

# Sour Faces, Happy Lives?

## On Laughter, Joy and Happiness of the Agelasts

Sari Kivistö

Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies

*During the Renaissance and the early modern period, laughter as a bodily phenomenon caused by the jubilant mind became the subject of numerous scientific and literary texts. Scholars endeavoured to give detailed physiological descriptions of laughter and its immediately observable effects on the human body, especially on the face. Laughter was described as a bodily movement that was the result of the emotions of joy and happiness. However, early modern texts often also referred to ancient philosophers, intellectuals or religious figures who had never laughed once in their lives, or who had laughed so much that they had died of laughter. This essay explores these agelast and hypergelast figures. If the signs of rejoicing and happiness included a drawing back of the lips, what did the grim faces of the agelasts mean? Why did they abstain completely from an emotion that, at least in theory, was proper to all human beings? By examining selected sixteenth- and seventeenth-century texts, this essay presents some reasons found for the absence of laughter and reminds us of the curious interrelationships between laughter, well-being and virtuous living in early modern thinking.*

During the Renaissance the old doctrine of the four humours, which had been based on the ancient notion of the permanent condition of man, began to give way to a growing interest in transitory emotions. In this changing atmosphere laughter, as a temporary emotional state, fascinated many authors, medical researchers, and philosophers.<sup>1</sup> Scholars often combined medical observation and psychological and cultural interpretation. In sixteenth-century medical treatises, laughter was treated as a bodily phenomenon, and medical treatises concerned themselves with explaining its physiological mechanics, its causes and the effects discerned in the body. Laurent Joubert (1529–1582), a French humanist and medical doctor from Montpellier who published an influential French treatise on laughter (*Traité*

---

1 Barasch 1997, 174.

*du ris*, 1579), defined laughter as “a movement caused by the jubilant mind and the unequal agitation of the heart, which draws back the mouth and the lips.”<sup>2</sup> Joubert’s approach was characteristic of Renaissance science, because he combined “a physiological explanation involving the mind’s impact on the body [...] and physiognomic symptoms observed in visual experience.”<sup>3</sup> As the seat of laughter, early modern scholars often preferred the heart, which expanded with joy, the expansion first proceeded to the muscles and nerves in the diaphragm and then up to the cheeks until the air and spirits were released and expelled through the open mouth.

Renaissance treatises on laughter also distinguished its different types: joyful laughter, malicious laughter, a smile caused by the perception of beauty, a chimpanzee’s smile, loud laughter, laughter caused by tickling, and so on. Joubert mentioned that a young man had died when two girls tickled him, but since this laughter was caused by touch and purely physical stimuli and not by the movement of the sensitive appetites only, it was not true laughter.<sup>4</sup> True laughter was often seen as the result of the emotions of joy and happiness. In his *De anima et vita* Juan Luis Vives (1492–1540) argued that laughter arises from the emotions of joy and delight, and the physician Girolamo Fracastoro (1478–1553) noted in his *De sympathia et antipathia rerum* that laughter signals internal happiness. Joubert also claimed that the laughing body manifests great signs of contentment and vehement movements that accompany intense and sudden joy.<sup>5</sup>

Early modern medical authors were interested in laughter, since they saw a connection between laughter, happiness and health. According to Joubert, sad and unhappy people are never seen laughing, whereas those who have no worries and are in good health (children, young people) are quick to laugh.<sup>6</sup> Laughter was more quickly produced when the person was in good condition and without worries, but it also had therapeutic effects: it dispelled melancholy, abolished distress and helped sick people to recover their health while they were watching comic scenes and amusing incidents. By stimulating and relieving the

---

2 Joubert 1980, 73; Barasch 1997, 175. On Joubert, see also Link-Heer 1999.

3 Barasch 1997, 175. According to Barasch, the descriptive natural sciences of the Renaissance focused on laughter as a visible phenomenon (1997, 174). On laughter and physiology, see also Berger 1997, 45–64; cf. Fracastoro 1550, 181.

4 For different kinds of laughter, see Joubert 1980, 74–90. For tickling and laughter, see also Aristoteles, *De partibus animalium* 3, 10.

5 Vives 1959 (1538), 210: *Ex laetitia & delectatione risus nascitur*; Fracastoro 1550, 181: *Laetitia interna in facie manifestetur*. Cf. Matthaeus 1582, 765: *cum gaudii accidens atque symbolum sit risus*; Puteanus 1612, 778: *Risus a gaudio*. However, Joubert conceived of laughter as a mixture of opposite emotions, joy and sorrow (1980, 43–45). On the view of laughter as an expression of contempt, see, e.g., Skinner 2000.

6 Joubert 1980, 36, 104.

mind and by providing recreation and relaxation from work, laughter could also lead to happiness and a healthier life.<sup>7</sup>

In his speech *Democritus, sive de risu dissertatio Saturnalis* (Democritus, or A Saturnalian Dissertation on Laughter), Erycius Puteanus (1574–1646), a Belgian humanist and philologist, regarded laughter as an aesthetic and ethical concept, which expressed the presence of both beauty and virtue.<sup>8</sup> A beautiful face was never grim, and laughter and smiles signalled a tranquil mind. Using the conventional wisdom of his day, namely, that laughter is a physiological expression of emotion, Puteanus also argued that laughter proceeded from joy and gladness (*gaudium*) aroused by pleasant things. The emotions expanded the heart until the whole body shook with laughter. Puteanus also noted the close resemblance between joy and sadness: laughter could lead to tears. Puteanus defended laughter as an instrument of moral improvement and for him laughter signalled a life well lived. He viewed joy as the most honest of all emotions, since it filled the mind with feelings of tranquillity and security.<sup>9</sup>

Early modern authors thus often paid attention to the immediately observable effects of laughter and joy on the human body. Authors like Joubert focused on the laughing face: no animal but man had a face, and as a social animal man “ought not to have his affections so hidden that one might not discover them.”<sup>10</sup> All the internal affections were imprinted in facial expressions; they were difficult to dissimulate, and especially vehement emotions were always revealed by some mark or noticeable facial change. Joubert emphasised that the face and its discernible emotions were also necessary to any social intercourse in order to discover other persons’ manners, emotions and nature.<sup>11</sup> Signs of rejoicing and happiness included a shining forehead, sparkling eyes, reddening cheeks – caused by the great quantity of humours and blood that gushes upwards – and a drawing back of the lips.<sup>12</sup> However, many early modern texts dealing with laughter also mentioned people who had neither laughed nor smiled in their entire lifetimes, as well as those who had laughed so much that they had made laughter a profession (Democritus) or even died of laughter. Early modern ideas of laughter have been studied earlier, but there is no focussed discussion of the agelast (non-laughing) and hypergelast (ever-laughing) figures. In

---

7 Joubert 1980, 126–127. There is an extensive literature on laughter as recreation and an antidote to melancholy. For two good discussions, see Olson 1982; Schmitz 1972.

8 Erycius Puteanus (Erik van der Putte, 1574–1646) succeeded Justus Lipsius as professor at Louvain. His speech was delivered at the University of Louvain in 1611 and published in 1612. For Puteanus, see also Verberckmoes 2000.

9 Puteanus 1612; Verberckmoes 2000.

10 Joubert 1980, 6; trans. David de Rocher.

11 Joubert 1980, 6–8.

12 Joubert 1980, 40.

the following essay, I will examine some of these exceptional individuals who were dealt with in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century texts on laughter. What kinds of people were those who had never laughed? Why did they abstain completely from an emotion that, at least in theory, was proper to all human beings?<sup>13</sup> And if laughter signalled joy and happiness, what did its absence mean?

In order to answer these questions, I will explore selected sixteenth- and seventeenth-century texts dealing with laughter. Laughter became a popular issue, for example, in *Quaestiones quodlibeticae*, hilarious and free academic discussions held yearly in European universities from the early fifteenth century onwards. Professors were asked to comment on whatever topic was put before them by students, and usually the respondent argued for and against the issue under consideration.<sup>14</sup> These playful *quodlibet* texts were then included in larger collections, such as Caspar Dornau's (1577–1631) *Amphitheatrum sapientiae Socraticae joco-seriae* (Amphitheatre of serio-comic Socratic wisdom; first published in 1619).<sup>15</sup> Dornau's compilation contains the following short texts on laughter: Caspar Diepelius' *Quaestio an ridere liceat* (A Question whether laughter is permissible; 1582);<sup>16</sup> Philipp Matthaeus' *Responsio* (Response; 1582);<sup>17</sup> Rudolph Goclenius' *De Physiologia Risus & Ridiculi, Theses* (Theses on the physiology of laughter and the ridiculous);<sup>18</sup> Johannes Kuhl's *Theses De risu, fletu et locutione* (Theses on laughter, weeping and locution);<sup>19</sup> and Erycius Puteanus' speech *Democritus, sive de risu dissertatio Saturnalis* (1611). I will take a closer look at some of these texts and in addition will refer to some sixteenth- and seventeenth-century medico-philosophical discussions, Laurent Joubert's extensive treatise in particular, that illuminate the nature of laughter and its relation to the good life.<sup>20</sup>

---

13 For the Aristotelian idea of man as the only animal capable of laughing, see Labarrière 2000.

14 Cf. Verberckmoes 2000, 400.

15 Dornau's compilation includes parodical eulogies and mock-dissertations (written in Latin and Greek) that followed the usual forms of encomia or scientific dissertations, but instead of more substantial topics they focused on something widely regarded as trivial, unworthy or vile. Laughter became one of the issues addressed along with other trivial and emphatically non-serious issues. For mock-encomia, see Kivistö 2009; on Dornau, see Seidel 1994.

16 Diepelius was a student from Hessen.

17 Matthaeus (1554–1603) was a professor of rhetoric at the University of Marburg.

18 Goclenius the elder (1547–1628) was a professor at Marburg. His son, Rudolph Goclenius the younger (1572–1621), wrote on laughter as well. Dornau's compilation does not include the whole treatise by Goclenius the elder, but only his short theses on laughter.

19 Kuhl was a student at Marburg.

20 This essay focuses on a handful of early modern texts only, but laughter was widely discussed in the late sixteenth-century medical, philosophical and rhetorical texts. For further information, see, e.g., Skinner 2000. For the art of joking and jesting, see Kivistö 2008.

## The Agelasts – the People Who Never Laughed

In early modern discussions of laughter the idea is often encountered that laughter must somehow be justified. Thus, in December 1582 student Caspar Diepelius posed the question whether a virtuous and wise human being was allowed to laugh (*Quaestio an ridere liceat*). Diepelius elaborated on the arguments both for and against this question. If laughter accompanied shameful and frivolous deeds and obscene words, he assumed that it should be forbidden. To support his argument against laughter he listed famous men whose names were automatically associated with not-laughing and in that sense had become paradigmatic. Other early modern authors also provided lists of persons who had remained unmoved and had never laughed in their lives:<sup>21</sup>

- Heraclitus: ca. 540–475 BC, the famous weeping philosopher.
- Anaxagoras: ca. 500–428 BC, a philosopher, astronomer and mathematician from Clazomenae.<sup>22</sup>
- Dionysius: 430–367 BC, a Sicilian tyrant of Syracuse and a playwright who loved tragedy but never watched comedy.
- Phocion: ca. 402–318 BC, an Athenian politician, war strategist and adversary of the orator Demosthenes.
- Aristoxenus: ca. 370–300 BC, a Peripatetic and Pythagorean philosopher who abhorred laughing.
- Parmeniscus of Metapontum: an early Pythagorean philosopher.
- Cato, M. Porcius: the elder, Cato Maior or Cato the Censor, 234–149 BC, a famous Roman politician and statesman.
- Crassus, M. Licinius: an uncle of the more famous first-century BC M. Licinius Crassus, Roman general and politician, who laughed, at most, only once in his whole life.
- Nerva: Roman Emperor in 96–98 AD, known as the first of the five good emperors, and successor to Domitian.<sup>23</sup>
- Christ.

Laurent Joubert also had an entire chapter on people who never or very seldom laughed. He included some of the names mentioned above: Phocion, Cato the Censor, Crassus, Nerva. In addition, Joubert mentioned Socrates, the Emperor Numerian, Philip the Younger, the modest Plato, Lazarus and those who visited Trophonius, the

---

21 Diepelius 1582, 764; Puteanus 1612, 778–779.

22 The anecdote that Anaxagoras never laughed or smiled was attributed by Puteanus to Aelian's historical miscellany *Varia historia* 8, 13. Aelian also mentions Aristoxenus here.

23 The anecdote that Nerva was never seen laughing or playing is attributed by Diepelius and Joubert to a first-century Pythagorean philosopher, Apollonius of Tyana, and his work *Apology*.

oracle of Jupiter, as men who had never been seen to laugh. In Italy the whole family known as the Arisis of Cremona owed their surname to not laughing.<sup>24</sup>

Of these men, Phocion was known to have a poker face. The Greek biographer Plutarch recorded that Athenians hardly ever saw Phocion either happy or sad, in laughter or in tears, and further, that “though his nature was most gentle and most kind, his countenance made him seem forbidding and sullen, so that hardly any one of those who were not on intimate terms cared to converse with him alone.”<sup>25</sup> When Phocion was teased because of his frowning brows he answered: “No harm [...] has come to you from this brow of mine; but these men’s laughter has cost the city many a tear.”<sup>26</sup> Phocion thus observed that not to laugh was to be virtuous in the sense of not hurting anyone; laughter was derision that was to be suppressed, because it caused pain to others. This reflects the dominant ancient view of laughter, according to which laughter was essentially scornful, directed at someone one finds inferior in some way and hence to be controlled.<sup>27</sup> In his *Life of Phocion*, Plutarch also pointed out that whereas others wept and shed tears in difficult circumstances, the countenance of Phocion was always the same, and his calmness and grandeur of spirit were greatly admired by other men.<sup>28</sup>

Plutarch is also a source for Anaxagoras, since in his *Life of Pericles*, Plutarch emphasised the philosopher’s great impact on the Athenian statesman’s character. Anaxagoras, nicknamed Nous (Mind), was closely imitated by Pericles.<sup>29</sup> From Anaxagoras, Pericles learned composure of countenance and an undisturbed serenity and calmness in all his movements. Similar stories were told of both Cato the Censor and Cato Uticensis (95–46 BC), a Roman politician and statesman who was known as a firm Stoic and legendary for his severe, stubborn character, rigidity and moral integrity. Cato Uticensis never smiled even as a child but looked suspiciously at everyone: “It was altogether difficult to make him laugh, although once in a while he relaxed his features so far as to smile; and he was not quickly nor easily moved to anger, though once angered he was inexorable.”<sup>30</sup>

24 Joubert 1980, 100–104. François Rabelais also listed *agelastoi*; see Ménager 1995, 80–81. For medieval agelasts (including St. Bernard and Hildegard of Bingen), see Minois 2000, 210–215.

25 Plutarch, *Phocion* 5, 1; trans. Bernadotte Perrin.

26 Plutarch, *Phocion* 5, 1; trans. Bernadotte Perrin. Frazier 2000 has pointed out Plutarch’s interest in laughter and people who laugh in his *Lives*.

27 Cf. Plato, *Philebus* 48–50; Aristotle, *Poetics* 1449a; *Nicomachean ethics* 1128a. On laughter and (ancient) philosophy, see the articles in Desclos 2000 (on Plato’s *Philebus* and Aristotle in particular); Ménager 1995, 79–116; Sanders 1995, 83–112; Morreall 1987; and Minois 2000, 57–60 (a brief discussion of the agelast Greek philosophers from Pythagoras to Plato).

28 Plutarch, *Phocion* 36, 1. See also Valerius Maximus, *Facta et dicta memorabilia* 3, 8, ext. 2; Cornelius Nepos, *Phocion*.

29 Plutarch, *Pericles* 4, 4–5, 1.

30 Plutarch, *Cato the Younger* 1, 2; trans. Bernadotte Perrin.

Puteanus noted that of these men, Crassus was even nicknamed Agelastus (“without laughter”, Gr. *gelastós*, laughable); the anecdote was attributed to Lucilius and repeated in many ancient sources.<sup>31</sup> Pliny the Elder mentioned him, for example, in his discussion of human curiosities and peculiar attributes given to men:

It is stated that Crassus the grandfather of Crassus who fell in Parthia never laughed, and was consequently called Agelastus, and that likewise there have been many cases of people who never wept, and that the famous philosopher Socrates always wore the same look on his countenance, never gayer and never more perturbed. This temperament sometimes develops into a kind of rigidity and a hard, unbending severity [*torvitas*] of nature, and takes away the emotions natural to humanity [...].<sup>32</sup>

Pliny’s passage continues with a list of philosophers who were particularly severe by nature, as well as two other curiosities: Pomponius the poet and ex-consul, who never belched, and Drusus’ daughter Antonia, who never spat.

Puteanus also included Parmeniscus of Metapontum, who lost his ability to laugh after descending into the cave of Trophonius to hear an oracle, but recovered it again on the island of Delos at the sight of a deformed and ugly statue representing the image of the goddess Leto.<sup>33</sup> Puteanus further drew attention to people who valued laughter even though they were otherwise famous for their restrained, exercised and virtuous way of life. The Spartans, for example, who were known for their strict seriousness, revered the Goddess of Laughter. Plutarch says that the famous Spartan lawgiver Lycurgus dedicated a statue to Laughter and introduced into Spartan drinking parties the habit of jesting to sweeten their otherwise austere way of life. Puteanus recalled an anecdote about a Spartan soldier with a fly painted on his shield, who was mocked as a coward because of this modest signum. He responded that he could attack an enemy so rapidly that he would be taken for a fly.<sup>34</sup> It has been argued that laughter and jokes were used to consolidate the social order

---

31 See Cicero, *De finibus* 5, 92; *Tusculanae disputationes* 3, 31; Ammianus Marcellinus 26, 9, 11; Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 2, 1, 6; and Solinus, *De mirabilibus mundi*, cap. 1.

32 Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 7, 79; trans. H. Rackham.

33 This story was told by Athenaeus (614A, according to Puteanus, lib. 14, cap. II); cf. Aristophanes, *Clouds* 508 and Strabo, *Geografica* 9, 39, 13. See Minois 2000, 19. The phrase “descent to the Trophonian cave” became proverbial in the meaning of “to suffer a great fright.” The cave in Boeotia was associated with melancholy, because the visitors emerging from the cave after having met the oracles and being given revelations always looked pale. It was also said of persons who looked serious and grave that they had visited the Trophonian cave.

34 Puteanus 1612, 779; Plutarch, *Lycurgus* 25, 4. Cf. Joubert 1980, 17; David 1989, 1. At the end of Book 2 of his *Metamorphoses* (celebrating the festival day of the god Risus), Apuleius related that, in Thessaly among the Hypatenses, Laughter was also revered as a god. In his short treatise on satire, Francesco Robortello (1516–1567) tells of an ancient tribe called *Phaestii* who, according to the testimony of Athenaeus, were educated in joking and jesting from childhood and trained to the degree that some of them regarded their unending hilarity as a plague sent by the gods. Therefore, they visited the oracle of Apollo in a vain effort to recover their seriousness. Robortello 1548/1970, 501–502. See also Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistes* 6, 261c–e.

in Spartan society and to improve and correct its (militaristic) character. Spartans had special laughter contests in which laughter seemed to express the sensation of superiority and inculcate the Spartan love of victory. Boys were educated to accustom themselves to joking, and the corrective force of laughter was repeatedly exercised against those who had somehow failed in society. According to Plutarch, to endure jesting and teasing was a peculiarly Spartan quality.<sup>35</sup>

Early modern authors thus noted that intellectuals, philosophers or well-known moral figures influenced by ancient moral teachings comprised a prominent group of agelast people. But why did intellectuals abstain from laughing? How was this curious quality of theirs connected with their ideas of the good and virtuous life? Apparently, the reluctance to laugh did not mean that the men singled out for their severity were unable to laugh or to experience positive emotions. Nor were they particularly unhappy or insensitive. Rather it was their deliberate choice to refrain from laughter. They were admired because they had risen above laughter through self-restraint.

### Why Did Intellectuals Reject Laughter?

Voluntary abstinence from laughter may be explained by judging the nature of laughter. The impulse to laugh was regarded as automatic, unreflective and something that appeared without choice or premeditation, unlike, for instance, the virtues involving choice. Joubert claimed, quoting Quintilian, that “laughter has an extremely great power which cannot be resisted. Most often it slips out of us and is not to be contained. It not only forces both the face to confess and the voice to declare our feelings, but its violence shakes and sets the whole body in motion [...]”<sup>36</sup> Laughter was a form of power that made people lose control of their bodies; it “burst out”, “was unrestrainable”, “took possession”, “had an imperious force” and “broke out against the will”.<sup>37</sup> According to Joubert, it was impossible for the vehement affections not to be revealed by some change imprinted in the face. Laughter caused involuntary physical convulsions in the body which, since the convulsions were natural, were sometimes difficult or nearly impossible to hide, stop, suppress or control “even with reason ordering it”. At times it was even difficult to close the mouth, because it was impossible to quiet the humours that were affected in the heart.<sup>38</sup>

---

35 David 1989, 3–5.

36 Joubert 1980, 16; trans. David de Rocher; cf. Quintilianus, *Institutio oratoria* 6, 3, 9.

37 Cf. Cicero, *De oratore* 2, 235.

38 Joubert 1980, 7, 29, 120.



If then the heart and the arteries did not obey the will, how was the conduct of the agelasts to be explained? Control of bodily movements was not completely impossible, as proved by the example of Crassus and others. Although the agitation of humours, the shaking of muscles and other first movements taking place in laughter were involuntary, in Joubert's words at times the heart did obey the command of reason. Laughter stopped if Reason decided the laughter was absurd.<sup>39</sup> According to Joubert's treatise, there were different reasons why laughable action did not always produce laughter. For example, if someone falls in the mire, we laugh, unless the person hurts himself and some injury, offence or real suffering ensues; then we are moved to compassion and stop laughing. Character also helps to determine how easily a person is moved to laughter: serious people seldom laugh at seeing a human's rear end or sex organs revealed but find the sudden exposure shameful. Or if someone eats excrement instead of honey, we may find it merely stupid rather than laughable, because it would have been easy to test the food before eating. In Joubert's words, although people who are easily deceived often cause laughter, such credulity may also cause mere annoyance or even anger, since the ridiculous situation could easily have been avoided had the person exercised even a modicum of caution. Joubert notes that laughable action may also lose its charm if it takes place at an improper time or if we have encountered similar occurrences so often that they merely tire us.<sup>40</sup>

People who wished to have full command of their reason and to live life undisturbed often resisted laughter. Laughter as an expression of uncontrolled emotion implied that the person laughing had abandoned himself to the senses, to outer impulses and circumstances, something the Stoics especially wanted to avoid. The opposition between the intellectual or virtuous life and the sensual life also plays a role here, since laughter was thought to be evoked by pleasure and to express passion. For the intellectuals mentioned above, laughter was not a sign of the good life but signalled weakness of will or lack of discipline and was thus to be avoided. Laughter was also a matter of persuasion. Plutarch tells us that Cato Uticensis was reluctant to be persuaded about anything by anyone or to allow anything to be done to him. This explained, for example, his difficulties in learning, and before accepting anything or obeying his teacher he always demanded to know the reason.<sup>41</sup> Thus, his suspicion and resistance to laughter were based on the fact that laughter was a reaction to the outer world and a sign that the laugher had been provoked and persuaded by someone else. Knowing the Stoic predilection for self-sufficiency, tranquillity and constancy of mind, Cato's resistance to laughter can easily be read as a sign of the power of his will to avoid such emotions and

---

39 Joubert 1980, 121–122.

40 Joubert 1980, 20–22, 25–26.

41 Plutarch, *Cato the Younger* 1, 4.

reactions. He may have felt like laughing but did not, because laughing would have meant surrendering his rational control. In Stoic terms, he did not resist laughter as such but took command of his own immediate reactions, emotions and impulses offered to him by the outer world. A famous dictum in Horace's *Ars poetica* says: "When a person laughs, people's faces smile in return" (101). This sympathetic reaction happened automatically; for the same reason it was resisted by the Stoics, who insisted that everything should be subjected to the command of reason. All the agelasts were significantly solitary figures.

However, the absence of laughter could also be explained through physiology. In Joubert's view even the Stoic *apatheia* was a natural condition. He referred to Pliny's passage 7, 79, which pointed out that most authors of wisdom and founders of philosophical schools (Diogenes, Pyrrho, Heraclitus and Timon the Misanthrope, who refused to communicate with people)<sup>42</sup> were naturally so afflicted that they were exempt from all passion. In Joubert's estimation the philosophers' self-restraint and tranquillity were not states of mind achieved through mental exercise, but rather natural inclinations based on a melancholic character and bodily constitution. Joubert continues: "For those who are reduced to the apathy of the Stoics, empty of all joy, are in no way tempted by laughable things. And this is because they are not moved by any emotion of the spirits, having hearts that are neither soft nor agile, but hard and stiff by nature."<sup>43</sup> Although some people may intentionally arrive at a stiffness that is less prone to laughter, more often than not this condition results from a natural insensitivity based on the physical structure of the heart: hard, stiff and small hearts dilate only with difficulty and are far less easily moved than soft, agile and large hearts. Humoral pathology also still played some role here, since sanguine people (women more than men, fat people more than skinny) and those who radiated heat were, through their natural constitutions, more inclined to laughter. For the same reason wine was thought to be conducive to happiness, since from wine came good blood, which took away all sadness and unhappiness.<sup>44</sup> Joubert claimed that "those who give themselves completely to study and contemplation, or to some great enterprise, are almost all *age/lasts*, sad, rude, severe, and have knitted brows, because the vital strength having been weakened by the consumption of spirits, they have little blood left, and that little is as coarse as the atrabilious kind."<sup>45</sup> That is to say, people without any sense of humour concretely lacked humour. These arguments illuminate how deeply Renaissance authors were at pains to explain laughter through physiology and how Joubert,

---

42 On Timon's misanthropy, see Ménager 1995, 81–83.

43 Joubert 1980, 104; trans. David de Rocher.

44 Joubert 1980, 101–105.

45 Joubert 1980, 104; trans. David de Rocher.

the medical doctor, interpreted the human habit from a medical perspective. The inclination to certain emotions was based on the bodily constitution.

Joubert mentioned two further reasons that stopped laughter: either one did not perceive laughable action or did not grasp it. When the mind was occupied by worries or a sharp pain, attention was turned away from laughable action. Joubert noted that if a bothersome worry hammers the brain, “in vain will something funny be presented to sad, grave, and severe Cato, to Heraclitus the weeper, and similar sour-faces.”<sup>46</sup> Joubert thus explained the absence of laughter in these men by their sad, serious or melancholic character: “[Melancholics] scarcely concern themselves with other than serious things, take no pleasure in ridiculous ones, and are not moved by them.”<sup>47</sup> Laughter was also deliberately avoided, since it turned serious people away from more important pursuits, hard work and intellectual endeavours. Then there were those who paid no attention to ridiculous things because of their absent-mindedness; this group of people included the dreamers, the abashed, the fearful, the suspicious and those suffering from deep love or madness.<sup>48</sup>

Juan Luis Vives also dealt briefly with laughter in his *De anima et vita*. In his view, people having serious intellectual or spiritual tasks were less prone to laughter. Vives argued that intellectuals rarely laughed, and only smiled rather knowingly. He gave several reasons for this. First, they were occupied by important issues, serious thinking and intense contemplation. Second, they were often melancholic and had stiff hearts. Third, sometimes decorum prevented them from laughing, since an open display of emotions and unbridled laughter were considered improper and vulgar. Fourth, because of their prudence, few things were new, sudden and surprising enough to provoke amusement.<sup>49</sup> If laughter arose from novel joy or delight, as Vives argues, then intellectuals and philosophers were not likely to laugh as often as children, women or uneducated rustics, since fewer things were unexpected or unforeseen by their sharp and thoughtful minds.<sup>50</sup> Vives also suggested that laughter should be harnessed through self-discipline. In the early modern period, the new

---

46 Joubert 1980, 26; trans. David de Rocher.

47 Joubert 1980, 101; trans. David de Rocher. On intellectuals' melancholy, see Rütten 1992, with further references.

48 Joubert 1980, 101.

49 Vives 1959 (1538), 202–204.

50 Joubert and Fracastoro emphasised that the sense of surprise was essential to laughter and delight. Things which evoke laughter were new, sudden, light and ridiculous, and these caused admiration (*admiratio*) and joy in people. Cf. Fracastoro 1550, 182–183. This so-called incongruence theory of laughter was later developed by Kant and Schopenhauer; see Morreall 1987.

standards of bodily control demanded that the elite differentiated themselves from their inferiors, that is to say, the ignorant, the peasants, children and women.<sup>51</sup>

But a grim face was also an advantage for intellectuals. The seventeenth-century Jesuit and satirist Jakob Balde (1604–1668) noted in his long satirical poem *Vultuosae torvitatis encomium* (In praise of grim faces) the great benefits of looking severe and even ugly. He argued that intellectuals were much happier if they looked ugly – as they usually did – because they had probably devoted their lives to true wisdom and learning. An ugly face protected them from selfishness, self-love and sensual pleasures, and thus allowed them to search for true beauty. A grim face thus signalled a virtuous life – and made it possible.<sup>52</sup>

### Exceeding the Proper Mean: Dying of Laughter and Mad Laughter

But if the happy life is a virtuous life and only the virtuous are happy, does a virtuous life necessarily need to be serious? Diepelius reminded his audience that many serious and virtuous men had given a prominent place to laughter: Plato's philosophy and even Aristotle's works were full of wit and laughter. Diepelius' question whether laughter should be allowed was answered by Philipp Matthaëus (1554–1603), a professor at Marburg University, an institution that specialised in the learned treatment of laughter in the early modern period.<sup>53</sup> In his *Responsio*, Matthaëus noted that there have always been people who have voluntarily refused to laugh or who have lost this ability because of some frightening incident. However, Matthaëus criticised both excessive laughter as well as the complete resistance to laughter. He based his argument on theological, ethical and physiological grounds, calling upon God as his witness to defend laughter. God had given human beings the ability to feel moderate joy and therefore also a licence to laugh, which signalled joy. Matthaëus argued that God specifically did not require insensibility (*apatheia*) from human beings but moderation of the emotions (*metriopatheia*) and that God also expected humans to feel the joy in good things. Among those who exceeded the proper mean, early modern authors mentioned the following:<sup>54</sup>

---

51 Cf. Fracastoro 1550, 188, where he argues that children, women and the common folk are more prone to wonder and amusement and therefore also to laughter, whereas men and philosophers are more serious-minded. Also drunkenness, social occasions and celebrations provoke laughter.

52 Balde 1660; cf. Baier 2005, 253.

53 Verberckmoes 2000, 401.

54 See Matthaëus 1582, 766; Joubert 1980, 41, 131–133; Ravisius Textor 1595, 300–301. Johannes Ravisius Textor (1480–1524) was a French humanist. His main work *Officina* was a popular encyclopaedia which included anecdotes and strange facts of every kind. Joubert, for his part, devoted one chapter to the issue of “Whether or not someone can die of laughter,” the very chapter that concluded his treatise. To be precise, Joubert talks about joy, Ravisius Textor about joy and laughter (*Gaudio et risu mortui*).

- Democritus: ca. 460–370 BC, the famous ever-laughing philosopher.<sup>55</sup>
- Chilon of Sparta: ca. 550 BC, a famous Spartan who died of happiness upon seeing his son come in triumph from the Olympic games.
- Zeuxis: 435–390 BC, a famous Greek painter who died laughing at a portrait of an old woman he had just depicted.<sup>56</sup>
- Sophocles and Dionysius the Tyrant of Sicily both died of joy when they heard news of their victories in tragedies.<sup>57</sup>
- Philippides: ca. 300 BC, an Athenian comic poet who died after unexpectedly winning the prize in a literary contest.
- Xenophantus: a man who, according to Aristotle's *Nicomachean ethics* (1150b10), attempted to suppress his laughter but failed and burst into a violent explosion of mad laughter.
- Chrysippus of Soli: ca. 280–207 BC, another Greek and Stoic philosopher, who died laughing at the sight of his donkey after it had eaten all his figs and washed them down with the wine offered by its master's servant.<sup>58</sup>

Of these examples, Democritus is of course the most famous. He laughed regularly and, in Joubert's estimation, lived for 109 years, dissatisfied with nothing.<sup>59</sup> Joubert thus inferred that laughter counteracted old age. Democritus' laughter had a serious point, since he laughed at the folly of humankind. In addition to excessive and continuous laughter, another way to exceed the proper mean was to die laughing.<sup>60</sup> As for Chrysippus' death, a similar donkey story was told by Joubert when explaining a special type of laughter called Catonian. Catonian laughter was "extremely inordinate and shuddering". It had been named for Cato the Censor, who laughed only once in his life at the sight of a thistle-eating ass.<sup>61</sup> Also, mothers

---

55 There is an extensive literature on Democritus; see, e.g., Rütten 1992.

56 The Zeuxis anecdote was told by Festus, *De verborum significatione*, s.v. pictor: *Pictor Zeuxis risu mortuus, dum ridet effuse pictam a se anum*. Cf. Ménager 1995, 28–30 (on Zeuxis and Philemon in Rabelais).

57 Cf. Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 7, 180: "Cases of people who died of joy are (besides Chilo - - ) Sophocles and Dionysius the tyrant of Sicily, in both cases after receiving news of a victory with a tragedy" (trans. H. Rackham). The anecdote about Sophocles' death was also related by Valerius Maximus, *Facta et dicta memorabilia* 9, 12, ext. 5.

58 This anecdote was also related by Diogenes Laertius 7, 185. Joubert also mentioned the anecdote of the ass and the figs when discussing Philemon.

59 Joubert 1980, 17.

60 Several Renaissance treatises on laughter also noted its negative effects on the human body and the occasional deaths resulting from it. On such treatises, see Ordine 2000, 540–541 (esp. notes 52 and 54).

61 Joubert 1980, 90.

had died of relief on seeing their sons return safely from battle, and people in Joubert's time had expired at sudden sad or happy news.<sup>62</sup>

However, according to Joubert these deaths were caused by a sudden joy rather than laughter. In his treatise Joubert examined the physiological reasons and differences caused in the body by these two emotions. One could die of sudden joy but usually laughter did not have such dramatic effects. Joy dissipated a great quantity of humours and blood in all directions throughout the body. In laughter this movement and a widening of the heart was never as excessive as in extreme joy, because there always remained enough blood in the heart to sustain life. Joubert claims that since laughter is caused by the mixed feelings of joy and sadness, the latter emotion prevents the effects of laughter from becoming excessive. Therefore, laughter usually did not cause death, whereas in joy the heart dilated rapidly and the sudden, great loss of humours was the main reason people died of this emotion, especially those with weak hearts. Death was likely if the heart was already weakened by ardent study, assiduous cogitation and neglect of nourishment, which together caused a great loss of humours and a general failure of bodily strength. For Joubert, the chief cause of death from laughter was not the sudden movement of humours in the heart, but lack of respiration.<sup>63</sup>

## Laughter, Jubilation and Religion

One case still remains to be discussed, since sixteenth-century authors also placed Christ among the agelast figures. The argument that, according to the Gospels, Christ wept but never laughed or smiled was the subject of numerous theological discussions from the Middle Ages to the seventeenth century.<sup>64</sup> Christ was capable of laughing as are all human beings, but by denying himself what was natural to man – a sense of humour – he emphasised the seriousness of his task of bringing salvation to humanity. His refusal to laugh has also been explained by saying that the Gospels do not include everything he did, or that since laughter was considered

---

62 Joubert 1980, 41; Ravius Textor 1595, 300–301. A similar list of women who died of good news was given by Valerius Maximus, *Facta et dicta memorabilia* 9, 12, 2–3; and Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 7, 180.

63 Joubert 1980, 43–44, 61–62 and 95.

64 On laughter and religion, see Moretti 2001; Sanders 1995, 35–57, 127–164 (for Christ, see esp. 135–141); Minois 2000, 95–134; Screech 1999; Ménager 1995, 117–148; and briefly Berger 1997, 197–204 and Verberckmoes 2003, 3–4. Laughter was mentioned in the Bible on several occasions. Ninety-year-old Sarah laughed in disbelief when she was told that she would give birth to Isaac – who embodied laughter – and to a whole new nation (Gen. 17:17; 18:12–15; 21). God laughed in the Old Testament four times (in Psalms 2:4; 37:13; 59:9; Proverbs 1:26) to ridicule sinners' vain ambitions and to remind them that they amounted to nothing in the face of his power. Laughter was also mentioned when Christ was mocked at his crucifixion. Early modern discussions of laughter often listed the conventional examples of people laughing in the Bible, including St. Paul, who advised everyone to rejoice with others. See, e.g., Diepelius 1582, 765.

random or malicious, it was avoided by Christ.<sup>65</sup> Matthaeus claimed that if Christ did not laugh, it was merely because laughter was too trivial to merit inclusion in the Gospels. Moreover, the Bible did not deal with everything that Christ did. On the other hand, Christ did not come to earth seeking pleasure. Matthaeus concluded that Christ did not reject all sorts of laughter but only excessive measures and *epikhairekakian* (malignant joy).<sup>66</sup> Puteanus, for his part, justified laughter as being acceptable on the basis of the angel's announcement to the shepherds at Christ's birth: a great joy for all people, a joy that lifted people's hearts and spirits. Thus laughter became a sign of true, heavenly and evangelical joy originating in God.<sup>67</sup>

The religious background was important for discussions of laughter, and patristic literature, for example, often touched upon this issue. To summarise this discussion very briefly, laughter was at times totally rejected for the reason that Christ did not laugh even once during his life on earth; at other times mankind was only advised to keep laughter to its proper proportion. Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–215 AD), for example, distinguished different types of laughter and rejected uncontrolled, explosive laughter and giggling as the laughter of whores. The type of laughter he accepted was smiling, “the laughter of the wise”, which was a kind of relaxation of tension and harmony. He also favoured the Greek hero Ajax, who was said to have gone into battle with “a smile on his grim face.” St. Basil rejected loud laughter and shaking of the body but accepted mild laughter (*lenis risus*).<sup>68</sup> In Renaissance art especially the smile came to express harmony and happiness, whereas loud laughter, open mouths, protruding tongues and visible teeth were more ambivalent and often related to visual depictions of death, the devil or evil and malicious laughter.<sup>69</sup>

Laughter was also shown in connection to Christ's ascension and redemption, and this particular holy shouting of joy was parodied in Renaissance literature. For example, *Epistolae obscurorum virorum*, a famous satire on stylistic vices, scholasticism and corrupted Catholics from the early sixteenth century, includes a passage that describes a successful homily on the subject of shouting for joy; the title of the sermon is “God is gone up with a shout” (*Deus ascendit cum jubilatione*). The topic of hilarious noise is elaborated upon here with random quotations from the Bible:

---

65 Puteanus 1612, 779. See also Verberckmoes 2000, 406.

66 Matthaeus 1582, 766.

67 For this passage in Puteanus, see also Verberckmoes 2000, 406–407.

68 Barasch 1997, 183–184; the passage is also quoted via Stobaeus in Dornau 1995, 780.

69 Barasch 1997, 194–201.

[...] when the Lord ascended on high with uplifted hands, then the apostles with the Blessed Virgin stood and shouted until they were hoarse, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, “I am weary of crying and my throat is dry.” [...] this outcry was a shout of joy, and furthermore necessary for the Catholic faith, as saith the Lord in the Evangel, “Verily, verily I say unto you, if these should hold their peace, the stones would cry out.” They all shouted with rapture and great zeal – especially St. Peter, who had a voice like a sackbut – as David witnesseth, “This poor man cried.” The Blessed Virgin shouted not, but praised God in her heart [...]. And while the Apostles thus shouted together with jubilation and devotion, an angel came from heaven and said unto them, “Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye here shouting, and gazing into heaven?” [...] (I, 30; trans. Francis Griffin Stokes)

This parodic passage increases the acoustical effect of the words by amplifying the topic of shouting for joy until the voice turns to mere quantitative expansion, which consists of inarticulate sounds and is thus devoid of any significance. Here parody serves religious satire, since the preacher who has given this mindless sermon – probably preaching in a loud voice – is Catholic, whereas the book is anti-Catholic. Parody also works here against mysticism and spiritual union, and speaks for rational and articulate speech.<sup>70</sup>

Laughter as a physical phenomenon was also bound up with the earthly and momentary nature of joy. Especially texts that celebrated intense joy defended earthly forms of laughter, i.e., laughter that was entirely based on joy felt in the finite and in the mundane. Such texts also made an anti-religious argument in emphasising the value of finite experiences and life. Religious views divided the joys into accidental and essential ones. Whereas the religious view of joy emphasised that only heavenly joy and the joys of the after-life were true, essential and lasting, worldly joy was seen as accidental, trivial and fleeting. In parody, however, these judgements were subverted. A good example was the short mock-disputation on jubilation, *Disputatio de jubilatu* (1621), which celebrated the loud and intense experience of joy that was entirely based on earthly pleasures, immoderate behaviour and intoxication.<sup>71</sup> The text does not permit any glimpse of higher joy, thus marking an emphatic distance from Christian silence, gravity and sobriety.

---

70 For this text, see also Kivistö 2002.

71 *Disputatio de jubilatu* follows the usual disputation form and its devices of pedantry, listing, categorising and quoting authorities. For example, the striving for classification is parodied by making a difference between the subtypes of jubilation, which depend on the formation of the larynx and on the ease with which the air passes through it. The praeses of the thesis was Calliphonus Stentor, professor in the art of jubilation and the cantor with the sweetest voice, and the respondent was Hugo Cüsonius Landaviensis. *Kalliphônos* means someone with a fine voice; *Stentôr* was a Greek at Troy who was famous for his loud voice and described in the *Iliad* as having the voice of fifty men. In his dedication the author emphasised that the audience addressed did not consist of serious old people but of young men whose hearts abounded in joy.



The anonymous author of the *Disputatio* began by studying the word “jubilation”, which meant a wild shout of joy that expressed exultation. It voiced happiness and joyful emotions that cannot be expressed verbally (such as divine joy, exultant inexpressible joy) but that cannot be hidden either.<sup>72</sup> Here I will deal only briefly with the author’s classification of jubilating people. These included especially younger people, students and craftsmen, whereas angels, animals and dead people do not jubilate – although some animal voices do coincidentally resemble jubilation. At times lifeless objects such as mountains or the earth can jubilate metaphorically (Psalms 98:4, 8; 100:1; Isaiah 44:23; 49:13). In addition, the poor, melancholics and monks belonging to mendicant orders and mutes do not jubilate. A mute is here defined as someone whose throat muscles were mutilated and whose tongue was so thick that it protruded from the mouth and prevented him from laughing. People who jubilate in an imperfect manner due to some physical injury also include those who lisp, old people and decrepit men who have lost some or all of their teeth.

As for gender differences in the expression of jubilation, in general, very generous body language, clapping hands or stamping feet, was not permitted among either the intellectual elite or women, since these actions were associated with uncivilised customs.<sup>73</sup> Likewise, loud laughter and strong gesticulation were not considered suitable for women, since these behaviours left a grotesque and shameless impression. The idealised view of women depicted them as sweetly smiling. A feminine smile implied a self-restrained, discreet and even enigmatic character; it connoted chastity that was not prone to any excessive pleasures. Also important here is silence: a smile is the silent and serene laughter suitable to women, and while being a restrained and controlled expression of joy, it was also considered the opposite of raucous merriment. Both angels and chaste women were depicted as quietly smiling, an image that reflected their divine quality, celestial harmony and inner superiority.<sup>74</sup>

---

72 The Latin nouns *jubilus*, *jubilum*, *jubilatio* and *jubilatus* appeared especially in Christian writers (with the meaning of “to shout for joy”). Jubilant joy was expressed by making a joyful noise, uttering loud sounds of joy, and rejoicing with songs and acclamations, all of which expressed that the joy was exultant. It was often accompanied by violent movement, shaking and trembling. Especially Augustine discussed the wordlessness of the *jubilus*, seeing jubilation as a symbol of a joy that surpasses the expression of ordinary speech. According to the dictionaries of later Latinity, this inarticulate sound was typical of pastoral and rural people who, for example, gave orders to their dogs by using this particular voice (cf. Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 8, 17) or expressed their happiness in the abundance of harvest. It also had its origins in military language: a warcry was called jubilation and a loud bellow probably alerted others to one’s strength and ability to fight. According to Silius Italicus, the Cyclops delighted in the jubilations of the Siren (*Punica* 14, 475). It also had a specific meaning in medieval music: in Gregorian song *jubilus* referred to the long melisma on the last syllable of the word *alleluia*, and this long, non-meaningful *aaaaa* was called *jubilus*. Here *jubilus* also had an emotional content and represented an echo of the jubilant music of heaven. See Du Cange, s.v. *Jubilus*; OED, s. v. *jubilant*, *jubilate*; Georges, s.v. *Jubilum*; LTL, s.v. *Jubilatio*, *Jubilum*; DML, s.v. *Jubilum*; NGDM, s.v. *jubilus*.

73 Verberckmoes 2000, 400.

74 On smiling, see Ménager 1995, 187–222; Barasch 1997, 201–206.

However, in the dissertation on jubilation, the author accords women a licence to loud laughter on the basis of both sexes being advised to express their innate joy equally. On the other hand, an idealistic view of girls' laughter still pervades the text, because their joyful laughing differs significantly in quality from boys' laughter. Girls have voices so sweet that when they jubilate they seem to breathe out roses (*Hybleas rosas*), honey (*Cecropium mel*) and all kinds of other fragrances (including poisonous ones). This image reminds one of those idealised literary women, from Sappho's beloved (cf. Catullus, *dulce ridentem*) to Petrarch's Laura, whose smile was always sweet (*dolce*), angelic and led one's thoughts to paradise and celestial pleasures.<sup>75</sup> Finally, the author announced the purpose of jubilation: to make an innate joy manifest and open, console the disturbed mind, fill it with joy and cure those suffering from chronic melancholy.

## Final Remarks

In early modern texts on laughter both joy and happiness were seen in the face. People were thought to be happy when they laughed, but they did not necessarily laugh when they were happy. As a sign of momentary pleasure, laughter was also condemned and criticised even to the extent that some serious-minded men refrained entirely from laughing. Early modern texts included the names of men who by their refusal to laugh wished to show their command of reason over passion and their ability to abstain from the scornful derision inherent in all laughter. For these men, true joy and happiness were not attained through momentary pleasures, but only by means of a sober mind and virtuous living. Leaving aside sensual pleasures and desires and enjoying mere contemplation was a source for true, intense and profound joy. Laughter that was too effusive was especially disapproved of, both by ancient and Christian authors, and therefore in parodies of such texts its loudest and most intense form, jubilation, was defended to the full.

Juan Luis Vives observed that laughter was frequently and easily produced by wine-drinking, playing, loving, telling amusing stories, staging merry feasts in which the mind relaxed, and by the sudden sense of relief after having escaped from a great danger or worry, for example.<sup>76</sup> This association with frivolity, bodily delights and entertainment was also one reason that the rigid moralists abstained from laughter and why they were mentioned in parodies and *quodlibet* discussions. University festivals celebrating the *quodlibets* gave a prominent place to laughter as a social phenomenon, as a reaction to someone telling a joke. Laughter was a form of merry exchange, a way of allowing someone to affect oneself. This was

---

<sup>75</sup> Ménager 1995, 192.

<sup>76</sup> Vives 1959 (1538), 204.

something that the Stoics as autonomous agents were not inclined to permit, and hence they became frequent objects of parody in texts dealing with laughter.<sup>77</sup> The resistance to laughter was criticised on the basis of the changed belief that real life was the opposite of rigidity and fixity. Especially on festive occasions laughter was emphatically understood as momentary, pleasurable, bodily, based on the senses, unbridled, a release from restraint and control, a phenomenon of the moment. In laughter “we are no longer in control of the moment” nor is there any “achievement of the will or imperative of character.”<sup>78</sup> Early modern critics thus argued that the agelasts who rejected all emotions took life too seriously. But by spelling out the dangers of excessive joy they also reminded one that the preferred emotional attitude was moderate cheerfulness. Happy and healthy lives were lived in temperate gaiety which was life-conserving.

---

77 Sixteenth-century parodies often ignore the fact that the ancient Stoics favoured laughter that underscored seriousness. The Stoics attempted to correct the excesses, both of high seriousness and unbridled laughter, of others. See, e.g., Sanders 1995, 79–80, 114–115.

78 Kimmel 1998, 181–182.

## References

Please note that the ancient authors are not listed here unless some specific edition is involved deserving separate mention.

### Primary sources

- Balde, Jakob 1660. *Vultuosae torvitatis encomium*. See: <<http://www.uni-mannheim.de/mateo/camena/bald3/te01.html>>.
- Diepeliuss, Caspar 1582. *Qvaestio, an ridere liceat*. In Dornau 1995, 764–765.
- Dornau, Caspar 1995 (1619). *Amphitheatrum sapientiae Socraticae ioco-seriae*. Ed. Robert Seidel. Goldbach: Keip.
- Epistolae obscurorum virorum* 1909 (1515–1517). Introduction and translation Francis Griffin Stokes. London: Chatto & Windus.
- Fracastoro, Girolamo 1550. *Liber I de sympathia & antipathia rerum*. Lyon. See: <<http://visualiseur.bnf.fr/Visualiseur?Destination=Gallica&O=NUMM-54410>>.
- Joubert, Laurent 1980 (1579). *Treatise on laughter*. [*Traité du ris*]. Trans. David de Rocher. Alabama: The University of Alabama Press.
- Matthaeus, Philippus 1582. *Responsio*. In Dornau 1995, 765–766.
- Pliny 1969. *Naturalis historia. Natural history in ten volumes*. Vol. 2. Trans. H. Rackham. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Plutarch 1967, 1969. *Plutarch's Lives in eleven volumes*. Vols. 1 and 8. Trans. Bernadotte Perrin. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Puteanus Erycius 1612. *Democritus, sive de risu dissertatio Saturnalis*. In Dornau 1995, 777–780.
- Ravisius Textor, Joannes 1595. *Theatrum poeticum et historicum, sive Officina*. Basiliae.
- Robortello, Francesco 1970 (1548). *Explicatio eorum omnium quae ad satyram pertinent*. In Bernhard Weinberg (ed.) *Trattati di poetica e retorica del cinquecento*, vol. I. Bari: Gius. Laterza & Figli. 495–507.
- Scaliger, Iulius Caesar 1557. *Exotericarum exercitationum liber quintus decimus, de subtilitate, ad Hieronymum Cardanum*. See: <[http://fondosdigitales.us.es/books/digitalbook\\_view?oid\\_page=303967](http://fondosdigitales.us.es/books/digitalbook_view?oid_page=303967)>.
- Stentor, Calliphonus & Cüsonius, Hugo Landaviensis (pseudon.) 1621. *Disputatio de jubilatu*.
- Valerius Maximus, *Facta et dicta memorabilia*. See: <<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/valmax.html>>.
- Vives, Juan Luis (Ioannes Lodovicus) 1959 (1538). *De anima et vita*. Ed. Mario Sancipriano. Torino: Bottega d'Erasmus.

### Secondary sources

- Baier, Thomas 2005. Baldes satirische Dichtungslehre im Zeichen der *Torvitas*. In Gérard Freyburger & Eckard Lefèvre (eds.) *Balde und die römische Satire*. NeoLatina 8. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag. 245–255.
- Barasch, Moshe 1997. *Language of art: Studies in interpretation*. New York and London: New York University Press.

- Berger, Peter L. 1997. *Redeeming laughter: The comic dimension of human experience*. Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter.
- David, Ephraim 1989. Laughter in Spartan Society. In Anton Powell (ed.) *Classical Sparta: Techniques behind her success*. London: Routledge. 1–25.
- De Rocher, David 1980. Introduction. In Joubert 1980. ix–xv.
- Desclos, Marie-Laurence (ed.) 2000. *Le rire des Grecs: Anthropologie du rire en Grèce ancienne*. Grenoble: Editions Jérôme Millon.
- (DML =) *Dictionary of medieval Latin from British sources*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Du Cange, Charles Du Fresne sieur 1937. *Glossarium mediae et infimae Latinitatis*. Paris: Librairie des Sciences et des Arts.
- Frazier, Françoise 2000. Rires et rieurs dans l'œuvre de Plutarque. In Desclos (ed.). 469–494.
- Georges, Karl Ernst 1951. *Ausführliches lateinisch-deutsches Handwörterbuch*. Basel: Schwabe.
- Kimmel, Lawrence 1998. Philosophy, literature, and laughter: Notes on an ontology of the moment. In Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (ed.) *Enjoyment: From laughter to delight in philosophy, literature, the fine arts, and aesthetics*. Analecta Husserliana, Vol. LVI. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers. 175–184.
- Kivistö, Sari 2002. *Creating anti-eloquence: Epistolae obscurorum virorum and the humanist polemics on style*. Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum, Vol. 118. Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica.
- Kivistö, Sari 2008. *Ars iocandi – latinankielisiä tutkielmia leikinlaskun taidosta, rajoista ja rangaistavuudesta* (Latin dissertations on the limits of jesting). In J. Kantola & H. Pyrhönen (eds.) *Homeroksesta Hesu Hopoon: Antiikin traditioiden vaikutus myöhempään kirjallisuuteen*. Helsinki: SKS. 203–217
- Kivistö, Sari 2009 (forthcoming). *Medical analogy in Latin satire*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Labarrière, Jean-Louis 2000. Comment et pourquoi la célèbre formule d'Aristote: "Le rire est le propre de l'homme", se trouve-t-elle dans un traité de physiologie (*Partie des Animaux*, III, 10, 673a8). In Desclos (ed.). 181–189.
- Link-Heer, Ursula 1999. Physiologie und Affektenlehre des Lachens im Zeitalter Rabelais'. Der medico-philosophische 'Traité du Ris' (1579) von Laurent Joubert. In Werner Röcke, Helga Neumann (eds.) *Komische Gegenwelten: Lachen und Literatur in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh. 251–282.
- (LTL =) *Lexicon totius Latinitatis*. Ed. Egidio Forcellini. Lipsiae.
- Ménager, Daniel 1995. *La Renaissance et le rire*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Minois, Georges 2000. *Histoire du rire et de la dérision*. Fayard.
- Moretti, Felice 2001. *La ragione del sorriso e del riso nel Medioevo*. Bari: Edipuglia.
- Morreall, John (ed.) 1987. *The philosophy of laughter and humor*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- (NGDM =) *The new Grove dictionary of music and musicians*. London: Macmillan.
- (OED =) *Oxford English dictionary*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Olson, Glending 1982. *Literature as recreation in the later Middle Ages*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.
- Ordine, Nuccio 2000. Rire thérapeutique et théorie de la nouvelle à la Renaissance. In Desclos (ed.). 525–552.

- Rütten, Thomas 1992. *Demokrit, lachender Philosoph und sanguinischer Melancholiker: Eine pseudohippokratische Geschichte*. Leiden: Brill.
- Sanders, Barry 1995. *Sudden glory: Laughter as subversive history*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Schmitz, Heinz-Günter 1972. *Physiologie des Scherzes: Bedeutung und Rechtfertigung der Ars locandi im 16. Jahrhundert*. Hildesheim, New York: Georg Olms Verlag.
- Screech, M. A. 1999. *Laughter at the foot of the cross*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Seidel, Robert 1994. *Späthumanismus in Schlesien: Caspar Dornau (1577–1631). Leben und Werk*. Tübingen: Niemeyer.
- Skinner, Quentin 2000. Why does laughter matter to philosophy? See <<http://socpol.anu.edu.au/pdf-files/passmorelect2000.pdf>>.
- Verberckmoes, Johan 2000. Puteanus' *Democritus, sive de risu*. *Humanistica Lovaniensia, Journal of Neo-Latin Studies* XLIX, 399–409.
- Verberckmoes, Johan 2003. What about medieval humour? Some historiography. Herman Braet *et al.* (eds.) *Risus mediaevalis: Laughter in medieval literature and art*. Leuven: Leuven University Press. 1–9.