

York University
Faculty of Liberal Arts & Professional Studies
Department of English

Course: AP/EN 3191 A – Comedy (S1 2019)
Monday and Wednesday, 2:30-5:30 pm, SC 205

Course Director: Dr. Natalia Khomenko
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Office hours: Wednesday, 1-2 pm

Course Description:

In the history of English literature, comedy has often been viewed as a “low” genre, unsuitable for dealing with serious matters. Its interest in seemingly insignificant everyday concerns, in the grotesque and embarrassing, and in general hilarity of human interaction has sometimes been interpreted as lack of sophistication and cultural value. To query these assumptions, this course will examine the conventions of comedy and the specific objectives targeted through the use of these conventions. From Chaucer’s famously bawdy “The Miller’s Tale” to Carlin’s stand-up comedy, we will analyze the specific rhetorical devices used in creating humour, engage with a range of theoretical approaches to creating humour, and explore the central themes of comedy – the difficulty of interpersonal relationships, communication failures and social confusion, and the eternal hope for happy endings.

Learning Outcomes:

- Gaining an understanding of the changing views of comedy in English literature and culture.
- Evaluating the function of humour and comedy within specific cultural and social contexts.
- Developing close familiarity with a range of comedic works, including poetry, prose, plays, and film.
- Successfully using a variety of theoretical approaches in reading and interpreting comedy, and building familiarity with the relevant terminology.
- Advancing critical thinking, as well as analytical and writing skills.

Required Texts:

William Shakespeare, *The Comedy of Errors* (Signet)
Susannah Centlivre, *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* (Broadview).
Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest* (Dover).
Anita Loos, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes: The Intimate Diary of a Professional Lady* (Penguin).
Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (Grove Press)

Evaluation:

Reading responses (2): 15%
 Essay proposal: 5%
 Research essay: 25%
 In-class tests (2): 15%
 Final exam: 25%
 Participation: 15%

COURSE SCHEDULE**April 29**

Introductions
 Theories of humour
 Comedy in the ancient world

May 1

Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Miller's Tale" (from *The Canterbury Tales*, 1380-1390)
<http://www.librarius.com/cantales.htm>

May 6

William Shakespeare, *The Comedy of Errors* (late 1580s or early 1590s)

May 8**Reading response #1 due (7.5%)**

John Wilmot, the 2nd Earl of Rochester, "A Ramble in St. James' Park," "A Satyre on Charles II," "The Imperfect Enjoyment" (late seventeenth century): on Moodle
 Aphra Behn, "The Disappointment" (1680)
<https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/html/1807/4350/poem142.html>

May 13

Susannah Centlivre, *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* (1717)

May 15**In-class test #1 (7.5%)**

Jonathan Swift, "The Lady's Dressing Room" (1732)
<http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/Texts/dressing.html>
 "A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed" (1734):
<http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/Texts/nymphbed.html>

Lady Mary Wortley Montague, "The Reasons that Induced Dr. Swift to write a Poem Call'd the Lady's Dressing Room" (1734)
<http://www.english.upenn.edu/~mgamer/Etexts/montagu>

May 20

NO CLASS: VICTORIA DAY

May 22**Reading Response #2 due (7.5%)**

Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895)

NOTE: May 27 is the last day to drop without receiving a grade.

May 27

Lewis Carroll, *The Hunting of the Snark, an Agony in Ten Fits* (1874) (electronic through York)
 Edward Lear, “The Owl and the Pussy-Cat” [online: <https://www.bartleby.com/360/1/125.html>],
 “The Dong with a Luminous Nose”
 [<http://www.bencourtney.com/ebooks/lear/index4.html#dong>], “Some Incidents in the Life of
 My Uncle Arly” [<https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2009/jul/27/poem-of-the-week-edward-lear>]

May 29

Dorothy Parker, “One Perfect Rose” (1923)

<http://public.wsu.edu/~delahoyd/parker.rose.html>

Anita Loos, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes: The Intimate Diary of a Professional Lady* (1925)

Essay proposal due (5%)**June 3****In-class test #2 (7.5%)**

Bringing Up Baby, dir. Howard Hawks (1938) (full movie available online)

June 5

Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (1953)

June 10**Final Essay due (25%)**

George Carlin’s stand-up comedy selections (watch on YouTube): “Pissing Off the Feminists,”
 “Religion is Bullshit,” “The Ten Commandments,” “Stuff,” “Death”
 “My Angry Vagina” from Eve Ensler’s *Vagina Monologues* – handout
 Exam Review

FINAL EXAM (25%): TBA**Additional Information**

Lateness Penalties and Extensions: Late assignments submitted will be penalized 2% per day. I am open to the idea of extensions, but they should be discussed at least a week in advance of the due date. Exceptions may be made in cases of illness or emergency if proper supporting documentation (e.g., a doctor’s letter) is provided.

Participation: Student participation is crucial in a seminar. Come to class having read the assigned works and ready to discuss them. Missing classes, or being physically present but mentally absent, can – and will – significantly affect your grade.

Technology in the Classroom: I am not, in principle, against laptops, tablets, or cellphones in the classroom: they can be useful when it comes to fact-checking or searching for a specific passage. However, they can also be distracting to you (and your neighbours), and make for less successful note-taking (<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/a-learning-secret-don-t-take-notes-with-a-laptop/>). If you are overly enthusiastic about engaging with your device during our three hours together, you will be asked to put it away.

Special Accommodations: If you require special accommodations for assignments or classroom engagement, speak to me as early as possible.

Academic Integrity: I expect that by now you are very familiar with the academic integrity definitions and policies (but here is the Senate Policy on Academic Honesty, just in case: <http://secretariat-policies.info.yorku.ca/policies/academic-honesty-senate-policy-on/>).

Plagiarism includes trying to pass off somebody else's words and ideas as your own (even if you are paraphrasing), as well as giving and receiving excessive assistance on an assignment. Substantial difference in writing style between assignments or significant quotation and citation problems can be grounds for an academic honesty case. Please be aware that this course uses Turnitin.

If you are having trouble with an assignment, please come talk to me. Academic dishonesty is never a good solution, and penalties for it are severe.

The Writing Department: The Faculty of Liberal Arts & Professional Studies Writing Centre, located at S329 Ross, offers one-on-one tutoring, as well as a series of non-credit writing workshops. For more information, have a look at their website: <http://writing-centre.writ.laps.yorku.ca/>. If you need help with a specific writing assignment, book your appointment well in advance, as there are often waiting lists.

Dropping the Course: You are responsible for knowing sessional dates for this course, including the last day to drop this course without receiving a grade. If you wish to drop the course, you must do so by the drop date and do so through the Registrar's Office.