Chapter 21
The Comic Vision: Restoring the Balance

**Comedy**: It is often referred to as the fraternal twin of tragedy. It originated in the ancient Greek world and has many similarities to tragedy.

A tragedy can be referred to as a comedy that has taken a negative turn and a comedy can be looked at as a tragedy in which the truth is discovered, the hero saves the day, the villain is overcome, the hero and heroine are united, and equilibrium and balance are restored.

The major difference between the two forms of drama is that, overall, tragedy leans towards death or death, whereas comedy moves towards success, happiness, and marriage.

**Origins of Comedy**: Aristotle states that he does not know as much about comedy as he does about tragedy because when tragedy was first introduced it was not taken seriously. Just like tragedy, comedy developed as an improvisatory form. Most of the comedies grew from “phallic songs”. The word _comedy_ is consistent with the explanation of this. Comedy comes from the Greek word _komos_ or “a _komos_ song” and it means “a song of revels” or “a song sung by merrymakers.”

The earliest date for the existence of comedy is 486 BCE, when a writer named Chionides won a state-sponsored comedy competition.

Comedies were respected enough to be put in regular competitions.

Crates was the first to really transform comedies because of his thematic plot development. It was because of him that comedies became popular enough to be put in state competitions in 44 BCE.

The comedies of the fifth century are called the **Old Comedy** or **Old Attic Comedy**. They followed intricate structural patterns and displayed
complex poetic conventions. The plot was usually fantastic and impossible and the dialogue was ridiculous and bawdy.

The most successful comedy writer was Magnes but, Aristophanes’ works were the only ones that survived.

**Middle Comedy:** All the plays introduced in the Middle Comedy were lost. In this time, comedy lost some of the complex patterns of Old Comedy. Political criticism was abandoned. New characters were introduced, such as the braggart soldier. The role of the chorus was diminished and exaggerated costumes were eliminated.

**New Comedy:** By the end of the fourth century BCE, Middle Comedy was replaced by New Comedy. The most important dramatist of the New Comedy era was Menander. He was thought to be the greatest comic writer of them all, in ancient times. After the fifth century, his works were lost. His comedies were romantic rather than satirical. He used characters such as young lovers, stubborn fathers, clever slaves, and long-separated relatives.

**Roman Comedy:** The main plot on Roman Comedy is to overcome the blocking agent, or the obstruction to true love. The Romans usually used the plot of intrigue or intrigue plot. This plot stems from the ploys that young lovers undertake to overcome the blocking agent.

When the Roman Empire was established in 29 BCE, the writing of comedy disappeared. Comedy fell into fifteen hundred years of obscurity. Comedy did not reappear until the Renaissance and from then it grew rapidly. English dramatists started writing comedies and they followed Roman conventions. The English plays consisted of 5 acts and observed the unities of time, place, and action. By the end of the sixteenth century, Shakespeare had completed many of his comedies, such as *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *Henry IV*, and English comedies were in full bloom. Since London authorities banned attending within the city limits, builders built theaters outside of the city limits.

**The Patterns, Characters, and Language of Comedy:** Comedy implies a complete narrative pattern of humorous action. Comedy as a genre involves patterns of humorous or comic situations and actions that make
up a complete and coherent story. They are usually fantastical or even bizarre. They are always resolvable and correctable, unless you are dealing with problem comedy. When looking at comic patterns, we see the dialogue, activity, even serious problems, and dangerous situations as amusing, entertaining, and usually instructive. In comedies, the characters usually benefit from learning about themselves and their commitments, about living well and loving deeply, about getting along with the people around them, and finding their place in the world. The characters realize their past errors, are ready to amend them, and also human and humble enough to ask forgiveness. Many comedies implied that the change that happens in the play should happen in the world. Comic problems flourish amid chaos and potential disaster. The climax is the peak of confusion. The climax in comedies is the moment where the audience is the most confused and no good solution seems to be in sight. The catastrophe, the changing or turning point, is launched by a sudden revelation in which a new fact, a misunderstood event, or a previously hidden identity is explained to both the characters and audience at the same time and then things start rushing towards improvement. The dénouement resolves initial difficulties and allows for the comic resolution. Comic characters are more limited than tragedy characters because they are representative and common rather than individual and heroic. Comedy uses language as a vehicle of humor. They use witty language, such as puns and bawdy jokes.

Types of Comedy: High comedy is witty, graceful, and sophisticated. The problems and complications are more closely related to the character rather than the situation. Romantic comedy is a type of high comedy. It views action and character from the standpoint of earnest young lovers. It is built on a plot of intrigue. Comedy of manners tests the strength of social customs and assumptions. Satirical comedy is based in a comic attack on foolishness and/or viciousness. The playwright dons the perspective of a rational observer measuring human life against a modern norm. Low Comedy focuses on funny remarks and outrageous
circumstances. Complications develop from the situation rather than the character.

**Other kinds of Comedy:** Ironic comedy, realistic comedy, and comedy of absurd. These all shun the happy endings of traditional comedy, a conflict is usually remained unresolved. Situation comedies are commonly found on television. They are more commonly known as sitcoms.