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Humanities Seminar  
Spring 2014  
W 1:00-4:00pm  
Poetry Center

## WHAT MAKES THE FRENCH LAUGH: FRENCH FILM COMEDY CLASSICS

### RECOMMENDED READINGS (subject to change)

Gordon, Rae Beth. *Why the French Love Jerry Lewis: From Cabaret to Early Cinema*. Palo Alto: Stanford UP, 2001.  
Lanzoni, Rémi Fournier. *French Cinema. From Its Beginnings to the Present*. New York: Continuum, 2004.  
Sypher, Wylie, ed. *Comedy. An Essay on Comedy by George Meredith. Laughter by Henri Bergson*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1956.

### 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.  
*Le Distrait* [The Daydreamer]. Dir. Pierre Richard, 1970, 01:40:00.  
*Les Aventures de Rabbi Jacob* [The Mad Adventures of Rabbi Jacob]. Dir. Gérard Oury, 1973, 01:32:00.  
*Un éléphant, ça trompe énormément* [Pardon Mon Affaire]. Dir. Yves Robert, 1976, 01:45:00.  
*La Chèvre* [The Goat]. Dir. Francis Veber, 1981, 01:30:00.  
*Trois hommes et un couffin* [Three Men and a Cradle]. Dir. Coline Serreau, 1985, 01:46:00.  
*Les Visiteurs* [The Visitors]. Dir. Jean-Marie Poiré, 1993, 01:47:00.  
*Gazon maudit* [French Twist]. Dir. Josiane Balasko, 1995, 01:41:00.  
*La Vérité si je mens* [Would I Lie to You?]. Dir. Thomas Gilou, 1997, 01:55:00.  
*Le Dîner de cons* [The Dinner Game]. Dir. Francis Veber, 1998, 01:20:00.

*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.

- 26 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**

- 2 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 1)
- 16 Lecture and discussion: Slapstick Superstars and Social Critique in *My Uncle*, *The Daydreamer*, and *The Goat*. (Part 2)
- 23 Conclusions and Synthesis.