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08. The Legend of the Altweiß

Elizabeth Sills
Northern State University

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08. The Legend of the Altweiß

Abstract

Once upon a time there was an Old White Man. He was very funny, but not in a “haha” kind of way. He was funny mostly in a non-threatening whimsical kind of way. Everywhere he went, people laughed merrily. He would make horrible puns and people would laugh. He would pause dramatically before saying something innocuous and people would laugh. He would make racist quips using words for Italian people that haven’t been popular since the 1920s and people would laugh. [excerpt]

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The Legend of the Altweiß

Liz Sills

Once upon a time there was an Old White Man. He was very funny, but not in a “haha” kind of way. He was funny mostly in a non-threatening whimsical kind of way. Everywhere he went, people laughed merrily. He would make horrible puns and people would laugh. He would pause dramatically before saying something innocuous and people would laugh. He would make racist quips using words for Italian people that haven’t been popular since the 1920s and people would laugh.

One day, on a cobblestone path that cut across a verdant meadow, the Old White Man came across an eighty-year-old girl wearing a fauxhawk and no innocence whatsoever. “Old White Man,” she asked, gazing up into his cataract-clouded eyes, “Why does everyone laugh merrily in your presence no matter what you do? When I say the same things people get offended or start mansplaining the world to me.”

The Old White Man thought and thought. He was very perplexed at the question, and also because the little girl had been talking to him for more than thirty seconds and had not laughed merrily. He must have an answer, he decided. Quickly (as quickly as he could, anyway) he made his way to the nearest university library and found an

August tome written by a venerated scholar with a repetitive name and decorated with an etching of a lemur whose sage eyes held the promise of resolving his quandary.

Ravenously the Old White Man searched for explanations. He read that some people laugh merrily because they feel superior to other people or ideas. This could not be true, he decided, because if it were then people would laugh more merrily at the little girl and her radical haircut than they did at him. The tome then informed him that people laugh merrily when they resolve incongruities. This was also not true, he decided, because Old White Men always automatically make sense. Relief Theory? Although he did understand that some people might be intimidated by his vast knowledge of How the World Works, he did not think that anything about him would relieve anyone of that impression. Humor and the aesthetic? Well, he wasn't bad to look at, he had to admit, but he didn't think his visage was guffaw-worthy.

Again as quickly as he could the Old White Man returned to the verdant meadow and found the little girl standing, arms crossed and legs akimbo, in the middle of the cobblestone path. "Little girl," croaked the Old White Man, "I am funny simply because I am funny. There is no need for inquiry into the matter. I am, in a manner of

speaking, always funny because that's always just the way it is."

The little girl scowled and the Old White Man was suddenly very disturbed that there should be a little girl in the world who was not smiling. He tried making faces, but she did not laugh merrily. Nor did she laugh merrily when he rubbed her affectionately on the head and made the most obvious puns he could think of. He even attempted a winning anecdote featuring Christian religious figures, overbearing wives, and a convenience store clerk with an Indian accent, but the little girl simply glared at him.

Finally, in exasperation, the Old White Man demanded of the little girl: "Why are you so curious about the things I do, anyway? Why don't you toddle off to pick daisies and poppies in the verdant meadow. Anyway, I'll bet that if you wanted to try to be funny you could just talk about, you know, woman things. Like boobs. Boobs are hilarious."

The little girl contemplated the Old White Man seriously for a few moments. Finally, she exclaimed: "Because you're in my way!"

And with that, the little girl kicked the Old White Man in the kneecap and trotted around him down the cobblestone path out of verdant meadow. In the nearest village the simple peasant folk felt the tranquil rustle of a pastoral breeze and for no apparent reason found themselves laughing merrily.