

## How Comedy Affects Us

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*. Comedy, because of this coldly rational approach, *lifts us out of the emotional aspects of an idea*. Many writers seize on this emphasis on the unemotional aspect of comedy (where our defenses are down) and for them, *comedy becomes a lever for change*. Comedy is successful in changing us, firstly because *it does not threaten us by asking for our emotional support*. Similarly, comedy allows for changes in the audience by *allowing us to feel superior to the comic character*. We can look at the character and say, "I hope I'm not like that fool." *But we know we do have something in common with the fool's blind repetition of an action*. Thus, and thirdly, *we sense our own rigidity and past reluctance to change* and in comedy we see how a character's inability to change makes him laughable.

"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 the, 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*. Thus, the action in 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 principal character until he finally sees how distorted he is, or the others decided that it would be heartless to have him face his realities...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*.

### Types of Comedy

#### Comedy of Ideas

In comedy of ideas, the characters argue ideas or are representative of people who hold these ideas. The dramatic action is an embodiment of these ideas in conflict; not an allegory, this genre uses characters who remain essentially personalities, capable of change, pitting their wits (or lack thereof) against those who view reality differently.

#### Comedy of Manners

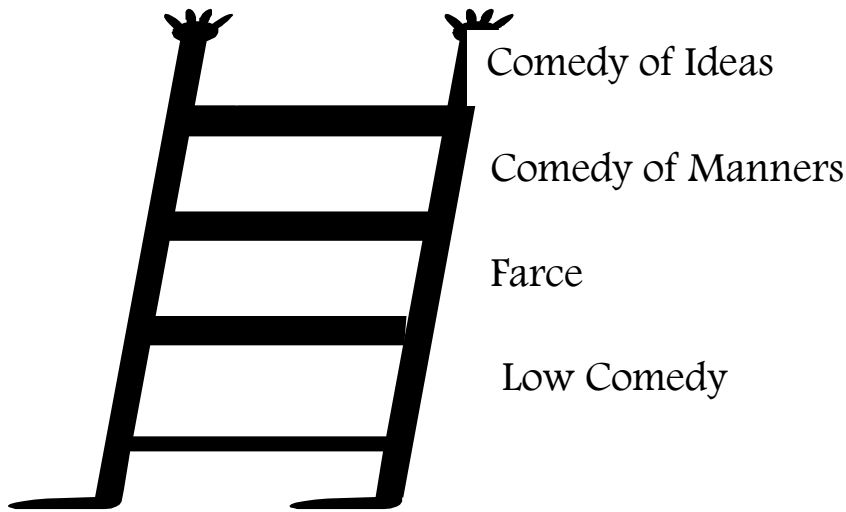
Referred to as the amorous intrigues of the aristocratic classes, this comedy emphasizes the mechanism of language, and reduces drama and life to a sheen of verbal wit. Such comedy does not hesitate to sacrifice humanity to dialogue; puns, paradoxes, epigrams, and witticisms of all types are the tools it uses often in the service of satire.

#### Farce

This comedy is most readily identified by the devices which drive the plot: mistaken identities, coincidences, and mistimings. The characters become the puppets of fate. Typically the plot is predictably improbable: devices include twins separated at birth, unhappy matches by tyrannical parents, allegiance complicated by memory and birth, and a rag shop of happy endings.

#### Low Comedy

At the bottom of the comedy ladder, man is almost indistinguishable from the animal. The laughter is longest and loudest over dirty jokes or dirty gestures. At this depth comedy unerringly finds the lowest common denominator. Typically, this is the rung for "bathroom humor" where body functions remind us we are certainly "a little lower than the angels". Physical mishaps, pratfalls, slapstick, and loud collisions are the obvious elements and here, too, are the deformed: long noses, humped backs, and dwarves.



Kind of Comedy	Qualities of this comedy	Use of this comedy in <i>Ros and Guil</i>	Themes Developed because of this comedy
Comedy of Ideas	Discussion of philosophy, theory, religion dominate; characters practice their various theories	Coin toss – breaks laws of probability; action vs. inaction; individual's morality over public law	Humanity's reliance on laws in order to give order to universal chaos proves disappointing
Comedy of Manners	Verbal repartee; quick put-downs; often amorous intrigues among aristocrats	Question game; stichomythia (Greek dramatic dialogue where characters speak individual lines alternately); witty put-downs	Although we depend on language to communicate, it often confuses; words break down just as ideas do
Farce	Mistaken identities; coincidences; mistimings, characters are puppets of fate	R & G lose track of who they are; others often confuse them; they are at the mercy of others	Identity is established by choice and action – it can be readily changed or lost through lack of individual choice
Low Comedy	Loud noises, falls, slapstick; sex and bodily functions are source of laughter	R's pants fall down; people in barrels; general confusion; sexual humor	Humanity develops by natural experiences; our heads must be reunited with our bodies; living too much in the abstract removes one from necessary experiences