

**NEW YORK UNIVERSITY**  
**GALLATIN**  
School of Individualized Study  
**THE SPIRIT OF THE COMIC AND**  
**THE SPIRIT OF THE AGE**

K20.1113 (4 credits)

Dr. Antonio Rutigliano



Fall 2009  
Wed. 3:20-6:10

Tel. (212) 998-7370  
ar31@nyu.edu

In tragedy every moment is eternity; in comedy eternity is a moment. The essence of happiness is in the moment. The Greek comedians set not only the basic rules and guidelines for the elemental passions and emotions common to all humanity, but also the essential tenets for captivating both audiences and readers. This class on the Spirit of the Comic and the Spirit of the Age is designed to help the student recognize the central issues and ideas that comprised the classical Greek consciousness that passed on to the Romans and ensuing generations. Literature essentially embedded in the realms of metaphysics and society sometimes becomes indelible by its transformation of pure thought into a pattern of human behavior. This class will explore those metaphoric patterns coming out of the chief literary achievements of the Greeks, Romans, and Renaissance writers that greatly inspired and served as a guide to subsequent writers and thinkers in the Western World, and consequently became the comical norms and mores of modern society.

Structuralist and deconstructionist literary criticism will be adopted for the interpretation of some of the works in this course. Eventually this will develop and refine students' analytical and critical thinking skills of literary works. The student will gain technical competence in recognizing genres, decorum and dominant literary tropes from the Greek to the modern period of literature in general.

Students will also acquire an understanding of comedy as a literary and theatrical genre. We will be studying various comedies through time in order to understand the characteristics of the genre and its evolution in the context of changing worldviews. Of particular interest will be the relationship between the written text of a play and its performance. This class will see at least one cinematic recreation or theater production of a play, with a discussion following on acting and directing requirements of comedy for the theater.

An understanding of the spirit of the times is necessary to understand the spirit of the comic, therefore this class will put in its historical context each play on the required reading list.

## **LECTURES**

Sept. 9: **INTRODUCTION**  
The Greek World

- Sept. 16: **THE GREEK THEATER: ARISTOPHANES**  
*The Clouds*
- Sept. 23: **PERFORMANCE AND TEXTUALITY IN THE CLOUDS**  
Read Rosen's article on Blackboard  
*Lysistrata*
- Sept. 30: **THE PELOPONNESIAN WAR**  
*Lysistrata*
- Oct. 7: **THE GREAT PLAGUE OF 1348**  
*The Decameron* (Day 1-5) Take home Examination is due.
- Oct. 14: **BOCCACCIO AND HUMANISM**  
*The Decameron* (Day 6-10)
- Oct. 21: **WOMEN IN THE DECAMERON**  
Read Williams' article on Blackboard  
Excerpts of Pasolini's *Decameron*
- Oct. 28: **SHAKESPEARE'S ADAPTATION OF BANDELLO'S  
22<sup>ND</sup> NOVELLA**  
*Much Ado About Nothing*
- Nov. 4: **ELIZABETHAN THEATER: SHAKESPEARE**  
Cinematic recreation of *Much Ado*
- Nov. 11: **SIX CHARACTERS IN SEARCH OF AN AUTHOR**  
*Pirandello*
- Nov. 14: **VISIT TO THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM**
- Nov. 18: **TRAGICOMEDY**  
*Six characters in Search of an Author*  
Read on blackboard Atkinson on *Endgame*
- Nov. 25: **NO CLASS**
- Dec. 2: **THE THEATER OF THE ABSURD : BECKETT**  
*Endgame*
- Dec. 9: **TRIAL**

**REQUIRED TEXT BOOKS:** Available for purchase at the NYU Book Ce.  
Aristophanes, *Lysistrata and Other Plays* (Penguin Classics: 1978).  
Boccaccio, *The Decameron* (Penguin Classics: 1987).  
Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing* (Penguin Classics: 1989).  
Pirandello, *Six Characters In Search of an Author*  
Beckett, *Endgame* (Grove Weidenfeld: 1958).

**REQUIRED READINGS ON BLACKBOARD**

Ralph M. Rosen, "Performance and Textuality in Aristophanes' *Clouds*"

Caitlin E. Williams, "The Voice of Dioneo: Women in Giovanni Boccaccio's Decameron"

David Lucking, "Bringing Deformed Forth Engendering Meaning in *Much Ado About Nothing*

Brooks Atkinson, Beckett's *Endgame*

**\*\*\*\*Reading is due each week before your section meets.**

### **CINEMATIC RECREATIONS:**

*Much Ado About Nothing*

*Decameron*

### **AUDITORY RECREATIONS:**

Gioacchino Rossini, *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*.

### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

The grade in the course will be based on ten essays, an examination, a paper, a trial, museum trip and class attendance/participation. . **There will be a grade penalty for coming in late and for late-papers. ONLY HARD COPIES OF ESSAYS, TESTS, AND PAPERS WILL BE ACCEPTED.**

1. **ESSAYS:** each week three essay questions will be posted on blackboard. You are to select one essay question and write a one page response (single or double spaced). Ten essays [50pts]
2. **EXAMINATION:** will be a take-home short essay exam (due on October 7th. 30). [10 pts.]
3. **MUSEUM ATTENDANCE AND ESSAY:** Nov. 14<sup>th</sup> [10 PTS]
4. **PAPER/TRIAL:** Students will pick a character or theme from the readings and will investigate, impersonate and defend in a mock trial (following the guideline of Oreste's trial in the *Eumenides*) the charges of the character's comedic wit. The following are possible characters to be assigned: Aristophanes, Lysistrata, Lampito, Petronius, Darkness, Trimalchio, Voltaire, Candide, Boccaccio, Fiametta, Lampito, Shakespeare, Wit, Beckett, Graucho Marx, Scaramouche, Pantalone, Pulcinella, Lazarillo, Socrates, Benedict, Beatrice, Pangloss, Kinesias, and Friar Alberto. Papers should be typed, double-spaced, between six and eight pages long. Footnotes or endnotes may be in any accepted style (MLA, Chicago Manual, Turabian, APA) provided it is used consistently and correctly. (10 points for the research paper, due on December 9th, and 10 points for the trial).
5. **ATTENDANCE** is necessary since we will be covering a lot of material. Ten (10) points will be assigned for participation and attendance.

**OFFICE HOURS:** Wed. 2:00-3:25 room 608 in 715 Broadway. If a problem arises do not hesitate to call me or email me at **ar31@nyu.edu**.