

DEFINING THE COMEDIC

THE TRAGIC, THE DRAMATIC & THE COMEDIC

HYBRIDITY

PATHOS

DIFFERENT NARRATIVES

- Films and television shows are usually structured in familiar ways.
- This helps the audience identify with characters and connect with the narrative.
- There is not one “right” way to structure a narrative project, but there are several common ones with many variations.

TRAGEDY

- Narrative follows the ultimately doomed life of a central protagonist who, despite many efforts, dies or meets an unhappy or unsuccessful end, usually as the result of a **tragic flaw** in his or her character.
- This is a common narrative arc in world literature, but is less common in contemporary narrative media.

EXAMPLE: DARTH VADER



THREE-ACT DRAMA

- Follows a central protagonist, **who overcomes many obstacles to doggedly achieve at least one large goal**, and usually several smaller sub-goals.
- In so achieving these goals, **the protagonist learns something personally and socially important** (maybe)
- Drama is the dominant structure in most of American Cinema.
- Has seemingly endless variability, and can be applied to wide variety of subject matter and film types.

EXAMPLE: THE REVENGE DRAMA

- Rocky IV (Stallone 1985)



EXAMPLE: THE REVENGE DRAMA

- Kill Bill I, II (Tarantino 2003, 2004)



THE SITCOM

- Sitcom is shorthand for “**situation comedy**”
- Is usually **circular** in comparison to drama’s linear progression. Problems represent **ripples** or **inconsistencies** in a narrative universe defined by **expected homeostasis**.

THE SITCOM (CONT'D)

- Shows a protagonist's sense of **normalcy** **changed rapidly** by various factors, usually related to that character's **flaws**.
- **Follows the character trying to make life normal again.**

THE SITCOM (CONT'D)

- Typical of most American television comedy, and some films
- Allows for the constant development and turnover of recurring characters.
- Characters do not change fundamentally or internally, so they can always begin in a state of normalcy.

THE DIFFERENCE

- **A tragic character is ultimately released from his suffering** or failure by the tragic moment. He/she frequently dies, or can no longer go back to change the past.
- **A comic character is perpetually revisited by his failures** or character flaws because he/she deals with them only well-enough to return to normalcy.
- **A dramatic character often sits in between the two.** He/she is as much at risk as the tragic character, but more proactive and noble than the comedic one.

HYBRIDITY

- **These structures are not definite, or all-inclusive.** They are just a guide to help us talk about storytelling.
- It is important to realize that **any work can contain various elements pulled from anywhere, and frequently do.**
- This seems to be a more contemporary trait of narrative media.

ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT

- Contains elements of situational comedy, goal-based drama, and existential tragedy.
- However, characters change and develop across the seasons, frequently making poor decisions that change the narrative's **stasis point**.
- Characters' goals are frequently shallow and unresolvable, and therefore abandoned before they can be accomplished.
- Characters are oblivious, having avoided truly dealing with their failures, and are thus comical.

PATHOS

- **It is an appeal to the audience's emotions; its most simple form is storytelling.**
- Its goal is to cause the audience to identify with a character's humanity or plight.
- A form of persuasion along with ethos and logos

COMEDIC PATHOS

- Storytelling is fundamental to all modes of comedic practice, and this is for a reason:
- **Somebody laughs when they are able to identify with a character, a specific set of circumstances, or a particular viewpoint.**

AMERICAN MOVIE (Chris Smith, 1999)

- How does this film define hybridity? Is it tragic? dramatic? are there elements of the Situation Comedy? If so, what?
- How is Pathos deployed in American Movie?