

THTR 313 Comedy of Manners

Monday/Wednesday 8:30 – 9:50 am KAP 148

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Office hours: Monday and Tuesday 11:15 am – 12:15 pm and by appointment

The Comedy of Manners genre could be more accurately described as the Comedy of Wit. It dates back to ancient Rome and is still popular among audiences today. Sometimes gentle, but more generally sharp as a stiletto, these comedies are characterized by poking fun at contemporary society – especially the behavior of the upper classes and their relationships to those less well off – hypocrisy, avarice, conflicts between parents and children, and marriage. In the English theatrical tradition, Comedy of Manners is most associated with the Restoration and 18th-century stages. This course will investigate the origins of the form and then closely explore some of its best examples written between 1660 and 1800. While understanding the history and politics, both social and theatrical, is critical to understanding the comedies, we will spend more of our time exploring textual analysis and staging. The class is aimed at students who have previous experience studying theatre history and stagecraft.

Recommended preparation: [THTR 201](#), [THTR 210](#), [THTR 211](#)

Learning Objectives

- To expose students to an in depth study of important dramatic works of this historical period
- To hone their ability to read and analyze these dramatic works in terms of production and performance
- To understand the controversies addressed by these comedies and learn how to relate them to audiences today
- To further develop a working knowledge of the collaborative relationships between actor, text, theatre event, and the audience, both in the historical period and today.
- To develop a sense for how to discover the immediacy of dramatic works written in another historical period

Required Reading

Books Sold at Bookstore:

Finberg, Melinda, ed. *Eighteenth-Century Women Dramatists*. Oxford University Press, 2001.
Corman, Brian, ed. *The Broadview Anthology of Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Comedy*. Broadview Press, 2013.

Additional readings will be available on Blackboard or in the library

Assignments:

For each of the six major plays we will be reading, scene work will be important. Each student will be required to work with other students to prepare two scenes over the course of the semester. The purpose of these scenes will be to explore various staging or interpretive problems they present. **Students will be graded on their ability to define the problem, offer one or two possible ways to address the problem through performance, and to be able to discuss their attempts, process, or difficulties with the class. There will be a sign up sheet available in class on August 29 and 31 to select the scenes you would like to perform.**

There will be two writing assignments. The first will be a three-page paper addressing a specific staging problem from *The Country Wife* or *The Innocent Mistress*. You will be graded on your ability to state your thesis clearly, develop your argument based on textual specifics, and draw logical conclusions from your analysis. Grammar, lucidity, and creativity are important. **This paper will be due September 19 at 5pm and will be submitted on Blackboard.**

The second writing assignment will be a 3 to 5 page paper on a comedy not discussed in class. I will give you a list to choose from and you are to explore the ways in which the comedy is part of the Comedy of Manners traditions, as well as the ways in which it differs and the innovations it offers to the standard characteristics. Other issues you may address are the play's strengths and weaknesses, particular staging issues it poses, what is particularly interesting about the characters or their relationships to each other. Again, what I am interested in is your ability to analyze a play script and explore how it would work on a stage and in relation to an audience. I encourage you to consult historical sources. I will provide suggestions with each play on the list. You may go beyond my suggestions if you like. You will be graded on your ability to state your thesis clearly, develop your arguments based on specifics in an organized, grammatical fashion. You will also be graded on how you draw conclusions based on your evidence, your willingness to take risks, and your creativity. **This paper will be due at 5pm on November 3.**

There will be a midterm in class on Monday, October 17. It will be closed book and consist of short answer questions and one essay to determine if you are up to date and understand the material.

The final exam will be in our classroom on Wednesday, December 7 from 8 am to 10 am. It will consist of two essays, each to be selected from a list of choices. It will offer you a chance to synthesize what we have discussed and read over the semester.

Although I will perforce do some lecturing, there will be ample opportunity for participation in class discussion and class participation will be a factor in your grade.

Assignment	Points	%of Grade
Scene 1	100	10
Scene 2	100	10
Writing Assignment 1	100	15
Writing Assignment 2	100	20
Midterm	100	15
Final	100	15
Participation	100	15
TOTAL	700	100

Grading Policy

Excellent: A (4) = 100-93; A- (3.7) = 93-90

Good: B+ (3.3) = 89-86; B (3) = 85-84; B- (2.7) = 83-80

Average: C+ (2.3) = 79-76; C (2) = 75-74; C- (1.7) = 73-70

Poor: the D range (1.3-0) = 60s; F (0) = 73-70

- “Excellent” indicates that the student couples clear understanding of the class material with original and creative insight; “Good” means that the student demonstrates a clear understanding of the material; “Average” indicates that the student demonstrates a general understanding of the material but with some gaps; “Poor” indicates that there are identifiable gaps in the student’s understanding of the class material; “Failure” is the result of the student not having completed his or her assignments coupled with poor understanding of the material.
- When the average falls between two grades, the final grade will be weighted toward the positive end of the scale for students whose attendance and participation in class have been good, and will be weighted toward the negative end of the scale for those with poor attendance and participation.

Additional Class Policies

- Unexcused absences will not be permitted. If you need to be absent due to illness or emergency, please send me an email.
- Unless you have a letter from the DSP, you may not use electronic devices during class and examinations. This includes cell phones, laptops, and other electronics.

- If electronic devices are on during examinations, you will be asked to leave the room and there will be no make-up examination.
- **No late assignments** shall be accepted unless advance extensions have been arranged between the student and the teacher or unless exceptional circumstances occur.

Academic Integrity

Dishonesty in any form harms the individual, other students, and the School of Dramatic Art. Plagiarism is the unacknowledged and inappropriate use of the ideas or wording of another writer. Plagiarism undermines the intellectual collaboration -- the exchange of ideas -- that should mark academic discourse because it permits the writer to avoid any genuine involvement with the concepts or opinions of others. Because the false discourse of plagiarism corrupts values to which the university community is fundamentally committed -- the pursuit of knowledge, intellectual honesty -- **plagiarism is considered a grave violation of academic integrity and the sanctions against it are correspondingly severe (sanctions recommended by the university range from a grade of "F" in the course to suspension from the university).** Most simply, plagiarism can be characterized as "academic theft."

As defined in the University Student Conduct Code (published in the current [SCampus](#)), plagiarism includes:

- "The submission of material authored by another person but represented as the student's own work, whether that material is paraphrased or copied in verbatim or near verbatim form;"
- "The submission of material subjected to editorial revision by another person that results in substantive changes in content or major alteration of writing style;" and
- "Improper acknowledgment of sources in essays or papers." (§11.11)

Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Section 11, Behavior Violating University Standards <https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions/>. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct/>

Sexual Harrassment & Reporting

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity* <http://equity.usc.edu/> or to the *Department of Public Safety* <http://capsnet.usc.edu/departments/public-safety/online-forms/contact-us>. This is important for the safety whole USC community. Another member of the university community -- such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member -- can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. *The Center for Women and Men* <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/> provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage sarc@usc.edu describes reporting options and other resources.

Support Systems

A number of USC's schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the *American Language Institute* <http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali>, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students.

The Office of Disability Services and Programs

http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, *USC Emergency Information* <http://emergency.usc.edu/> will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

Course Outline

All readings should be completed before arriving to class on the listed day.

Introduction

Monday, August 21

What is Comedy of Manners and What are its Sources?

Wednesday, August 23

A Brief History of 17th- and 18th-Century England

Restoration Comedy: William Wycherley, *The Country Wife*

Monday, August 29

Overview: The Restoration and Restoration Comedy, Life of William Wycherley

Reading: William Wycherley, *The Country Wife*

Wednesday, August 31

Close examination of *The Country Wife* Acts 1 – 2

Monday, September 5 – Labor Day – No Class

Wednesday, September 7

Close examination of *The Country Wife* Act 3 – 4

Monday, September 12

Close examination of *The Country Wife* Act 5

Augustan Comedy: Pix, Congreve**Wednesday, September 14**

More close examination and scene work

Monday, September 19

Overview: The Glorious Revolution, Late 17 century comedy and the role of women on stage and as authors, Life of Mary Pix

Reading: Mary Pix, *The Innocent Mistress* **First paper due on Blackboard by 5 pm**

Wednesday, September 21

Close examination of *The Innocent Mistress* Acts 1 – 2

Monday, September 26

Close examination of *The Innocent Mistress* Acts 3 – 4

Wednesday, September 28

Close examination of *The Innocent Mistress* Act 5

Monday, October 3

More close examination and scene work

Wednesday, October 5

Overview: The Marriage Plot, Life of William Congreve

Reading: William Congreve, *The Way of the World*

Close examination of *The Way of the World* Acts 1- 2

Monday, October 10

Close examination of *The Way of the World* Acts 3 - 5

Wednesday, October 12

More close examination and scene work

Monday, October 17

Midterm

Early Eighteenth-Century Comedy of Manners: Susanna Centlivre**Wednesday, October 19**

Overview: The early 18th- century stage and its ramifications for comedy, Life of Susanna Centlivre

Reading: Susanna Centlivre, *The Busy Body*

Monday, October 24

Close examination of *The Busy Body* Acts 1 - 3

Wednesday, October 26

Close examination of *The Busy Body* Acts 4 - 5

Monday, October 31

More close examination and scene work

Late Eighteenth-Century: Sheridan and Cowley

Wednesday, November 2

Overview: The Licensing Act and the Age of Garrick (and a little gossip on the Sheridan family)

Reading: William Brinsley Sheridan, *The School for Scandal*

Second paper due on Blackboard by 5 pm

Monday, November 7

Close examination of *The School for Scandal* Acts 1- 3

Wednesday, November 9

Close examination of *The School for Scandal* Acts 4 – 5

Monday, November 14

More close examination and scene work

Wednesday, November 16

Overview: Theatrical Politics in the Late 18th-century and Life of Hannah Cowley

Reading: Hannah Cowley, *The Belle's Stratagem*

Monday, November 21

Close examination of *The Belle's Stratagem* Acts 1 - 3

Wednesday, November 24 Thanksgiving No Class!

Monday, December 28

Close examination of *The Belle's Stratagem* Acts 4-5

Wednesday, November 30

More examination and scene work

Last day to submit rewrites of papers

Final Exam: Wednesday, December 7, 2016 8 am to 10 am