

ENGL/HIST 3300-01W

COMEDIC REPRESENTATIONS OF SATAN:

AN INTRO TO AMERICAN STUDIES

SPRING 2009

*Be careful lest, in casting out your demons,
you cast out the best thing that is in you. –Nietzsche*



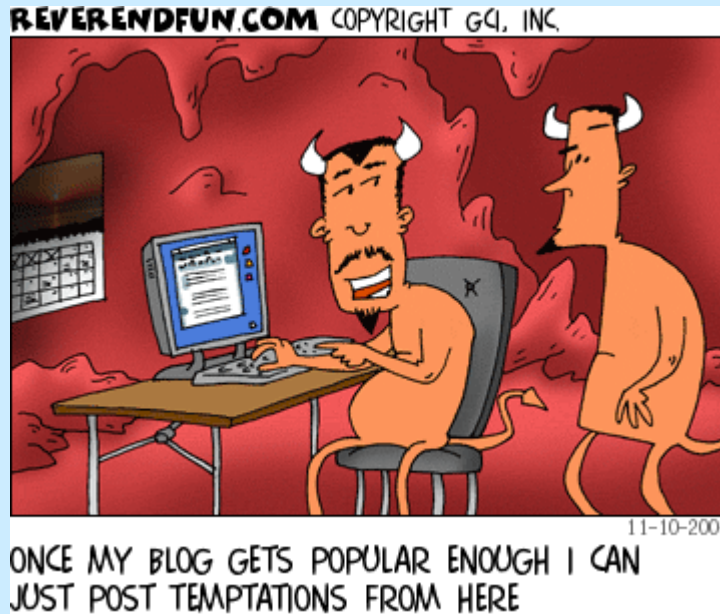
TUESDAY/THURSDAY 2:00-3:15 P.M. PAFFORD 204

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Office Hours: M, W 1:00-2:00 p.m.; Tu, Th 7:30-9:30 a.m. and by appointment.

*In this course, we will consider a problem that Andrew Delbanco identifies in *The Death of Satan: How Americans have Lost the Sense of Evil*, in which he argues that “a gulf has opened up in our culture between the visibility of evil and the intellectual resources available for coping with it”; has our postmodern culture, he asks, “emptied” the concept of evil of all meaning? Humor theorists John Morreall and V.I. Zilvys, on the other hand, argue that contemporary humor—even when it’s transgressive—is one of the most effective strategies for coping with evil, conflict, or adversity, especially in the endless complexities of our pluralistic national and global culture.*

As an introduction to American studies, therefore, we will examine Satan-comedy as a symptom of culture: its roots in our history and evolution in our literature and art. In so doing, we will attempt to answer three overriding questions for the course: What does “Satan-comedy” reveal about our religious and cultural fears, and the ways in which we confront them? What deeper meanings about our ongoing struggle with the problem of evil might we derive from such a paradoxical approach? Does such humor trivialize our experience, or might it be a means by which we can reorder our own perceptions of evil, morality, and value systems in collision?



*It is no good casting out devils. They belong to us;
we must accept them and be at peace with them. –D.H. Lawrence*

REQUIRED TEXTS

**Batchelor, Stephen. *Living With the Devil: A Meditation on Good and Evil.*
ISBN: 1594480877. Publisher: Riverhead Trade**

Coursepack of Supplementary Readings--available at University Book Store.

A “W” designation after a section number of a 3000- or 4000-level course signifies that the course is a Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) course. WAC accepts as a guiding principle the idea that writing is a valuable tool for learning and communication. Therefore, the writing components of a course so designated are designed to help you learn the material and communicate what you have learned. Students are required to take two “W” courses for an undergraduate degree in the College of Arts and Sciences.



SYLLABUS

**(SUBJECT TO FREQUENT ANARCHIC AND
DIABOLICAL CHANGES, SO CHECK THIS
SCHEDULE OFTEN)**

WEEK 1

Please read your Course Requirements and Policies beginning on p. 7 of this document.

1/08 Th

Introductions, etc. Discussion: Why Satan and why comedy? Western Civ. from Caesar to Sarah Silverman. “Burning Questions.”

WEEK 2

First Week to Submit Response Papers

1/13 Tu

Reflective writing, and identifying our sensibilities. CP (course pack): Kierkegaard and Twain. Burning questions (BQs).

1/15 Th

CP: Morreall, “Humor in the Holocaust.” Discussion: The comic protagonist v. the tragic hero.

WEEK 3

Looking ahead: we’ll be discussing two of the three Delbanco readings beginning Week 4 (CP)—it’s a lengthy selection, so please read and take notes early and often!

1/20 Tu

CP: Zilvys. Film clips. BQs. For next class find and be prepared to discuss a couple of devilily quotations that you think are relevant/thought-provoking.

1/22 Th

CP: King, “Why We Crave Horror Movies.”

Discussion: The US Constitution: weaving conflict into the tapestry of the American experiment. Current debates and their relationship to our course of study. Identifying our sensibilities and the challenges of national diversity and global citizenship.

WEEK 4	Joining the cultural conversations.
1/27 Tu	Devil quotations. Discussion: Satan as Archetype. Judeo-Christian and Koranic representations of Satan—Job, Matthew, and Luke. Satan as stereotype.
1/29 Th	The contemporary debate about all things Evil; CP: Delbanco, Introduction to <i>The Death of Satan</i> .
WEEK 5	Looking ahead: We'll be discussing Mark Twain's <i>Letters From the Earth</i> beginning on 2/12.
2/03 Tu	CP: Delbanco, ch.1
2/05 Th	Delbanco, concluded. Read ahead for Weeks 6 and 7.
WEEK 6	Looking ahead: be thinking about topics you'd like to work on for your research paper—proposals due Week 9.
2/10 Tu	CP: Reis, "Sinful Natures and Natural Sins." BQ's. CP: Mather, "The Devil in New England."
2/12 Th	CP: Twain, <i>Letters From the Earth</i>
WEEK 7	
2/17 Tu	Twain, continued.
2/19 Th	Research paper discussion: informal proposals (typed, MLA format) due Week 9.
WEEK 8	Looking ahead: in Weeks 13-14, we'll be discussing contemporary examples of Satan comedy that you find and recommend. Please send me weblinks or quick descriptions of samples you'd like to discuss via e-mail NO LATER THAN March 12th at 5:00 p.m.
2/24 Tu	Research paper workshopping, concluded.
2/26 Th	
Read ahead: we have a lot to discuss in Week 9	Research paper proposal work day: no class meeting. Proposals due 3/05 at beginning of class.

WEEK 9	
3/03 Tu	Discussion: Faust Legends in American Literature and Culture CP: Washington Irving, "The Devil and Tom Walker," and Hawthorne, "Young Goodman Brown."
3/05 Th	Hawthorne and Irving, continued. Research proposals due.
WEEK 10	Looking ahead: submit class reading assignments for your research presentation no later than Thursday, April 2nd.
3/10 Tu	CP: Twain, "Sold to Satan." Weblinks/descriptions of contemporary Satan comedy due via e-mail by 5:00 p.m. Wednesday 3/11/09.
3/12 Th	Research Day: no class meeting.
WEEK 11 3/16-20	SPRING BREAK! WOO HOO!!
WEEK 12	Contemporary cultural examples of Satan comedy: Reading American culture.
3/24 Tu	Benét: "The Devil and Daniel Webster." <i>The Simpsons</i> "Treehouse of Horrors IV." Discussion: The comic perspective revisited.
3/26 Th	Benét, continued; Faustian tales in American culture, concluded.
WEEK 13	Satan comedy without Satan: applying/testing class theory, formulating our own theories about The Other in American culture...and making the leap between theory and practice.
3/31 Tu	CP: Delbanco, "The Culture of Irony." <i>Student selections: SEE page 12 of this document, below.</i>
4/02 Th	Submit class reading assignments for your presentation today. Batchelor, <i>Living With the Devil</i> , ch. 1 & 2 Contemporary Satan comedy, continued.

WEEK 14	
4/07 Tu	Batchelor, ch. 3& 4 Contemporary Satan comedy, continued.
<i>4/09 Th</i>	<i>No class meeting today; I will be at a conference.</i>
WEEK 15	Research project presentations: <u>SCHEDULE</u>
4/14 Tu	Research presentations.
4/16 Th	Research presentations.
WEEK 16	<i>Last week for submitting response papers</i>
4/21 Tu	Research presentations.
4/22 Th	Research presentations.
WEEK 17	
4/28 Tu	Last Day of Class! Final BQ's. RESEARCH PAPER DUE AT MY OFFICE (PAFF 323) on May 4th at noon. No exceptions
	HAVE A DEVILISHLY FANTASTIC SUMMER BREAK!
REGARDING THE	

AMERICAN STUDIES MINOR

American Studies, as an area of academic study, employs the approaches and critical methods of a number of different academic disciplines to analyze the cultures and societies of the United States. Since its methods and perspectives are interdisciplinary, it often brings together scholarly tasks that have been separated by the structure of academic departments and courses, placing American Studies at the forefront of much educational and intellectual reform.

Students and employers have found American Studies programs and courses to be particularly valuable preparation for graduate study in the humanities and social sciences or for professional careers in private industry, law, government and politics, journalism, publishing, research institutions, museums, public history, and teaching. In completing the minor, students will have access to the resources of numerous academic departments and courses, as well as the opportunity to develop relevant technological skills.

For more information, see <http://www.westga.edu/~dnewton/amstudies/>



ENGL/HIST 3300

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Attendance and Participation

Your attendance and active, informed participation are essential to the success of our semester's study. While I will impose no concrete attendance policy, *if you are absent more than four times during the course of the semester, it's unlikely you'll succeed in this class.*

Course Objectives

Students will:

- become familiar with the theories and methods that contribute to the interdisciplinary focus of American Studies.
- learn the major periodic divisions of American social and intellectual history and the issues relevant to various American identities.
- develop a critical understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of traditional approaches to American Studies.
- demonstrate in both oral and written work a critical facility combining two or more disciplines.
- demonstrate their command of academic English and of the tenets of sound composition by means of thesis-driven analytical prose.

Writing to Learn

1) Reading Responses—5 @ 10% each = 50%.

These will consist of brief (1-1/2 to 2 pages, typed, MLA formatting) responses to our readings-- you may approach these responses in an informal, inquiring tone, but I'll expect that you do so in standard academic English. You must turn in FIVE of these during the course of this semester; I don't accept multiple submissions.

2) In-Class Reflective Writing 10%

(You'll need a dedicated notebook for this assignment):

As a springboard to the day's discussion, I will ask you to do focused free-writing on a general topic or question for 10-15 minutes each day, and to be prepared to share your writing with the class. At the end of the semester, I will collect your Reflective Writing notebooks and assess them with respect to the evidence they provide of your class preparation, your engagement with the primary AND secondary texts, and the level of complex thinking that your writing reveals.

We will accomplish four important learning outcomes with these WTL activities:

- (1) to help you flesh out ideas or work through questions that the readings evoke;
- (2) to help you prepare for insightful class discussion of the readings;
- (3) to practice connecting your reading to the theories we'll be discussing; and,
- (4) to discover and develop your thinking as you prepare to undertake your research project.

**Please refer to the essay grading criteria
by which I'll be assessing your formal written work:**

http://www.westga.edu/~llipoma/Essay_grading_criteria_2000+level.html

Oral Presentation: 10%

Each student will sign up to lead the class in a 15-20 minute presentation of his or her research project; this assignment is NOT a reading of your paper, but rather a presentation of your primary text, connections between your research and the rest of our class texts, and your conclusions about what the interaction of all these texts suggest about American culture. Please prepare hand-outs and other visuals for your classmates, including any pre-reading you'd like us to do in advance of your presentation.

As part of this grade, I will also expect you to listen closely to classmates' presentations, and be prepared to ask insightful questions and engage in substantial discussion about his or her work.

I will assess your presentation according to the following criteria:

- Coherence of your analysis—thorough close reading and mastery of the text.
- Basic presentation skills (i.e. can everybody hear you? Can you sustain eye-contact with your classmates? Can you overcome your nerves and deliver an interesting, informative, pleasant—maybe even fun—presentation, and lead the group in Q&A/discussion?)
- Efficacy of any additional visual examples you bring to class (you're welcome to use our classroom computer/projector if you want to add your own visuals—just let me know a day or

two ahead of time).

- Integration of course concepts in your analysis.

Writing to Communicate: Research Paper: 30%

An 8-10 page analytical essay, carefully formatted according to the requirements of your discipline. Choose a primary text that we have not studied together, and write an interpretation of it as a specimen of American transgressive comedy or demonizing discourse. Your paper must be a focused analysis of the relevance of the text to ongoing political or cultural debates, and what your text suggests/reveals about contemporary American culture. Ground your arguments in course theory as well as secondary source materials relevant to your specific text...we'll discuss this assignment in depth as a class and in individual conferences.

This paper will represent a high level of college writing and critical thinking; I will assess it according to the English Department's grading criteria for courses at the 2000-level and above.

POSSIBLE PRIMARY SOURCES FOR YOUR RESEARCH PAPER

(not at all an exhaustive list—feel free to propose selections of your own):

An event.

A social movement.

A political debate.

A satirical website, such as TheOnion.com, or LandoverBaptist.com

Cultural criticism/transgressive humor in the work of one or more American stand-up comedians, such as Lenny Bruce, George Carlin, Dave Chappell, Louis CK, Sarah Silverman, Margaret Cho...

A text or work of art or media, for example:

Little Nicky (2000)

Devil's Advocate (1997)

Robert Heinlein: *Job: A Comedy of Justice*

Dogma

Duncan Glen: *I, Lucifer: Finally, the Other Side of the Story*

Deconstructing Harry (1999)

Steven Brust: *To Reign in Hell: A Novel*

Constantine (2005)

Bedazzled (2000)

Death Becomes Her (1992)

The Devil Wears Prada (2006)

To Be or Not to Be (1986)

Carol K. Mack and Dinah Mack: *A Field Guide to Demons, Fairies, Fallen Angels and Other Subversive Spirits.*

The Village (2004)

Tenacious D In the Pick of Destiny (2006)

All That Money Can Buy (1941)

Damn Yankees (1958)

John Updike: *The Witches of Eastwick* (film or novel)

Stephen King: *The Stand* (film or novel)

Bill and Ted's Bogus Journey (1991)

Jon Lovitz's recurring Satan character on *Saturday Night Live*

Christopher Moore: *Lamb: The Gospel According to Biff, Jesus's Childhood Pal.*

John A. DeVito: *The Devil's Apocrypha*

Any volume of *Lucifer*—graphic novel series

Hot Stuff—Harvey Comics series

Mark Twain: "Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven" or "The Mysterious Stranger."

Meet Joe Black

Current Cultural Conversations—Student Selections Weeks 13 and 14

Sadie: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZbLbpqz5I14>

Adrianna: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=swGBIDn_yiI

Brittany: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aInKfxeJwjA>

Deborah: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xOrgLj9lOwk>

Brice:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=29khjYTOLC8&playnext_from=PL&feature=PlayList&p=2C87EA351B3FA7B7&playnext=1&index=25

Madeline: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Devil%27s_Dictionary

Megan: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TjkQWl_GzFA

C.J.: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JNNj3vKVpHQ>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w27meg0YfEU&feature=related>