

long association with him since student days at the Presidency College. Their informal discussions over a cup of tea covered serious topics, like contemporary literature and music as well as day-to-day mundane affairs, such as the results of cricket matches played in the Eden Garden.

Roy had a fine sense of humour, which could be explored only through personal interactions on close quarters. He was a

very friendly person and was affectionate to young teachers, helping them in varied issues, either family problems or applications for research projects. Over the years he earned a place of deep love and respect amongst his colleagues, which will probably last for a long time. Supriyo Babu, as he was popularly known to all near and dear to him, is survived by his wife (Chitra), daughter (Sucharito), son-in-law and grand-daughters.

NIBIR MANDAL¹
A. B. ROY²

¹Department of Geological Sciences,
Jadavpur University,
Kolkata 700 042, India
e-mail: nibirmandal@yahoo.co.in
²3/2G Niloy Apartment,
46A Ramenath Das Road,
Kolkata 700 031, India
e-mail: ashitbaranroy@gmail.com

HISTORICAL NOTES

Cartoon humour on Nobel Prizes

Sachi Sri Kantha

To celebrate Alfred Nobel's munificence of 33 million Swedish kronor (approximately US\$ 9.2 million) in his signed will of 27 November 1895 to posterity, I provide a brief overview on how scientists as well as other members of the society are portrayed by two American cartoonists, Sidney Harris and Jim Berry, on Nobel's 180th birth anniversary. Three cartoon categories are identified: (1) pseudo-hopes of scientists, (2) mockery of humorous achievement and (3) prestige enhancement. Apart from their recognized role as serving as a gold standard for gauging exceptional creativity, Nobel Prizes also possess the merit as a source for cartoon humour.

'A cartoon is a drawing, representational or symbolic, that makes a satirical, witty or humorous point.'

– David Low

This year marks the 180th birth anniversary of Alfred Nobel (1833–1896), who is universally recognized as the foremost philanthropist for trend-setting scientists in the disciplines of chemistry, medicine or physiology and physics^{1–9}.

David Low (one of the elite cartoonists of the 20th century) recorded that though the targets of cartoons are predominantly in the field of political or public affairs, cartoons may also depict 'social customs, fashions or sports events or personalities'¹⁰. The annual Nobel Prizes which began to be awarded since 1901, had become an established social custom within a few decades drawing attention to the achievements of scientists. Apart from scientists, even mass media and public look forward to the announcement made in October of each year and to the pomp of ceremonies held in Stockholm in December for a week^{11,12}.



Figure 1. a–d, Four cartoons by Sidney Harris (used with permission).

HISTORICAL NOTES

According to Zuckermann¹³, who had studied the significance of Nobel Prizes on science, the cash value of Nobel Prizes has fluctuated over decades. A better indicator to comprehend the cash value of Nobel Prizes is how it stood in comparison to an American professor's annual salary. In 1901, each prize amounted to US\$ 42,000, then about 18–20 times a professor's average annual salary. In 2012, the cash value of a Nobel science award (approximately US\$ 1.2 million) was still about 10 times an American science professor's mean annual salary.

While Nobel Prizes and their winners have been recognized and covered in quite a few journals under philately theme^{14–16}, to the best of my knowledge potential Nobel Prize candidates have not been studied as a humour-generating theme in cartoons. One prominent reason exists for this discrepancy. While stamps are public property, contemporary cartoons are considered as private property of the creator. Copyright permission is needed for their use and it is costly. I comment on eight cartoons on Nobel Prizes, for which I have received permission for reproduction from the two cartoonists concerned.

Cartoon categories

I present eight cartoons which specifically identify Nobel Prizes in their script. Cartoonists who have contributed these eight cartoons are Sidney Harris^{17–19} (Figures 1 and 2a–c) and Jim Berry (Figure 2d). One can identify three categories among these eight cartoons.

Category 1: Pseudo-hopes of scientists

While one of the doctors in the operating room (Figure 1a) thinks he deserve a Nobel Prize in medicine, the scientist Zinzhoff (Figure 1c) carrying a test tube performs an experiment believing that his work deserves either a Nobel Prize in medicine or chemistry. European émigré August Krenwick (Figure 1b) appears in an unbelievable news release as Nobel Prize grand slam winner having bagged four prizes (chemistry, physics, literature and peace), but expressing his disappointment that he failed to get the economics prize! One may wonder when such an event will become a reality.

Probably, scientist Schact (depicted in three vertical panels of Figure 1d) can be identified as one who is thinking that he deserves a Nobel Prize in physics for his equation. In the first panel of this cartoon, he was sure in his thoughts. Then, the second panel shows Schact doubting his equation. In the third panel, this doubt makes him abandon his thoughts of a Nobel Prize.

Category 2: Mockery of a humorous achievement

Mathematicians are the target of two cartoons by Harris (Figure 2a and b). They elicit humour on the plight of mathematicians who are not considered for a Nobel Prize in their speciality²⁰. But, in reality, quite a few mathematicians of repute have been awarded a Nobel Prize

in other categories. Bertrand Russell²¹ was one of them, to be honoured with a Nobel Prize in literature. In depicting a mathematician receiving a phone call, while standing in front of a white board (Figure 2b), Harris had anticipated the currently popular IgNobel awards²².

Category 3: Prestige enhancement

Nobel Prizes have gained social status as a yardstick for prestige enhancement. Harris (Figure 2c) and Berry (Figure 2d) elicit humour in two varying stereotypes. Madame Zizi (fortune-teller) in Harris's cartoon brags to passerby, 'Believe me, if they gave a Nobel Prize for this type of work, I'd be your winner.' Berry, in his 1994 cartoon portrays a dumb interviewee who had falsely claimed in his resume that though 'I DIDN'T win the Nobel Prize'.



Figure 2. a–c, Three cartoons by Sidney Harris (used with permission). d, One panel cartoon by Jim Berry (BERRY'S WORLD copyright NEA, used with permission).

Nobel Peace prize four years ago', it was 'just a little resume enhancement'. In this cartoon, Berry pokes fun at an ignoramus who seems unaware that such a faux pas of factual cheating will seriously deprive his chances of selection for the job he had applied.

Conclusion

Almost all the cartoons used in this study focus on the theme that scientists are partially motivated by the prestige of a Nobel Prize. Apart from its recognized role as serving as a gold standard for gauging exceptional creativity^{23,24}, Nobel's unique benefaction also possesses the merit as a source for cartoon humour. It can be safely inferred that none of the other eponymous prizes has generated as many cartoons as the Nobel Prize.

1. Schuck, H. and Sohlman, R., *Nature*, 1930, **125**, 495–497; 532–535.
2. Hevesy, G., *Nature*, 1951, **167**, 57–59.
3. Stratton, F. J. M., *Nature*, 1951, **167**, 422–425.
4. Jorpes, J. E., *Br. Med. J.*, 1959, **1**, 1–6.
5. Jorpes, J. E., *J. Chem. Educ.*, 1960, **37**, 328–334.
6. Synek, V. M., *N. Z. Med. J.*, 1986, **99**, 589–592.
7. Sri Kantha, S., *Med. Hypotheses*, 1999, **53**, 338–344.
8. Kauffman, G. B., *Chem. Educ.*, 2001, **6**, 370–384.
9. Ringertz, N., *Nature Rev. Mol. Biol.*, 2001, **2**, 925–928.
10. Low, D., In *Encyclopedia Americana*, Grolier Inc., Danbury, Connecticut, 1996, vol. 5, pp. 728–734.
11. Zuckerman, H., *Scientific Elite – Nobel Laureates in the United States*, The Free Press, New York, 1979 (originally published in 1977).
12. Crawford, E., *The Beginnings of the Nobel Institution – The Science Prizes, 1901–1915*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987 (originally published in 1984).
13. Zuckerman, H., *Theor. Med.*, 1992, **13**, 217–231.
14. Miller, F. A. and Kauffman, G. B., *J. Chem. Educ.*, 1988, **65**, 843–846.
15. Dunlop, J. M., *Br. Med. J.*, 1988, **297**, 1674–1677.
16. Rugendorff, E. W. and Wilson, T., *J. Urol.*, 1997, **158**, 1335–1339.
17. Harris, S., *Einstein Simplified; Cartoons in Science*, Rutgers University Press, New Jersey, 1989.
18. Harris, S., *Chalk Up Another One; The Best of Sidney Harris*, AAAS Press, Washington DC, 1992.
19. Harris, S., *Einstein Atomized: More Science Cartoons*, Springer-Verlag, New York, 1996.
20. Beck, M. T., *Math. Intell.*, 2001, **23**, 68–69.
21. Sri Kantha, S., *Curr. Sci.*, 2011, **100**, 262–263.
22. Abrahams, M., *IgNobel Prizes*, Orion Books Ltd, London, 2002.
23. Crawford, E., *Science*, 1998, **282**, 1256–1257.
24. Crawford, E., *The Nobel Population 1901–1950: A Census of the Nominators and Nominees for the Prizes in Physics and Chemistry*, Universal Academy Press Inc., Tokyo, 2002.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS. I thank cartoonists Sidney Harris and Jim Berry for permission to use their cartoons. An oral version of this manuscript was first presented at the 2000 International Humor Conference at Osaka, Japan, sponsored by the International Society for Humor Studies.

Sachi Sri Kantha is in the Center for General Education, Gifu University, 1-1 Yanagido, Gifu City 501-1193, Japan.
e-mail: srikanth@gifu-u.ac.jp