

HUMANITIES SEMINAR:
CLASSIC TRAGICOMEDIES OF EUROPEAN THEATRE
Prof. Patrick Baliani - Fall 2014 – baliani@email.arizona.edu

“If the audience doesn’t know whether to laugh or to cry, that will be a success for me!” (Garcia Lorca.) What a fascinating genre, tragicomedy! We will consider ten great “tragicomic” plays across the spectrum of European theatre history. We will emphasize critical thinking, theatre aesthetics, staging techniques, and the historical contexts of the works. How does a certain age perceive tragicomedy? How do interpretation and performance affect our view of the works today? Supplemental readings may be suggested, but are not required since most of these plays make for challenging reading in themselves. Selected film screenings will complement the plays and professional actors will present key scenes during a good number of the lectures.

Oct. 1---*Plautus’s Amphitryon*: Introductions; looking ahead to the course; New Comedy vs. Old; tragicomedy in the age of Virgil, Ovid, Horace; a Greek myth, a Roman retelling.

Oct. 8---*Shakespeare’s All’s Well that Ends Well*: A “problem” play; the influence of Plautus, Boccaccio, Italy at large; moral ambiguities; the Jacobean stage.

Oct. 15---*Ben Jonson’s Volpone*: Comparisons/contrasts to Shakespeare; Venice as setting; *Commedia dell’arte*. What’s Dante got to do with it?

Oct. 22---*Lope de Vega’s Fuenteovejuna*: The “Golden Age” of Spain; transgressions of genre; power, class, and gender in Spain’s 17th Century; peasant heroes and noble antagonists.

Oct. 29--- *Moliere’s Tarfuffe*: French “enlightenment”; influence of *commedia dell’arte*; Moliere’s *Amphitryon*; the Court of Louis XIV.

Nov. 5--- *Chekhov’s: Three Sisters*: Stanislavsky “versus” Chekhov; tragic *and* comic? Turn of the century Russia; The Moscow Art Theatre.

Nov. 12---*Ibsen’s The Wild Duck*: the “father” of modern theatre; Shaw: “a profound tragedy, shaking with laughter all the time at an irresistible comedy.”

Nov. 19--- *Pirandello’s Six Characters in Search of an Author*: Comic agony; translations into English; *Umorismo*; all the world’s a stage, inverted.

Dec. 3--- *Calderon de la Barca’s Life Is a Dream*: Spain’s “greatest play;” more power, class, and gender; comparisons/contrasts to Vega; returning to the “Golden Age” of Spain.

Dec. 10---*Ionesco’s The Bald Soprano*: Comic absurdity; the “anti-play;” cliché as novelty; looking back at the course.