



### CLAS 4000 Seminar in the Classics: The Comedies of Aristophanes

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Spring 2025  
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Continuity of Instruction: This seminar has an online synchronous Canvas section and a face to face section. In the event of a disruption in campus services, all instruction will revert to synchronous instruction in Canvas.

#### Course Objectives:

- Acquire knowledge of Aristophanes' comedies, their form, characters, and develop an understanding of the nature of Attic Old Comedy.
- Identify and interpret passages in the readings that merit close study
- Evaluate critically the definition of civilization posed by Aristophanes, through an appreciation of his political philosophy.
- Knowledge of the context of the comedies in the fall of the Athenian empire during the Peloponnesian War (431-404 BC).

**Writing Intensive (WI) Objectives.** CLAS 4000 is a writing intensive course in the Writing Across the Curriculum program at East Carolina University. This course will focus on the development of writing skills. Upon completion of the course students will:

1. Use writing to investigate complex, relevant topics and address significant questions through engagement with and effective use of credible sources.
2. Produce writing that reflects an awareness of context, purpose, and audience, particularly within the written genres (including genres that integrate writing with visuals, audio, or other multimodal components) of their major disciplines and/or career fields.
3. Demonstrate that they understand writing as a process that can be made more effective through drafting revision.
4. Proofread and edit their own writing, avoiding grammatical and mechanical errors.

5. Assess and explain the major choices that they make in their writing.

This course contributes to the four-course WI requirement for students at ECU. Additional information is available at the following site: <https://writing.ecu.edu/>.

#### University Writing Portfolio Requirement (WI 5)

- Students in all writing intensive courses are required to submit at least one completed written project to their University Writing Portfolio. In this course, students will submit assignments using the Portfolium tool. The university uses these writing samples to assess the writing program and to make improvements where necessary. To report problems with Portfolium, contact ITCS: <https://go.ecu.edu/Portfolium>.
- By default, assignments that you submit to your University Writing Portfolio become part of your personal Portfolium website (<https://ecu.portfolium.com>), which you may use or not as you please. Be aware that you are in control of the privacy settings of your Portfolium site and should review the settings to ensure your privacy settings are set to your preference. Making items on your personal Portfolium site public or private does not impact your grade in your writing intensive courses. Your Portfolium account remains yours after you leave ECU.

#### Grading. CLAS 4000:

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|---|-----|---|
| • Class discussion  | 30% | Scale: A 92.5-100, A- 89.5-92.49  |
| • Four 5-page syntheses @ 10% each covering 2 plays with: summary of plot and class discussion, and paper stub / idea on a passage of interest. | 40% | B+ 86.5-89.49, B 82.5-86.49, B- 79.5-82.49<br>C+ 76.5-79.49, C 72.5-76.49, C- 69.5-72.49<br>D+ 66.5-69.49, D 62.5-66.49, D- 59.5-62.49<br>F 0-59.49 |
| • 6-8 page final paper on <i>Frogs</i> or <i>Ecclesiazusae</i> or both due 5/5  | 30% |   |

#### Description of Writing Assignments. General guidance (WI 2-4):

Proofread; use a spelling and grammar check (MSWord has automated tools for this); 12 pt font double-spaced; italicize titles and foreign words. If you must use the ideas of another source, footnote and carefully distinguish which ideas are yours and which are borrowed; use of AI is a form of plagiarism and not allowed; ideally all writing in this seminar should come exclusively from class discussion and your own ideas about the readings. Observe a formal academic tone & language and argue as if before a someone who has also read the text. Your opening paragraph should efficiently anticipate your argument (no general flowery introductions). Do not re-trace the arc of your learning experience; cut to the persuasive argument. Do not praise, blame, or critique ancient texts. Assume they have an integral purpose. Use fact-filled arguments, cite passages from the text by work and line #, and analyze them closely. Edit your work before submission: read aloud to detect usage errors and breakdowns in sentence structure. In a 2nd drafts, expect that 1/3 to 1/2 of the paper is the strong core, leaving space for promising threads.

**1. Class discussion.** The writing assignments in this seminar will require you to have heard the discussion of every play, so you will need to be present or listen to recordings for every class. For the class discussion grade, however, mere attendance or listening is only a portion of the grade. To earn a grade above passing, you must also contribute to discussion. You will be expected to have read the assigned portion of the play and to have a question about the reading and to be ready to answer questions about it. This will probably necessitate reading the passage more than once, since this is ancient comedy with lots of strange content and context.

**2. Syntheses (WI 1, 2, 4).** A synthesis should bring together the steps in the learning process. Begin by briefly summarizing the play based on the text and our seminar discussion; then identify a passage of particular interest (or potentially a word or image that recurs throughout the text) and explicate from it an important interpretive thread of the play; this should amount to a 'paper stub' or the beginning of a paper idea on the play, which takes the argument beyond what was said in class. Each synthesis should take around 5 pages and cover 2 plays. You will receive feedback on the writing as well as the success in following this format, which you should apply in subsequent syntheses.

**3. Final paper (WI 1-4)** produced in stages. Students will present ideas for it in class and get feedback from seminar participants. The rough draft of four pages (due 4/17) should set out a topic that has sufficient depth and promise to develop into a larger analysis. It will be graded for style, content, organization, and mechanics and returned to you. The final paper is due Monday, 5/5. You should anticipate that you will not be able to keep all four pages from the rough draft. You will be graded on the editing decisions you make about how to revise the rough draft, give it a new frame, and expand upon promising elements. The starting point for any paper is a question or problem, not a topic. It should have important interpretive implications that the text can answer through close reading.

#### **Textbooks:**

Complete Plays of Aristophanes by Aristophanes / Hadas, Moses, ed. (9780553213430)

#### **Links:**

- [Timeline of the historical context of the comedies of Aristophanes with map links.](#)
- [Outline of Thucydides' Peloponnesian War](#)

#### **Introduction.**

Ancient Greek comedy is divided into "old" and "new". New comedy falls mostly within the Hellenistic period and is largely lost except that Plautus combined plot elements to make up his plays. Of "Old Comedy" we have 11 plays of Aristophanes and some fragments of works by him and others. Comedy was celebrated at two festivals in Athens, the Lenaia in January-February, and the City Dionysia in March-April. Comedies were the focus of the Lenaia, but at the Great Dionysia, producers staged tetralogies of 3 tragedies followed by one satyr play (mock tragedy) and it is unclear how comedies fit in. Usually they had 5, but during the Peloponnesian War, only 3 were offered, so winning was a big deal. Both were festivals to Dionysos and served as part of the proper way to worship him as a God, which began with a parade including phalluses to celebrate the god's aspect of restoring fertility to the land. The wine would flow freely, with actors dressed up like satyrs (his followers, half man, half goat), endowed with oversized genitalia props for sight gags, and subjects ripe for mockery and satire.

Aristophanes undertook to criticize the leading figures of his day: Cleon the demagogue, Alcibiades, other leading generals and political figures by likeness or inference, Socrates, Euripides, even the early version of Plato's *Republic*. Most of his works touch upon the folly of the Peloponnesian War in one way or another: bad leadership; economic hardship; the decay of the Athenian empire, and with it the decay of standards, morality, and reverence for the gods. His political philosophy is that of the old fashioned or traditional moralist educated in Homer and Hesiod. Thus his works satirize the human condition as led by its lowest drives for sex and food. In *Clouds*, he portrays the "Just Speech" as unable to live up to his own standards – attracted to young boys – like the audience judges with their "gaping sphincters." In *Lysistrata*, he famously

suggests the Peloponnesian War could be ended by a sex strike. In *Ecclesiazusae* (*Assemblywomen*), perhaps reacting to Plato *Republic* V, he imagines cross-dressing women taking over the legislature and enacting a law to let ugly women demand sex from any man they like, with priority over attractive women.

One might view Homer as portraying the natural origins of politics, based on the unity of virtues – that goodness should be found among beauty, power, fame and glory. Aristophanes seems to be satirizing the opposite ideas circulating in Athens under the restored democracy. One finds such ideas in Plato's *Republic*; and critics are not sure whether to take Plato as merely exploring ideas in theory or as wholly ironic (as he surely was). Plato's *Symposium* ends with Socrates talking to Aristophanes about the shared nature of tragedy and comedy after everyone else passes out. We may say that they were in a dialogue on man and nature.

Comedy is the most difficult literary genre for an outsider to understand, because jokes turn on an insider's knowledge of contemporary culture. Even reading the works in translation, there will be things we don't understand. The flip side of this coin is that comedy is like a living window into history showing in real time what the Athenians thought of their own contemporary events, though in a satirical form. It takes some 'unpacking' to convert satire into an opinion straightly expressed. This makes Aristophanic comedy an ideal subject for a seminar: sex, politics, war and peace, history, all taught through satire, inviting both laughter and serious reflection.

For information about severe weather and university closings, see <http://www.ecu.edu/alert/>. East Carolina University seeks to comply fully with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Students requesting accommodations based on a disability must be registered with Disability Support Services located in Slay 138 ((252) 737-1016 (Voice/TTY). Academic integrity is expected of every East Carolina student. Cheating, plagiarism (using the ideas of others without attribution), and falsification, will be considered a violation of Academic Integrity: (<http://bit.ly/2RgFpLh>). Do not use *Cliff's Notes* type sites (Shmoop, online paper mills etc.) or AI generated papers (if it is not your own, it will be evident); and do not use ideas from even reputable internet sources without citation. It will result in a 0 for the assignment.

Schedule of assignments:

T 1/14	Introduction to Aristophanes, including Plato <i>Symposium</i> (189a-193d), and the elements of his comedy (Canvas)
Th 1/16	Aristophanes' <i>Banqueters</i> (Δαιταλῆς, <i>Daitaleis</i> 427 BC). Read fragments and my article on <i>Banqueters</i> in Plato's <i>Republic</i> I in Canvas.
T 1/21	Aristophanes' <i>Acharnians</i> (425 BC). Read <a href="#">summary in Wikipedia</a> , and 1-625 (Hadas 28-49)
Th 1/23	<i>Acharnians</i> , finish play
T 1/28	Aristophanes' <i>Knights</i> (Ἴππείς, Latin: <i>Equites</i> , 424 BC). Read <a href="#">summary in Wikipedia</a> and 1-690 (Hadas 75-100)
Th 1/30	<i>Knights</i> , finish play
T 2/4	<b>Synthesis 1 due.</b> Aristophanes' <i>Wasps</i> (Σφήκες; Latin: <i>Vespae</i> , 422 BC). Read <a href="#">summary in Wikipedia</a> and 1-748 (Hadas 171-193)
Th 2/6	<i>Wasps</i> , finish play
T 2/11	Aristophanes' <i>Peace</i> (Εἰρήνη; Latin: <i>Pax</i> , first version 421 BC). Read <a href="#">summary in Wikipedia</a> , lines 1-656 (Hadas 215-35)
Th 2/13	<i>Peace</i> , finish play

T 2/18	<b>Synthesis 2 due.</b> Aristophanes' <i>Clouds</i> (Νεφέλαι; Latin: <i>Nubes</i> ; orig. 423 BC; surviving revised version 416 BC) . Read <a href="#">summary in Wikipedia</a> , first third of play
Th 2/20	<i>Clouds</i> , lines -888
T 2/25	<i>Clouds</i> finish play
Th 2/27	Aristophanes' <i>Birds</i> (Ὄρνιθες; Latin: <i>Aves</i> , 414 BC). Read <a href="#">summary in Wikipedia</a> , first third of play
T 3/4	<i>Birds</i> middle third of play
Th 3/6	<i>Birds</i> finish play
3/9-16	<b>Spring Break</b>
T 3/18	<b>Synthesis 3 due.</b> <i>Lysistráta</i> (411 BC). Read <a href="#">summary in Wikipedia</a> , first half of play
Th 3/20	<i>Lysistráta</i> , finish play
T 3/25	<i>Thesmophoriazusae</i> ( <i>Women celebrating the Thesmophoria</i> to Demeter and Persephone, first version 411 BC). Read <a href="#">summary in Wikipedia</a> , first half of play
Th 3/27	<i>Thesmophoriazusae</i> , finish play
T 4/1	<b>Synthesis 4 due.</b> Aristophanes' <i>Frogs</i> (Βάτραχοι; Latin: <i>Ranae</i> , 405 BC). Read <a href="#">summary in Wikipedia</a> , first quarter of play
Th 4/3	<i>Frogs</i> , 2 <sup>nd</sup> quarter of play
T 4/8	<i>Frogs</i> , 3 <sup>rd</sup> quarter of play
Th 1/10	<i>Frogs</i> , finish play
T 4/15	Aristophanes' <i>Ecclesiazusae</i> ( <i>Assemblywomen</i> , c. 392 BC). Read <a href="#">summary in Wikipedia</a> , first half of play
Th 4/17	<i>Ecclesiazusae</i> , finish play and read my article in Canvas on Aristophanes in Plato's <i>Republic</i> .
T 4/22	Aristophanes' <i>Wealth</i> ( <i>Plutus</i> , orig. 408 BC; surviving 2 <sup>nd</sup> version 388 BC). Read <a href="#">summary in Wikipedia</a> , first half of play
Th 4/24	Last day of class. <i>Wealth</i> , finish play
Mon 5/5	<b>Final paper due at noon</b>

Lost plays (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aristophanes>). The standard edition of the fragments is Rudolf Kassel and Colin François Lloyd Austin's, *Poetae Comici Graeci* III.2.

Banqueters (Δαιταλεῖς Daitaleis, 427 BC)  
 Babylonians (Βαβυλώνιοι Babylonioi, 426 BC)  
 Farmers (Γεωργοί Georgoi, 424 BC)  
 Merchant Ships (Ὀλκάδες Holkades, 423 BC)  
 Clouds (first version, 423 BC)  
 Proagon (Προάγων, 422 BC)  
 Amphiaraus (Ἀμφιάραος, 414 BC)  
 Plutus (Wealth, first version, 408 BC)  
 Gerytades (Γηρυτάδης, uncertain, probably 407 BC)  
 Cocalus (Κώκαλος, 387 BC)  
 Aiolosicon (Αἰολοσίκων, second version, 386 BC)  
 Undateable lost plays:

Aiolosicon (first version)  
Anagyrus (Ἀνάγυρος)  
Frying-Pan Men (Ταγηνισταί Tagenistai)  
Daedalus (Δαίδαλος)  
Danaids (Δαναΐδες Danaides)  
Centaur (Κένταυρος Kentauros)  
Heroes (Ἡρωες)  
Lemnian Women (Λήμνιαι Lemniai)  
Old Age (Γῆρας Geras)  
Peace (second version)  
Phoenician Women (Φοίνισσαι Phoinissai)  
Polyidus (Πολύιδος)  
Seasons (Ἵρραι Horai)  
Storks (Πελαργοί Pelargoi)  
Telmessians (Τελμησσεῖς Telmesseis)  
Triphales (Τριφάλης)  
Thesmophorizusae (Women at the Thesmophoria Festival, second version)  
Women in Tents (Σκηνὰς Καταλαμβάνουσαι Skenas Katalambanousai)