

ENG 461-01 Fall 2018

Senior Seminar: Classics in Comedy

Wednesdays: 4:00–6:45 p.m.

Professor Miriam Chirico



Dear Student of Comedy:

Hello! Join your fellow students in a year-long intensive study of comedy. What is comedy? Contrary to popular opinion, comedy is not just what makes us laugh. It turns out to be a very complicated field of literature with many twists and turns to explore.

Aristotle, in his treatise, *Poetics*, determined what made tragedy powerful, but his explanation of comedy is lost to us; his students didn't keep good notes! So, in this guided seminar in Western stage comedy, we will work towards our own understanding of comedy by focusing on three specific genres: Romantic Comedy, Dark Comedy, and Stand-Up Comedy.

We will read theorists, philosophers, and literary critics who have proposed ways to think about comedy, such as Henri Bergson, Sigmund Freud, Northrop Frye, and Susanne Langer. We will examine their ideas and apply them to the study of various dramatic and performance texts in our quest towards understanding how comedy works.

As we delve into the roots of comedy, we will consider the present context as well and ask a number of relevant questions:

- What kinds of comedies do we find funny today?
- What tricks do we play on others and what masks do we wear?
- What societal purpose does comedy serve?
- Does comedy reinforce stereotypes or challenge the status quo?
- Why do we laugh at dark or painful topics?
- How do stand-up comedians use the self in performance?

Questions? Write or visit Dr. Miriam Chirico about potential projects or interests for next semester

"Life is a tragedy for those who feel, and a comedy for those who think." -Jean de la Bruyère



Please join us! On with the Show!

"Comedy is, as we have said, an imitation of characters of a lower type – not however, in the full sense of the word bad, the ludicrous being merely a subdivision of the ugly. It consists in some defect or ugliness which is not painful or destructive. To make an obvious example, the comic mask is ugly and distorted, but does not imply pain." -The *Poetics*, Aristotle