

## Englische Literaturwissenschaft

**Dr. Wieland Schwanebeck**

**Ü/PS**

**What a Farce!**

**Mo (5)**

**W48/001**

“Doctor, doctor! The world is full of naked men running in all directions!” This baffled outcry from Joe Orton’s seminal comedy, *What the Butler Saw* (1969), may just contain the essence of farce: confusion, innuendo, bodily excess, hysteria. People get mistaken for one another, objects are mislaid, doors are opened at inopportune moments, figures of authority are caught with their pants down – this is fast-paced theatre where the lewd and the obscene prevail, where innocence gets corrupted and where characters are constantly humiliated, all to the great amusement of the audience.

Our seminar will trace modern British farce from its Shakespearean beginnings all the way to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, where authors like Joe Orton or Michael Frayn (*Noises Off!*, 1982) have raised the bar with their grotesquely perverted or meta-theatrical plays. We will also discuss important forerunners of farce, like French playwright Georges Feydeau, and some notable films like Peter Bogdanovich’s *What’s Up, Doc?* (1967): farce has to be seen in performance to work its magic.

Together, we want to find out if there is more to the genre than mere laugh-out-loud absurdity: May farce actually have a point about human nature and about the meaninglessness of existence? In hell, according to Terry Eagleton, we hear “the bellowing of low farce, not the chuckling of high comedy” (*On Evil*, 2010).

Please buy and read:

William Shakespeare: *The Comedy of Errors*. Oxford: OUP, 2008 (Oxford World’s Classics). ISBN 978-0199536146

Excerpts from further primary texts (including plays by Ray Cooney, Georges Feydeau, Michael Frayn, and Joe Orton) will be available on OPAL at the beginning of the term.

You can join this class no matter if you have already attended the introductory course or not. You do not have to register beforehand – just be there for the first meeting.