

# Some Distinctions Between Classical Tragedy and Comedy

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## TRAGEDY:

## COMEDY:

### Purpose and Effect

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1) Emphasizes human suffering</li><li>2) Ends with rigid finality</li><li>3) Moves with solemnity and foreboding</li><li>4) Emotional Response (pity and fear)</li><li>5) Identification with the hero</li><li>6) Laments man's fate</li><li>7) Criticizes <u>hubris</u>, self-delusion, and complacency</li><li>8) Offers some hope (man <u>can</u> learn), but stresses limitations of the human condition</li></ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1) Emphasizes renewal of human nature</li><li>2) Moves from rigidity to freedom</li><li>3) Plays with prevailing high spirits</li><li>4) Intellectual response (ridicule and absurdity)</li><li>5) Scorn/approval of protagonist/others</li><li>6) Celebrates life</li><li>7) Criticizes folly, self-delusion, and complacency</li><li>8) Suggests cynicism (man a fool), but offers hope of renewal.</li></ol> |
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### Tragic Hero versus Comic Protagonist

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1) Hero recognizes great mistake, but too late to change it</li><li>2) Hero demonstrates a personal flaw or error in perception</li><li>3) Hero frequently <u>hubristic</u></li><li>4) Hero isolated from community in individuality</li><br/><li>5) Hero exercises free will</li><li>6) Hero suffers terrible downfall</li><li>7) Hero fails through error</li><li>8) Hero aspires to more than he can achieve</li><li>9) Hero is larger than life, considerably above the audience in status or responsibility</li></ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1) "Hero" awakens to better nature after folly exposed.</li><li>2) "Hero" undergoes improbable improvement.</li><br/><li>3) "Hero" frequently intolerant or prudish</li><li>4) "Hero" finds selfhood by joining flow of society and community, rejecting individuality</li><li>5) "Hero" is a comic mechanism</li><li>6) "Hero" loses <u>and recovers</u> his equilibrium</li><li>7) "Hero" triumphs by luck, wit, acceptance</li><li>8) "Hero" pretends to be more than he is</li><li>9) "Hero" is just like everyone else, or might even be an anti-hero or buffoon.</li></ol> |
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### Tragic Struggle versus Comic Struggle

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1) Serious and painful struggle</li><li>2) Life and societal norms at odds</li><li>3) Struggle against unchangeable</li><li>4) Struggle dominated by Fate or necessity</li><li>5) Discovery of true nature leads to hero's isolation</li><br/><li>6) Struggle against predictable and inevitable</li><li>7) Struggle between man and destiny, or between man and social forces beyond man's control</li></ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1) Less serious and painful struggle</li><li>2) Norms valid and necessary</li><li>3) Struggle against movable</li><li>4) Struggle dominated by Fortune (chance)</li><li>5) Discovery of true nature leads to hero's conformity with group norms.</li><li>6) Struggle against coincidence (unpredictable)</li><li>7) Struggle between individual and group or between groups (e.g., men and women)</li></ol> |
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### Tragic Methods versus Comic Methods

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1) Tragedy depends on validity of universal norms</li><li>2) Cohering episodes clarify action</li><li>3) Causality dominates pattern of (a) deed, which leads to (b) suffering, which leads to (c) recognition or understanding</li><br/><li>4) Plot moves from freedom of choice to inflexible consequence</li></ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1) Comedy exploits conflicting values</li><li>2) Plot more intricate, less plausible</li><li>3) Coincidence dominates a patternless grappling with the unpredictable and the absurd. Plot forwarded by chance discoveries and accidental encounters.</li><li>4) Plot moves from rigidity at the beginning to greater freedom for characters at end.</li></ol> |
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