

Plato and Aristotle argue over the merits of comedy but agree that tragedy is the best art form.

1900- 1930?? Vaudeville

Comedies in the movies evolved from the raucous tales, minstrel shows, bawdy limericks formulated in the minds of travelling thespians in the U.S. beginning in the mid 19th century. Vaudeville the term that evolved from a variety of sources, but sometimes attributed to the French words "Vaux de Ville" meaning "worth of the city". By the turn of the 19th century Vaudeville became a distinctively American form of comedy and spawned the likes of Buster Keaton, The Keystone Kops, Charlie Chaplin and Laurel and Hardy. With the advent of the talkies in the late twenties an unlikely foursome who had been popular on Broadway with a number of fast talking comedies...the Marx Brothers broadened the pallet for comedy with their absurd depictions as they depicted the classic odd men out.

Screwball Comedies 1930s-40s

The genre Screwball Comedies evolved over a period of time through the thirties and forties. Women's roles in society were increasingly asserted and were a prominent element. When the Depression was in full swing, audiences wished to escape the mundane forces of their lives and look at the other side of existence: the rich and privileged class. In that vein, The privileged classes became the butt of jokes for a variety of reasons related to their lifestyles, and their mores.

The movie "It Happened One Night" arguably popularized the form. Directed by Frank Capra and starring Claudette Colbert and Clark Gable, "It Happened One Night" was a story about a rich girl rebelling against convention and striking out on her own. Her "disappearance" is followed by a down on his luck newspaper man who accidentally stumbles on to her when he is fired from his job. Its zany juxtaposition of unlikely coincidences and cultural clashes are a basis for misunderstanding and comedic 'pain'.

Other examples of screwball comedies:

Frank Capra ... "Mr. Deeds Goes to Town" 1936

Howard Hawks'... "Bringing Up Baby" 1938

George Cukor... "Philadelphia Story" 1940

Howard Hawks'... "His Girl Friday" 1940

Howard Hawks'... "Ball of Fire" 1941

Preston Sturges... "Palm Beach Story" 1942

'The Theatre of the Absurd' 1950s-1960s

'The Theatre of the Absurd' was a term adapted by critic Martin Esslin as a description for the work of a number of plays that were in vogue during the 50s, 60s and evolved into the movies and TV. The term originally appeared in an essay by the French philosopher Albert Camus. In his 'Myth of Sisyphus', written in 1942, he first defined the human situation as basically meaningless and absurd. Nonsense in a loosely controlled environment would be an apt description of the world constructed by the Absurdist.

It could also be described as a comedic form of nihilism. How it evolves has some sense of formula. It usually begins with familiar characters and scenes which are constructed around bewildering, obscurely threatening situations. Actors and material are juxtaposed in an incongruous fashion which molds them into odd scenes with overt or covert references to other pieces of literature, characters, politics, music, TV or movies which are funny by virtue of the nonsense that it creates.

Examples:

"Alice In Wonderland"

"Dr. Strangelove"

"Monty Python's Flying Circus"

"Monty Python's Holy Grail"

"Take The Money and Run"

"A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum"

"Catch 22"

Slapstick: 1900-----present-----

Born out of Burlesque and Vaudeville...

Involves physical violence and the loss of control.

Usually concerning pratfalls, accidents, physical mishaps which create situations of indignity.

Such as: Pants dropping, pies in the face, clothing being pulled off, losing wigs, acrobatic death-defying stunts, water soakings, or wild chase scenes with trains and cars. Cartoon violence are examples of slapstick comedy;

other examples:

"The General"

"Pink Panther Films"

"It's a Mad Mad Mad Mad World"

"The Mask"

"Ace Ventura: Pet Detective"

Irony: Where an event occurs which is unexpected, in the sense that it is somehow in absurd or mocking opposition to what would be expected or appropriate.

Allegory: Where every aspect of a story is representative, usually symbolic, of something else, usually a larger abstract concept or important historical/geopolitical event.

Personification (II) Where an abstract concept, such as a particular human behavior or a force of nature, is represented as a person.

Symbolism: The use of specific objects or images to represent abstract ideas. This term is commonly misused, describing any and all representational relationships, which in fact are more often metaphorical than symbolic. A symbol must be something tangible or visible, while the idea it symbolizes must be something abstract or universal. (In other words, a symbol must be something you can hold in your hand or draw a picture of, while the idea it symbolizes must be something you can't hold in your hand or draw a picture of.)

Metaphor: A direct relationship where one thing or idea substitutes for another.

Finally:

You are all required to go to the Gary Baseman lecture. Tuesday Mar. 9th you will receive 20 points for attendance. 0 points for non attendance.

A sign up sheet will be at the door .

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