

## ATTIC COMEDY: CLAS 460: FALL 2009

**Time and Place:** MW, 8.30-9.45, NH 132

**Instructor:** Sophie Mills, NH 122; work: 251-6296; home: 253-2721; email: [smills@unca.edu](mailto:smills@unca.edu)

**Office hours:** WF 4.45-5.45; TR 9-10 and by appointment

**Texts:** *The Clouds*, Greek text (repr. Elbow Press, 2000)

*Lysistrata*, Bryn Mawr Commentary, Ed. J. H. Turner (Bryn Mawr, 1982)

*Four Plays by Aristophanes: The Birds; The Clouds; The Frogs; Lysistrata* (Meridian Classics, 1994) trans. Arrowsmith, Lattimore and Parker is the "official" translation, but any modern translation will help. The Loeb's to use are Jeffrey Henderson's: anything older will not properly reflect Aristophanes' obscenity. I also strongly recommend that you look at Plato's *Symposium* and *Apology* in translation as background for the *Clouds*.

**The course:** We will read the *Clouds* before Fall Break and the *Lysistrata* after it. Theoretically, we have 27 sessions to read some 2800 lines, which would be roughly 100 lines per session. This is probably too optimistic and will require flexibility and willingness to adapt from us all. In any event, we will read all of the plays in translation if time is running short. Additionally, I would like us to reflect throughout the course on the nature of humour and its relationship to ancient and contemporary culture.

Week 1 (8/17-21): M: introduction and dipping toes in Aristophanic waters. W: *Clouds* 1-78

Week 3 (8/31-9/4): M: 79-168; W: 169-262

Week 4 (9/7-11): M: **NO CLASS (LABOR DAY)**; W: 263-374

Week 5 (9/14-18): M: 374-475; W: 475-563

Week 6 (9/21-25): M: 564-659; W: 660-763: what's funny? (1)

Week 7 (9/28-10/2): M: 764-864; W: 865-960: what's funny? (2)

Week 8(10/5-9): M: 961-1035; W: 1036-1131: what's funny? (3)

Week 9: 10/12-10/13: **FALL BREAK**. W: **MIDTERM**

Week 10: (10/19-23): M: *Clouds* 1132-1236; W: 1237-1342

Week 11: (10/26-30): M: 1343-1440 W: 1441-1510 with discussion of the Aristophanic and Platonic Socrateses: what's funny? (4)

Week 12: (11/2-6): M: *Lysistrata* 1-101 W: 102-253: what's funny? (5)

Week 13: (11/9-13): M: 254-485 IN TRANSLATION W: 486-586:

Week 14: (11/16-20): M: 587-681; W: 682-780 and 781-844 IN TRANSLATION: what's funny? (6)

Week 15: (11/23-24): M: 845-950: Thanksgiving Break (11/25-29)

Week 16: (11/30-12/4): final week of classes. M: 951-979 and the rest of the play IN TRANSLATION. I will be at a conference in Greece from 12/2 on and will make individual arrangements with you regarding your end of term projects.

**Questions to consider:** Comedy is much more culture-specific than tragedy is, and there are parts of these plays which you simply may not find very funny, as well as parts which will you will. Some central questions to keep in mind when dealing with Aristophanes are: Is this funny? Why is it funny? What types of humour can be found in Aristophanes? What continuities/discontinuities can be found between Aristophanic humour and what we find funny today? Is his work funny to a modern audience in the same way as to an ancient audience (and

how can we know, anyway?) Even more central are questions such as the function of Aristophanes' comedy. What does it mean for a huge body of citizens (and some non-citizens, possibly including women) to gather collectively to laugh at public figures and institutions of their city? Do we have anything remotely equivalent in our world? What is the function of laughter in our world? Is comedy just funny or is there a serious point to it and if so, what? To this end, each of you will have 5-10 minutes maximum to offer a short clip of something you find funny, complete with a brief analysis of what makes it so, if there is a serious point underlying the humour and if there are (clear) Aristophanic parallels.

This was quite interesting. <http://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/pto-20001101-000036.html>

And adapted and expanded from <http://ryanwjohanson.com/blog/2009/02/11/8-comic-devices-you-should-master/> are the following comic elements.

1. **Repetition:** "If it's funny once, it will be funny again, especially with slight variations."
2. **Inversion:** "Turn most things or situations upside down or inside out, and through inversion, you have laughs."
3. **Juxtaposition.**
4. **Disguise or mistaken identity.** Shakespeare loved disguises, which can lead to mistaken identities, plot complications, awkward situations (good for laughs) and heightened stakes.
5. **Exaggeration:** You can exaggerate a lot and use parody, or go all the way into camp.
6. **Irony:** Verbal irony, when someone says one thing but means another, usually the opposite. A kind of variant of this is the double entendre or pun. And dramatic irony, where we know something the character doesn't which adds a layer of meaning we understand but the character doesn't.
7. **Surprise:** surprises for us - which we don't see coming - and surprises for the characters - which we do.
8. **Reaction:** The slow burn, the double take, the exasperated moan,
9. **Slapstick/violence/toilet humour.**
10. **Parody** (various levels possible.)

**Grading:** The major goal of this course is to increase your fluency in reading Greek and to acquire a sense of the style, vocabulary and colloquial idiom of Greek comedy. To this end, 50% of your grade will be based on performance in class in terms of preparation and contribution to class discussion. The midterm will consist of translation and is worth 10%; the comic analysis is worth 10%; another 10% will come from a literary/linguistic commentary on a 20-line passage of the play while the remaining 20% will come from a comprehensive final exam, consisting of translation, commentary and an extended essay, for which you will be given the questions beforehand so that you can prepare. You will be allowed to take notes for this into the exam.

### **Some bibliography**

#### Other useful editions

*Clouds* ed. Alan H. Sommerstein (Warminster, Wilts, Eng. : Aris & Phillips 1982)

*Clouds* ed. K. J. Dover (Oxford UP, 1989)

*Lysistrata* ed. Jeffrey Henderson (Oxford, 1987)

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R. M. Harriott, *Aristophanes, poet & dramatist* (Baltimore, 1986)

D.M. MacDowell, *Aristophanes and Athens* (Oxford, 1995).

\*R. G. Ussher, *Aristophanes* (Oxford University Press, 1979) (ASU)

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E.W. Handley, 'Comedy' in Easterling, P.E. & Knox, B.M.W. (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature*, vol. 1, (Cambridge 1985), 355-425.

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Articles

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S. Goldhill, 'Representing Democracy: Women at the Great Dionysia', pp. 347-70 in R.Osborne and S.Hornblower (eds.), *Ritual, Finance, Politics*, Oxford 1994.

S Halliwell, "The Uses of Laughter in Greek Culture" *CQ* 41 1991 279-96

S. Halliwell, "Comic satire and freedom of speech in classical Athens", *JHS* 111 (1991), 48-70

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On the Clouds

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W.K.C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, vol. 3 *The Fifth-century Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1969)

G. B. Kerferd, *The Sophistic Movement* (Weisbaden, 1981)

Marie C. Marianetti, "Socratic Mystery-Parody and the Issue of asebeia in Aristophanes' Clouds" *SO* 68 (1993) 5-31

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<http://www.skidmore.edu/academics/classics/courses/2000spring/cl223/unit1.html> offers some excellent material from Perseus on philosophy and history.