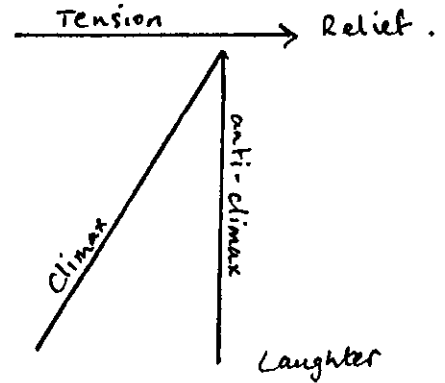
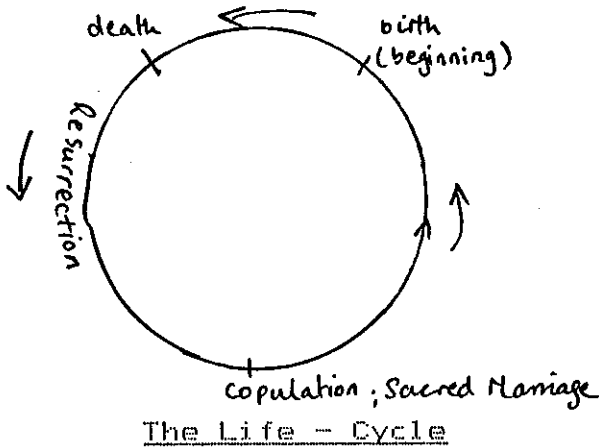


OUTLINES OF COMEDY



Theories of Laughter and Jokes.

1. Laughter caused by relief at not being oneself the victim: pulling chair away.
2. Laughter created by incongruity: eg Henry James' style is like an elephant picking up a pea.
3. The dignified Modern theory of comedy: Comedy instructs us and improves us by making us laugh at evils: eg Ben Jonson and Moliere.
4. Freud on jokes: Jokes are a human way of easing tensions about areas of life where we feel inhibitions: eg sex, lavatories, racialism. That is, laughter is a nervous reaction to the inward disturbance we feel when these subjects crop up.

Comedy and Tragedy.

1. Comedy continues the life cycle whereas Tragedy breaks it.
2. Tragedy resists the conditions of life; comedy accepts and reconciles them. (?)
3. The major difference between comedy and tragedy is a matter of TONE: a light or frivolous tone makes a play a comedy. (NB Satire - a form of comedy - can have a very hard edge.)

Historical outline

Early folk processions in Western and Eastern Europe contained certain elements clearly connected with fertility rites - that is, the encouragement of the life - cycle by sympathetic magic (ie acting a thing out to make it happen):

1. dressing up as animals.
2. begging parties.
3. insulting people they met to avert ill luck.
4. carrying a phallus in procession

In Greece official Dionysos worship arrived about 500 BC. Dionysos originally a beer god, then a grain god of death and resurrection. He was worshipped with wild self abandonment and joy: intoxication was his gift which freed men from his troubles and the limitation of the self. He was worshipped with Apollo at Delphi; they shared the paean and the Dithyramb

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and the arts of healing and purification. Truthfulness was seen to have a cathartic effect.

The dithyramb was a circular chorus of men and boys, fifty strong and usually wild. Circular perhaps because they were dancing out the cycle of life; cf Zorba's dance. Komos = revelry ; Greek verb komadzein = to revel.)

(A Hellenistic - ie late and improbable etymology: Kome: village; therefore comedy = village song.)

The earliest record of Greek comedy is of a procession carrying a phallos, with appropriate songs. The phallos was worn by a youth and the procession marched into the orchestra. Sometimes they would pretend to be drunk, and address the audience abusively.

The official drama festival did not include comedy until tragedy had been going for some time; even then the comedy was included in the performance before the contest for comedy were introduced.

Dates: City Dionysia - comedies played 486 BC but contests not until 329 at earliest or 312 BC

Lenaea: officially sponsored comedies ca. 442 BC

The sudden rise of the Old Comedy after 460 BC was due to the abolition in 462 BC of the general powers of censorship vested in the Areopagus rather than any positive legislation. The other factor was the wealth of Athens. Comedy, like musicals today, cost more money to put on.

But there are comedy elements even in Greek tragedies: eg the Sentry in Antigone; certain slaves in Euripides and even Ocranus in "Prometheus Bound".

Old Comedy gave way to Middle Comedy, and eventually New Comedy, their main difference being the gradual loss in importance of the Chorus. Aristophanes' later comedies were Middle Comedies eg Ekklesiazusae.

There were three basic ingredients of Old Comedy: strife; decision; and consequences.

The chorus numbered 24; this made for more music and more dance than in tragedy.

The Lenaea was attended only by Athenians since it was in wintertime. This made a difference to the subjects dealt with.

The City Dionysia attracted people from all over Greece.

Elements of Greek Comedy:

(props, whisps)

(chorus)

1. Chorus (sometimes animal or fantastic)
2. Song
3. Parabasis - the march on stage and the stepping forward to address the audience on the author's behalf
4. Altercation: argument or quarrel between two actors. cf Punch and Judy
5. Use of physical grotesqueries - fat bellies, travesties (wearing drag) and fertility obscenities. Travesties of myth including stories of Heracles
6. The sacred marriage between Dionysos and the Queen of Athens (or King Archon's wife)
7. Exodos - march out singing.

OUTLINES OF COMEDY - 2 -

Two themes with religious bearing run through the plays: reconciliation and release.

Releasing or freeing from the city of evils is even more significant: war or disease - amounting to "save the state!"

"The Greek poet is a medicine man; Apollo is the god of healing - not only soothing personal anxiety but also strengthening and advising the people in a time of national distress. Even invective was intended to purify the community by driving out wrongdoers and averting social evil."

K. Lever: The Art of Greek Comedy.

Reconciliation: achieved by revealing to man the beauty of nature and the joys of experience fostered by the gods.

The Satyr plays often dealt with the theme of release, but do not count as comedy because they contained no abuse and invective, therefore no purification.

The abuse was in iambs (te - tum)

The structure of Aristophanes' plays is a series of conflicts unified by an emotional and intellectual tension.

The dramatist's success depends on his ability to communicate his invisible concepts and ideas through the medium of the human being. Aristophanes in particular has a very wide range of ideas corresponding with the different levels of his work (see the various techniques of his comedy).

Primitive childish humour depends on indecency, deceit, physical abuse, mockery of foreigners and the burlesque of myth. It was also naturally conservative and laughed at many kinds of change and difference.

Three methods of comedy:

1. Through direct statement - choros
2. Dramatically through one or more characters (real people guyed)
3. Through allegory eg. Just and Unjust Arguments in "Clouds".

Aristophanes uses all of these.

Comedy Patterns

Young couples

One old man and one young man both funny: (Alf Garnett and Steptoes)

Two middle-aged men in contrast: (Laurel and Hardy, Morecombe/Wise)

One young man (Buster Keaton & Charlie Chaplin) with love interest.

One straight, one funny man - different ages, young man straight.

Women trying to get hold of men

The effeminate man (John Inman)

OUTLINES OF COMEDY - 2 -

Techniques of Comedy used by Aristophanes & others
(in ascending order of art/sophistication)

1. Infantile humour
 - a) slapstick ... beatings
 - b) lavatory humour
 - c) laughing at physical inadequacy
 - d) idiocy
 - e) fleas and bugs
 - f) burning house down to get rid of occupants
2. Sexual humour
 - a) fixation on private parts
 - b) masturbation
 - c) homosexuals as effeminate
 - d) bugger's arse and punishment for adultery (Clouds)
3. Fantasy
4. Literary humour
5. Satire a) political; b) social; c) personal.
6. Political comedy
7. Wit and verbal humour.
8. Visual humour.
9. Audience participation humour.
10. Comedy of the reversal of expectation.
11. Situation comedy - entirely a matter of plot.
12. Comedy of character - does not depend on plot

For the efficacy of Aristophanes' comedy:

1. Cleon twice brought a suit against him, the first time successfully, the second time A. seems to have got off by playing the ape.

2. Socrates was eventually tried and convicted on just those counts which are brought against him in the "Clouds" which Plato has Socrates mention as his "old accusers" in the "Apology".

3. Cleon never in fact brought a case against Laches for swindling in Sicily.

Aristophanes won 1st prize for Acharnians, Knights and Frogs, 2nd prize for Wasps, Peace and Birds, 3rd for Clouds. No records about Lysistrata. We have only 11 of his plays.

The Clouds, the first play we have of his: 423 BC