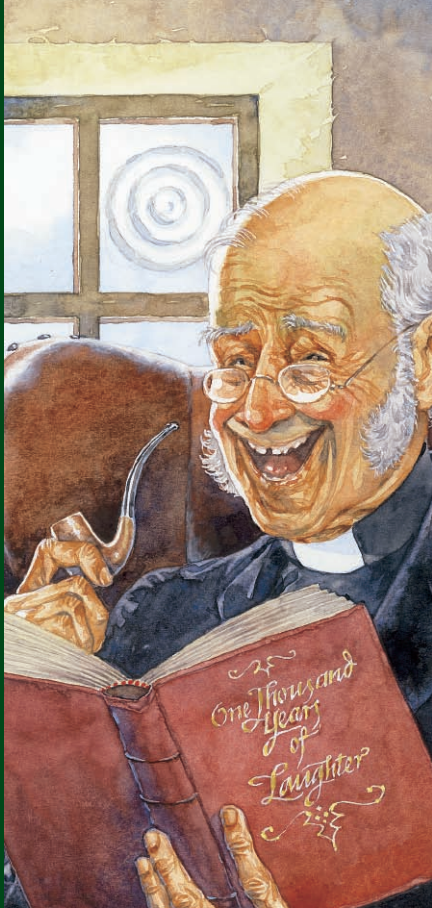


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**NON-
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COLLECTIONS



1000 Years of Laughter

An Anthology of
Classic Comic Prose

Written and compiled by
David Timson

Introduced by
Griff Rhys Jones

With
Carole Boyd
Jonathan Keeble
John Moffatt
Cathy Sara
Benjamin Soames
David Timson

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CONTAINS MORE THAN
100 CLASSIC COMIC EXTRACTS

1	Laughter – Robert Burton #	2:37
2	Anglo-Saxon Riddles § †	2:35
3	from The Autobiography of Giraldu Cambriensis #	1:13
4	14th-century advice from Johannes de Mirfeld +	1:33
5	An Alphabet of Tales †	1:20
6	Demaundes Joyous by Wynkyn de Worde (1511) † § +	1:07
7	from The Gull's Horn-Book by Thomas Dekker (1609) §	3:55
8	from Wits, Fits and Fancies (1595) § †	0:49
9	Eight Kinds of Drunkenness from Pierce Penniless His Supplication To The Devil by Thomas Nashe (1592) +	2:24
10	Launce and his Dog from Two Gentlemen of Verona by William Shakespeare	2:38
11	from The Anatomy Of Melancholy by Robert Burton (1621) #	4:42
12	Jokes from 17th-century jest books § # +	2:29
13	The great age of clubs: from The Spectator by Addison and Steele (No. 9 March 10 1710-1) §	2:39
14	The Club of Little Men by Alexander Pope (<i>The Guardian</i> No. 91 June 25 1713) #	2:22

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- [15] **The Club of She-Romps** by 'Kitty Termagant'
(No. 217 Nov. 8 1711) † 2:06
- [16] **The Club of Ugly Faces**
(No. 78 May 30 1711) + 1:32
- [17] **The Island of Laputa from Gulliver's Travels**
by Jonathan Swift # 7:06
- [18] from **Peregrine Pickle** by Tobias Smollett § 9:47
- [19] from **Tristram Shandy** by Laurence Sterne #
Tristram Shandy read by John Moffatt
(Naxos AudioBooks 4CDs) 6:23
- [20] **Tristram Shandy** (cont.) 8:25
- [21] Joe Miller's Jests 1:41
- [22] from **Fanny Burney's Diary 1785** † 3:09
- [23] from **Fanny Burney's Diary 1785** (cont.) 6:10
- [24] from **Emma** by Jane Austen † 5:01
- [25] from **That We Should Rise with the Lark**
by Charles Lamb (1826) + 4:35
- [26] Lamb's Letter to H.F. Carey + 4:35
- [27] Sayings of Sydney Smith # 2:49
- [28] from **Mrs. Caudles Curtain Lectures**
by Douglas Jerrold (1840s) Lecture XXXI.
Mrs. Caudle complains very bitterly that Mr. Caudle
has 'broken her confidence' † 8:09

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- 29 Victorian Humour: Oscar Wilde to Punch # + § ≠ 1:57
- 30 from **De Omnibus** by Barry Pain (1864-1928) + 8:10
- 31 **At Rochester** from **The Pickwick Papers**
by Charles Dickens 6:31
The Pickwick Papers read by Anton Lesser
(Naxos AudioBooks 4CDs/4 cassettes)
- 32 Mrs Bardell from **The Pickwick Papers**
by Charles Dickens 5:18
- 33 Mrs Jarley from **The Old Curiosity Shop**
by Charles Dickens ≠ 8:37
- 34 **To Agnes Hull** by Lewis Carroll
(Rev. Charles Dodgson) + 3:46
- 35 **The Mad Hatter's Tea Party** from
Alice's Adventures in Wonderland ≠ 8:24
- 36 from **The Wind in the Willows**
by Kenneth Grahame 5:35
The Wind in the Willows read by Martin Jarvis
(Naxos AudioBooks 3CDs/3 cassettes)
- 37 from **The Wind in the Willows**
by Kenneth Grahame 3:27
The Wind in the Willows read by Martin Jarvis
(Naxos AudioBooks 3CDs/3 cassettes)
- 38 from **The Diary Of A Nobody** by George

	and Weedon Grossmith (1892) §	7:51
39	from Happy Thoughts by F.C. Burnand (1866) +	9:40
40	from Two on a Tower by Thomas Hardy	9:40
41	from Mr Polly by H.G. Wells +	5:35
42	Mr Polly (cont.) +	7:44
43	from Three Men in a Boat by Jerome K. Jerome §	7:18
44	Three Men in a Boat (cont.) §	5:05
45	from Rip Van Winkle by Washington Irving #	7:23
46	from Josh Billings, His Sayings by Henry Wheeler Shaw (1865) +	0:57
47	from The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County by Mark Twain	4:07
	<i>Classic American Short Stories</i> read by William Roberts (Naxos AudioBooks 2CDs)	
48	from A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court by Mark Twain	3:50
	<i>A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court</i> read by Kenneth Jay (Naxos AudioBooks 2CDs)	
49	The one-liner	1:45
50	The Waltz by Dorothy Parker †	10:36
51	The Young Visitors by Daisy Ashford ¶	10:29
52	Reginald On House-Parties by Saki (H.H. Munro) #	6:10

53	from Right Ho Jeeves by P.G. Wodehouse +	9:45
54	from Right Ho Jeeves (cont.) +	10:02
55	from Jeeves Takes Charge +	5:55
56	from The Remarkable Rocket by Oscar Wilde <i>The Happy Prince and Other Stories</i> read by Anton Lesser (Naxos AudioBooks 2CDs/2 cassettes)	2:40
57	The Squib, the Roman Candle, the Catherine Wheel	1:39
58	The Rocket	4:13
59	The Rocket – ‘What right have you to be happy?’	4:13
60	The dance – and the firework display	3:06
61	A little frog, with bright jewelled eyes	3:01
62	A large white duck	3:29
63	So they piled up the wood and put Rocket on top, and lit the fire	2:02

Total time: 4:59:55

† Carole Boyd § Jonathan Keeble # John Moffatt
¶ Cathy Sara + David Timson

1000 Years of Laughter

An Anthology of Classic Comic Prose

There's nothing like a good laugh, is there? Yet why do we do it? Bursting into laughter is one of the most inexplicable and unpredictable of human actions and it takes so many forms.

We laugh with embarrassment when we make a mistake; it can be cruel – whole TV programmes seem to be built on videos of people continually falling over, producing gales of audience laughter without a thought for the pain of the victim involved. We laugh out of sympathy, too, when we recognise someone else's predicament and thank heaven we aren't in it.

But whatever the motivation for a good laugh, we certainly feel the better for it. A hearty guffaw lightens the spirits, relaxes tension and leaves us with a sense of well-being towards our fellow man. Authors have tried, from generation to generation, to discover the key, the secret ingredient that can reduce their readers to helplessness. P.G. Wodehouse found it, so did Dickens and Jerome K. Jerome, classic authors that will cause explosive, uncontrollable laughter for as long as man continues to read.

It was with the arrival of the printing

press that the professional humorist was born. The oral tradition of telling jokes was refined and explored in a narrative form, and before long the comic novel evolved, the earliest appearing in the reign of Elizabeth I. Comic authors were necessarily writing for the educated, and used literary devices such as wit, defined by Pope as 'what oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed'. Wit became a social grace in the 18th century when, for a gentleman, a knowing smile was permissible, but loud laughter was only for the vulgar. Lord Chesterfield, during the course of a series of letters advising his son on social etiquette, remarks: 'Since I have had the full use of my reason, nobody has ever heard me laugh'. The comic literature that is reliant on wit can be seen in Joseph Addison's contributions to *The Spectator* and the dry elegance of Alexander Pope's verse. The desire to be considered a wit produced the likes of the Rev. Sydney Smith and Oscar Wilde, both of whom are remembered today more for what they said than for what they did.

Satire was another tool of the professional humorist. Sometimes it was

used to shocking effect, as in Swift's essay, not included here, in which he suggests that any superfluous children in the world should be eaten as a delicacy! The thread of satire weaves throughout this selection – almost every literary piece contains it to a degree. Yet one has to wonder sometimes if it is intentional or not, as in Robert Burton's 17th-century examination of the 'humour' of melancholy. It appears to be a sort of 'self-help' book, yet at times it is ludicrously funny. Listen to the description of a lover's mistress, and see if you don't agree. Comic writers, in search of that elusive philosopher's stone of humour, have pushed back the boundaries of taste, as Smollett did for his contemporaries, getting himself labelled as coarse in the process. Writers also destroyed those boundaries as Sterne did in his startlingly crazy novel *Tristram Shandy*. One cannot read it without thinking of another comic genius of our own time, Spike Milligan. Both men changed the course of comic writing.

In the 19th century, comic writing concentrated on the observation of character with its attendant foibles and eccentricities, and besides a brief glimpse at the gallery of comic creations by Dickens, I have also included some other Victorian favourites, though not so well-known today, such as Douglas Jerrold's indomitable 'Mrs.

Caudle' and Barry Pain's long-suffering 'bus-conductor'.

The pioneers of the British Empire, along with the obligatory Bible and Complete Works of Shakespeare, doubtless also took their favourite light reading abroad with them. Early writers in America, for example, copied the style of the old folks at home but it was Mark Twain who defined a native style and made it popular worldwide. From imitators, the American humorists became imitated. In fact the sharp spare one-liner is an American invention, dating back to the 'wise sayings' of Josh Billings. Dorothy Parker is a mistress of it, and attacks our senses with barbed darts, hitting the solar plexus before we realise it, in her classic short story *The Waltz*. American humour is now regularly encountered on this side of the Atlantic. There is not a TV comedy, or wise-cracking stand-up comedian that doesn't owe something to the American style of humour.

But humour is not international, it is often parochial, and no writer has yet conceived a joke that reduces the entire world to unrepressed hilarity. One man's hearty laugh is another man's feeble smile. But one can detect humorous trends, and one needs to look beyond the professional comic writer. Included in this anthology are the jokes of the man in the street collected

in riddle-books, joke and jest-books from Saxon times to our own, and published in endless editions, a testament that on the popular level at least, someone got it right. This gives us a strong notion of what collectively tickled our forefathers' tastes.

We sense the Saxons liked enigmatic double-entendre – something to think about and puzzle over on those long winter nights in the 10th century. The medieval man liked a touch of coarseness in his comic diet, with a liberal sprinkling of four letter words. Shakespeare's fellows enjoyed seeing folly exposed with a homely moral attached. After the Civil War, when the monarchy was restored, relief from strife and the establishing of a degree of stability meant, for a century and a half, that oral humour was both bawdy and political. The Victorians found escape from the strictures of their society, through indulging in sheer

nonsense and excruciating puns.

Today anything goes. However, it is not difficult to see in these jest-books, that jokes as old as the hills have a way of being recycled again and again, from generation to generation. So perhaps in the final analysis our sense of humour and those of our ancestors do have more in common than we like to think. After all, it may be that, like plots for novels, there are only five jokes in the world. If so, I hope that every example will be found many times over in this selection. Here, I aim to reflect the buffoonery, wit, satire and nonsense of the comic writers, both famous and anonymous, of the last thousand years who always (at least in my book) can guarantee – a good laugh!

Notes by David Timson

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Cover picture: Hemesh Alles



David Timson has performed in modern and classic plays across the country and abroad, including *Wild Honey* for Alan Ayckbourn, *Hamlet*, *The Man of Mode* and *The Seagull*. He has appeared on TV in *Nelson's Column* and *Swallows and Amazons*, and in the film *The Russia House*. A familiar and versatile audio and radio voice, he reads *The Middle Way – The Story of Buddhism* and performs in *Hamlet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; he has also reads volumes of *Sherlock Holmes* stories for Naxos AudioBooks.



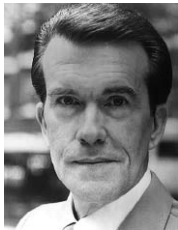
Griff Rhys Jones is best known for his award-winning comedy sketch work on the BBC, most notably *Not The Nine O'Clock News* and *Smith and Jones*. He is a prolific writer for radio with four series of *The Griff Rhys Jones Show*. His theatre credits include *An Absolute Turkey* for which he won Best Comedy Performance/Olivier Award, *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, *The Wind in the Willows*, *Charlie's Aunt* and *Horse and Carriage*. He has also played Frosch in *Die Fledermaus* at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. His film work includes *Puckoon & Wilt*.



Carole Boyd trained at the Birmingham School of Speech and Drama where she won the principal national prize for voice, the Carleton Hobbs Award and immediately joined the BBC Radio Drama Company. Vocal versatility is her speciality, from her creation of the notorious character of Lynda Snell in *The Archers* to *Poetry Please* and all the female characters in *Postman Pat*. She has won two prestigious awards for her reading of Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Huth's *Landgirls*. She has also written and recorded her own audiobook, *Lynda Snell's History of Ambridge*.



Jonathan Keeble's theatre work includes leading roles at Manchester's Royal Exchange, Coventry, Liverpool, Exeter, Lancaster and West Yorkshire Playhouse. TV includes *People Like Us*, *The Two of Us* and *Deptford Graffiti*. Jonathan has featured in over 250 radio plays for the BBC and was a member of the Radio Drama Company. For Naxos Audiobooks he has recorded *Black Beauty*, *Classic Chilling Tales*, *Macbeth* and *Oedipus the King*.



John Moffatt's distinguished theatre career encompasses two hundred roles across the UK, forty-two major London productions and two Broadway appearances. He played Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* at the Open Air Theatre, Regents Park, appeared in Ingmar Bergman's production of *Hedda Gabler* and in *Married Love* directed by Joan Plowright. Film credits include *Prick Up Your Ears* and he has appeared on UK TV in productions as varied as *Love in a Cold Climate* and *Maigret*. For Naxos AudioBooks he has recorded *Canterbury Tales*, *Oedipus the King*, *Great Narrative Poems of the Romantic Age* and *Tristram Shandy*.



Cathy Sara has worked for the New Shakespeare Company in *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Romeo and Juliet*, the Stephen Joseph Theatre, West Yorkshire Playhouse and the Hackney Empire in *King Lear*. Her television appearances include *Kavanagh QC*, *Beck*, *The Detectives* and *Heartbeat*, and she has worked extensively for the BBC Radio Repertory. For Naxos AudioBooks: *Blithe Spirit*, *Henry V*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.



Benjamin Soames trained at LAMDA. He has appeared in the TV series *Sharpe* and *Absolutely Fabulous* as well as the films *Heavy Weather* and *England, My England*. He toured worldwide in the acclaimed Cheek By Jowl production of *Measure For Measure*, and reads *Tales of the Greek Legends*, *The Adventures of Odysseus* and others for Naxos AudioBooks.

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1000 Years of Laughter

An Anthology of Classic Comic Prose

Written and compiled by **David Timson**

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Laughter is unique to man. This delightful anthology presents some of the funniest extracts in English literature. It opens with Anglo-Saxon riddles – ‘they couldn’t keep themselves warm on a diet of Beowulf’ – and continues with medieval memories, Tudor comic turns and Restoration buffoonery. The rise of the novel in the 18th century brought classic humour from Swift, Sterne and Smollett, the mantle then passing to Charles Dickens in the 19th. Included here are rarities from the antiquarian’s cupboard. Children’s literature produced unforgettable images from *Wind in the Willows* and *Alice in Wonderland*, while in the first half of the 20th century emerged unforgettable comic writers as diverse as Dorothy Parker and P.G. Wodehouse. Entertaining from start to finish.

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