

# THEA 61C – Birth of the Modern

## COMEDY EDITION!

**Spring Quarter, 2020. Modified for Online Instruction.**

**T Th 6:00 pm – 9:30 pm**

**Professor**

Dr. Michael M. Chemers

**Phone**

~~502-7571~~

**Email**

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**Office Location**

Zoom conference

**Office Hours**

By apppt

**Teaching Assistant**

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**Course Overview**

This course covers the establishment of what we think of as “modern” drama, defined in this case as mid 19<sup>th</sup> century to today. This course looks at certain significant texts that give the student a strong sense of the evolution of Western, English-language drama over this period. In deference to the COVID-19 lockdown, and my impression that no one wants to read *Long Day's Journey Into Night* while sheltering in place, this course focuses exclusively on comedies.

**Course Objectives**

Upon successful completion of the course, the student will be able to:

- Track the evolution of English-language drama through some significant texts.
- Understand major themes and other important dramaturgical principles that extend through the period.
- Be able to understand theories of comedy and incorporate them into critical responses.

**Required Texts**

Oscar Wilde, *Salome* • Nikolai Erdman, *The Suicide* • Nikolai Gogol, *The Nose*

Eugene Ionesco, *The Bald Soprano* • Jean-Paul Sartre, *No Exit*

Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur, *The Front Page*

Vaclav Havel, *The Memorandum* • Charles Ludlum, *Irma Vep*

August Wilson, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* • Robert O'Hara, *Barbeque*

Luis Valdez, *I Don't Have To Show You No Stinking Badges*

Henry Lewis, *The Play that Goes Wrong*



I. "The Peacock Skirt," an original illustration from *Salome*

## Requirements

- **Class Attendance and Participation.** Yeah, well, here's a funny little thing, isn't it? Normally, attendance in the lecture is absolutely essential to passing the course. Assignments and guidance will be given during the lecture sessions, and the central ideas of the course will be presented and discussed. Also, quizzes will be given and graded in class, with no make-up unless your absence is excused (like, for a serious reason, and the make-up is more difficult than the quiz by a lot). At the end of each lecture session, there will be a chance for students to raise questions and discussions. You are expected to come to all lectures and sections with all readings and assignments completed, and prepared to discuss the topics of the week. But how, in this online world, can I police this? Should I police it? No. This is a two-way street. I promise to teach, you promise to learn. If you don't show up, I'm not going to penalize you or come after you, but at the same time, you're going to miss most of what you need to pass the class, so don't come crying to me when it's all over. Seriously. I will take a dim view of someone complaining to me in Week 10 that they missed material because they were absent a lot.
- **Professional Class Conduct.** Students are expected to come to class on time, with homework done, and fully prepared to engage the material of the day. Students should engage proactively with the material while in class, ask questions (see below), and be respectful of fellow students. Students should be taking notes every day. Students are expected not to be disruptive, not to sleep, not to chat with one another, email, IM, websurf, or otherwise fuck around while in class. Students are expected not to work on other homework during the class. Students are expected to turn off all cell phones (if you are expecting an emergency call, please inform your teaching assistant before class). Students are expected to behave with professional decorum at all times. Students who fail to meet these requirements will be asked to leave the class session and may be penalized in their participation grades.
- **Online protocols.** Since the class is being held this quarter entirely on zoom, I have a few more expectations of decorum. The chat is a very interesting device. In my Monsters class, the chat became a place where people could tell jokes and respond in interesting ways to the material. I enjoy this, UP TO A POINT. This class deals with much more complex work than Monsters. I cannot monitor the chat and teach the class at the same time, so I will be designating an assistant to play that role. You will observe good online protocols by largely restricting your participation in the chat to asking questions for the monitor to bring to my attention, and "raising your hand" in zoom if you want to make an observation or critique. Not to say you can't react in chat to things you hear in the class. Just keep it reasonable. Of course, professional standards of decorum apply. No trash-talking, no bullying, and absolutely no sexism, racism, homo- or transphobia, or ableism. I'll kick you out of this class for that nonsense.
- **QUIZZES.** Each class meeting there may be a quiz on the material due to be discussed that day. Quiz content varies between multiple choice and short answer questions. Because of the difficulties of this quarter, the quizzes will

represent half of your overall grade. This means it's vitally important that you keep up with the readings and attend the lectures. There will be no make-ups for quizzes unless you have an excused absence, and the make-up is more difficult than the quiz. Any students whose disability accommodations might impact online multiple-choice quizzes should contact me about alternate assignments right away.

- **PAPER.** During the course, you will select a comic play, written in the 20<sup>th</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup> century, that is not one of the plays we discuss in class. You will then do an analysis of the play based on one or more of the readings from the *Reader in Comedy*, or another theoretical source that you bring to Doc for pre-approval. You are shooting for 1750-2000 words. The paper will follow the “Goethe’s 3” model and have three sections.
  - Evidence. Explain the major arc and themes of the play, and identify where the funniest parts are.
  - Analysis. Use the theoretical reading to place this play into a discussion with these larger conversations about the role of comedy.
  - Evaluation. Answer “so what?” What does this analysis say about the play? Is it a play we should do now? Why or why not? These answers are based on your analysis.

### Additional Resources

- CANVAS: Most communication outside the class will take place on CANVAS. There, under “Files,” you will find some required readings and additional resources – all kinds of stuff! Updated syllabi will appear under “Files.”



## Evaluation

Attendance/Participation	100	450-500	A
Quizzes	200	400-449	B
<u>PAPER</u>	<u>200</u>	350-400	C
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>500</b>	300-350	D
		>300	F

In this course, “A” work represents a mastery of the course material and communication of that material. “A” work is cogently organized, correctly researched and appropriately cited and presented, and can be understood with clarity.

A “B” is awarded to work that shows a solid comprehension of the course material, an understanding of the concepts and theories, and a capability to communicate these ideas by providing evidence of critical analysis and evaluation.

A “C” is awarded to acceptable work, which demonstrates at least a basic familiarity with the course material – enough to pass the course, but not enough to indicate a strong future as a Theatre Major.

A “D” is awarded to minimally acceptable work. For whatever reason, the student has demonstrated only a limited understanding of the material, and the professor cannot attest that the student has acquired the critical skills the class hoped to teach. A “D” is not a passing grade for Theatre Majors or Minors.

An “F” is given when the student’s work has demonstrated an insufficient understanding of the course material, or when the student has not contributed enough work for a reasonable evaluation, or when the student’s work has proven significantly lacking in evidence or critical engagement at an appropriate level, or if the student’s work is fraudulent or dishonest in some way.



3. Professor Danny Scheie in *MYSTERY OF IRMA VEP* at CalShakes

## Course Schedule (subject to change)

Students are expected to complete an average of 30 hours of work per week for this course (including class time).

Date	Discussion Topic	Readings
6.23	Introduction	CANVAS: Syllabus and “Introduction” to <i>Reader in Comedy</i>
6.25	History of Comedy/ Comedy of History	CANVAS: <i>Reader in Comedy</i> 207-227 (Meredith, Shaw, Twain, Bergson)  PLAYS: Wilde, <i>Salome</i>
6.30	Satire	Canvas: Burke, “Comic Correctives”  PLAYS: Erdman, <i>The Suicide</i> , and Gogol <i>The Nose</i>
7.2	The Absurd	PLAYS: Ionesco <i>The Bald Soprano</i> , and Sartre, <i>No Exit</i> . <b>EVIDENCE PART OF YOUR PAPER DUE.</b>
7.7	Jewish and Queer Humor	CANVAS: Wisse, “No Joke: Making Jewish Humor”  PLAYS: <i>The Front Page</i> , Hecht & MacArthur
7.9	Mechanical Laughter	CANVAS: North, “Machine Age Comedy”  PLAYS: Havel, <i>Memorandum</i> , and Ludlum, <i>Irma Vep</i> .
7.14	Black Humor	CANVAS: Carpio, “Black Humor in the Fictions of Slavery”  PLAYS: Wilson, <i>Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom</i>
7.16	Cont.	PLAYS: O’Hara, <i>Barbecue</i> ... Valdez, <i>I Don’t Have to Show You No Stinking Badges</i>  <b>ANALYSIS PART OF YOUR PAPER DUE.</b>
7.21	The Farce	PLAY: Lewis, <i>The Play that Goes Wrong</i>
7.23	Final Paper	No meeting. <b>Your paper is due by 9:00 pm today. Please submit on canvas.</b>



## FAQ

**When's the best time to talk to the professor?** Just before or just after classes are terrible times to talk to me. Come to my office hours or email to schedule an appointment.

**Do you check email?** Yes, but it's not my religion. On weekdays, during the working day, I will *usually* respond before the end of the day. I do not regularly check email on weekends or evenings, so if you email me at midnight with an urgent message, I will not see it until the following morning, and a Saturday email may go unread until Monday. Please follow up and confirm all messages sent via email.

**How do you feel about cheating?** The official UCSC policy governing Academic Integrity is available at [http://www.ucsc.edu/academics/academic\\_integrity/](http://www.ucsc.edu/academics/academic_integrity/). Suspected cases of plagiarism or other cheating will be handled strictly according to those policies. If you have *any* questions about what exactly constitutes plagiarism, read [http://www1.ucsc.edu/academics/academic\\_integrity/undergraduate\\_students/resources.html](http://www1.ucsc.edu/academics/academic_integrity/undergraduate_students/resources.html) and talk to me. No behavior that constitutes cheating, plagiarism, or any form of misconduct (including submitting a paper to me that has been submitted to another class) will be tolerated in this class for any reason. If you get caught, in other words, you automatically receive an "F" for the class and may no longer attend the class sessions. In addition, the professor may choose to pursue more stringent academic disciplinary action, which may include your expulsion from the university.

**Come on, not really?** Really. Cheat and fail.

**Is working together plagiarism?** I want you to work together! In this class, that might mean getting together and reading the scripts out loud – much higher level of comprehension than reading alone. But if you and your friend hand in two assignments that are basically copies of the same assignment, you're guilty of plagiarism – or of doing 50% of one assignment, which is an F. Collaborate, share resources, commiserate all you like, but in the end, I want one complete and completely unique assignment from each one of you. My strong advice, if you're going to work together, don't even do the same play.

**What if I have a disability that might affect my class work?** The University of California and this professor are committed to providing an equitable learning environment for all students. If you require special accommodations, please get an Accommodation Authorization from the Disability Resource Center (DRC) and submit it to me within the first two weeks of the quarter. Contact DRC at 459-2089 (voice); 459-4806 (TTY); [drc@cats.ucsc.edu](mailto:drc@cats.ucsc.edu); or <http://drc.ucsc.edu/>.

**What if I have personal problems that interfere with my work?** College is stressful, and stress is psychologically damaging; nevertheless, we all have to find ways of coping to complete our work. If you feel yourself getting overwhelmed emotionally, please contact:

**Counseling and Psychological Services** (831) 459-2628. Hours 8:00am to 5:00pm, Student Health Center, East Wing 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor.

If you feel that your emotional condition may interfere with your work, please make whatever arrangements you require and make sure to inform one of us as soon as possible.

**What if I need to take time off for religious observance?** I will make all reasonable accommodation if any events in the schedule conflict with your religious creed. You must make any request for such accommodation to me directly within the first two weeks of the term.

**Any trigger warnings?** I am ambivalent about trigger warnings on works of art, especially on works of art that are *meant* to challenge and disturb. This class is meant to be fun and exciting, but also a serious investigation of human culture and behavior. The professor will discuss these matters in a clinical way, and will not insist on deep, focused discussions of horrifying details. However, you ought to be prepared if you know that you are susceptible to frank discussions of sexuality, race, gender, and other topics that are typically lampooned in comedies. If you have other issues that you think may come up, please speak to the professor. All of us have places in our minds where, if we go, it feels like “the earth has been kicked out under our feet,” as Neil Gaiman says. However, if you cannot study the material and complete the coursework, your grades will be adversely affected.

**Extra credit?** In *college*? Don’t even ask.



4. Lillias White as Ma Rainey at the Mark Taper, LA, 2016. Phylicia Rashad, dir.