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***You are responsible for all information contained in this syllabus. Claiming ignorance of any of the following information is NOT an excuse for being unprepared.***

***This syllabus is subject to change at my discretion.***

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<b>AMHERST COLLEGE</b> College of Theater and Dance
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**Who's Laughing Now?**  
**(ENGL393/THDA 278)**  
**Spring 2024**

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**TR 1-2.20**  
**Prof. SEVAN**

**Office Hours:** TR 4-8PM / Frost B18

**LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

Amherst College acknowledges and appreciates the fact that our college is built within the ancestral homelands of the Nonotuck peoples. We also recognize our present-day neighboring indigenous nations: the Nipmuc and the Wampanoag to the East, the Mohegan, Pequot, and Narragansett to the South, the Mohican and Mohawk to the West, and the Abenaki to the North. Finally, we acknowledge and celebrate that Indigenous people continue to live here in the Kwinitekw Valley among us.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course is designed around analysing what comedic plays teach us about the self and culture(s), especially when we come to understand its patterns of transgression as confounding social norms through jokes and laughter. We will traverse genres, periods and cultures to reflect on various types of humour: satire, farce, slapstick, love, tragedy, parody, and screwball. Essentially, you will read for laughter, but also, you will read for how that laughter informs cultural ideologies and constructs social identities. How does comedy comment on politics, philosophy, and other socio-cultural topics?

Beginning with its origin and tracking its transformations through time and cultures to contemporary forms we will investigate the following: Where did comedy originate? What is its relation to tragedy? Is comedy thus universal and timeless or is it culture-gender-experience-specific? What does comedy tell us about the culture from which it arises? What exactly is comedy's purpose? Does comedy have its own language, rules, or system? Does comedy happen or is it constructed? Why do we laugh and what do we laugh at? Does laughter thus define comedy and is the person laughing hold as much agency? How did your sense of humour become yours? Orange you glad I didn't say banana?

**NOTE ABOUT SENSITIVE MATERIAL**

Some of the plays we will read in this course may examine issues related to race, class, gender, violence, and so forth. If you find yourself in discomfort with a particular reading and can't attend a particular class discussion, please let me know. Also, know that you may

excuse yourself from a discussion due to personal discomfort with the subject matter if the occasion arises. Our classroom should be a safe space for you to explore and discuss the material; if at some point it does not feel safe to you, you must do what you need to, to take care of yourself and your classmates. I ask you to consider the difference between discomfort and trauma in our examination of these texts.

### **STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES**

- To provide the tools and to nurture your ability to read comedies and critical writing.
- To increase your consciousness of social, philosophical, and artistic questions and approaches to the world through Comedy.
- To improve and refine your abilities to express and communicate ideas, feelings, and arguments effectively and persuasively.
- To encourage your understanding and enjoyment of art and social-politics.
- To critically engage with plays through drama analysis, and theory through critical analysis.
- To form thoughtful and supported critical analyses of plays through thesis-driven essays that show a deep engagement with and understanding of course material.

### **CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE**

- Be respectful. To me. To each other. We are all different. Make space.
- I have an open-door communication policy. Anytime you have a question or concern please reach out ASAP. Don't sit and stew. However, please make sure all concerns are class-related.
- Be engaged. You'll get the most out of the course if you're present and participating.
- I aim to create a safe space where we can be honest and critical. Art is subjective – there are very rarely right or wrong answers.
- Mobile Devices. Turn them off. Seriously. I encourage you to bring in laptops and tablets to write/take notes on, but please be present and a part of our community.
- Because of the space we are in please do not bring food or drink into the room outside of water.

**REQUIRED WORK:**

Mid-Term Essay Exam	20%
Final Essay Exam	30%
Dramaturgy Project	15%
Reflection Journal	25%
Class Participation	10%

**READINGS**

You are expected to diligently and carefully read the assigned plays and critical excerpts. Be prepared to fully discuss them and answer questions during class meetings and for your journal. Readings must be done before they are up for discussion. All course readings will be provided for you on our course Moodle.

**COURSE WORK**

- **Mid-term Essay Exam** — a 5-8 page analysis of a comedy from any period from a writer not covered and using class readings as secondary sources. The analysis will focus on social criticism and analysis. Outside sources will not be required.
- **Final Essay Exam** — an 8-10 page comparative analysis of any play assigned in the course and your dramaturgy project play through social criticism. Outside sources will be required.
- **Dramaturgy Project** — a PPT/media presentation (design/approach of your choosing) of a contemporary writer and play not covered in the class. The project will offer not only background and contextual information, but also discuss the play's approach to using comedy as social criticism. A part of this project will include relevance to our modern 2024 sensibilities and lives.
- **Class Participation** — means attending sessions, coming prepared and being involved in a conversation, and contributing to discussions. Theatre is about engaging with a community in the present moment. I recognize that verbal participation is easier for some than others, so please feel free to discuss any participation concerns with me.
- **Reflections Journal** – for each play/playwriting topic we read in the course you will fill out a reader response reflection entry. These are due weekly on Tuesdays by noon.

**GRADING:**

Theatre is subjective. Your work won't be graded based on thematic content or personal taste, but on the execution of the narrative based on the playwriting of narrative/dramatic

questions, conflict, resolutions, character development, and dialogue, as well as how feedback has been integrated and how drafts grow from one to the other.

### **LATE WORK:**

In theatre and in life, time is of the essence. The practise of completing work by a given deadline will help you whether you pursue theatre or you never touch a play again. Therefore, if you turn in late work, you will not earn full credit unless there is a special circumstance—for example, a personal emergency—that prevents you from completing your work on time and for which you have documentation. Please contact me regarding any special circumstances. Late work will be penalised at 10-points per day late. *Note: The final exam cannot be turned in late.*

Tech Snafus: We live in a world of technological glitches. Moodle might be down or your access to the Amherst website may have an issue. Have a backup plan. In the case of written work I highly recommend that if you wait until the last minute, as is the birthright of all students, and something does go wrong that you email me immediately with the assignment in question to lock in your submission day and time. I can't help you troubleshoot any technical issues, but you can cover yourself from any penalties by this email lock in.

### **ATTENDANCE**

Three unexcused absences will result in 10-point deduction from your course grade. Additional unexcused absences will result in a 5-point course grade deduction per absence. Excused absences are illness/hospitalization (with appropriate supporting documents) or a death in the family.

### **AMHERST POLICY OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

Every person's education is the product of his or her own intellectual effort and participation in a process of critical exchange. Amherst cannot educate those who are unwilling to submit their own work and ideas to critical assessment. Nor can it tolerate those who interfere with the participation of others in the critical process. Therefore, the College considers it a violation of the requirements of intellectual responsibility to submit work that is not one's own or otherwise to subvert the conditions under which academic work is performed by oneself or by others.

- We will cultivate our studio atmosphere to be a space of support, respect, patience, and care as well as a time for examining our process with an overall generosity of spirit. It is our responsibility to make an effort to build and maintain this atmosphere.
- Your willingness and concentrated participation in class activities is your responsibility in this course.
- Experiential learning works best in an atmosphere of openness and trust. It is your responsibility to contribute to this atmosphere by attending all class meetings and

completing assignments on time, by communicating problems openly, honestly, and promptly, and by listening to your peers without any judgment.

Plagiarizing will result in a 0 for the assignment and possible failure of the course

### **BELONGING AND INCLUSION**

As the instructor of this course, I endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment. However, if you experience barriers to learning in this course, let's connect to discuss ways to best support your access. If you have disability-related circumstances and are seeking academic accommodations (e.g. extra-time testing, reduced distraction test area, short breaks as needed, note taking assistance, etc.), Accessibility Services is eager to assist us with identifying reasonable accommodations for the course. They can be contacted at [accessibility@amherst.edu](mailto:accessibility@amherst.edu)

### **COURSE SCHEDULE**

The course schedule is subject to change. All changes will be announced in class and posted to Moodle and/or email.

### **ADA POLICY**

Amherst College is committed both philosophically and legally to assuring access to all college programs and services. The college pursues the goal of equal access through proactive institutional planning and barrier removal, as well as through the provision of reasonable and appropriate accommodations to students, staff, and faculty with documented disabilities.

For more information about Amherst College Disability Services please visit:

<https://www.amherst.edu/offices/student-affairs/accessibility-services>