

LIT 250: Comedy as Politics

This class examines the styles of comedy from Aristophanes to Samuel Beckett and contemporary stand-up. We begin by clarifying distinctions fundamental to comic representation of action (such as invective, humor, grotesque, wit mock, irony, sarcasm, deadpan, etc.) Then we undertake a journey through different worlds of comedy (the comedy of errors, satire, grotesque, nonsense, and black humor). Throughout our readings, we will consider the following alternatives: Does comedy subvert or reinforce existing social norms? Does it unmask or justify inequality? Is laughter a servant of hegemony or an agent of emancipation? In each of our readings, we will work to identify the potential of comedy to sketch sociological commentary, supply models of selfhood and offer incentive to political action. Primary texts will be supplemented by reading in the theory of comedy (Hegel, Baudelaire, Bergson, Freud).

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