

Shakespeare & Classical Comedy (English 265) – Fall 2015

Professor Newstok, newstoks@rhodes.edu

Office hours (Palmer 306): MTu 2-4pm, or by appointment (please email)

*“Education should have a ‘depth-charge’ effect, the consequences of which might only reveal themselves years down the line. . . . Two invaluable lessons can be taught through Shakespeare. A) He’s **difficult** and there’s something to be said for sitting and working through something difficult, and B) Shakespeare demands that we deal with **ambiguity** and ask questions of the world around us.”—Jonathan Gil Harris*

Course description

Mocking authority figures, kissing your brother’s wife, whacking someone upside the head – what sounds like the latest episode of Saturday Night Live is actually part of a comedic tradition running all the way back through Shakespeare to the Roman and Greek theatre. This seminar surveys the history of staged humor, reading a play a week, ranging from Aristophanes’ ribald jokes and Plautus’ hijinks to the Elizabethan theatre’s clowning. We’ll also explore philosophical and historical reflections upon why we laugh. The seminar will include a month-long residency from British director Nick Hutchison, with whom we will workshop scenes from *Comedy of Errors*. Students must perform scenes for the **symposium on Comedy (October 23, 2-5pm, McCoy)** and report on at least one local production (e.g. *Chimes at Midnight*, November 8).

Schedule—subject to revision, per class interest and instructor’s discretion

Have the texts read **before** our discussions each week. Ideally, you will read them once over the weekend, and then **re-read** them during the week—good reading always entails **re-reading**. Read aloud, read slowly, and take notes. You should plan on **at least four hours** of preparation for every class session, and **even more at the beginning of the semester**. Bring your **Norton Shakespeare** to each seminar.

| <i>Week of</i> | <i>Readings</i> |
|----------------|--|
| Aug. 27 | Introduction—Frye |
| Sep. 1 | Aristophanes & Menander |
| Sep. 8 | Plautus & Terence |
| Sep. 15 | Ovid & Chaucer |
| Sep. 22 | Comedy of Errors (Plautus) |
| Sep. 29 | Love’s Labour’s Lost (Aristophanes) |
| Oct. 6 | A Midsummer Night’s Dream (Ovid) |
| Oct. 13 | As You Like It (Pastoral) |
| Oct. 20 | [NO CLASS—Fall Break] |
| Oct. 22 | Two Noble Kinsmen (Chaucer) |
| Oct. 23 | Symposium on Shakespearean Comedy [2-5pm, McCoy]—SCENES |
| Oct. 27 | Theories of comedy |
| Nov. 3 | Shakespearean comedy on screen |
| Nov. 8 | <i>Chimes at Midnight [Indie Memphis Film Festival]</i> |
| Nov. 10 | Final project proposals – office discussions with Professor Newstok |
| Nov. 17 | Library research sessions |
| Nov. 24 | Annotated bibliography due |
| Nov. 26 | [NO CLASS—Thanksgiving recess] |
| Dec. 1 | Peer reviews |
| Dec. 8 | Final paper due |

Requirements

Engagement (20%) is mandatory, broadly conceived to include active **participation** (*listening and responding* to your peers as well as the professor), consistent **preparation** of course readings, **enthusiasm** for assignments, **collaboration** with your peers, and **respect** for the course. Successful students are those who re-read thoroughly in advance of discussion, arrive on time to class, and participate thoughtfully every day of the semester. You are expected to attend every class session. To paraphrase Gertrude Stein: *absence is an absence is an absence is an absence*; I don't distinguish between excused and unexcused absences. If *for whatever reason* (including medical and personal emergencies, extracurricular events) you miss **more than five classes** (that is, **two full weeks of the semester!**), **you will fail the course**.

Sunday emails (20%) are carefully honed paragraphs (approximately **300 words**) designed to keep you on schedule with the reading, as well as sustain a conversation with the professor. Paragraphs are due **every Sunday by noon via email**. **No late work**—the responses prepare your thoughts in advance of Tuesday's discussion.

Scene (30%) rehearsed with Nick Hutchison, and performed at the **October 23 symposium**.

Final paper (30%) – a 3,500-word analysis of Shakespeare's engagement with his comedic predecessors. The argument must engage with scholarly research of 6-8 approved sources (consult WSB & Newstok).

Grading: 'C' (70–79%) represents *satisfactory* work; a 'B' (80–86%) represents *good* work; a 'B+' (87–89%) represents *very good* work; an 'A-' (90–93%) represents *excellent* work; and the infrequent 'A' (94% and above) represents *extraordinary* achievement. This holds true for your overall engagement, your short essays, and your final exam.

Policies: You must complete **all written work** to pass this course. As always, please observe Rhodes guidelines regarding the **Honor Code**; academic dishonesty will not be tolerated, and students caught plagiarizing **will fail the course**, in addition to being reported to the Honor Council. See attached departmental policies for further details. Respect the integrity of the seminar: please turn off **cell phones** and **remove hats** before entering the classroom; please **do not eat during class**; please **use the bathroom before our session commences**. Treat email exchanges with one another and with the professor as **formally composed correspondence**.

Typical Week

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|-------------|---|
| Weekend | <i>Read play twice in full</i> |
| Sunday noon | Email your weekly paragraph |
| Tuesday | Brief quiz ; overview of the play |
| Thursday | <i>More detailed immersion in play per student interest</i> |
| Friday | <i>Begin reading the next play</i> |