

**Greek and Roman Comedy and Satire:
The Traditions and their Reception**
(190:411)

“*Satire is a sort of glass wherein beholders do generally discover everybody’s face but their own*”
-Jonathan Swift

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TTh 5:35-6:55, (T at HSB 201; Th at HCK-131)
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Course Description and Expectations

This class explores the definitions and development of the generic and cultural modes of ancient Greek and Roman comedy and satire. This course will emphasize the close analysis of texts in translation, the transmission and reception of these forms in the post-classical era, with a close look at Shakespeare, Swift and Mozart’s *Marriage of Figaro*, and culminates with an analysis of comedy and satire as cultural modalities in contemporary popular media such as film, television, stand-up and music. The cultural and historical contexts of each text will be supplemented by course lectures, secondary literature and student reaction papers throughout the semester. Class discussion is a major component of the course and will stress each text’s topicalities, major themes, staging and reactions to supplementary readings.

In this course, students should be able to identify the authors, their texts and defining features by the end of the semester. Students will be able to understand how and why varying comic and satiric characteristics of the ancient canon transmit into later forms and modes. Students are also expected to contribute critical and thoughtful theories of their own based on coursework.

*** Due to the nature of these texts, please be advised that some of the class material may be considered offensive.** There is strong language and situations, such as sexual violence, murder, sex, gender-bending, castration, etc. As is the sometimes-provocative nature of this literary and visual media, your belief systems – including culture, politics and religion – will be challenged! If this is a problem, DO NOT take this class.

Required Texts and Course Materials

In addition to the materials listed below, I will distribute supplementary readings and handouts during the semester. You must use and have in class the editions listed below, unless otherwise noted. The following texts are available at the Rutgers bookstore:

Ruden, Sarah (trans.), *Lysistrata*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003. (ISBN 978-0872206038) [DO NOT BUY - excerpts will be provided on *Sakai*]

Stephen Halliwell (trans.). *Aristophanes Birds and other Plays*. Oxford University Press, 2009 (ISBN: 978-0199555673)

Amy Richlin (trans.). *Rome and the Mysterious Orient*. University of California Press, 2005 (ISBN: 978-0520242753)

Niall Rudd (trans.). *Satires of Horace and Persius*. Penguin, 2005 (ISBN: 978-0140455083)

William Barr and Niall Rudd (trans.). *Juvenal: The Satires*. Oxford World Classics, 2008 (ISBN: 9780199540662)

Francis Dolan (ed.). *The Comedy of Errors*. The Pelican Shakespeare, 1999 (ISBN: 978-0140714746)

Jonathan Swift. *A Modest Proposal and Other Satires*. Digireads.com, 2007 (ISBN: 1420928481)

Course Components

1. Reaction papers, class discussion and attendance (25%): Show up to class ready to discuss the material, which includes 1-page reaction papers assigned bi-weekly and based on primary and secondary readings to be discussed in class (a reaction paper guideline sheet will be provided). If it becomes apparent students are not prepared, weekly quizzes will be given to supplement your participation grade. After two absences, final class grade will drop by half a letter grade (A to A-, B+ to B, etc.). Tardiness, rudeness and disrespect of other classmates will not be tolerated.
2. Midterm (25%): Passage identifications and explications
3. Writing assignment (20%): 6-10 pp. stage movement, script of classical scene/text
4. Final project (30%): A longer literary analysis of a text (10 pp.) or your own innovative comedy/satire in the style of an author discussed in class, or other creative project. Details TBA.

NB: Every component must be completed in order to pass the class.

- A. No make-up quizzes, exams or papers unless due to extreme emergency. If you intend to miss class frequently due to athletic or community participation/events, then this class is not for you. If you miss class due to an emergency absence, you must notify me as soon as possible, provide official documentation verifying emergency and date, then consult me concerning missed work. You must complete missed work within one week of scheduled assignment or you receive no credit.
- B. All course components must be completed satisfactorily for a passing grade.
- C. If you miss class, you must acquire the material from a classmate. The professor's office hours are NOT to be used to make up missed class due to absence
- D. Your work for this class must be your own and in accordance with Rutgers Standards of Academic Integrity. Failure to comply with or infringement of these

policies will result in a failing grade for the course, or withdrawal from the course, as well as appropriate action by the College Dean.

Special Needs

Any students with learning disabilities must notify me immediately (within the first week of class) and provide the necessary documentation from the Rutgers Student Disabilities Center.

SCHEDULE (** Please be advised that this syllabus is subject to change at the professor's discretion at any time during the semester. You will be notified of any changes by any one of the following methods: in class, by email or via *Sakai*. Let this not preclude any personal responsibility on your part to acquire missed lecture or discussion notes.)

Week 1

Tuesday, January 18 – Introductions, requirements, course introduction;
“What is satire and comedy by modern example?”

Thursday, Jan 20 – Aristophanes I: Lecture: “Old Comedy, Aristophanes, City Dionysia”
and the Greek theater

Week 2

T, Jan 25 – Aristophanes II: Lecture: “*Birds*: Escape from Athens” and *Birds*
discussion;

TH, Jan 27 – Aristophanes III: Lecture: “Athens, Peloponnesian War and (of the
sexes)”; *Lysistrata* discussion (alternate translation of *Lysistrata*
provided on *Sakai*)

Week 3

T, Feb 1 – Aristophanes III: *Lysistrata* class discussion; Gonda Van Steen reaction due;

TH, Feb 3 – Roman Comedy: Lecture: Roman dramatic traditions, comedy/culture;
Richard Beacham's “Staging Roman Comedy”

Week 4

T, Feb 8 – Plautus I: Ethnicity; *Persa* (“Iran Man”); discussion

TH, Feb 10 – Plautus II: Empire; *Persa* and *Poenulus* (“Towelheads”) discussion;

Week 5

T, Feb 15 – *Poenulus* discussion; Edwards article discussion

TH, Feb 17 – Roman Satire I: “Roman satire: Rome, literature and politics”

Week 6

T, Feb 22– Horace I: “What is Satire?”; Horace’s *Satires* (Book 1)

TH, Feb 24 – Horace II: Definition of satire revisited; Selections from Horace’s *Satires* (Book II.1-2. II.4, II.6, II.8);

[Friday, Feb 25: Guest lecturer Dr. Kirk Freudenburg (Yale) on Roman satire: *Irony and the Politics of Self-effacement in Augustan Rome* at 3:30pm in Hickman 216 (extra credit reaction: 2% increase on final grade)]

Week 7

T, Mar 1 – Juvenal I: the angry critic of Imperial Rome (satires 1-6)

TH Mar 3 – Juvenal II: *Satires* discussion (satires 10, 14, 15 and 16); **PAPER DUE**

Week 8

T, Mar 8 – Catch-up and review for Midterm

TH, Mar 10 – **MIDTERM**

Week 9

T, Mar 15 and TH 17 – SPRING BREAK – No class

Week 10

T, March 22 – Shakespeare I: Shakespeare’s nod to Plautus: *Comedy of Errors*;
Lecture: “Old and New Traditions: Shakespeare”

TH, Mar 24 - Shakespeare II: *Comedy of Errors* discussion; Erich Segal on the “Death of Comedy”

Week 11

T, Mar 29 – Opera I: Mozart’s *Marriage of Figaro*

TH, Mar 31 – Opera II: *Marriage of Figaro* and musical reception

Week 12

T, April 5 – Jonathan Swift I: *A Modest Proposal*; Lecture: Birth of Western Satire

TH, Apr 7 – Jonathan Swift II: *A Modest Proposal* (con’t), *Predictions for the Year 1708*, *The Accomplishment of the First of Mr. Bickerstaff’s Predictions* and *An Argument to Prove that the Abolishing of Christianity in England May, as Things Now Stand, Be Attended with Some Inconveniences, And Perhaps Not Produce Those Many Good Effects Proposed Thereby*” discussion

Week 13

T, Apr 12 – Bill Hicks I: American political hypocrisy

TH, Apr 14 – Bill Hicks II: Dark Poet and use of Invective
(½ page Final project statement due in class)

Week 14

T, Apr 19 – *Da Ali G Show* I: *Booyakasha* and British comedy comes to America with Sacha Baron Cohen

TH, Apr 21 – *Da Ali G Show* II: Gender and Sexuality

Week 15

T, Apr 26 – No class

TH, Apr 28 – Parodic Punditry: Colbert’s “Colbert Nation”;
FINAL DISCUSSION;
FINAL projects due IN CLASS;