WHAT MAKES THE FRENCH LAUGH: FRENCH FILM COMEDY CLASSICS

RECOMMENDED READINGS (subject to change)


FILMOGRAPHY (subject to change)

L’arroseur arrosé [The Sprinkler Sprinkled]. Dirs. Lumière Brothers, 1895, 00:01:13.
Boudu sauvé des eaux [Boudu Saved From Drowning]. Dir. Jean Renoir, 1932, 01:26:00.
Mon Oncle [My Uncle]. Dir. Jacques Tati, 1958, 01:56:00.
La Grande Vadrouille [Don’t Look Now, We’re Being Shot at]. Dir Gérard Oury, 1966, 01:59:00.
Un éléphant, ça trompe énormément [Pardon Mon Affaire]. Dir. Yves Robert, 1976, 01:45:00.
Trois hommes et un couffin [Three Men and a Cradle]. Dir. Coline Serreau, 1985, 01:46:00.

Available on Youtube
Available on Netflix
Screened in Rubel Room

Please note: Several of the films above include nudity and/or sexually explicit scenes.

SEMINAR DESCRIPTION
What makes the French laugh? Why do the French like Jerry Lewis, Charles Chaplin (and other comics) so much? Why does Hollywood remake so many French comedies? This interactive seminar responds to these questions by examining the comic and humor techniques used in French cinema throughout the years. In addition to analyzing several representative films from different periods, participants will study the cultural and historic roots of French humor and laughter through assigned readings. Representative films (with English subtitles) and theoretical texts are used in our investigation.
METHODOLOGY
Class sessions, conducted entirely in English, will be devoted to discussing the films and the readings. The emphasis in this seminar will be on exchanging interpretations of films/texts with each other. The forum for exchanging ideas will consist both of full lectures and active class discussions between the instructor and participants. The first class will have one break (at 2-2:15pm). All other class sessions will have two breaks (at 2-2:15pm and 3-3:10pm), except on optional screening days.

PROGRAM (subject to change)

JANUARY
22 Presentations and introduction to the seminar
   In-class screening: L’arroseur arrosé [The Sprinkler Sprinkled] (00:01:13) and Gazon maudit [French Twist] (01:41:00)
29 Roots of French Comedy
   Lecture and discussion on An Essay on Comedy by George Meredith
   Lecture on Gerald Mast’s The Comic Mind and Noël Carroll’s “Notes on the Sight Gag”
   Recommended: watch on your own Boudu Saved From Drowning prior to next class.

FEBRUARY
5 Lecture and discussion on Henri Bergson’s On Laughter (“Preface” and “Chapter I”) 
   Lecture and discussion: Ménage à trois, reversal of fortune and social satire in Boudu Saved From Drowning and French Twist. (Part 1)
12 Optional Screening of La Grande Vadrouille [Don’t Look Now, We’re Being Shot at] in Rubel Room of Poetry Center.
19 Optional Screening of Les Aventures de Rabbi Jacob [The Mad Adventures of Rabbi Jacob] in Rubel Room of Poetry Center.
26 Lecture and discussion on Henri Bergson’s On Laughter (“Chapter II,” “Chapter III,” and “Appendix”)
   Lecture and discussion: Ménage à Trois, Reversal of Fortune and Social Satire in Boudu Saved From Drowning and French Twist. (Part 2)

MARCH
5 Optional Screening of Un éléphant, ça trompe énormément [Pardon Mon Affaire] in Rubel Room of Poetry Center
   Recommended: watch on your own The Visitors prior to next class.
12 Lecture and discussion on Rae Beth Gordon’s Why the French Love Jerry Lewis.
   Lecture and discussion: Carnival, National Solidarity, and Social Stratification in Don’t Look Now, We’re Being Shot at, The Mad Adventures of Rabbi Jacob, and The Visitors. (Part 1)
19 UA Spring Break
   Recommended: watch on your own The Visitors prior to next class.
Lecture and discussion: Carnival, National Solidarity, and Social Stratification in *Don’t Look Now, We’re Being Shot at, The Mad Adventures of Rabbi Jacob*, and *The Visitors*. (Part 2)
Recommended: watch on your own *Three Men and a Cradle* and *Would I Lie to You?* prior to next class.

**APRIL**

26 Lecture and discussion: Masculinities in *Pardon Mon Affaire, Three Men and a Cradle*, and *Would I lie to You?*
Recommended: watch on your own *My Uncle, The Daydreamer*, and *The Goat* prior to next class.


9 Lecture and discussion: Slapstick Superstars and Social Critique in *My Uncle, The Daydreamer*, and *The Goat*. (Part 2)

23 Conclusions and Synthesis.