



Language of Comedy

Catchphrases

Charlie Higson:

Steve Martin wrote a very good book about comedy and, his comedy, and he said the reason he stopped doing the live work was because his act had become an entirely Pavlovian act; it had been reduced to a series of catchphrases and things that he did, and he just knew that as long as he did them the audience would wet themselves laughing. And he was saying he was putting no work into it, the stuff itself was not inherently funny but he knew that if he said and did these things the audience would really, really laugh. If you're creating character comedy, where you have a, er, a cast of characters who are coming back every week, erm, a lot of the comedy is about repetition, but it's also about, er, expectation, er, setting up expectations and then either undermining that, or it's a Pavlovian response; erm, the audience are waiting for the character to do the thing they know he's going to do. Er, and that's an odd thing about catchphrases, that the, a catchphrase in itself is not inherently funny.

Lady Mary must marry the Duke, it is then only a matter of... Ooh! Sorry, I've just come. As I was saying, were Lady Mary to marry the Duke, then... Ooh! Oh, I'm sorry, I've just come again.

[Laughter].