

WOMEN ON TOP: GENDER AND COMEDY
FGS 220; CO 200
PROFESSOR Lisa B. Hughes
BLOCK 7 2005
Armstrong 238
Office Hours TW 3-5 and by appointment



Comedy is both culturally specific and still in many ways universally human. In comedy we find strong indicators of the gender values of a given time and place—what a culture finds funny about women, or finds it funny to see women doing, or to see being done to women, or makes fun of a woman for doing-- can tell us a great deal about the culture. Beginning with Aristophanes, western comedy shows interest in women, as comic butts and as fellow citizens. Hollywood comedy (the movies and the sitcom) has its roots in Greek and Roman New Comedy, which focuses primarily on obstacles between young lovers. Typical plots feature sex, domestic conspiracies, comic misunderstandings, mistaken identities, mockery of old women and more. In this course we will read and view primary sources of Athens, Rome, and Hollywood, as well as secondary theoretical works from the nineteenth and twentieth century that put these works in social and political context. We will look at what the Greeks and Romans found funny, as well as how that humor translated –or didn’t - into modern America.

You are expected to come to class every day prepared to talk about the readings and the viewings. Your grade will be based on your class preparedness and reports, a midterm exam, and a final paper. Every absence beyond two will have severe negative consequences on your grade, and every for every absence, excused or not, you will write a two page response to some aspect of the material of the missed class.

TEXTS:

Henderson, J. *Three Plays by Aristophanes: Staging Women*, Routledge 1996.

Terence, *Comedies of*. . . Penguin.

Plautus, *Pseudolus* Penguin.

ELECTRONIC RESERVE look under CO 200 in Tutt Web Site

<http://coloradocollege.docutek.com/eres/coursepass.aspx?cid=244>

GRADE:

Attendance and participation	20%
Exam	35%
Paper	35%
Short assignments	10%

WEEK 1

Mon Ritual Origins of Comedy (Cornford); *Make 'em Laugh*
Electronic Reserve: Cornford's Ritual Origins

Tue Henderson, Intro (p. 3-42); *Lysistrata*, first half
Electronic Reserve: "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?."

Wed *Lysistrata*, the whole play, Ortner, Bergson

Thur *Thesmophoriazousai*, Bergson

Electronic Reserve: "Travesties of Gender and Genre. . . ."

Info on Thesmophoria

<http://inside.bard.edu/academic/specialproj/ritual/Rituals/Thesmo/00.html>

Fri *Some Like It Hot*

Electronic Reserve: "The Body and its Representation in Aristophanes' *Thesm.* . . ."

Electronic Reserve: "The Mythos of Spring" (Frye)

WEEK 2

Mon *Pseudolus*

Women's Roles in Plautine Comedy

<http://www.vroma.org/~araia/plautinewomen.html>

Tue *Andria*, *The Mother in Law*

Women and Laughter ch. 1 "Theorizing Laughter"

Electronic Reserve: "From Boys to Men: Rape and Developing Masculinity"

Wed *The Brothers* Prostitution in Rome

Thur *Risky Business*

Electronic Reserve: The Hays Code

Fri **EXAM**

WEEK 3

Mon *It Happened One Night*

Electronic Reserve: "Knowledge as Transgression"

Electronic Reserve: "Commitment in Hollywood Romantic Comedy"

Tue *The Philadelphia Story*

Electronic Reserve: "The Importance of Importance"

Wed *The Women*

Electronic Reserve: "Sexual Inequality in Humor"

Thu *Pillow Talk; Ozzie and Harriet, Happy Days*
Women and Laughter ch. 2 "Sitcoms"

Fri *Mary Tyler Moore; Down With Love*

NB Paper Topic must be approved by today at noon. *Must include antiquity.*

WEEK 4

Mon Various Sitcoms

Electronic Reserve: "Sexual Inequality in Humor"

Tue NO CLASS; WORK ON PAPER

Wed **FINAL PAPER DUE**

SETTING THE TABLE

Your group will be responsible for setting the table for one class discussion, something to get us in the mood. There are a variety of ways to do this, including something you think of yourself, outside of the following suggestions. First, you should familiarize yourself with the materials well in advance of the class itself. Then, essentially, you find some outside thing to serve as an introduction to the class that day. You might photocopy excerpts from an outside source that would enable the group to focus on a particular aspect of the text(s) (e.g., a contemporary review essay for one of the works, a cartoon, an "artifact" from popular culture [such as an advertisement, article, photo, etc.], or bring in a video excerpt from TV or a movie to present and discuss in relation to the reading or viewing of the day. What will remind us of the time period? What relevant food can you bring in? You may also perform some scene from the reading or from an earlier one that seems relevant, perhaps restaging to allow multiple interpretations. Your presentation may include more than one of these suggestions, but it is important that at all times you make clear the connection to the text.

"Pillow Talk"

"Mary Tyler Moore"

"The Mother in Law"

"Risky Business"

"It Happened One Night"