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21L.421 Comedy
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While writing your next paper, you may want to read, digest, and even quote and cite from the online readings under “Theories of Comedy.”

For example, if you’re writing about the ironic witty tone of Pride and Prejudice or Pudd’nhead Wilson, you might want to use Freud’s definition of irony (174). [NOTE: Page numbers here refer to the page numbers in the texts on your class site under Course Materials]

The theory readings give you connections to make between the “comic” and, say--

--*character representation (Question 1)*: Bergson on the “human” in comedy; Aristotle on tragic/comic “shame” (14) and the need for character in comedy as opposed to tragedy (21); Meredith on the comic spirit’s “correcting of ...inflation, of dulness” (sic) (36).

--*deception and self-deception (Question 2)*: Freud on unmasking and exposure (201; 222,) and on displacement and defenses (233).

--*sexuality (Question 3)*: Freud on comic pleasure (221-222); Bakhtin on the role of the lower body, the womb and rebirth (74-5; 91-2 and passim)

--*“festive” roles (Question 4)*: Bakhtin on the role of feasts (78-82), on gluttony and excess (think Wilde) (74-5), on the social, not subjective (and compare Bergson) (92).

--*freedom and transgression (Question 5)*: Bakhtin on parallel cultural forms that are travesties of official ones (74); Freud on childish behavior (224-6; 236), and on inhibition and pleasure (171).

--*the idea of comedy as (opposed to) tragedy (Question 6)*: Bakhtin on official and unofficial forms (74); Freud on pain (228), on Twain (230-1), and on mixed forms (232); Aristotle on pain (14).

All your readings suggest that laughter is liberating, though they disagree about how this works. For example, compare Freud’s theory of comic economy (189-90) with Bergson’s idea that laughter is a corrective (476-7)—these are not quite the same thing, although they could both be said to be part of a psychosocial “economy”. Also, there seems to be some sense that there is either a need for empathy (Freud, 197) or for a lack of it (Aristotle, 14; Bergson, 472), and that the comic has to do with the human body and its reduction to the mechanical (Freud, 190; Bergson, 476) when it is really physical and messy (Freud, 202, 222; Bergson, 476 ; Bakhtin, 62).