



## CONTEXUALIZING CHRISTMAS: COMEDY, PASTORAL, AND SATURNALIA

**Lisa B. Hughes** **Armstrong Hall 238**  
**2008 Block 4 TR 11 am, and by app't**

This course proposes to read literary texts and view films and television shows associated with the Christmas season as products of long traditions, including ancient pastoral of Greeks, Romans, and the Old Testament; comedy as theorized by Cornford and Frye; and the Roman winter solstice holiday of Saturnalia, a time of visiting friends, giving gifts and lighting candles. Beginning with theorists and classical antiquity we will read the modern texts critically in order to understand how they create meaning. In what sense is *Frosty the Snowman* a variant of Frazer's dying vegetation god? How does the

Greco-Roman tradition of literary shepherds help explain the significance of Shepherds in Luke's version of the Christmas story. What exactly is the source of nostalgia into which Irving Berlin taps in making America dream of a *White Christmas*? Texts include *It's a Wonderful Life*, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, *Old Testament*, *New Testament*, Macrobius' *Saturnalia*, *Frosty the Snowman*, Vergil's *Eclogues*, *Bad Santa*, Aristophanes' *Acharnians*, *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, and *White Christmas*.

Texts: Menander, *Plays and Fragments*, Oxford  
Aristophanes, *Acharnians and other Plays*, Penguin  
Vergil, *Eclogues*, Penguin  
Plautus, *Pseudolus and Other Plays*, Penguin  
Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, Dover (optional) (watch it or read it over Thanksgiving)

DVD: *The Original Christmas Classics* (Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer/Santa Claus is Coming to Town/Frosty. . .)

**Class convenes** MWF at 10:00 am, and TR at 12:30; please don't be late (it's rude, you may be counted absent, and you may find the door locked). Unless otherwise announced, the films for each class will be shown in the Cornerstone Arts Screening Room before they are discussed in class 7:00 PM. The films are on reserve at Tutt if you can't make one of the showings. There will be a short break mid-class, so please do not leave the class for any reason; we're all adults here and we can wait for an hour and a half. If you find you must leave, do not return until after the break. If there's a song on youtube, print the words. (Dec. 16= AM class)

**Attendance** is required of course. You are expected to be in class every day, mind congruent to body; that is, read the assignments carefully, take notes as you watch the films and do the readings, and be ready to ask questions and take part in conversation/debate.

You may miss up to 2 days of class, but for each day you miss you owe me a three page focused paper on some aspect of the film or reading we discussed that day. I will not remind you to do the paper. Any more than 2 absences **for whatever reason** will mean a deduction from your course grade, so beware of getting sick if you've already used your days up.

**Grading**, will be based on the following: paper–35%; exam–25%, memorization 10%, class presentations 20%; writing exercises, quizzes, and positive contribution to discussion 10%. Remember, you should take up about 1/25 of the space of the class, and taking up an excessive amount habitually can have a negative effect on your grade. Learn how to filter your thoughts; you don't have to express every one that comes into your head.

**ELECTRONIC RESERVE:**

Agius, "War and Christmas"

Cornford, "Introductory"

Frey, "The Mythos of Spring"

Williams, "The Country and City"

Marx, "Pastoralism in America"

Garber, "Pastoral Spaces"

Rhodes, "White Christmas, or Modernism"

Glancy, "Hollywood and the Second World War"

Noakes, "How the FBI Determined *It's a Wonderful Life* is a Subversive Movie"

Beuka, "Gender and the Politics of Landscape in *It's a Wonderful Life*"

Segal, "From Slavery to Freedom"

Frazer, "Saturnalia"

**EXTRA CURRICULAR EVENTS: ATTEND AND WRITE UP AT LEAST ONE**

-*Festival of Lights* Parade December 6, 5:50 pm <http://www.coloradospringsfestivaloflights.org/>

-*The Nutcracker* November 28-30 Evening and Matinee performances <http://www.csphilharmonic.org/>

-*The Lying Kind* UCCS Theatreworks December 4-21 <http://www.theatreworkscs.org/currentseason.htm>

-*Deck the Hall* Colorado Springs Chorale Dec. 12 7:30 <http://www.cschorale.org/>

-Festival of Lessons and Carols CC Chapel Sunday Dec. 7, 6pm

-Room 46 Holiday Concert Gates Hall Dec. 9 and 10, 7:30 pm

<u>Week One</u>	<u>Class Topic</u>	<u>Film/ Website</u>	<u>Readings</u>
Monday	Old Comedy: The Festival of the Phallus	The Christmas truce of 1914 <a href="http://www.history.com/minisite.do?content_type=Minisite_Generic&amp;content_type_id=57110&amp;display_order=6&amp;mini_id=1290">http://www.history.com/minisite.do?content_type=Minisite_Generic&amp;content_type_id=57110&amp;display_order=6&amp;mini_id=1290</a>	Aristophanes, <i>Acharnians</i>
Tuesday	The Lenaia The Rural Dionysia Alazons and Eirons	<a href="http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/classics/hansen/dionfest.htm">http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/classics/hansen/dionfest.htm</a>	Aristophanes, <i>Acharnians</i> e-res: Cornford, “Introductory”; Agius, “Christmas and War”
Wednesday	New Comedy Stock Characters Agelast, Grinch, Herod, and Scrooge	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MPBS7dVrE1U">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MPBS7dVrE1U</a>	Menander, <i>Dyskolos</i> <a href="http://www.simpsoncrazy.com/gallery/image.php?image=screenshots/lists/news_198.jpg">http://www.simpsoncrazy.com/gallery/image.php?image=screenshots/lists/news_198.jpg</a>
<b><u>Week Two</u></b>			
Monday	Saturnalia	<a href="http://www.history.com/video.do?name=culture&amp;bcpid=1681694254&amp;bclid=1675979322">http://www.history.com/video.do?name=culture&amp;bcpid=1681694254&amp;bclid=1675979322</a> <a href="http://penelope.uchicago.edu/~grout/encyclopaedia_romana/calendar/saturnalia.html">http://penelope.uchicago.edu/~grout/encyclopaedia_romana/calendar/saturnalia.html</a>	Plautus, <i>Pseudolus</i> e-red: Segal, “From Slavery to Freedom”; Frazer, “Saturnalia”
Tuesday	The Pastoral Tradition Messianic Psalms and Prophecies Mithraism	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mxPynSu2LGE&amp;feature=related">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mxPynSu2LGE&amp;feature=related</a>	Isaiah 7-14; 40; 50-53; <i>Eclogues</i> 1-4 e-reserve: Garber, “Pastoral Spaces”
Wednesday	No Shepherd, No Pastoral Moses, David, Anchises, Paris <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7VJoEe_zO_Q&amp;feature=related">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7VJoEe_zO_Q&amp;feature=related</a>	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=10ZC3gHvFNw&amp;feature=related">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=10ZC3gHvFNw&amp;feature=related</a> <a href="http://www.cyberhymnal.org/html/s/ssoyds/p.htm">http://www.cyberhymnal.org/html/s/ssoyds/p.htm</a>	Luke 2; Psalm 23; <i>Eclogues</i> 6, 7; e-res: Marx, “Pastoralism” <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DKk9rv2hUfA">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DKk9rv2hUfA</a>

Thursday	Dying and Rising Gods Imperiled Baby Syndrome <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0inp9eRMovM">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0inp9eRMovM</a>	<i>Frosty, the Snowman</i> (1969) <i>Santa Claus is Comin' to Town</i> (1975); <i>Rudolph, the Red. . . .</i> <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=63u8T3abETo&amp;feature=related">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=63u8T3abETo&amp;feature=related</a>	Jonathan Z. Smith <a href="http://depts.drew.edu/jhc/jzsmith.htm">http://depts.drew.edu/jhc/jzsmith.htm</a> e-res: Cornford
Friday	City and Country Amoebian Verse Otium	Sandrich, <i>Holiday Inn</i> (1942) <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zpYYBHs-fOc">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zpYYBHs-fOc</a>  <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y1GPxcxrBkI">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y1GPxcxrBkI</a>	e-res: Williams, "The Country and the City"; Glancy, "Hollywood and the Second World War" <i>Eclogues</i> 5, 7, 9
<b><u>Week Three</u></b>			
Monday	Gender, Anxiety, and Nostalgia The Machine in the Garden	Godfrey, <i>Christmas in Connecticut</i> (1945) <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cC9o4oYMIqI&amp;feature=related">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cC9o4oYMIqI&amp;feature=related</a>	e-res: Marx, "Pastoralism in America"
Tuesday	Angels, Shepherds, and Postwar Ideology	Capra, <i>It's a Wonderful Life</i> (1946) <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GUqtKJ13eH4&amp;feature=related">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GUqtKJ13eH4&amp;feature=related</a> <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D8WwgYBul5I&amp;feature=related">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D8WwgYBul5I&amp;feature=related</a>	e-res: Beuka, "Gender and the Politics of Landscape in <i>It's a Wonderful Life</i> "; Noakes, "Bankers and Common Men in Bedford Falls"
Wednesday	The Argument for Comedy The Mythos of Spring	<i>Miracle on 34<sup>th</sup> St</i> (1947) <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oUQycfgCjr0">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oUQycfgCjr0</a>	e-res: Frye, "The Mythos of Spring"; Mundy "Christmas and the Movies"
Thursday	Christmas and Modernism	Curtiz, <i>White Christmas</i> (1954) <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=00S-N3cy9DU&amp;feature=related">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=00S-N3cy9DU&amp;feature=related</a>	e-res: Rhodes, "White Christmas, or Modernism" <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iZ8OR8ehZfU">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iZ8OR8ehZfU</a>
Friday	EXAM		

<b><u>Week Four</u></b>			
Monday	The Anxiety of Commercialism <b>MISE EN SCENE ANALYSIS DUE</b>	Schultz, <i>A Charlie Brown Christmas</i> (1965); Seuss, <i>How The Grinch Stole Christmas</i> (1966) <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dB3JLKfmq-M">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dB3JLKfmq-M</a>	e-res: McKay, "CocaCola and Santa Claus" Martial bk. 14
Tuesday <b>AM Class</b>	The Return of Phallic Comedy	Zwigoff, <i>Bad Santa</i> (2003)	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UwfaxZcLW0w&amp;feature=related">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UwfaxZcLW0w&amp;feature=related</a>
Wednesday	6 PM Class Feast and Komos <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ELLX9qSGvOg&amp;feature=related">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ELLX9qSGvOg&amp;feature=related</a>	Curtis, <i>Love, Actually</i> (2003) <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5m2T5yfgsZ0">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5m2T5yfgsZ0</a>	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hfZEZM2Bgh4&amp;feature=related">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hfZEZM2Bgh4&amp;feature=related</a>
Thursday	PAPER CONFERENCES	PAPER CONFERENCES	PAPER CONFERENCES
Friday	FINAL PAPER DUE	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Fe11OIMiz8">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Fe11OIMiz8</a>	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nnHksDFHTQI&amp;feature=related">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nnHksDFHTQI&amp;feature=related</a>

**PAPER ONE: MISE EN SCENE ANALYSIS** 2-3 pages, see handout

**PAPER TWO:** See handout.

**MEMORIZATION:**

You must recite by the last Wednesday of class either a) A Visit From St. Nicholas, or b) Luke 2:1-20, King James Version

**HISTORICAL CONTEXT REPORTS**

- Vergil's *Eclogues*: soldiers of the dying Roman republic and Augustus, Mithraism, land confiscations
- Messianic Psalms and Isaiah: the Babylonian captivity
- Love, Actually (2003): 9/11; Afghanistan, air travel
- It's a Wonderful Life*: economics, film noir
- A Charlie Brown Christmas (1965) 7 O'Clock News/Silent Night (1966): 60's politics and society