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ENG 3504-001: Film and literature: comedy in film and literature

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English 3504, Film and Literature: Comedy in Film and Literature

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Spring 2008, Thursday, 6:30-9

Course Description and Objectives:

From absurd and satiric to slapstick, comedy has a place in a variety of film genres. The comic mode disrupts class hierarchies, builds community, and, as Sherman Alexie asserts, makes political and social arguments more powerful. This section of 3504 will explore the boundaries of comedy in multiple genres of film and literature. (old curriculum Group 6; new curriculum Group 5)

Texts:

- Kurt Vonnegut. *Breakfast of Champions.*
- Laura Esquivel. *Like Water for Chocolate*
- Ralph Ellison. *The Invisible Man*
- Fay Weldon. *Life and Loves of a She-Devil*
- James M. Cain. *Double Indemnity/The Postman Always Rings Twice*
- Novel of your choice for group presentation—paired with a similar film.
- Bordwell and Thompson’s *Film Art.*
- Handouts
- Other films

Course Requirements:

1. **Weekly Responses and Participation:** Responses are two pages typed, double-spaced with no more than 12 point font. They should reflect careful reading and synthesis of course materials and/or films. Your responses will serve as a source for discussion in class as a whole or in small groups so are part of your participation grade. Responses should analyze, critique, argue for or against, or evaluate—they should not summarize except to make the writer’s point(s). **You must be in class to receive credit for your response or for any in-class work.**

2. **Midterm Exam:** This exam will provide an opportunity to internalize material all students read for class and to carefully read the first set of films in the class.

3. **Group Novel Teaching and Presentation:** To further immerse us in the film and literature tradition, members of five different groups will each read a different novel and be responsible for teaching it to the rest of the class (with my help).

4. **Final Exam:** This exam will not be cumulative. It will provide an opportunity to internalize material read for class as a group and as a class from Midterm forward and carefully to read the last three films in the class.
5. **Final Paper and Presentation:** This paper will expand on the best thoughts of your response to your chosen group’s novel. I will provide a handout to clarify requirements for this paper and comments on your response to help stimulate best idea development. Presentations will give you the opportunity to share your thoughts with your classmates.

**Grades:** Grades will be determined as follows for a total of 100%:

- **Weekly Responses and Participation** 20%
- **Midterm** 20%
- **Group Teaching/Presentation** 20%
- **Final Exam** 20%
- **Final Paper** 20%

100%

**Grading of Responses, Presentation, and Paper:**
Response grades will be based on analytical complexity. Each will be worth twenty points. If a response only summarizes a film or novel, the response gets only half credit. Adequate analysis (or argument or critique) will result in 14 points (C level). Good analysis, etc., earns 16 points (B level). Great analysis, etc., from 18-20 points, depending on clarity, precision, and sense of voice.

Paper grades will be based on the following areas: Audience awareness, organization, development, sentence structure, word choice, grammar/usage/mechanics. The first three areas will be weighted more heavily than the second three (60% vs. 40%). I will also distribute the English Department’s grade analysis in class.

Presentations will be evaluated according to a rubric I will distribute in class. Groups should also turn in any class handouts or visuals with novel responses.

**Students with Disabilities:** If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Coordinator of the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible.

**Plagiarism:** The English Department states, "Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism -- 'The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one's original work' -- has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignment of a grade of "F" in the course."

**Electronic Writing Portfolio:** This class is a writing intensive class, so you may submit your paper as a writing portfolio sample, following the instructions on the CASL Website. Submissions must be made during the course of the class to receive my approval. Please note that the Writing Center is available for help with all writing assignments, as well. Take advantage of this free service.
Spring 2007 English 3504 Tentative Course Calendar, Subject to Change

January
10  Introduction to Class and Course focus and requirements. Read “Film Form” Chapter for 1/17 from *Film Art* and write a response applying one element to Keaton’s *Sherlock Jr.* (1924) watched in class.

17  **Response Due.** Discuss responses and film. Lecture on Film Form with segments from *Wizard of Oz* to illustrate elements. Read “FilmStyle” in *Film Art* and write a response in relation to *Wizard of Oz* or another film you have viewed.

24  **Response Due.** Discuss responses. Lecture on Film Style. View *Singin’ in the Rain* excerpts in relation to Style. Read *Double Indemnity* for 1/31 and write a response.

31  **Response Due.** *Double Indemnity* discussion and lecture. View *Something Wild* and take notes in relation to one element of mise-en-scene. Write a response.

February
7   **Response Due.** Discuss responses. Compare *Double Indemnity* and *Something Wild*—two faces of noir. Read first half of *Breakfast of Champions* for February 21 and write a response.

14  **Response Due.** Discuss responses. Complete *Breakfast of Champions* for February 21 and write a response.

21  **Response Due.** Discuss responses. View *Used Cars*. The film will be included on the midterm—in comparison to *Breakfast of Champions*. I will pass out a Midterm Review sheet for next Thursday, February 28. No response due on February 21.

28  Midterm. Read *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* for 3/6 and write a response.

March
6   **Response Due.** Discuss Responses. Read *Like Water for Chocolate* for 3/20 and write a response. Have a great Spring Break!

20  **Response Due.** Discuss responses. View *Bringing Up Baby* and Write a response—comparing it to either She-Devil or *Like Water for Chocolate*.

27  **Response Due.** *Waitress* or *Fast-Food Women* (Anne Lewis?) Read the first half of *The Invisible Man* for 4/3 and write a response.

April
3   **Response Due.** Complete *Invisible Man* for 4/10 and write a response. Discuss final paper and presentations—get into groups and begin to prepare.

10  **Response Due.** View *Bamboozled*. Prepare for Group Presentations next week!

17  Group Presentations

24  Group Presentations—Final Paper due. I will pass out a study guide for the final. It will include work from midterm, including group presentations, speaker, and films on which you did not write a response.

Final Exam!