

Cambridge University Press
0521807492 - Class, Language, and American Film Comedy
Christopher Beach
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CLASS, LANGUAGE, AND AMERICAN FILM COMEDY

This book examines the evolution of American film comedy through the lens of language and the portrayal of social class. Christopher Beach argues that class has been an important element in the development of sound comedy as a cinematic form. With the advent of sound in the late 1920s and early 1930s, filmmakers recognized that sound and narrative enlarged the semiotic and ideological potential of film. Analyzing the use of language in the films of the Marx Brothers, Frank Capra, Woody Allen, and the Coen brothers, among others, *Class, Language, and American Film Comedy* traces the history of Hollywood from the 1930s to the present, while offering a new approach to the study of class and social relationships through linguistic analysis.

Christopher Beach teaches at the University of California, Irvine and the Claremont Graduate University. He is the author of three books on various aspects of American poetry.

Cambridge University Press
0521807492 - Class, Language, and American Film Comedy
Christopher Beach
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CLASS, LANGUAGE, AND AMERICAN FILM COMEDY

CHRISTOPHER BEACH



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press
 0521807492 - Class, Language, and American Film Comedy
 Christopher Beach
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
 The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
 The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK
 40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
 477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
 Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
 Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa
<http://www.cambridge.org>

© Christopher Beach 2002

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
 and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
 no reproduction of any part may take place without
 the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2002

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeface Adobe Garamond 11/14 pt. *System* QuarkXPress [HT]

A catalog record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Beach, Christopher.

Class, language, and American film comedy / Christopher Beach.

p. cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0521 80749 2 – ISBN 0 521 00209 (pb.)

1. Comedy films – United States – History and criticism. 2. Speech and social status – United States. I. Title.

PN1995.9.C55 B43 2001
 791.43 617 – dc21 2001025935

ISBN 0 521 80749 2 hardback
 ISBN 0 521 00209 5 paperback

CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>page</i> vii
Introduction	1
1 A Troubled Paradise: Utopia and Transgression in Comedies of the Early 1930s	17
2 Working Ladies and Forgotten Men: Class Divisions in Romantic Comedy, 1934–1937	47
3 “The Split-Pea Soup and the Succotash”: Frank Capra’s 1930s Comedies and the Subject of Class	67
4 Is Class Necessary?: Preston Sturges and Howard Hawks in the Early 1940s	95
5 Desperately Seeking Status: Class, Gender, and Social Anxiety in Postwar Hollywood Comedy	125
6 Is There a Class in This Text?: Woody Allen and Postmodern Comedy	155
7 Yuppies and Other Strangers: Class Satire and Cultural Clash in Contemporary Film Comedy	179
<i>Notes</i>	213
<i>Works Cited</i>	231
<i>Index</i>	237

Cambridge University Press
0521807492 - Class, Language, and American Film Comedy
Christopher Beach
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I owe a great debt to Linda Williams, who helped point me in the right direction in the early stages of this project. I also owe thanks to Alice Fahs and Lee Medovoi, both of whom made valuable suggestions about individual chapters, and to the various members of the UC Irvine community who discussed the evolving book with me. Finally, thanks to Carrie Noland for all her support and encouragement, without which none of it would have been possible.