

**LITERATURE & THE MORAL IMAGINATION/
FREN 205**

**“Laughter is the Best (Moral) Medicine:
The Comedies of Molière”**

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Office Hours: M 11:30-1:30; W 11:30 – 3:00

Course Description : This course is designed to contribute to the Ethics, Religion and Society focus of the core curriculum. Students will study the French philosopher Henri Bergson’s analysis of what makes humans laugh and, then, see how this analysis is played out in the comedies of the classical French comic genius, Molière, one of the greatest comic playwrights of all time who represented timeless models of human vice and folly as he exposed social and political issues to ridicule. Indeed, he stated that the greatest rule of comedy was to “plaire” or be pleasing but, at the same time, to “corriger les vices des hommes,” to correct human vices. Several of his “comedies of manners” and “comedies of character” will be studied and discussions will focus on the universal aspect of the societal or personal problem or foible that is being held up to ridicule. Continual reference will be made to the contemporary social scene, its “isms,” and to the “masks” worn by people today.

Course Objectives: You will be challenged by means of –

- close reading of the texts using critical thinking and ethical analysis;
- reflective essays written on the plays that will be evaluated on quality of content, logical development and clarity of expression;
- qualitative contributions to class discussion (enriched by what you have learned in PHIL 100 and/or THEO 111) and that demonstrate your careful reading and your ability to apply ethical principles;
- your ability to work with various groups (determined by lottery) during the course of the semester in leading the discussion of three plays as well as your active, informed participation in class discussions. (The first day of your group presentation, you are to present a dramatization of a selected scene and then to lead of discussion of the comic techniques employed along with some of the social implications surfaced by your group. On the second day, you will select another scene or part of a scene, again discuss the comic techniques and then use the discussion questions that the others in the class will have posted on the Blackboard Discussion Board prior to the first day on which a new play is to be treated. The instructor will lead the third day’s discussion using various techniques to further explore some of the “isms” that may or may not have been discussed to that point.)

- the completions of a final project (completed in pairs) that will relate what you have learned about comedy and its “corrective” nature to the monologues and skits presented by comics today (such as Jay Leno, Stephen Colbert, David Letterman, Jon Stewart, Conan O’Brian, Jimmy Kimmel, the Saturday Night Live players, and the like). You will treat the social or human problem being parodied and analyze its apparent ability or inability to have had a “corrective” or moral impact. This project will be in the form of a PowerPoint presentation followed by a general class discussion which your group will lead with the class.

This course will be taught in English and does not fulfill requirements for the French major or minor. Prerequisite/Corequisite: PHIL 100 or THEO 111.

Required Texts:

Comedy: “An Essay on Comedy” by George Meredith, “Laughter” by Henri Bergson, Wylie Sypher (Editor), Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980; ISBN-10: 0-8018-2327-7; ISBN-13: 978-0-8018-2327-5

Don Juan and Other Plays, Molière (Author), Ian McClean and George Graveley (Translators), Oxford University Press, 1998; ISBN-10: 0192835513; ISBN-13: 978-0192835512

The Misanthrope, Tartuffe, and Other Plays, Molière (Author), Maya Slater (Translator), Oxford University Press, 2008; ISBN-10: 0199540187; ISBN-13: 978-0199540181

The Imaginary Invalid, Molière (Author), Charles Heron Wall (Translator), Dodo Press, 2007; ISBN-10: 1406580988; ISBN-13: 978-1406580983

Grades:

Essay – Test #1 20%
 Essay – Test #2 20%
 Essay – Test #3 20%
 Final Project 20%
 Participation 20%

Departmental Grading Scale:

A	100-93	C	76-73
A-	92-90	C-	72-70
B+	89-87	D+	69-67
B	82-80	D	66-63
B-	79-77	D-	62-60
C+	79-77	F	59 and below

For the Departmental Attendance Policy please consult the Departmental web site at http://www.xavier.edu/modern_languages/

You should also be familiar with the University policy on Academic Honesty in the University Catalog which applies to all courses in the Department of Modern Languages.

Schedule:

Aug.	26	Introduction
	28	Meredith – “An Essay on Comedy”
	31	Bergson – “Laughter” (Chapter I)
Sept.	2	Bergson – “Laughter” (Chapter II)
	4	Bergson – “Laughter” (Chapter III)
	7	LABOR DAY
	9	“Precious Provincials”
	11	“Precious Provincials”
	14	“Precious Provincials”
	16	“The School for Wives”
	18	“The School for Wives”
	21	“The School for Wives”
	23	“The School for Wives Criticized”
	25	“The School for Wives Criticized”
	28	“Tartuffe”
	30	“Tartuffe”
Oct.	2	“Tartuffe” (Essay Test #1 Due)
	5	“Don Juan”
	7	“Don Juan”
	9	FALL HOLIDAY
	12	“Don Juan”
	14	“The Misanthrope”
	16	“The Misanthrope”
	19	“The Misanthrope”
	21	“The Miser”
	23	“The Miser”
	26	“The Miser”
	28	“The Would-be-Gentleman”
	30	“The Would-be-Gentleman”

Nov.	2	“The Would-be-Gentleman” (Essay Test #2 Due)
	4	“Scapin the Schemer”
	6	“Scapin the Schemer”
	9	“Scapin the Schemer”
	11	“The Clever Women”
	13	“The Clever Women”
	16	“The Clever Women”
	18	“The Imaginary Invalid”
	20	“The Imaginary Invalid”
	23	“The Imaginary Invalid” (Essay Test #3 Due)
	25	THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY
	27	THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY
	30	Presentations
Dec.	2	Presentations
	4	Presentations
	7	Presentations
	9	Presentations
	11	Presentations

