

First Midterm, AMS 243 American Humor, Professor Lavender, Fall 2009

For the midterm exam, to be given Saturday 24 October, you should do all the readings for the following topics:

- 1) The Formal Elements of Humor; 2) What is “American” About American Humor?; 3) Hucksters; 4) Liars; 5) Hicks

You should be prepared to address the following:

I – American Humor as a Genre:

A) Recognize, identify, and define the following kinds of humor (from Ernest Penney Earnest)

- 1) Boorish Humor
- 2) The wise-crack
- 3) The pun (and other wordplay)
- 4) The Mock Heroic
- 5) Satire
- 6) Irony (and its three varieties: Linguistic or Verbal Irony; Situational Irony; and Dramatic Irony)
- 7) Kindly humor
- 8) Laughing at Oneself
- 9) The Absurd/Surreal
- 10) The Non-Sequitur

B) Recognize, identify, and define the following types of joke:

- 1) Ironic
- 2) Satirical
- 3) Gallows Humor
- 4) Surreal
- 5) Ethnic
- 6) Political
- 7) Religious
- 8) Wordplay
- 9) Shaggy Dog
- 10) Riddle

C) Recognize, identify, and define the sources of the distinctiveness of American humor (from H. R. Haweis)

- 1) “the shock between Business and Piety”
- 2) the clash between European settlers and the native peoples
- 3) “the contrast between the vastness of American nature and the smallness of man”

D) Recognize, identify, and define the following humorous types (from Constance Rourke)

- 1) The Yankee (“Corn Cob Twists Your Hair”)
- 2) The Backwoodsman (“The Gamecock of the Wilderness”)
- 3) The “Plantation Negro” (“That Long-Tail'd Blue”)
- 4) The City-Slicker (“Strollers”)
- 5) Larger-than-life theatrical storytellers (“The Comic Poet”)
- 6) Mystics (“I Hear America Singing”)
- 7) Americans Abroad (“Facing West From California's Shores”)

E) Recognize, identify, and define other distinctive elements of American humor

- 1) Irreverence (Walter Blair)
- 2) The “comic narrative modeled upon the oral tale” (Walter Blair)
- 3) Incongruity (Louis Rubin)
- 4) Linguistic and Thematic Violence (William Keogh)
- 5) “An anti-intellectual bent” (Don L. F. Nilsen)
- 6) “A heavy use of exaggeration” (Don L. F. Nilsen)
- 7) “Making fun of ethnic minorities” (Don L. F. Nilsen)
- 8) “Dialect as deliciously funny” (Don L. F. Nilsen)
- 9) “[H]umor as a subversion of seriousness” (Bruce Michelson)

II – Texts we have examined:

You should be able to recognize and identify the following texts, from excerpts or stills, and discuss types of humor in them:

- A) Abbot & Costello, “Who’s On First”
- B) The Kids in the Hall, “McGillicuddy & Greene”
- C) Chuck Jones, dir., *The Rabbit of Seville* (Warner Bros., 1950)
- D) Ian Frazier, "Coyote v. Acme" (1990)
- E) Chuck Jones, dir., *Fast and Furry-ous* (Warner Bros., 1949)
- F) Chuck Jones, dir., *Beep, Beep* (Warner Bros., 1952)
- G) Leo McCarey, dir., *Duck Soup* (Paramount, 1933)
- H) Mark Twain, “The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County” (1865)
- I) T.C. Haliburton, "The Yankee Pedlar" (1854)
- J) B.A. Botkin, "Pecos Bill" (1944)
- K) Joel Chandler Harris, “How Brer Rabbit Lost His Tail,” "Brer Rabbit and the Little Girl," "Plantation Proverbs," "Brer Rabbit and the Tar Baby" (1890s)
- L) Southern Workman and Hampton School Record, “Why the Fox's Mouth Is Sharp, Why the Possum Has No Hair on His Tail, and Why the Rabbit Has a Short Tail and a White Spot on His Forehead" (1896)
- M) Works Progress Administration, “Brer Rabbit's Boy and the Devil" (1941)
- N) Walt Disney’s “Uncle Remus and His Tales of Brer Rabbit” (1947)
- O) Will Rogers, “The Greatest Document in American Literature,” “‘The World Tomorrow,’ After the Manner of Great Journalists,” “How to Tell a Butler, and Other Etiquette,” and “Defending My Soup Plate Position” (1924)

III – Texts, Figures, and Concepts Discussed in the Readings:

You should be able to discuss the following with regards to humor:

- A) Mark Twain, “A Map of Paris,” “The Petrified Man,” and “The Whittier Birthday Speech”
- B) Johnny Appleseed
- C) The Yankee Pedlar (including the following traits: Stinginess/Meanness; Stubbornness; Ugliness; Knavery/Rascality; Ignorance/Rusticity; Clever Retorts; Degeneracy; Laziness; Absent-mindedness; General Eccentricity)
- D) Pecos Bill
- E) Davy Crockett
- F) Joel Chandler Harris
- G) Brer Rabbit and Slave Stories
- H) Cowboy Humor
- I) The Tall Tale (and exaggeration)
- J) Will Rogers
- K) The Marx Brothers
- L) “Yes We Have No Bananas!” and the Comic Song
[also Groucho singing “Hello, I Must Be Going” and “Hooray for Captain Spalding” from *Animal Crackers* (1930); "Whatever It Is I'm Against It" in *Horse Feathers* (1932); "Just Wait Til I Get Through With It" in *Duck Soup* (1933); and "Lydia the Tattooed Lady" from *At the Circus* (1939)]

IV – Comparative Analysis:

You should be ready to write comparatively about the following:

- A) Irreverent humor (Marx Brothers, Mark Twain, Bugs Bunny, Will Rogers)
- B) Linguistic and Thematic Violence (Chuck Jones cartoons, Ian Frazier, The Marx Brothers, Pecos Bill, Davy Crockett, and Joel Chandler Harris)
- C) The use of the wise-crack (Bugs Bunny, Will Rogers, Groucho Marx, Chico Marx)
- D) Incongruity (Harpo Marx, Mark Twain, Coyote v. Roadrunner cartoons and Frazier essay, Abbott & Costello)