

Comedy

1. In comedy, the appeals are made to the head, not the heart.

As audience members, the playwright expects us to see the incongruity (an intellectual process) of an action.

2. Comedy is based on the principle that no man knows what he is, that he cannot see his real mirror images but only what he wants to see.
3. Irony and incongruity are the triggers of laughter. These reversals, exaggerations, or understatements surprise our mental expectations and make us see things differently, however briefly. In that moment of jarring our expectations with surprise and perhaps delight, the mind is prepared to let go of its former way of seeing and believing.
4. A good comedy throws a strong emphasis on a character who is simplified in such a way that we can readily see the distortions that have made him a fool in other men's eyes; we can see them, that is, if we understand what is considered normal behavior in the society reflected in the comedy. Norms are, therefore, very important in comprehending comedy.
5. The action of a comedy consists of a string of incidents that reveal the fool in situation after situation where he always shows the same distortions, the same variations from what is considered normal behavior. Consequently, the fun of a comedy usually consists of the reactions of the other characters to the continuing stupidities of the principle character until he finally sees how distorted he is or the others decide that it would be heartless to make him face his realities.
6. Henri Bergson, a French existentialist, believed comedy is successful in changing our perception of who we are in a society. Comedy rarely threatens us emotionally or asks for our emotional support of the comic character. Rather, comedy opens us for an intellectual or perceptual change as we find a comic fool who is unaware of his distorted view of the world. Although we scorn this blindness in the character, we realize we share some of those distorted views. Although we say, I am not like that fool, we know there are times when we might have done or said something foolish by this society's standards. Bergson believed that in seeing the fool's blind repetition of an action, we sense our own rigidity and past reluctance to change. In comedy, see how a character's reluctance to change makes him laughable.
7. Are there things that comedy should not address? Comedy has no sense of reverence and does not hesitate to take on the serious, the sensitive, or the sacred.

The Comedic Ladder

Comedy of Ideas (High Comedy):

Characters argue about ideas like politics, religion, sex, marriage. They use their wit, their clever language to mock their opponent in an argument. This is a subtle way to satirize people and institutions like political parties, governments, churches, war marriage.

Examples _____

Comedy of Manners (High Comedy)

The plot focuses on amorous intrigues among the upper classes. The dialogue focuses on witty language. Clever speech, insults and 'put-----downs' are traded between characters. Society is often made up of cliques that are exclusive with certain groups as the in-----crowd, other groups (the would-----be-----wits, desiring to part of the witty crowd), and some (the witless) on the outside.

Examples _____

Farce (can be combination or high/low comedy)

The plot is full of coincidences, mistimings, mistaken identities. Characters are puppets of fate----- they are twins, born to the wrong class, unable to marry, too poor, too rich, have loss identity because of birth or fate or accident, or are (sometimes) twins separated, unaware of their double.

Examples _____

Low Comedy:

Subjects of the humor consists of dirty jokes, dirty gestures, sex, and elimination. The extremes of humor range from exaggeration to understatement with a focus on the physical like long noses, cross eyes, humped back and deformities. The physical actions revolve around the slapstick, pratfalls, loud noises, physical mishaps, collisions----- all part of the humor of man encountering an uncooperative universe.

Examples _____