

## ENG 4319 Film Humor and Comedy Spring 2013

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Office Hrs: T12:30-1:45 pm  
Th 2-3:30 pm



[www.turnitin.com](http://www.turnitin.com) Class ID: 5830097 Password: laugh

**Required Text:** Austerlitz, Saul. *Another Fine Mess*. 2010  
**Required:** Attendance at Miami International Film Festival Mar. 1-10  
<http://www.miamifilmfestival.com>

**Recommended Text:** Bergan, Ronald. *Film: Eyewitness Companions*  
**Best sources of films for class:** Reserves in Film Library

From its humble beginnings as a novelty in a handful of cities, cinema has risen to become a billion-dollar industry and the most spectacular and original contemporary art form. After World War I and into the early 1920s, America was the leading producer of films in the world.

By the end of the Second World War, a growing segment of the American filmgoing public was wearying of mainstream Hollywood films and began to seek out something different. In major cities and college towns across the country, art film theaters provided a venue for alternatives to the films playing in main-street movie palaces: British and foreign-language films, as well as documentaries were introduced to a wider American audience. While the sub-titles alert us to our entry into another world, this slight disturbance on the screen is much less important than our examination of that world. Can we do more than merely observe its time-and place-bound issues? Can we actually enter into this strange "other" and attempt to understand it? The cinematic stories and the societal traditions they mirror (which tend to be country-specific), along with the human elements within them (which tend to be universal), are invaluable aids in this endeavor. Culture clash is possible at every turn, but the bridge to understanding and larger tolerance of "the other" is open precisely when we dare cross into it. We can interpret

fairly only when we understand, and we can understand only when we know. In learning about international diversity, foreign cinema is both an excellent partner and a pragmatic tool.

### **Links to Helpful Sites:**

<http://www.miamifilmfestival.com/>, <http://www.timeout.com/london/feature/1529/100-best-comedy-movies>,

### **GRADING POLICIES**

**Attendance and Tardy Policy:** “90% of success is just showing up”—Woody Allen

Regular attendance in this class is **MANDATORY**, especially in a **DOUBLE** class when each class is, in effect, equal to 2 1/3 classes for normal schedules. In addition, since assignments may be given out on a daily basis and I will inevitably make changes to the syllabus, it would behoove you to be present for these announcements. Please be on time and stay for the entire class period. If you arrive late, it is your responsibility to talk to me after class to avoid being marked absent. Absenteeism as well as excessive tardiness will adversely affect your grade.

**Plagiarism:** Academic dishonesty of any kind **will not be tolerated**. This includes cheating on quizzes or exams as well as plagiarism. Plagiarism is a specific form of cheating defined as using as one's own, without proper citation, words and/or ideas expressed by others in public arenas such as (but not restricted to) print, electronic publications, and scholarly lectures. It is your responsibility to be knowledgeable about this topic. Please be aware that there are numerous ways to detect plagiarism beyond the instructor actually identifying the source of the plagiarism. Plagiarism is easy now that so much information is available on the web. Remember that I also have access to the web and I will fail and report any student careless enough to get caught cheating. Plagiarism wastes my time and yours—if you are experiencing any kind of difficulty in completing an assignment, PLEASE see me as soon as possible. I will consider instituting the policy on student academic dishonesty for any case of plagiarism I discover. Evidence of cheating, plagiarism or fabrication of sources will result in a failing grade for the course and report to the appropriate University authorities

**Late Papers and Assignments:** All assignments are due before the beginning of class time (10:59 am). The grade will be dropped one point for each 24 hour period it is late after that. I have little sympathy for people who come to class the day a paper is due asking for an extension. I know that PCs crash and MACs sometimes don't obey, files get deleted and cars break down, but please find a way to prevent or work around these errors. Starting an assignment well in advance is a good start.

**Preparation/Participation:** I expect you to come to class prepared. If a reading is due, make sure you have read the chapter and are prepared to discuss it. Responding to readings, films, and assignments through class discussion is an explicit part of this course, crucial for making it successful and enjoyable. Class attendance is very important for your final grade.

**Responsibility of student:** If you are having any type of problem or confusion which is preventing you from completing your work, please come talk to me about it. If you do miss class, you are responsible for finding out what you missed and making up any missed work before the next class.



**Etiquette (or Pet Peeves):** Please turn off all cell phones or anything else that beeps or makes noise. These disturbances are annoying and disruptive to class.

Laptops are for help in taking notes in class. They are NOT for looking at emails, browsing the web, writing letters or papers in class. Open laptops distract students behind you from the screen or the professor.

Also, please make every attempt NOT to leave the room during discussions and screening of films or clips. This disturbs others in the class (including myself) and prevents you from seeing the entire screening and understanding the concepts being presented. If you have a condition which prevents you from sitting for two hours at a time, please talk to me at the beginning of the semester, so we can make arrangements.

*Policies indicated in this syllabus may be changed or amended at any point during this semester. Bring this syllabus with you to every class to make changes on it as necessary.*

*Chapters to be read shown under a class period are for discussion the following class period*

### **What to expect from the professor**

- The professor will not insult your intelligence by expecting less from you than college-level work.
- The professor will provide suggestions, feedback, and critical evaluation concerning all aspects of the learning process both in and outside of class.
- The professor will read papers and/or exams to provide feedback and will evaluate these fairly, honestly, and constructively.
- The professor will challenge you to think and ask Why?
- The Professor will respect all students by discussing and evaluating ideas and not personalities--and will expect no less from the members of the class.
- The professor will strive to maintain a bias-free classroom that judges the merit of ideas not individuals. She will expect that all members of the class respond to each other respectfully. Students who do not conduct their intellectual work respectfully will be asked to leave the class.
- The Professor will bring not only her expertise but also her enthusiasm for learning to our classroom environment and expects no less from her students.

## **SYLLABUS**

### **IN CLASS**

### **ASSIGNMENTS**

Jan 10	Introduction/What is Comedy?	Read Austerlitz : Introduction
17	Discusson/Films	Read Austerlitz: Ch. 1, 2, 3
24	No class	
31	Slapstick Comedy	Read Austerlitz: Ch. 5
Feb 7	Quiz/ The Marx Brothers	Choose from Laurel & Hardy, W.C. Fields, Mae West-- <b>Write analysis</b>
14	Duck Soup—discussion	Read Austerlitz: Ch. 8
21	analysis due/Ernst Lubitsch	Choose from Sturges, Wilder, Grant, Hepburn- <b>Write analysis</b>
28	Ninotschka--discussion	Read Austerlitz: Ch. 15
Mar 7	Jerry Lewis	Choose from Monroe, Day, Sellers
14	SPRING BREAK	<b>Write analysis</b>
21	The Nutty Professor--discussion	Read Austerlitz: Ch. 20
28	Woody Allen	Choose from, Altman, Brooks, Hoffman
Apr 4	Take the Money and Run	<b>Write analysis</b> /Read Austerlitz: Ch.26

11 The Coen Bros.

Choose from Martin, Pryor, Murphy, Murray

18 Barton Fink

Write Final analysis

### Tentative Grading Formula:

Final Paper (due April 20)	25%
Bi-Weekly Film Analysis Submissions	25% (5)
MIFF Film Analyses	10%
Class Attendance and participation	15%

### Film Analysis and Final Paper

***When you write about movies, "it is insufficient to convince others to like or dislike the film, but to add to their understanding of the film... personal feelings, expectations and reactions may be the beginning of an intelligent critique, but they must be balanced with rigorous reflection on where those feelings and expectations and reactions come from and how they relate to more objective factors concerning the movie in question: its place in film history, its cultural background, its formal strategies... what is interesting is not pronouncing a film good or bad but explaining why" (T. Corrigan).***

#### Film Analysis Notebook

Students are required to see 2 comedy films screened at the Miami International Film Festival (Mar 1--10 2013) You must fill out film analysis sheets for each film. See last page for Form.

#### Film Reflective Analysis

##### Final Paper

You will choose one foreign film available through legal download streaming or from DVD to write a **2500 word** paper, examining the film and its context. In your paper, you are expected to demonstrate an ability to analyze and interpret a film critically as well as demonstrate knowledge about the **background or society from which it emerged** (gleaned from your texts, research, as well as class discussion); this means that you should address issues of **aesthetic style, narrative, and historical tradition** of the film that are relevant to your discussion. In your introduction, explain briefly why you chose to address the particular film. Next, identify the context of the film and explain how it is relevant to your understanding of the whole film—its style, narrative, mood, etc. Discuss as many details as possible **in the film** (dialogue, setting, action, editing, sound, plot features, camera movement) that reflect the points you are making about the way it represents (or does not) the particular types of films we have been studying. Make sure you go through the chapter of your book and your notes looking for ALL the elements that define or identify the type of film, then go through the film (more than once) looking for ALL evidence of what the film shows us. Through a detailed analysis of the film, you will demonstrate how it does or does not relate to other films from that foreign film industry and movement.

You don't have to talk about everything in the film, but you do need to support your argument as stated in the introduction with sufficient evidence. **Concrete examples** are a central feature of an analysis since they provide the justification for your argument. An analysis should not only provide evidence, it should also demonstrate how that evidence supports the argument/thesis being advanced. While you need to invoke aspects of the film for your examples, **avoid excessive** description. For example, if you are arguing that a character is constructed in a certain way, only cite the evidence that supports your analysis (that which relates to characteristics of the foreign film culture) -- avoid details that don't add anything to your argument -- if a character's clothing is not important for your

analysis, don't bother describing it. If you're not making a thematic point about your observations you're likely being overly descriptive.

A weak paper is **simply descriptive** with no attempt to pull out the possible **implications** of what the writer observes. In order to transform the descriptive into the analytical, ask your self "**So what?**", "**What are the thematic implications of what I've observed?**" It is not enough, for example, to say something is contrasted with something else -- consider what is being said about the contrast.

To illustrate your points, pick out a few short scenes for detailed analysis. When analyzing them, be careful not to retell plot when analysis is required. When talking about story/plot, discuss the shape, range, depth, closure of the narrative. When pointing out stylistic features (such as pacing or cinematography or soundtrack), describe what effect they have on the overall design of the scene and film and how they affect the viewer. Do not simply point out film style without talking about its meanings!

Wrap up your paper by summarizing what you have learned in your detailed analysis and reflect on the connections between it and the discussions of that country's films or its mentality as a whole. State how this affects/changes your overall reading of the film.

If you use any ideas from outside resources, cite properly, in accordance with the MLA Manual of Style. Presenting other people's ideas as one's own is considered plagiarism

### **POINTS TO REMEMBER**

1. Please don't spend more than one short paragraph describing the film's plot. Assume the reader has seen the film.
2. Please don't base your paper on the director's commentary from a DVD.
3. Please don't choose a film that is *studied* in class or discussed at length in the texts.
4. Points will be deducted if the paper is: too short, full of correctible spelling and grammatical errors and/or handed in late.

### **Grading Scale**

A - Essay is observant; well-organized; has a clear thesis; uses details to amplify the thesis argument; makes an argument, rather than letting the thesis speak for itself; uses clear paragraph structure; explains significance of details in sophisticated and convincing ways; grammar/syntax is free from error; uses written text for support and with powerful effect; conclusion/thesis argument is convincing and says something significant.

B - Above qualities are present in less complete form; states a thesis; uses argumentation to prove thesis; organized; uses evidence; uses text as support; language not quite as persuasive or clear as "A"essay.

C - Thesis not clear or not clearly argued; organization needs work; needs paragraph structuring; impact of argument (the "so what question") not clear; needs more amplification, examples, and/or text reference.

D - Paper needs a thesis; lacks details and evidence; thoroughness is lacking; writing lacks depth or is not well organized; grammar or syntax needs extensive work.

F - Essay does not fulfill assignment in any meaningful way.

0 – Essay is not turned in



## **Student Presentations**

1. To prepare, you should all do some research and/or intensive analysis before your group organizes its presentation. Be sure to focus your analysis to make specific points about the area of the world whose cinema you are talking about.
2. Choose a clip from a representative film from the world culture you are presenting ; then focus on how and/or why it reflects (or doesn't) the particular region of the world we have been reading about and will be discussing and analyzing for class. Your group will need to identify a specific aspect of the film or a specific scene to discuss. The clip should not be longer than 3-3 ½ min. and your explanations should take place before (*laying the groundwork*) and after (*reminding us how it reflects the area and its cinema*) the clip.
3. Since each group will have 5 people to begin with, your entire presentation should be about ½ hour, with each person responsible for about a 5 minute segment dealing with some aspect of that world culture and its film industry and linking the two so that the rest of the class will be ready to view a film from that region and be much better versed in understanding and interpreting it. (time your part beforehand to make sure it fits with the rest of your group)

Some advice:

- Have a structure to your presentation. Plan the main points all of you intend to cover before you begin.
- Speak clearly and *don't rush*. Give other students time to think about what you are saying.
- If you use quotations in your presentation keep them short. Longer quotes should be printed on a handout
- Show only one clip—know *the exact point* where you want to begin the film. *Do not* waste precious time fast forwarding or rewinding to find that point,
- Don't waste time on background information or narrative (unless necessary) to set up the part of the film you're showing....give us just enough so we are not lost but remember the point of the clip is to illustrate something about the cinema and the culture of that region,

Film Analysis Form  
*Make 7 copies*

This involves responding to a film of your choice with your reactions and comments to the film *in one thorough paragraph for each* question. Creativity and personal reflections will be highly valued. Your responses will form the basis of 35% of your grade. **Please write your responses in a color other than black (and one that is legible)**

Use the following model for each film: \_\_\_\_\_

Film entry #: \_\_\_\_\_

Year: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Filmmaker & country of origin: \_\_\_\_\_

**ABOUT THE FILM**

Main idea/topic:

Main characters:

Who is the writer of the film? Has the screenplay been adapted from another work?

Give background on the director:

When was the film made? What is/was the social and political climate like at the time in that country and the world?

What does the title mean in relation to the film as a whole? Try to establish a connection—sometimes clear, sometimes metaphorical, sometimes impossible to figure out.

Describe how the opening credits are presented? How do they relate to meaning?

What three or four sequences **do you believe** are most important in the film? Why?

What were your expectations from your knowledge of that country's cinema or director's work? Were they confirmed or disappointed? Explain.

In your opinion, what was the aim/purpose of this film? Be specific.

Give at least five examples from the film (besides its language) which signal its being labeled a film from that country or region.

What is your personal response to the film?



