

Opponent Evaluation for Sumin Sung: Experiencing humour in performance

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Let me say upfront that I am recommending this thesis for defence, with the grade of C. Sumin Sung proves competent at approaching a deceptively difficult topic, and the work holds good potential, however, loose argumentation and an unclear throughline prevent me from suggesting a higher grade.

One thing apparent from the thesis is that Sumin has a strong personal connection to the topic. This is evident from the introduction, which is written with a strong personal tone and drive. The discussion of alienation and humour is very much “of the moment” and Sumin’s experience with humour as a method for overcoming alienation and fear is a highlight of the work (which is later successfully expanded in the interviews section of the work).

I was also initially pleased with the theory presented. As I have mentioned, humour can be deceptively difficult. One simply cannot take “humour” for granted and Sumin is aware that this seemingly simple term is in fact comprised of a host of nebulous processes. She correctly chose to anchor her thesis in a wide range of sources. The choice of sources is equally competent. From Aristotle to Vyskočil, the sources are appropriate to the topic. The same is true for the plays discussed (though I found the film an odd choice). They showcase Sumin’s ability to read into various dimensions of the works.

That being said, while the choice of the sources is solid, I felt the thesis itself does not use them enough. To fully support Sumin’s claims, each of the philosophers and practitioners would require deeper exploration and engagement. A reader familiar with the sources knows that the claims being made are solid, but I believe they need to be made explicit in the thesis as well. The section on Kant is an encapsulation of this. The claim that “Laughter is the intense excitement that comes from the abrupt turn of tense expectations into nothing” from *Critique of Judgement* is simply stated along with a single anecdote, without further exploration of how exactly it fits into Kant’s – and therefore Sumin’s – larger argument.

The situation is better with the plays. Sumin explores the works with more depth and successfully showcases the roles of humour in them, though – once again - it is somewhat unclear how they fit into the larger picture. Sumin clearly has a vision and intent behind the thesis, but I feel the reader is sometimes insufficiently guided. The chapter on the Fool in *King Lear*, for example, is very promising. Sumin describes the role competently and raises interesting points, which are left dangling. Again, a reader familiar with the role of the Fool knows that it works well with Sumin’s larger theme of humour as reflexive and transformative, but the section does not make this connection explicit.

These interesting but loose connections become problematic when we come to the interview part of the work, since the reader is left unsure about what to focus on. There are resonances between the results of the interviews and the frontloaded theory, but if the previous chapters were more connected or sharply argued, the payoff would have been much greater.

Finally, I would be remiss not to mention the practical execution of the work. I have largely overlooked language mistakes since English is used as a second language here. As such they do not factor into my grade. That said, some sentences come out quite nebulous and there are

formal mishaps that Sumin should seek to avoid in the future: the formatting of citations is all over the place, block quotes are overlong (more than a full page in one case) and there is a plethora of other inconsistencies (Paul Jean v. Jean Paul, the *first sentence* of the text is missing a verb etc.). These could have been avoided with more proofreading.

To summarize the most crucial points: the text's individual sections are competently structured and handled, showcasing Sumin's awareness of the necessary theory and an openness to interpretation of text, but the overall thesis is left largely disjointed with several unclear arguments. Thus, C.

Questions from the opponent:

- 1) The sources you chose focus primarily on the experience of humour in the recipient, but the interviews are of the performers. **Could you expand on the experience of the performer vs. the audience member? To what extent is it shared? How does it differ?**

- 2) I found it slightly odd that you chose to insert a film in a text about "experiencing humour" since you focus mostly on live performers. **Could you briefly consider how the experience of humour might differ for the audience of a film and a live performance and how (or if) it complicates your argument?**