the uses of humour in journalism. There is, perhaps, too much of an American weighting; Twain and *Mad Magazine*, *Spy* and *Snark* are well covered; as the authors note, *Private Eye*, *Le Canard*

Enchaîné and much of the rest of Europe and Asia are not. But it has certainly got me thinking about what we can do to make journalism study fun, as well as inspiring.