

COLT 204 – World of Fiction  
**Clowns and Tricksters**

Winter 2005 -- CRN 23271  
T, Th 12-1:50 – 300 VIL

Instructor: Audrey Vanderford

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Office Hours: T 10-12 and by appt.

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This course will survey the histories and functions of various trickster and clown figures in mythology, folktales, literature, and popular culture. Beginning with tricksters in Native American, African, and Greek mythology and moving through the Medieval European clowns of both the court and the countryside, this course will examine the roles of tricksters and clowns as characters that challenge reason, invoke chaos, and mark and transgress social conventions. Figures of tricksters and clowns remain important in many contemporary writings, oftentimes appearing as marginalized characters standing outside the mainstream, criticizing the status quo, hastening social transformation, and turning the world upside-down.

**Required Course Materials** (You can purchase the novel and play at the UO Bookstore; the packet is available for photocopying at The Copy Shop. All materials are also on reserve at the Knight Library):

Edward Abbey. *The Monkey Wrench Gang*

Dario Fo. *The Accidental Death of an Anarchist*

Course packet

**Recommended:**

William Bright. *A Coyote Reader*

William Shakespeare. *King Lear*

William Shakespeare. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

**Assignments and Grading:**

Participation 15%

Presentation 10%

Exams 3 @ 25% each

**Participation:** While I have no formal attendance policy per se, I do expect you to come to class prepared—do the readings, and be ready to discuss the material. “Participation” in my mind is a combination of attendance, attentiveness, in-class assignments, and the occasional pop-quiz if I’m feeling particularly mean.

**Presentation:** The dreaded group project. In preparation for Week 5, I will divide the class in half. Groups will read either Shakespeare’s *King Lear* or *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and prepare a presentation (focusing on clowns, tricksters, and fools, of course) for the other half of the class. Be creative; entertain us. This assignment may include a written element—some sort of write-up of your thoughts on the project.

**Exams:** In order to strong-arm you into engaging with the materials I’ve assigned, I will be testing you throughout the course of the term. There will be three exams: the first two exams will take place in class; the last one will be a take-home exam, due during Finals Week. The exams will draw on readings, lectures, films, and discussions. Hint: Do the reading.

*Warning: As clowns and tricksters often emphasize the “lower bodily stratum,” some of the material we will read and watch this term is quite crude and vulgar. If you find this kind of thing offensive or if you cannot handle this stuff maturely, this is not the right class for you.*

**Tentative Schedule:** Subject to change at the whim of the instructor. [CP] = course packet

Week 1	1/4 1/6	Introduction TRICKSTERS IN MYTHOLOGY Reading: Aristotle, Homer [CP]
Week 2	1/11 1/13	Reading: Bright [CP] (Recommended: Toelken [CP]) Reading: Pelton, Owomoyela, Harris [CP]
Week 3	1/18 1/20	<b>Exam 1</b> MEDIEVAL LAUGHTER Reading: Rabelais [CP]
Week 4	1/25 1/27	COMEDY & THE GROTESQUE – THE CARNIVALESQUE Reading: Bakhtin [CP] Reading: Bakhtin, cont. [CP]
Week 5	2/1 2/3	SHAKESPEARE’S FOOLS Reading/ <b>Presentation:</b> Shakespeare [CP] COMEDIA DELL’ARTE
Week 6	2/8 2/10	THE CIRCUS Film: TBA (Recommended Film: <i>P.T. Barnum: America’s Greatest Showman</i> ) <b>Exam 2</b> FROM STAGE TO SCREEN: SLAPSTICK, VAUDEVILLE, & “CLASSIC” FILM COMEDY Films: “The Rink,” “Cops”
Week 7	2/15 2/17	Film: <i>Duck Soup</i> A PSYCHOANALYTIC APPROACH TO JOKES Reading: Freud [CP]
Week 8	2/22 2/24	TRICKSTERS AND CLOWNS—UPDATED Reading: Fo Reading: Rubin [CP] Film: <i>The Pie’s the Limit</i>
Week 9	3/1 3/3	Reading: Abbey Reading: Abbey, cont.
Week 10/3/8	3/10	Reading: Phelan [CP] Conclusions
Finals Week		<b>Exam 3</b> due in my office no later than 5pm on March 15.