

Huron University College
Department of English
English 3771E: Forms/Modes/Genres
“Attack of the Clowns: Comedy, Culture and Change”
Dr. John Vanderheide

Class: Wed. 1:30-2:30, F 12:30-2:30 HUC W112

Office: HUC V207

Office Hours: Mondays 12:30-1:30 or by appt.

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Prerequisite(s): At least 60% in 1.0 of any 1000-level English course, or permission of the Department.

General Course Description

An examination of how the genre and modes of expression of various forms, such as novels, drama, film, graphic texts and digital genres influence interpretation and cultural meaning.

Specific Focus:

This course explores the modes and genres of comedy as they have appeared and developed historically to the present day. We will thus examine a wide range of forms of comedic expression: from the comic dramas and poetry of antiquity to contemporary sitcoms, stand-up performances and films from around the world. Aggressive and conciliatory, witty and bawdy, comedy is a paradoxical phenomenon that appeals to the basest of impulses and the highest of aspirations. We will read our texts in light of the origins of comedy in invective, ridicule and mocking impersonation. And in doing so, we will analyze the ways comic writers in different cultural and historical contexts have negotiated the various conflicts or politics of their day: especially the politics of gender and sexuality, race, culture and social class. We will thus gain a greater understanding of both the ideological and utopian dimensions of comedy, not only how it may enforce prejudice and justify oppressive power structures, but also how it may help us to undermine and dismantle such oppressive structures—and laugh off the past.

Course Learning Objectives

Successful students who complete the course will be able to:

- Analyze a variety of comic forms and their cultural contexts and histories from antiquity to the present day
- Develop an understanding of a number of widespread theories of comedy from antiquity to the present (theories of “superiority,” “incongruity,” “violation,” and “catharsis”)
- Develop a conception of the political (utopian and ideological) functions of comedy through an exploration of its representations of class, race, gender, sexuality and other markers of identity and identification
- Develop the capacity to produce thoughtful critical and creative responses to a ubiquitous cultural and historical phenomenon (comedy)

- Develop the capacity to appreciate the scholarship on a subject and write effectively in a selected scholarly (critical/theoretical) tradition. This includes learning effective research methods, utilizing and incorporating secondary sources, and formatting and documenting work in MLA format.
- Produce written and other kinds of critical and creative work for university digital archive

Description of Class Methods

Classes will consist of lectures on, and discussions of, weekly readings and viewings, theories of allegory and realism and related topics. Students can expect some improvised group work on 1) specific passages in the readings, 2) scenes in the viewing, or 3) handouts on critical and theoretical perspectives. Thus, they should come to class with their readings in print or digital media, having read the work scheduled for that day, and prepared to participate in lectures, discussions, and improvised idea creation.

Students are expected to turn off their cell phones and other electronic devices during class **unless for research or creative purposes**. Any student who distracts the instructor or other students in class, and especially in screening, by idle cell-phone usage will be asked to leave the classroom or the screening. Students are encouraged to come to office hours or if that is not possible to make other arrangements to discuss course material, the course project, exams, etc.

Textbooks and Other Required Resources

Required Reading

Aristophanes. *Lysistrata*

Behn, Aphra. *The Rover & Other Plays*.

Chaucer, Geoffrey. *The Canterbury Tales*.

Hau-ofa, Epeli. *Tales of the Tikongs*

Hurston, Zora Neale, and Langston Hughes. *Mule Bone*.

Silverman, Sarah. *The Bedwetter: Stories of Courage, Redemption, and Pee*

Smith, Zadie. *White Teeth*

Twain, Mark. *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*

Recommended Reading

Molière, *Tartuffe*. Freely available online at <https://archive.org/details/tartuffe02027gut>

Schedule of Readings and Lectures

TERM 1 HISTORICAL FORMS, MODES AND GENRES OF COMEDY

Week 1: INTRODUCTION

Sept 8: Introduction to course

Week 2: THE OLD COMEDY OF ANCIENT GREECE

Sept 13: Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*

Sept 15: Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*

Week 3: READING/EXPERIENCING COMIC DRAMA

Sept 20: TRIP TO STRATFORD TO SEE TARTUFFE

Sept 22: Comparison of *Lysistrata* and *Tartuffe*

Week 4: GETTING MEDIEVAL WITH ENGLISH COMIC POETRY

Sept 27, 29 Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*.

Selections: General Prologue, The Miller's Prologue and Tale, The Reeve's Prologue and Tale

Week 5: GETTING MEDIEVAL WITH ENGLISH COMIC POETRY

Oct 4, 6 Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*

Sections: The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale

FALL READING BREAK (OCT 9-13)

Week 5: EARLY FEMINIST STAGE COMEDY OF THE RESTORATION

Oct 18, 20: Aphra Behn, *The Lucky Chance*

Week 6: EARLY FEMINIST STAGE COMEDY OF THE RESTORATION

Oct 25, 27: Aphra Behn, *The Feigned Courtesans*

Week 7: GILDED AGE NARRATIVE SATIRE

Nov 1,3: Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*

Week 8: GILDED AGE NARRATIVE SATIRE

Nov 8, 10: Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*

Week 9: HARLEM RENAISSANCE STAGE COMEDY

Nov 15, 17: Zora Neale Hurston & Langston Hughes, *Mule Bone: A Comedy of Negro Life*

Week 10: HARLEM RENAISSANCE STAGE COMEDY

Nov 22, 24: Zora Neale Hurston & Langston Hughes, *Mule Bone: A Comedy of Negro Life*

Week 11: EARLY HOLLYWOOD FILM & TELEVISION COMEDY

Nov 29, Dec 1: The Marx Brothers, *Duck Soup*, Lucille Ball, *I Love Lucy*

Week 12: EARLY HOLLYWOOD FILM & TELEVISION COMEDY

Dec 6: Lucille Ball, *I Love Lucy*

TERM 2 CONTEMPORARY FORMS, MODES AND GENRES

Week 1: THE CONTEMPORARY SATIRICAL NOVEL

Jan 10, 12: Zadie Smith, *White Teeth*

Week 2: THE CONTEMPORARY SATIRICAL NOVEL

Jan 17, 19: Zadie Smith, *White Teeth*

Week 3: TELEVISION COMEDY (1970s-1990s)

Jan 24: Sitcoms, variety shows, etc.

Jan 26: Class presentations on student selected topics in contemporary comedy

Week 4: TELEVISION COMEDY (2000s-present)

Jan 31: Sitcoms, contemporary political comedy, etc.

Feb 2: Class presentations on student selected topics in contemporary comedy

Week 5: ANIMATED TELEVISION COMEDY

Feb 7: From *Looney Tunes* to *South Park*

Feb 9: Class presentations on student selected topics in contemporary comedy

Week 6: ANIMATED TELEVISION COMEDY

Feb 14: From *The Boondocks* to *One Punch Man*

Feb 16: Class presentations on student selected topics in contemporary comedy

SPRING READING BREAK (FEB 19-23)

Week 7: WORLD COMEDY IN PRINT

Feb 28, Mar 2: Epeli Hau'ofa, *Tales of the Tikongs*

Week 8: WORLD COMEDY ON FILM

Mar 7, 9: Juzo Itami, *No Minbo*

Week 9: STAND-UPS ON STAGE AND IN PRINT

Mar 14, 16: Sarah Silverman, *The Bedwetter* & other stand-ups

Week 8: STAND-UPS ON STAGE AND IN PRINT

Mar 21, 23: Sarah Silverman, *The Bedwetter* & other stand-ups

Week 9: STAND-UPS ON STAGE AND IN PRINT

Mar 28: Sarah Silverman, *The Bedwetter* & other stand-ups

Week 10: DIGITAL COMEDY & EVERYDAY LIFE

Apr 4, 6: Comic memes, youtube comedy, *The Onion*

Week 11: DIGITAL COMEDY & EVERDAY LIFE

April 11: That's all folks!

Method of Evaluation and Assessment

FALL TERM

Assignment	Due	Weight
Stratford Reflection	Friday Oct 6	10%
Concept Map	Friday Nov 10	5%
Annotated Concept Map	Dec 6	5%
Fall Term Research Paper	Jan 12	10%
Attendance & Participation	Ongoing	5%

WINTER TERM

Assignment	Due	Weight
Presentation	Weeks of Jan 24-Feb 16	10%
Winter Term Project (Creative or Critical)	March 21	20%
Final Exam	To be scheduled by the registrar	30%
Attendance & Participation	Ongoing	5%

Attendance and Participation

Attendance and participation multiply perspectives and enrich the educational experience for all. *If you miss more than nine hours of class meetings per term (the equivalent of two weeks of class meetings), your attendance & participation grade will be forfeited automatically.* Participation means having engaged the readings and being prepared to discuss them in class.

Stratford Reflection Assignment

At the beginning of the Fall Term, students will have the opportunity to go as a class to Stratford to watch some live comic drama, subsequently producing a critical reflection on their experiences. Exceptional reflections may be published and archived on a Huron Research Portal Page in development devoted to comedy. Students who opt out of the Stratford opportunity will be given an alternative writing assignment.

Fall Term Research Paper

A traditional research paper (1000-1500 words) on selected topics in the history of comedy using course texts, due in early January. Leading up to the final draft of the paper, students will engage in research workshops and produce preliminary concept maps of their ideas and research guided by Huron Associate Librarian, Colleen Burgess. Exceptional work may be published on the Research Portal mentioned above.

Presentation

Class presentations of 15-20 minutes will be taking place in the weeks of Jan 24-Feb 16. Students may select their own topic in contemporary comedy, and their own “text”

(whether from the comedic domains of literature, film, television, stand-up or the web). Further information provided when classes begin.

Winter Term Project

Determined by the student in consultation with the professor, the course project may be CRITICAL or CREATIVE.

A critical course project entails UNDERSTANDING COMEDY and producing a scholarly work of 1500-2000 words on the comedic dimensions of one or more of the course texts, shows, performers, course topics, etc. A list of topics and further instructions will be provided in class. You may also develop your own research topic in consultation with the course instructor. Exceptional work may be published and archived on the aforementioned Research Portal.

A creative course project entails PRODUCING COMEDY of the student's own making in one of three forms: 1) Collaboration on online satire site in the style of *The Onion*; 2) Performance of stand-up comedy at an open mic night in the community; 3) Collaboration on short film comedy. Again, students will have the option to publish and archive their creative work on the Research Portal. More information on creative options, guidelines and rubrics will become available when classes begin.

Final Exam

The final exam will consist of short answer and essay questions based on course material and take place in the April exam season.

Late Policy

All assignments are due by the end of class on the due date and should be handed to the instructor personally. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that the instructor receives the essay.

Late assignments will be penalized at the rate of 2 marks per calendar day until the instructor receives the essay. *Normally, late assignments will receive a grade but no detailed commentary.* **After 7 days, the assignment will not be accepted and a mark of 0/F will be awarded.**

Students must pass both term work and the final examination in order to pass the course. Students who fail the term work are not allowed to take the final examination. Students who fail the final examination (regardless of their term work) automatically fail the course.

Appendix to Course Outlines

Prerequisite Information

Students are responsible for ensuring that they have successfully completed all course prerequisites. Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Provost and Dean to enrol in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

Conduct of Students in Classes, Lectures, and Seminars

Membership in the community of Huron University College and the University of Western Ontario implies acceptance by every student of the principle of respect for the rights, responsibilities, dignity and well-being of others and a readiness to support an environment conducive to the intellectual and personal growth of all who study, work and live within it. Upon registration, students assume the responsibilities that such registration entails. The academic and social privileges granted to each student are conditional upon the fulfillment of these responsibilities.

In the classroom, students are expected to behave in a manner that supports the learning environment of others. Students can avoid any unnecessary disruption of the class by arriving in sufficient time to be seated and ready for the start of the class, by remaining silent while the professor is speaking or another student has the floor, and by taking care of personal needs prior to the start of class. If a student is late, or knows that he/she will have to leave class early, be courteous: sit in an aisle seat and enter and leave quietly.

Please see the *Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities* at:

<http://www.huronuc.ca/CurrentStudents/StudentLifeandSupportServices/StudentDiscipline>

Technology

It is not appropriate to use technology (such as, but not limited to, laptops, cell phones) in the classroom for non-classroom activities. Such activity is disruptive and is distracting to other students and to the instructor, and can inhibit learning. Students are expected to respect the classroom environment and to refrain from inappropriate use of technology and other electronic devices in class.

Academic Accommodation for Medical/Non-Medical Grounds

Students who require special accommodation for tests and/or other course components must make the appropriate arrangements with the Student Development Centre (SDC). Further details concerning policies and procedures may be found at:

http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/ssd/?requesting_acc

- (a) **Medical Grounds for assignments worth 10% or more of final grade: Go Directly to Academic Advising**

University Senate policy, which can be found at http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf, requires that all student requests for accommodation on medical grounds for assignments worth 10% or more of the final grade be made directly to the academic advising office of the home faculty (for Huron students, the “home faculty” is Huron), with supporting documentation in the form (minimally) of the Senate-approved Student Medical Certificate found at: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform_15JUN.pdf.

The documentation is submitted in confidence and will not be shown to instructors. The advisors will contact the instructor when the medical documentation is received, and will outline the severity and duration of the medical challenge as expressed on the Student Medical Certificate and in any other supporting documentation. The student will be informed that the instructor has been notified of the presence of medical documentation, and will be instructed to work as quickly as possible with the instructor on an agreement for accommodation. The instructor will not normally deny accommodation where appropriate medical documentation is in place and where the duration it describes aligns with the due date(s) of assignment(s). Before denying a request for accommodation on medical grounds, the instructor will consult with the Provost and Dean. The instructor’s decision is appealable to the Provost and Dean.

(b) Accommodation on Medical Grounds for assignments worth less than 10% of final grade: Consult Instructor Directly

When seeking accommodation on medical grounds for assignments worth less than 10% of the final course grade, the student should contact the instructor directly. The student need only share broad outlines of the medical situation. The instructor **may** require the student to submit documentation to the academic advisors, in which case she or he will advise the student and inform the academic advisors to expect documentation. The instructor may **not** collect medical documentation. The advisors will contact the instructor when the medical documentation is received, and will outline the severity and duration of the medical challenge as expressed on the Student Medical Certificate and in any other supporting documentation. The student will be informed that the instructor has been notified of the presence of medical documentation, and will be instructed to work as quickly as possible with the instructor on an agreement for accommodation. The instructor will not normally deny accommodation where appropriate medical documentation is in place and where the duration it describes aligns with the due date(s) of assignment(s). Before denying a request for accommodation on medical grounds, the instructor will consult with the Provost and Dean. The instructor’s decision is appealable to the Provost and Dean.

(c) Non-medical Grounds: Consult Instructor Directly

Where the grounds for seeking accommodation are not medical, the student should contact the instructor directly. Late penalties may apply at the discretion of the instructor. Apart from the exception noted below, academic advisors will not be involved in the process of accommodation for non-medical reasons.

Where a student seeks accommodation on non-medical grounds where confidentiality is a concern, the student should approach an academic advisor with any documentation available. The advisors will contact the instructor after the student’s request is received, and will outline the severity and duration of the challenge without breaching confidence. The student will be informed that the instructor has been notified that significant circumstances are affecting or have affected the student’s ability to complete work, and the student will be instructed to work as

quickly as possible with the instructor on an agreement for accommodation. Before denying a request for accommodation where documentation has been submitted to an academic advisor, the instructor will consult with the Provost and Dean. The instructor's decision is appealable to the Provost and Dean.

Statement on Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

Statement on Academic Integrity

The International Centre for Academic Integrity defines academic integrity as "a commitment, even in the face of adversity, to five fundamental values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. From these values flow principles of behaviour that enable academic communities to translate ideals to action." (CAI Fundamental Values Project, 1999).

A lack of academic integrity is indicated by such behaviours as the following:

- Cheating on tests;
- Fraudulent submissions online;
- Plagiarism in papers submitted (including failure to cite and piecing together unattributed sources);
- Unauthorized resubmission of course work to a different course;
- Helping someone else cheat;
- Unauthorized collaboration;
- Fabrication of results or sources;
- Purchasing work and representing it as one's own.

Academic Integrity: Importance and Impact

Being at university means engaging with a variety of communities in the pursuit and sharing of knowledge and understanding in ways that are clear, respectful, efficient, and productive. University communities have established norms of academic integrity to ensure responsible, honest, and ethical behavior in the academic work of the university, which is best done when sources of ideas are properly and fully acknowledged and when responsibility for ideas is fully and accurately represented.

In the academic sphere, unacknowledged use of another's work or ideas is not only an offence against the community of scholars and an obstacle to academic productivity. It may also be understood as fraud and may constitute an infringement of legal copyright.

A university is a place for fulfilling one's potential and challenging oneself, and this means rising to challenges rather than finding ways around them. The achievements in an individual's university studies can only be fairly evaluated quantitatively through true and honest representation of the actual learning done by the student. Equity in assessment for all students is ensured through fair representation of the efforts by each.

Acting with integrity at university constitutes a good set of practices for maintaining integrity in later life. Offences against academic integrity are therefore taken very seriously as part of the university's work in preparing students to serve, lead, and innovate in the world at large.

A university degree is a significant investment of an individual's, and the public's, time, energies, and resources in the future, and habits of academic integrity protect that investment by preserving the university's reputation and ensuring public confidence in higher education.

Students found guilty of plagiarism will suffer consequences ranging from a grade reduction to failure in the course to expulsion from the university. In addition, a formal letter documenting the offence will be filed in the Provost and Dean's Office, and this record of the offence will be retained in the Provost and Dean's Office for the duration of the student's academic career at Huron University College.

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com.

Computer-marked multiple-choice tests and/or exams may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that will check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating.

Personal Response Systems ("clickers") may be used in some classes. If clickers are to be used in a class, it is the responsibility of the student to ensure that the device is activated and functional. Students must see their instructor if they have any concerns about whether the clicker is malfunctioning. Students must use only their own clicker. If clicker records are used to compute a portion of the course grade:

- the use of somebody else's clicker in class constitutes a scholastic offence,
- the possession of a clicker belonging to another student will be interpreted as an attempt to commit a scholastic offence.

Policy on Special Needs

Students who require special accommodation for tests and/or other course components must make the appropriate arrangements with the Student Development Centre (SDC). Further details concerning policies and procedures may be found at:

http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/ssd/?requesting_acc

Attendance Regulations for Examinations

A student is entitled to be examined in courses in which registration is maintained, subject to the following limitations:

- 1) A student may be debarred from writing the final examination for failure to maintain satisfactory academic standing throughout the year.
- 2) Any student who, in the opinion of the instructor, is absent too frequently from class or laboratory periods in any course will be reported to the Provost and Dean of the Faculty offering the course (after due warning has been given). On the recommendation of the Department concerned, and with the permission of the Provost and Dean of that Faculty, the student will be debarred from taking the regular examination in the course. The Provost and Dean of the Faculty offering the course will communicate that decision to the Provost and Dean of the Faculty of registration.

Class Cancellations

In the event of a cancellation of class, every effort will be made to post that information on the Huron website, <http://www.huronuc.ca/AccessibilityInfo> ("Class Cancellations").

Mental Health @ Western

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health @ Western <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Academic Advising

For advice on course selections, degree requirements, and for assistance with requests for medical accommodation [see above], students should contact an Academic Advisor in Huron's Student Support Services (hurousss@uwo.ca). An outline of the range of services offered is found on the Huron website at: <http://www.huronuc.ca/CurrentStudents/AcademicAdvisorsandServices>

Department Chairs and Program Directors and Coordinators are also able to answer questions about their individual programs. Their contact information can be found on the Huron website at: <http://www.huronuc.ca/Academics/FacultyofArtsandSocialScience>