

# CHAPTER ONE

## METHODOLOGY AND FRYE'S ARCHETYPAL CRITICISM

### Framework/Background

Northrop Frye, in his *Anatomy of Criticism*, identified four main myths. These were essentially genres, each of which moves through six phases. For each of these phases, Frye identified typical narrative structures and characteristics. Frye believed a critic could simply organize literature into these phases to show that literature formed “an ideal order” (*Anatomy of Criticism* 18).

Frye attempted to organize this ideal order through archetypal criticism—a type of criticism attempting to identify the primal myths with which humanity was and is consistently concerned. These are life patterns one’s ancestors experienced: “birth, death, love, family life, struggle” (Scott 21). Archetypal critics merely agree that there are certain patterns and symbols cultures share, regardless of how they came to share them.

### Dissertation Question and Goal

In this dissertation, I will attempt to identify whether Frye’s four myths divided into twenty-four phases are applicable to Twentieth Century American and European film. Using the mythic approach, I will make no assumptions about whether the films are good or bad (Frye, in *The Anatomy of Criticism*, called such value judgments “an illusion in the history of taste” (20)). The goal will be to show how each film could serve as one of Frye's phases of myth by drawing on past mythic plot lines. In *Anatomy of Criticism*, Frye used mostly examples from *written* literature to give examples of these phases. I intend to show how *film* literature can also easily illustrate and fit into each of the six phases of each of Frye’s four mythoi. As Frye himself recognized in interviews in *A World in a Grain of Sand* (collected by Robert Denham), film “is a literary art in itself, and it has a power of expressing symbolism that . . . is unmatched by any other form in the history of mankind” (47) in its “extraordinary immediacy” (202). This is the importance of showing that Frye’s *Anatomy of Criticism* is applicable not simply to

Medieval, Renaissance, Restoration, Romantic, Victorian, and Modern literature (as Frye has shown) but also to Twentieth Century Film.

Jim Kitses calls for just such a study as this when he writes in his *Horizons West*: "What are the archetypal elements we sense within the genre and how do they function? As Northrop Frye has shown in his monumental *The Anatomy of Criticism*, for centuries this immensely tangled ground has remained almost wholly unexplored in literature itself. The primitive state of film criticism inevitably reveals a yawning abyss in this direction" (14). In other words, as Andrew Tudor would call it, this will be "an abstract exploration of the cyclical recurrence of certain themes" (134) in Twentieth Century Western film.

This dissertation, written primarily for scholars of film and literature, will be the first book-length study which examines film solely through the lens of Frye's *Anatomy*. There have been numerous articles and books written on myth structure in movies, like James Clauss's "Descent into Hell: Mythic Paradigms in *The Searchers*" (which shows how *The Searchers* follows archetypal patterns like that found in *The Divine Comedy* etc.) and Stuart Kaminsky's *American Film Genres*, which analyzes movies as part of an 'ideal order' but which uses eight genres (Frye used only four).

Recently, William K. Ferrell's *Literature and Film as Modern Mythology* categorizes literature and the films based on it according to classical myths (not Frye's phases), like the Prometheus myth, for instance, or the Creation narrative of the Hebrew Bible. Although it cites Frye as, essentially, a progenitor of archetypal criticism, it only uses Frye in defining the genres and only twice mentions Frye's phases within the genres. Susan Mackey-Kallis' *The Hero and the Perennial Journey Home in American Film* also emphasizes myths, especially quests, which "invite audiences to change rather than crystallizing status-quo" (236). Such myths, according to Mackey-Kallis, "may be deemed superior to those that do not" challenge the status-quo. Despite all these excellent studies and more, no book has used Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* as closely as I will in establishing Frye's 'ideal order.'

I will now develop the methodology for the dissertation, explain the movies I will use and why, and further interpret Frye's archetypal phases and analogues.

### **Frye's Genre Categories Translated to Film**

Frye's four mythoi presented in *The Anatomy of Criticism* are Comedy, Romance, Tragedy, and Irony/Satire. In this study, I plan to consider Comedy films for Frye's Comedy mythos, Western films for Frye's Romance mythos, War films for Frye's Tragedy mythos, and Film Noir films for Frye's Irony/Satire mythos.

It should be noted that Frye's archetypal criticism is independent of historical and chronological considerations. Frye is simply concerned with narrative. However, some of the film genres which I am equating to Frye's mythoi are chronologically bound. The Western movie is certainly a less common sight in movie theatres at the end of the twentieth century than in the early twentieth century. The Film Noir genre, the equivalent of Frye's Irony/Satire mythos begins in the forties, according to film critic John Belton, and lasts until, depending upon the theorist, anywhere from the late fifties to this first decade of the twenty-first century. Of course, Frye makes no reference to such chronology in literature, although it's important in understanding film genre.

**Comedy.** Frye's study of Comedy in literature, applies *mutatis mutandis* to film.<sup>1</sup> Frye writes: "The tendency of comedy is to include as many people as possible in its final society" (165). Frye defines a Comedy as simply that which leads to inclusion, where "the blocking characters are more often reconciled or converted than simply repudiated" (165), although there are unsuccessful as well as successful phases in Frye's Comedy, as we shall see. For a successful example, Frye uses a Greek Comedy plot type, where "[w]hat normally happens is that a young man wants a young woman, that his desire is resisted by some opposition, usually paternal, and that near the end of the play some twist in the plot enables the hero to have his will" (163). Of course, most twentieth-century Comedy films, like Frye postulated for literature, are characterized by a

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<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, in one of his scarce references to the cinema, Frye writes about the Comedy mythos: "In a movie, where darkness permits a more erotically oriented audience, the plot usually moves toward an act which, like death in Greek Tragedy, takes place offstage, and is symbolized by a closing embrace" (*Anatomy of Criticism* 164).

final, happy, communal society (as, for instance, in *It Happened One Night* or *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*).

Frye's use of Comedy--very similar to the way Dante used the word *Comedy* to describe his combined *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso* with Dante's journey finally ending in heaven--is much more of a medieval definition of Comedy than a modern one. For instance, in *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*, Ross Murfin and Supryia Ray define Comedy as "any amusing and entertaining work" (53). However, they do note that "[d]uring the Middle Ages, the term *comedy* was applied to any literary work that had a happy ending and a style less exalted than that ascribed to tragedy" (53). Some of Frye's phases of Comedy, however, also seem to hint at what we today would call dark Comedy or Tragicomedy, of which there doesn't seem to have been very much of a medieval conception.

**Romance.** Similarly, Frye divides Romance into three different stages for the hero: "the stage of the perilous journey and the preliminary minor adventures," "the crucial struggle," and "the exaltation of the hero" (187).<sup>2</sup> Perhaps the film genre which best exhibits these characteristics is the Western, where the cowboys are the heroic knights who set off on many adventures or quests—as in *The Searchers*, for instance—and are often redeemed as heroes through this quest.<sup>3</sup>

**Tragedy.** In his interview with Janet Somerville collected in *A World in a Grain of Sand*, Frye defines Tragedy as being "really about disaster" (85). If Comedy is about the hero's integration into his society, Tragedy is about the hero's separation from society (37).<sup>4</sup> Frye also hints in the *Anatomy* that Tragedy emphasizes the natural order of life—i.e. death—without any supernatural salvation from it (206-207). Of course, Twentieth Century wars (and most other wars), with the Twentieth Century civilization's

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<sup>2</sup> Of course, the modern definition of Romance can also mean an emphasis on romantic love. But Murfin and Ray in the *Bedford Glossary* hint that Romance, even today, still retains some of the elements of the chivalric knight, except with an emphasis on his romantic love (346). Interestingly, according to Murfin and Ray: "the landscapes of romance are often outward manifestations of the hero's or heroine's inner state" (346), which certainly seems to apply to the wide-ranging, adventurous cowboy.

<sup>3</sup> Many science-fiction films also fit Frye's Romance category, as they include modern-day cowboys on quests in the frontier of space.

<sup>4</sup> This seems to simply be a concise definition of the modern one. For instance, Murfin and Ray, in their *Bedford Glossary*, state that in Tragedy "catastrophic consequences for the protagonist (and often other individuals in tragic works) result from some error in judgment (hamartia) made by the protagonist" (404).

geometrically increasing technology, led to the savage death of many and were, almost without exception, disasters. This is why the War film illustrates Frye's Tragedy mythos, although other types of film also contain Tragedy as well.

**Irony/Satire.** Film Noir is a movie with a "gloomy or fatalistic character" ("Film Noir"). Frye defines the Irony mythos as the "'realistic' level of experience" (366). The term refers equally to a genre or a style of film characterizing "a dark, corrupt and violent world" (Blankford et al 97). The seemingly no-nonsense characters often found in Film Noir seem to represent very well Frye's idea of Irony. Of course, many hard-boiled Film Noir detectives, like Sam Spade or Phillip Marlowe, pride themselves on their toughness, realism and observation of details.

Frye's definition of Irony is rooted in Socrates as an *ieron* or self-deprecator (Frye 172). Socrates pretended not to have any knowledge in order to draw out those around him. Irony came to mean, as Frye describes it, a "technique of saying as little and meaning as much as possible" (40), which fits Murfin and Ray's definition of Irony in the *Bedford Glossary*: "contradiction or incongruity between appearance and reality" (176). Of course, such dissembling is commonly a technique of Film Noir detectives such as Humphrey Bogart's Sam Spade, who pretends to have the Maltese Falcon when he doesn't (at least early in the movie), and such pretending actually keeps him alive.

Frye defines a satirist as somebody more interested in surviving everyday life than in espousing some moral imperative (as Frye believes a philosopher would) (229). This also seems to fit a Film Noir private eye, who sometimes seems more concerned with making a decent living than being honest and truthful. As Bogart's Spade tells Mary Astor's O'Shaughnessy in *The Maltese Falcon* (1941): "We didn't believe your story, Mrs. O'Shaughnessy; we believed your two-hundred dollars."

### **Brief Summary of Frye's Phases and the Movies Illustrating Them**

The following films were selected because they are excellent, typical examples of films that fit Frye's phases.

**Comedy First Phase.** A Comedy of everyday experience, where the hero “triumphs or remains undefeated” (177) after a “potentially tragic crisis” (179), all while an angry, abusive “father” (*senex iratus*) threatens him. *Our Gang Follies of 1938* (1937) is an everyday childhood story of over-ambition. Alfalfa (Carl Switzer), the ‘king of crooners’ and singer of sentimental love songs, decides to instead become an opera singer. He finally returns to crooning after a nightmare about a tyrannical opera manager (Henry Brandon)—Frye’s tyrannical *senex iratus* whom Alfalfa looks to as a father figure for his opera career—who has signed him to a contract and forced him to sing in the street for money.

**Comedy Second Phase.** A very real, everyday hero “does not transform a humorous society but simply escapes or runs away from it, leaving its structure as it was before” (180). In *City Lights* (1931) the Tramp (Charles Chaplin) establishes an on and off again relationship with a millionaire (Harry Myers): good when the millionaire is drunk, bad when the millionaire is sober. Eventually, the Tramp is able to convince the once again drunken millionaire to pay for a blind flower girl’s (Virginia Cherril) operation to help her see again. The movie ends with the Tramp--still poor and penniless--walking free in the city after being imprisoned for supposedly stealing from a sobered millionaire, but the flower girl can see.

**Comedy Third Phase.** “A *senex iratus* or other humor gives way to a young man’s desires” (180). *It Happened One Night* (1934) is about Ellie Andrews (Claudette Colbert) trying to escape from her domineering father (Walter Connolly). She meets Peter Warne (Clark Gable), and the two finally decide they love each other. Mr. Andrews, who at first is suspicious of Warne, gives his approval when he realizes Warne is not a gold-digger.

**Comedy Fourth Phase.** The “pattern of a temperate social order on the stage” (182) is set up, and this happy, idealistic, innocent society triumphs definitively, as opposed to simply escaping from the greater society around it. *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) features an idealistic senator Jefferson Smith (James Stewart) who is able to withstand, and eventually triumph over, corruption in Washington.

**Comedy Fifth Phase.** A comedy where the group moves from a “lower world of confusion” (represented by the sea) to an “upper world of order” (184) and where “the

comic ending is less a matter of the way the plot turns out than of the perspective of the audience” (184). *Gilligan’s Island*--”Two on a Raft” (1964) was the first original episode where the skipper (Alan Hale Jr.) and Gilligan (Bob Denver) construct a raft to escape the island. After another huge storm, they find themselves safe back on the same island (although they don’t know they are on the same island).

**Comedy Sixth Phase.** The comedic society falls apart into isolated, individual units (as Frye puts it: “the social units of comedy become small and esoteric, or even confined to a single individual” (185)) and dies. *Network* (1976) is a dark comedy about an insane TV news anchorman (Peter Finch). His ratings rise as his insanity increases until he becomes corrupted by big-market politics and, consequently, becomes bland and boring. Finally, he is killed in an attempt by network executives to raise ratings once again.

**Romance First Phase.** New life, tutored by a fatherly role model (“sometimes represented by a wise old man or teacher” (199)), escapes from a doomed land, saving others from great disaster. *The Searchers* (1956) involves Martin Pawley (Jeffrey Hunter) and Ethan Edwards' (John Wayne) search for Pawley’s adopted sister and Edwards’ niece Debbie Edwards (Natalie Wood). The young Debbie (Lana Wood) has been kidnapped by an Indian raiding party while Pawley and Edwards were away hunting cattle stealers. Eventually, Pawley and Edwards are able to save Debbie from Comanche warriors.

**Romance Second Phase.** This includes an Edenic, ideal world, full of “the chaste love that precedes marriage” (200), where “the sense of being close to a moral taboo is very frequent” (200). *Shane* (1953) is about an extremely quick gunslinger, Shane (Alan Ladd), who is able to save settlers from a land-hungry tycoon Ryker (Emile Meyer) and his hired gun Jack Wilson (Jack Palance). An intriguing conflict in the movie is whether Shane will give into his attraction for one of the settlers’ wives, Mariann Starrett (Jean Arthur).

**Romance Third Phase.** A Messianic hero wins an endangered bride and saves his society--in circumstances reminiscent of “the quest of St. George” (194) to kill the dragon. *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962) features the highly educated lawyer Ran Stoddard (Jimmy Stewart) who battles town gunslinger Tom Doniphon (John Wayne) for the hand of town beauty Hallie Ericson (Vera Miles). Stoddard is eventually credited with killing evil outlaw Liberty Valance (Lee Marvin) and wins Hallie’s hand in marriage (although, as we discover, it is actually Doniphon who killed Valance).

**Romance Fourth Phase.** A happy, innocent world must defend itself “against the assault of experience” (201). *The Wild Bunch* (1969) is a group of outlaws led by Pike Bishop (William Holden), who find that the individualism of the West is only a memory with increasing technology and organization (“the assault of experience”). The world has become much less heroic and more a matter of financial resources, and, eventually, almost all of the Bunch (except two) are killed.

**Romance Fifth Phase.** Objectively, a past world (often of love) is analyzed and categorized from the viewpoint of age and maturity. “The true lovers are on top of a hierarchy of what might be called erotic imitations, going down through the various grades of lust and passion” (202). *Once Upon A Time In the West* (1969) is the story of the love of three men for Jill (Claudia Cardinale), a former New Orleans prostitute. A certain Harmonica (Charles Bronson) is the hero—the only one of the three men who doesn’t die—and the only one who loves Jill platonically and not sexually.

**Romance Sixth Phase.** This phase “marks the end of a movement from active to contemplative adventure” (202). *Dances with Wolves* (1990) shows us Lieutenant Dunbar (Kevin Costner), who has become disillusioned with the ravages of industrial society and the American Civil War. He retires to the Midwestern plains where he finds a somewhat more peaceful, contemplative existence among the Lakota Sioux.

**Tragedy First Phase.** A dignified hero (whose mother is a central character) “has the innocence of abundant life in a sick and melancholy society” (219). *Sergeant York*

(1941) is the development of a dissolute Alvin York (Gary Cooper), who has caused his mother much pain and eventually converts to Christianity through the influence of his eventual wife-to-be, Gracie Williams (Joan Leslie). A pacifist for religious reasons, York eventually must fight in the hellish, surrealistic world of The Great War and becomes an Allied war hero.

**Tragedy Second Phase.** “A tragedy of innocence in the sense of inexperience” where we become aware of the loss of the Edenic world, after which the inexperienced hero develops a “new and more mature experience” (220). *Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949) is about young soldiers, like Private First Class Peter Conway (John Agar), who are bullied by their training camp sergeant, Sergeant Stryker (John Wayne). They must learn the importance of their rigorous training in the battle for Iwo Jima, which is their loss of the Edenic world and ‘new and more mature experience.’

**Tragedy Third Phase.** The hero is portrayed as completely successful, even in his suffering, and, therefore, the suffering is seen as both tragedy and victory, so that “tragedy may be expressed by a double perspective in the action” (220). *Patton* (1970) describes how George S. Patton’s (George C. Scott) surly temper and ego first lead to his suspension from field command. But this same surly temper and ego eventually help lead the Americans to victory in the Battle of the Bulge after Patton returns to command. Patton’s hard-driving desire to be first, and his ‘damn the torpedoes’ mentality is ironically necessary to win the Battle of the Bulge.

**Tragedy Fourth Phase.** An experienced hero falls apart through “hybris and hamartia” (221). *Apocalypse Now* (1979) depicts the highly intelligent Army Colonel Kurtz (Marlon Brando), one of the army’s most decorated soldiers. He has become isolated during the Vietnam War and, partly as a result of his unchecked power, has gone insane. Meanwhile a certain Captain Willard (Martin Sheen) is assigned to kill him and, eventually, does.

**Tragedy Fifth Phase.** An experienced hero has lost direction, not through hubris, but through a lack of knowledge and through confusion about his own location and falls “into a state of lower freedom than the audience” (221). *Das Boot* (1981) is about a group of young German submariners, including Correspondent Lieutenant Werner (Herbert Gronemeyer), who are led by an experienced Captain (Jurgen Prochnow). They endure

Allied anti-submarine measures and—after surviving much anxiety, confusion and danger literally at the sea bottom, certainly ‘in a state of lower freedom than the audience’—eventually are killed by an Allied air strike at their submarine base just after they have returned home.

**Tragedy Sixth Phase.** Completely shocking tragedy full of “cannibalism, mutilation, and torture” (222) which eventually moves into an undiluted and uncensored picture of hell. *Platoon* (1986) tells us about an American army platoon that, in response to the death of one of its soldiers, cruelly kills many Vietnamese villagers. This leads to a deep resentment between two army sergeants (one who supports the reprisal, and one who doesn’t) Barnes (Tom Berenger) and Elias (Willem Dafoe) respectively. Barnes eventually kills Elias and, finally, Barnes is killed by one the platoon’s newest recruits, Chris Taylor (Charlie Sheen), as retribution for Elias’s death.<sup>5</sup>

**Irony/Satire First Phase.** An absurdist, depressing criminal society where a rustic hero survives by seeming to be “a plain, common-sense, conventional person” (226) and at the same time “relying on observation and timing” (226). *Maltese Falcon* (1941) describes the search for a hidden treasure inside a statue. Sam Spade’s partner, Miles Archer (Jerome Cowan) is killed, and Spade (Humphrey Bogart) eventually nabs his partner’s killer, Brigid O’Shaughnessy (Mary Astor). He makes an astute, common sense observation noting that Archer had not unbuttoned his coat when he was shot, thus showing that Archer’s murderer was a woman, because Archer had felt comfortable enough not to make his gun available.

**Irony/Satire Second Phase.** A society where there is “the setting of ideas and generalizations and theories and dogmas over against the life they are supposed to explain,” (230) showing the impossibility of dogmatic generalizations and stereotypes. *Citizen Kane* (1941) gives us millionaire Citizen Kane’s (Orson Welles) last word:

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<sup>5</sup> While there is no cannibalism per se in *Platoon*, it is very much full of a metaphorical cannibalism. Although human beings do not literally eat each other, they are constantly killing each other and hurting each other, so that they almost might as well be cannibalizing each other.

“Rosebud” before he dies. This word sparks an investigation into his life through the eyes of various people who all paint somewhat different pictures of him, showing the difficulty of making exact, dogmatic statements about somebody’s personality and character.

**Irony/Satire Third Phase.** In this society both dogmatism and *common sense* (“we must let go of even ordinary common sense as a standard” (234)) are humbled, as human beings realize the inability of absolutely being sure about anything. *North by Northwest* (1959) shows Roger Thornhill (Cary Grant) mistaken for government agent George Kaplan by an international ring of spies. Thornhill begins a cross-country chase with a beautiful woman Eve Kendall (Eva Marie Saint), but, soon, we discover the difficulty of knowing who, if anybody, is telling the truth, until the end.

**Irony/Satire Fourth Phase.** “[T]here is no attempt to make fun of the character, but only to bring out clearly the ‘all too human,’ as distinct from the heroic, aspects of tragedy” (237). *Taxi Driver* (1976) posits Travis Bickle (Robert De Niro) as a troubled taxi driver whose violent tendencies (including an attempted assassination attempt) actually become useful in saving a street prostitute (Jodie Foster) from her pimp, ‘Sport’ Matthew (Harvey Keitel).

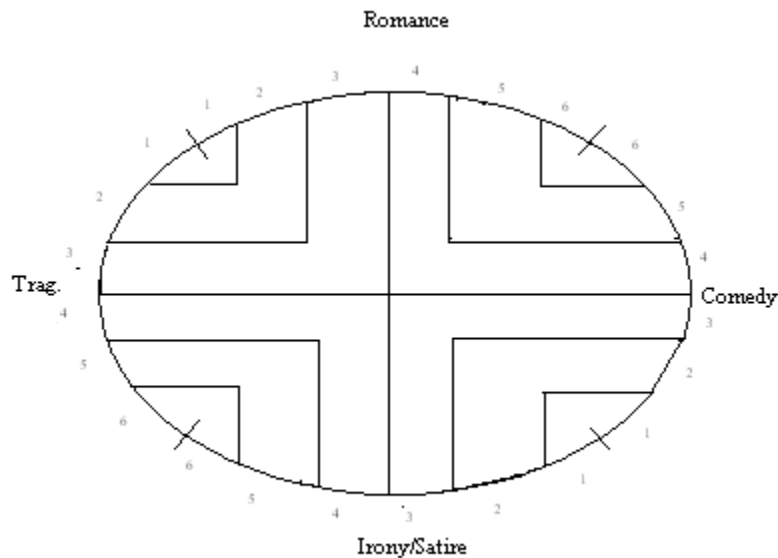
**Irony/Satire Fifth Phase.** “[I]rony in which the main emphasis is on the natural cycle, the steady unbroken turning of the wheel of fate or fortune” (237), so that fate seems unavoidable. *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) has the movie open with a shot of a man dead in a swimming pool. The movie then tracks the career of a certain Joe Gillis (William Holden), who is desperate for a break in Hollywood as a screenwriter. The retired silent film actress Norma Desmond (Gloria Swanson) takes Gillis as her paramour and, at the end of an increasingly insane relationship, kills him, so that Gillis is revealed to be the dead man in the opening swimming pool shot. His fate seems to have been predestined from the movie's beginning (because of his obsession with Hollywood).

**Irony/Satire Sixth Phase.** This phase depicts never-ending bondage full of torturous instruments and parodies of religion and romanticism, along with a demonic epiphany, where “on the other side of this blasted world of repulsiveness and idiocy, a world without pity and hope” (239), hope begins again. *Silence of the Lambs* (1991) begins with Clarice Starling (Jodie Foster) interviewing Dr. Hannibal Lecter (Anthony Hopkins)

in an attempt to understand the psychopathic killer Buffalo Bill (Ted Levine), who skins his victims: Lecter--who has an almost religious sincerity in his serial murders--eventually escapes. The movie is full of Buffalo Bill and Lecter's torture scenes, as well as the realization that Lecter and Buffalo Bill are the low-point of humanity, and it cannot get any worse from there.

### Frye's Phases as They Work Together

Frye imagined his different phases as different points on the circumference of a circle. That is, the phases are not distinct from each other, but, rather, blend into each other. At some points on the circumference a work is an equal mixture of two different myths. At another point a work might have a preponderance of one myth and at another point a work might be almost completely—but not quite—one complete myth. We might be tempted to refer to this roundness and cyclical effect as a conventional “clock” (12 points) or a “compass card” (16 points), but we need to have the image of a circle with 24 points, similar to a clock that keeps military or European continental time. The following illustration to better explain Frye's phases and their integrations has been offered by Roger Ebert (during a class in which he was a student at the University of Illinois in 1967).



*Figure 1: Circle Illustrating Phases*

**Analogous Films Describing Analogous Phases.** Frye developed a way to check himself in his categorization. Importantly, the movies representing the different phases

not only fit their original mythos phases but also fit a majority (although not necessarily all) of the characteristics from the same numbered phase of the different genre within the same quarter circle. So, a Tragedy First Phase movie (in this case, *Sergeant York*) fits most (if not all) of the principal characteristics of Tragedy First Phase *and* Romance First Phase (in this case, movies like *The Searchers*) and vice-versa. Irony/Satire Fifth Phase (*Sunset Boulevard*) is also described in large part by Tragedy Fifth Phase (*Das Boot*) and vice versa. Tragedy Sixth Phase (*Platoon*) can also be described by most (if not all) of Irony/Satire Sixth Phase (*Silence of the Lambs*) characteristics and vice-versa. This is why each movie should illustrate not only Frye's description of the movie's original mythos phase but also Frye's analogue phase. These comparisons are important to make, because Frye frequently made comparisons between phrases and their analogue in the *Anatomy of Criticism*.

### **Tragedy and its Analogues**

I will now show, using the example of Tragedy phases one through six, how each movie in each phase can also be described very well by Frye's corresponding, analogue phase. A movie in Frye's Tragedy First Phase can also be described in part by Romance First Phase, for example, and a movie in Tragedy Second Phase partially by Romance Second Phase, and a movie in Tragedy Third Phase by some of the characteristics of Romance Third Phase. While each pair of phases shares the same, basic similarities, there are slight differences accounted for by the phases' different mythoi (or genres).

Tragedy First Phase emphasizes a hero's innocence in a corrupt world, where Romance First Phase emphasizes how new life (of mysterious origins) leads some out of an evil land. So the difference between the two is mostly to be found in the hero's origin, which, in Romance First Phase, is mysterious (and perhaps more romantic) and, of course, in the difference between the hero's separation (Tragedy) and the hero's victory (Romance). Tragedy Second Phase chronicles innocent characters who endure suffering and, from the suffering, gain more maturity. Romance Second Phase, similarly, shows us an ideal, platonic world on the brink of spiritual, and sexual, disaster. In both cases, we have innocent characters who both must go through a trial, so these two phases are obviously analogues, although Romance Second Phase emphasizes more of the sexually romantic. Tragedy Third Phase is characterized by a suffering hero whose actions are a

complete tragedy and a complete victory (i.e. Christ), while Romance Third Phase describes a young, Messianic hero who saves an endangered woman and society. Again, both phases share many similarities, although Romance Third Phase does not emphasize as much the tragic suffering.

Tragedy Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Phases are analogous to Irony/Satire Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Phases. Tragedy Fourth Phase emphasizes the experienced hero's hubris and eventual fall. Irony/Satire Fourth Phase likewise shows how suffering is avoidable if human beings weren't so mistake-prone. Again, these phases essentially describe the same thing, although Tragedy focuses on the inevitability of the natural cycle (of life and death) as a whole while Irony/Satire focuses on everyday experience. Tragedy Fifth Phase describes an experienced hero who has lost his direction--not because of flaws but because of simple confusion, while Irony/Satire Fifth Phase depicts suffering which is unavoidable, regardless of the character's integrity. Both are essentially the same thing--in that the protagonist has little control over his fate. Finally, Tragedy Sixth Phase describes a complete, unsparing picture of Hell, while Irony/Satire Sixth Phase similarly shows tortuous instruments with a demonic epiphany. Both, essentially, show us the horrible nature of Hell.

## CHAPTER TWO

### MOVIES ILLUSTRATING FRYE'S COMEDY PHASES AND THEIR ANALOGUES

#### Comedy Introduction

For Frye, Comedy's subject matter is the hero's integration into society (*Anatomy of Criticism* 43), although in Comedy this integration may be more or less successful (Comedy Second Phase is an example of this less successful Comedy). There are also, for instance, comedies in which the hero is integrated but in destructive ways (*Network* and *Dr. Strangelove* are examples of this as Comedy Sixth Phase). Elder Olson writes about such comic alienation: "[t]he point is that the extreme comic is produced by making the observer so indifferent to the fortunes of the persons he is observing that he can concentrate on the absurdities of action and fortune as such, without emotional commitment" (78).<sup>6</sup>

The first three Comedy phases are analogous to Irony/Satire and Irony/Satire's emphasis on realism and everyday experience (as opposed to Irony/Satire's polar opposite, Romance, which is an "idealized world" (Frye 367)). This is why *Our Gang's Follies of 1938*, for instance, chronicles Alfalfa's lesson that his voice is not as operatic as he thinks it is. Alfalfa learns to be realistic. The Irony/Satire analogue accounts for the Tramp's focus on everyday survival in *City Lights*. The Tramp cannot afford to be a philosopher in a world where he struggles to find enough money to eat everyday.

The last three Comedy phases are analogous to idealized Romance. For example, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) shows us an idealistic senator Jefferson Smith, who is able to triumph against the politically corrupt Washington machine only with the help of his secretary and boys clubs. This seems to be a plot far removed from reality. In the

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<sup>6</sup> Gerald Mast writes: "if the subject matter [of a comedy] is not intrinsically trivial, a comedy reduces important subject matter to trivia" (10). Mast gives *Dr. Strangelove* as an example, where "a serious subject, the destruction of the human race, is treated as if it were no more important than inventing hole-free doughnuts" (10). Mast's definition of Comedy differs from Frye's in that he sees Comedy as making "the audience accept a potentially exciting, heroic adventure as not strictly credible, as not real, as 'worthless'" (14). In this Mast agrees with one of the other important literary critics of Comedy, Olson, who saw Comedy as "the imitation of a worthless action" (46-47).

first episode of *Gilligan's Island*, boat passengers are shipwrecked and are portrayed as living a happy, relatively carefree life, despite the fact that they are an island far from any civilization. Again, reality does not seem to often intrude into *Gilligan's Island*.

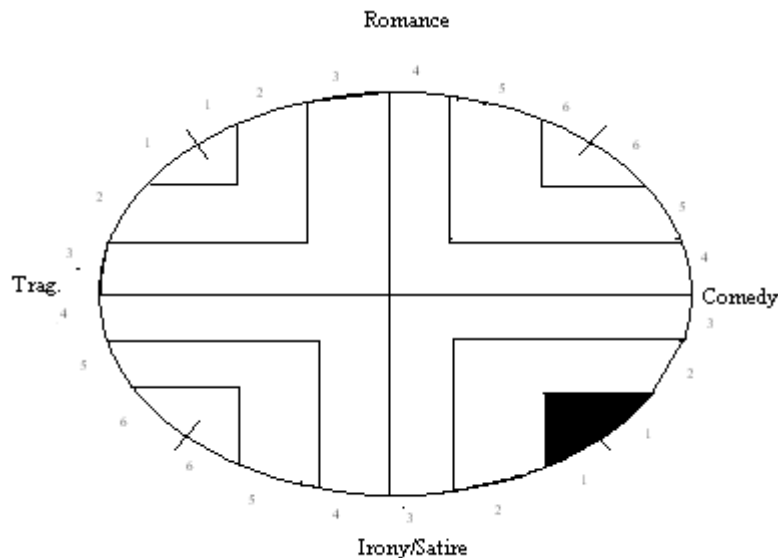


Figure 2: *Comedy and Irony/Satire First Phase*

***Our Gang Follies of 1938 (1937) Comedy First Phase.***

**Comedy First Phase Characteristics.**

1. Humorous (capricious, whimsical, natural) society is undefeated or, in irony, “simply disintegrates without anything taking its place” (177).
2. The demonic is always nearby (178).
3. There is a ritual death from which the characters are barely saved by a *cognitio* (recognition) (179).

Comedy First Phase, for Frye, is the "most ironic" (*Anatomy of Criticism* 177) of the Comedy phases. By “ironic,” Frye means that Comedy First Phase is the “realistic” level of experience (366)--specifically, of everyday life. As Frye said in one interview: “The aim of education is to be able to distinguish illusion from reality” (*A World in a Grain of Sand* 51). All three of Frye’s Comedy First Phase characteristics exactly fit *Our Gang*

*Follies of 1938*, which describe Alfalfa's childhood fantasy that he possesses an incredibly talented voice. Alfalfa (Carl Switzer) has found instant success as a crooner of love songs, especially for the girls his age who idolize romantic relationships. However, he has become dissatisfied with this genre and, at the same time, so self-satisfied with his voice that he decides he no longer wants to croon but to sing opera. Of course, as we all know, Alfalfa's belief that he has an excellent operatic voice is an illusion, certainly not on the "'realistic' level of experience" (177).

Spanky (George McFarland) has organized a group of follies, vaudeville acts played by children, with Alfalfa ("The King of Crooners") as the centerpiece. The problem is that when Alfalfa begins singing, he begins singing from the opera *The Barber of Seville*—not crooning as the girls want him to. When Spanky demands to know why Alfalfa no longer croons, Alfalfa says with disgust: "Crooning. My crooning days are over." He then refers to a previous decision Alfalfa and Porky (Eugene Lee) had made that Alfalfa's "voice ... is a gift. And from now on," Alfalfa says, "I'm not going to sing anything but opera."

Refusing Spanky's pleadings to return to crooning, Alfalfa immediately walks to an opera house, where he interrupts an adult opera singer (Gino Corrado), practicing *The Barber of Seville*, with his own 'Alfalfa' version. In order to get rid of him, more than anything, Barnaby, the opera impresario (Henry Brandon), gives him a contract for twenty years later—until which time Alfalfa is told to 'rest' his voice. Alfalfa returns to the theatre where Spanky's "follies" are still running, where Spanky continues to beg him to croon.

Alfalfa promptly falls asleep, in an apparent attempt to 'rest' his voice. Asleep, Alfalfa dreams of his glorious return to the opera, twenty years later, with his name flashing all over the city in neon lights. Alfalfa is told by the older Barnaby in the dream: "Let me have the contract, and I'll open the door of fame for you."

However, when Alfalfa begins singing, his audience (of fellow little Rascals) grows hostile towards him (understandably) and finally begins throwing vegetables at him. Barnaby throws Alfalfa out on the street, saying: "You an opera singer, bah. I've wasted twenty years waiting for you." Alfalfa is told to sing in the streets for money, exactly what Spanky predicted he would be doing earlier in the film (if he pursued opera).

The operatic impresario is the short movie's most obvious manifestation of what Frye described as the demonic world ("in ironic comedy ... the demonic world is never far away" (178). Alfalfa's nightmare about Barnaby the impresario presents Barnaby as a type of Dracula, with his wide cape, wicked laugh, and greedy look. Of course, this impresario is not reality; it is only a nightmare, although it is very much reality to Alfalfa. Barnaby, despite the fact that he probably has quite a few responsibilities as an impresario, promises that he will always be watching Alfalfa singing on the street. Actually, he is true to his promise, watching Alfalfa as he sings and suddenly appearing from behind walls (although most impresarios would not waste time on a failed singer by closely watching whether they are singing in the street) when he sees something he doesn't like. This certainly seems to be a supernatural, even demonic, ability (many of the impresario's statements in Alfalfa's dream are followed by demonic sounding laughter).

In Alfalfa's dream, as Porky and Alfalfa look wistfully at Club Spanky, while Alfalfa sings in the street, the demonic impresario appears and cries: "Say you. Never mind about Club Spanky. Get busy and sing." This fits Frye's example of the demonic world, "the rages of the *senex iratus* ["angry father"] in Roman Comedy ... directed at mainly the tricky slave" (178). Alfalfa has become enslaved to the impresario's contract—more generally to his foolish, childish, highly egotistical over-evaluation of his singing abilities which have led him to sign that contract. This is the point where the slave, as Frye says, "is threatened with the mill, with being flogged to death, with crucifixion" (178) etc. Although this doesn't literally happen to Alfalfa, he seems to feel as if something *like* this is happening to him.

After seeing an excellent show put together by Spanky at his club, full of swing dancing and lovely ditties which the impresario interrupts to drag Alfalfa away, Alfalfa finally awakens from his dream. He immediately tells Spanky: "Swing music's finally got me. I wanna' croon." The "Follies" end with Alfalfa crooning a song which includes the line: "Learn to croon, if you want to win your heart's desire."

Frye writes that, in the first phase "[w]e notice how frequently a comic dramatist tries to bring his action as close to a catastrophic overthrow of the hero as he can get it, and then reverses the action as quickly as possible" (178). Alfalfa, in his nightmare, has

finally agreed to croon for Spanky and is then immediately collared by the omnipresent impresario, who tells him: “You’re supposed to be out in the streets singing opera.” Saved from this nightmare as he awakes from it, Alfalfa averts the disaster he dreamed of in the nightmare by returning to crooning.

The Little Rascals are, of course, children, and so “the fear of death, sometimes a hideous death,” which Frye identifies in Comedy First Phase, is translated to a youthful equivalent: in Alfalfa's dream Porky and Alfalfa are left out in the snow, hungry. This, for Frye, is the ‘point of ritual death’ after which a “*cognitio* [*recognition*] takes place” (179). Porky and Alfalfa do not really come close to death, but, as children abandoned in the cold snow, they perhaps feel as if they have come close to death.

***Our Gang Follies of 1938* Comedy First Phase Analogue: Irony/Satire First Phase Irony/Satire First Phase Characteristics.**

1. No displacement (Frye defines this as “the adaptation of myth and metaphor to canons of morality or plausibility” (365)) in the story of myth of the humorous (capricious, whimsical, natural) society (226).
2. One feels very close to the demonic and nightmarish (226).
3. A world full of crime and injustice is ‘taken for granted’ (226).
4. For survival, one must observe more and say less (226).
5. The emphasis is on pragmatism (226).

Frye points out in this phase “the Omphale archetype” where the man is “bullied or dominated by women” (228). This is the original undisplaced (meaning in the original, pure form of myth without being changed to fit the modern society's expectations), which fits perfectly in *Our Gang Follies of 1938*. Alfalfa is “bullied or dominated by women,” whom he only seems to please when he croons. He seems to want to be appreciated not for his genre that absolutely anybody can sing in (as Alfalfa has shown with even his voice) but for his voice itself. The *Our Gang Follies of 1938* is really the story of how Alfalfa will be browbeaten back into doing what the girls want him to do and have to

forgo his own personal choices. “Learn to croon if you want to win your heart’s desire,” Alfalfa sings at the end of the short, as girls gather around him, entranced. Only a few minutes earlier they were booing him off the stage when he refused to croon.

The demonic or nightmarish in this phase (226), of course, is the impresario, who also seems to represent a world of crime and injustice that Spanky has taken “for granted” (226). When Alfalfa dreams of his opera contract, he sees bright lights everywhere heralding his opening opera debut. It is almost as if he is being promoted by the Mafia as the greatest opera singer ever, and yet the impresario hasn’t heard him sing in the last twenty years. Spanky, when he sees Alfalfa singing on the street, nods his head knowingly as if he knows exactly what had happened to Alfalfa, that he has been used and abused by the typically corrupt and incompetent opera business. Alfalfa has been led on to think he has a good voice when he really doesn’t.

Frye uses the word *alazon* to describe Irony/Satire First Phase, and he defines an *alazon* as a “deceiving or self-deceived character in fiction, normally an object of ridicule in Comedy” (Frye 365). Alfalfa is self-deceived, infatuated with his belief that his singing voice is very good when it is actually not. Alfalfa is obsessed with his perceived talent, regardless of how practical or appreciated his perceived talent is. Near the short’s end, despite the fact that he has been booed off the opera stage and thrown out of the opera house, Alfalfa refuses to croon, because, as he tells Spanky, he is “a slave to his art” of opera.

“Hence the satirist may employ a plain, commonsense, conventional person as a foil for the various *alazons* of society” (226). While Alfalfa is the *alazon*, the braggart, Spanky is the plain, commonsense, conventional person. Frye writes that “What is recommended is conventional life at its best: a clairvoyant knowledge of human nature in oneself and others” (226). In *Our Gang Follies of 1938*, Spanky represents the worldly wise and practical “conventional life at its best” (226). Although he does have visions of glory, they are rooted in the practical demands of audience. Spanky, much more conventional and practical than Alfalfa, is only interested in what the people like or want, irrespective of talent. Alfalfa doesn’t have much talent as a crooner, but when Spanky recognizes that the girls are in love with Alfalfa’s sentimentality, he encourages

Alfalfa to do what he is so popular doing (crooning), although Alfalfa is not a 'talented' crooner in the musical sense.

In Alfalfa's dream, we are shown that Spanky's concern for the audience's desires will lead him to be a big producer on Broadway, while Alfalfa, as a slave to his art, will be singing on the streets "with a tin cup in his hand." Spanky's life as a big-time producer is founded on an understanding of the conventional desires of his audience. Alfalfa's audience of young girls desires him to croon and not sing opera, so that is what Spanky gives them, although Alfalfa is perhaps not any better at crooning than at singing opera. Crooning is simply more popular with the ladies.

Spanky exhibits "a clairvoyant knowledge of human nature in oneself and others" (226). He understands what motivates Alfalfa, who wants to be recognized for his talent and not merely because his song fits a certain niche of young girls' desires. So Spanky exhibits "avoidance of all illusion and compulsive behavior" (226)—specifically Alfalfa's illusion and compulsive behavior. Further, Spanky relies on "observation and timing rather than on aggressiveness" (226). He doesn't force Alfalfa to sing. He only makes the observation that Alfalfa will find himself singing on the street with a tin cup which, when Alfalfa dreams that exactly that will happen, Spanky is able to capitalize on.

"And however good or bad expertly conventional behavior may be thought to be, it is certainly the most difficult of all forms of behavior to satirize, just as anyone with a new theory of behavior, even if saint or prophet, is the easiest of all people to ridicule as a crank" (226). Spanky's behavior is actually quite amusing. Although he is the gruff, energetic producer type, he opens up the 'follies' singing a ditty about love. Despite the strangeness of this, Spanky is able to get away with it, mostly because it is conventional for an impresario to wear several hats. However, Alfalfa's pretension to be an opera singer, although not much more funny than Spanky singing a love song, is completely ridiculed, because it is not conventional.

Frye writes that, in Irony/Satire First Phase, the "principle is that anyone who wishes to keep his balance in such a world must learn first of all to keep his eyes open and his mouth shut" (226). Of course, part of Alfalfa's problem is that he is less observant of his actual (insubstantial) musical talent, and talks more about what a great singer he is, which, of course, leads him to believe it.

“Where gaiety predominates in such satire, we have an attitude which fundamentally accepts social conventions but stresses tolerance and flexibility within their limits. Close to the conventional norm we find the lovable eccentric, the Uncle Toby or Betsey Trotwood who diversifies, without challenging, accepted codes of behavior” (Frye 227). This is Alfalfa exactly. Alfalfa is not the standard, suave heartthrob with a mellifluous voice, but because he is willing to sacrifice all self-respect to croon he attracts quite a few young teenage girls, because he is willing to (as he would see it in the first half of the short) demean himself. The crooning of love songs is the social convention, Alfalfa’s awkward voice and lard-sculpted hair are tolerated by the girls as long as Alfalfa is willing to croon in a socially accepted way.

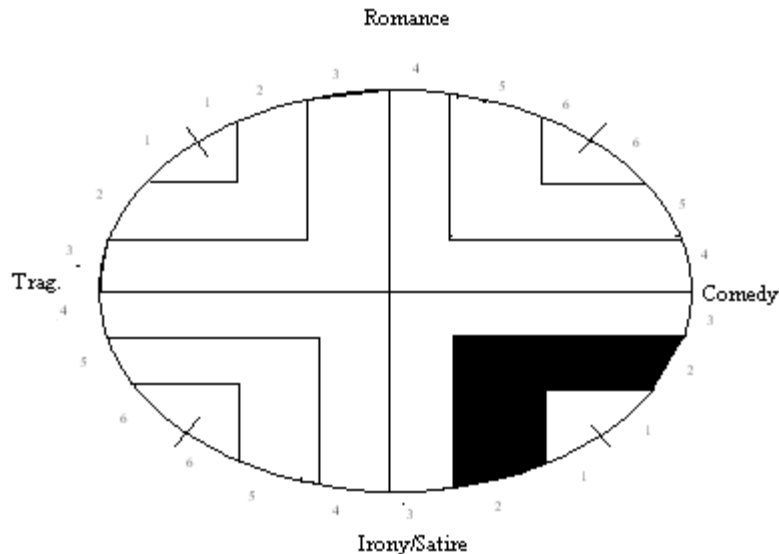


Figure 3: Comedy and Irony/Satire Second Phase

**City Lights (1931) Comedy Second Phase**

**Comedy Second Phase Characteristics.**

1. The comic hero “does not transform a humorous society but simply escapes or runs away from it, leaving its structure as it was before” or the society surrounding a hero is unable to affect him (180).
  2. The hero is usually a whimsical runaway.
  3. In lighthearted comedies, the comic ending sweeps “over all quixotic illusions” (180).
- All three characteristics of Comedy Second Phase fit *City Lights* perfectly. Frye

characterizes Comedy Second Phase as either “a Comedy in which the hero does not transform a humorous society but simply escapes or runs away from it, leaving its structure as it was before” (180) or “when a society is constructed by or around a hero, but proves not sufficiently real or strong to impose itself” (180). Both of these plot descriptions apply to Charlie Chaplin’s *City Lights*. The movie opens with a shot of various speakers apparently trying to take credit for a monument that is about to be dedicated. The inter-title reads: “To the people of this city, we donate this monument, peace and prosperity.” However, the actual speeches seem less concise and much less comprehensible. Their words are represented on the sound track (articulate, spoken dialogue had begun a little more than three years earlier with *The Jazz Singer*) as incoherent, screechy babbling (actually saxophones<sup>7</sup>). From the first few minutes, the movie’s society is portrayed as pompously humorous and, as Frye described Comedy Second Phase, superficial, “not sufficiently real” (180). These politicians and dignitaries are all fluffy, superficial pretension without anything real on the inside.

A cloth is dropped from the monument of three statues, revealing the Tramp (Charles Chaplin) slumbering on the lap of one of the statues to the audience’s uproarious delight. The exasperated dignitaries command the Tramp to leave the statues, but the Tramp only lazily dismounts. A police officer shouting vehemently at the Tramp suddenly has to stop as the Star Spangled Banner begins to play. The police officer salutes.

After the Star Spangled Banner ends, the dignitaries’ vociferations begin again. The Tramp places his nose against the thumb of a hand of a statue (the hand is in the ‘stop’ position), so that the Tramp appears to be thumbing his nose at the dignitaries. Then, lightheartedly, an unfazed Tramp leaves the statues, leaving behind the highly superficial society. This opening scene is a microcosm for the entire movie, in which the society surrounding the Tramp will be revealed as self-serving, neurotically humorous, and, ultimately, unable to affect the Tramp’s spirit.

In the next scene, the Tramp encounters a blind flower girl with whom he falls in love. The Tramp attempts to find money for the flower girl in jobs and his pursuit of a relationship with the manic-depressive Eccentric Millionaire (Harry Myers). The

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<sup>7</sup> The critic David Robinson believes this to be—not only a subtle jab at politicians—but “a sly dig at the sound quality of many early talkies” (75).

Tramp's relationship with the Millionaire is on and off again, after the Tramp saves the inebriated Millionaire from trying to commit suicide twice. The relationship between the Millionaire and the Tramp is good when the Millionaire is drunk, bad when the Millionaire is sober. In a sober, rather grouchy, state, the Millionaire doesn't even recognize the Tramp. As one of the inter-titles states about the Millionaire: "The sober dawn awakens a different man."

The Millionaire's first suicide attempt is another microcosm for the movie, because the Tramp is almost killed and then walks lightheartedly away. The Tramp first sees the Millionaire along a water walk tying a noose around his own neck. The Millionaire then ties the rope around a rock and picks up the rock to throw into the water.

Immediately, the Tramp tries to stop him. The Tramp says: "Tomorrow, the birds will sing. Be brave. Face life."

But the Millionaire eventually, after a few clumsy, hazy seconds, declares: "No, I'll end it all." After trying to throw the noose around himself (he has actually thrown the noose around the Tramp), the Millionaire throws the rock out to water, and the Tramp falls in the water. In trying to help the Tramp up, the Millionaire falls in himself. After both climb out of and fall into, and climb out of, the water again, finally, the Millionaire (arbitrarily) decides that he doesn't want to commit suicide anymore (at least at that moment), and the Tramp and the Millionaire walk off, as if nothing serious had happened. The Tramp tips his hat happily at a policeman and the Tramp and the Millionaire walk away best of friends. Once again, the Tramp escapes danger without his spirits being affected by it.

Another example of the Millionaire and the Tramp's escapades is an early morning drive home from a drunken night out. The Tramp seems to have sobered, but the Millionaire has not as he drives blissfully over sidewalks at intersections and towards oncoming cars. When the Tramp warns the Millionaire: "Be careful how you are driving," the stunned Millionaire looks at the Tramp with bleary eyes and asks: "Am I driving?" The Tramp then must work his way into the driver's seat and take the wheel to bring the two home relatively safely. Throughout the movie, the Tramp is trying to escape from the Millionaire's dangerous drunkenness and then the Millionaire's bad temper when he awakes from the drunkenness.

Eventually, the Tramp is able to convince the once again drunken Millionaire to pay for a blind flower girl's (Virginia Cherril) operation to help her see again. The Millionaire gives the Tramp a thousand dollars, but after the Millionaire is knocked out by a robber, and after the Tramp has gone for the police, the Millionaire sobers up. When the police find the thousand dollars on the Tramp, they ask the Millionaire if he had given the money to the Tramp. As usual for his sobered state, the Millionaire cannot recognize the Tramp at all, much less remember that he had given the Tramp a thousand dollars.

The Millionaire is essentially the "society constructed by or around a hero" which "proves not sufficiently real or strong to impose itself" (180) around the Tramp. Any friendship the Millionaire shows for the Tramp is gone the next time the Millionaire becomes sober. Further, Frye writes that "[i]n this situation the hero is usually himself at least partly a comic humor or mental runaway" (180), and this, of course, is exactly what a tramp can be defined as, especially because there is no stability in his relationship with the Millionaire.

The Tramp is imprisoned for having stolen from the Millionaire, although, of course, he didn't. The Tramp is led towards a jail as he smokes a cigarette. Just outside the door, he happily throws the cigarette behind him and kicks it away with his foot. Lighthearted movements with his legs are a typical Tramp gesture, showing that even in jail, he is shaking off his lack of freedom like it means nothing to him. There is nothing the society around the Tramp, despite its neuroses, can do to change his attitude. Even sending him to jail for wrong reasons won't really dampen his spirits. Gerald Mast writes: "He goes to jail, but he has succeeded in helping one human being" (109). *City Lights* ends with the Tramp--still poor and penniless--walking free in the city after being imprisoned for supposedly stealing from a sobered Millionaire, but the flower girl can see.

***City Lights* Comedy Second Phase Analogue: Irony/Satire Second Phase Irony/Satire Second Phase Characteristics.**

1. A successful "rogue ... makes conventional society look foolish without setting up any positive standard" (229).
2. The emphasis is on surviving in everyday life, as opposed to attempting to understand life philosophically (229).

3. Consequently, this phase does not set up a moral imperative (229).
4. Stereotypes and dogmas are shown to be inapplicable when set against real life (230).

All four aspects of the Irony/Satire Second Phase fit *City Lights*. Frye writes that “[t]he satiric counterpart” of Comedy Second Phase “is the picaresque novel, the story of the successful rogue who ... makes conventional society look foolish without setting up any positive standard” (229). The Tramp, although not exactly prosperous, is successful in the sense that he is finally able to secure money for the Blind Flower Girl’s operation. While focusing on this kind of success, there are numerous points in the movie where the Tramp makes conventional society look foolish. For instance, he awakens on the statues—just as they are being unveiled publicly—and fiddles brazenly around on them, making the assembled dignitaries look very foolish, since they don’t seem to have manpower bold enough to force him off the statue. The movie is full of other instances of the Tramp flouting authority, especially police officers, as when the Tramp avoids a police officer standing next to a car by opening a car door behind the police officer (who has his back turned) and then slipping out through the door on the other side, or when he slips away from the police officers as they are attending to the Millionaire. Police officers, although they are not necessarily “conventional society” (229), are trying to enforce a conventional, law-abiding society.

“Satire ... has an interest in anything men do. The philosopher, on the other hand, teaches a certain way or method of living; he stresses some things and despises others; ... he continually passes moral judgments on social behavior” (229). Frye contrasts satire with philosophy. A satirist is simply interested in anything humankind does, whereas the philosopher (for Frye) is interested in morally categorizing men’s actions. In this sense, the Tramp is a satirist and not a philosopher. The Tramp doesn’t scold a drunken (and suddenly friendly) Eccentric Millionaire for the same Millionaire’s rudeness early in the morning. He is only concerned with what he can get at that moment from the Millionaire before the Millionaire becomes sober again. As Frye writes: the attitude “of a satirist [is] pragmatic” (229), where the attitude of a philosopher is dogmatic. A philosopher would likely criticize the Eccentric Millionaire frequently for his sober churlishness, regardless of whether it hurt his relationship with the Millionaire (and any chance for money). However, the Tramp only criticizes the Millionaire when the Millionaire is about to

commit suicide (the Tramp saves his criticism for then, perhaps often because if the Millionaire commits suicide then the Tramp will no longer have anybody he can use to bum off money for the Flower Girl). The Tramp is not one to set up a positive standard. Indeed, instead of criticizing the Millionaire for his drunkenness, the Tramp becomes drunk with him, perhaps in order to smooth the way for more money.

Of course, the Tramp ought not to try to evade the police<sup>8</sup> with the money he has supposedly “stolen” from the Millionaire for the blind girl, and this also shows his pragmatism, as opposed to adherence to a moral code. “Insofar as the satirist has a ‘position’ of his own, it is the preference of practice to theory, experience to metaphysics” (230). The Tramp does not blindly follow society’s mores. In fact, he will disobey them gladly when doing so will give him certain things.

“Here an outsider to the society ... has no dogmatic views of his own, but he grants none of the premises which make the absurdities of society look logical to those accustomed to them” (232). The Tramp, who is the homeless outsider in a city where most of the people have a home, has difficulty with the societal conventions of those who not only have a home but have gigantic mansions bigger than many of the restaurants in which they eat.

This can be shown perfectly in the *City Lights* scene where the Eccentric Millionaire and the Tramp, both drunk, enter a restaurant. It is immediately clear that the Tramp is in an unfamiliar environment. Further, this environment contains many people sharing many premises which the Tramp doesn’t share—the exact same “premises which make the absurdities of society look logical to those accustomed to them” (232). A maid takes off the Tramp’s hat from behind him without his realizing it. When he feels for his hat and discovers it is not there, he sees a man next to him with a very similar black Bowler hat. Thinking the man has taken his hat from him, The Tramp taps the man on the shoulder and then begins to take off his own jacket, ready to fight. But he is quickly whisked away to his table. The incident is perhaps rooted partly in the fact that the Tramp has probably seldom experienced servants taking his hat from him in fancy

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<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, the Tramp first reads of the operation for the blind by reading the newspaper headline: “Doctor has cure for blindness.” What the Tramp apparently does not read in the headline just below it: “Free Operation for the Poor.” All the Tramp’s chicanery would have been unnecessary if he had only read a little further.

restaurants. He assumes that his hat being gone means it was stolen from him, because that is often the meaning of the disappearance of one's clothing items on the streets (which actually happens to the Tramp later in the movie). Admittedly, of course, the Tramp is also drunk, and not thinking clearly.

A few seconds later, while the Tramp and the Millionaire are sitting at the table, a couple enters and performs a violent 'Apache' dance in which the man pretends to beat the woman by pushing her down to the ground. It is, of course, a simple entertainment routine, and the audience, used to such things, applauds at the end. But the Tramp, perhaps because he has seen quite a bit of violence on the street, rises and begins to take off his jacket. The Tramp thinks that it is a real beating and that he must defend the girl.

This is because he does not share the premises of the society around him. They see a beating as a type of exciting entertainment, perhaps because they see it so rarely. The Tramp, living on the street, sees it as a fact of life and not entertainment at all. Indeed, perhaps it seems absurd to the Tramp that an audience could take pleasure in that entertainment, although that seems very logical to most people accustomed to it in society (who live in commonplace luxury with a need for excitement).

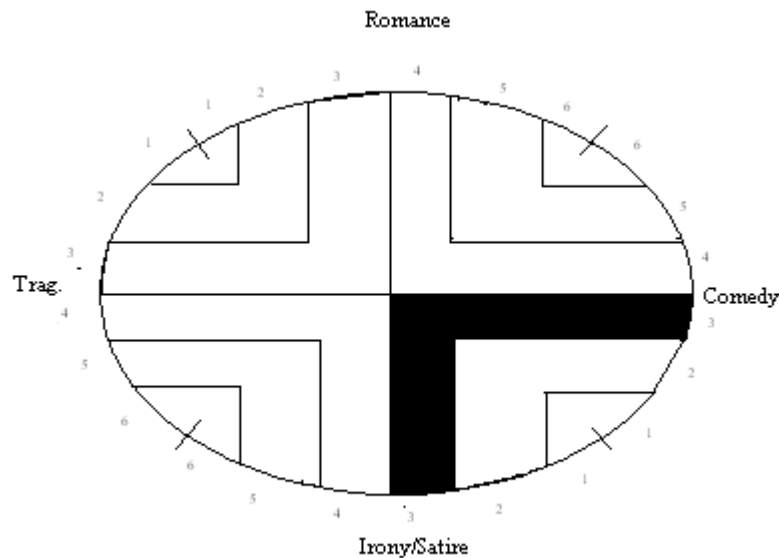


Figure 4: Comedy and Irony/Satire Third Phase

***It Happened One Night (1934) Comedy Third Phase***

**Comedy Third Phase Characteristics.**

1. A *senex iratus* “gives way to a young man’s desires” (180).

2. The father and son of the father are “frequently rivals for the same girl” (180).

*It Happened One Night* fits the main characteristic of Frye’s Comedy Third Phase, the battle between an angry old man and potential suitors for his daughter. Frye writes that in Comedy Third Phase there is, sometimes, the “doubling of the *senex* figure” (181). The *senex iratus* (which Frye defines as a “heavy father” (172)) in *It Happened One Night* is embodied in two characters.<sup>9</sup> The first *senex* is Mr. Andrews (Walter Connolly), the father of the heroine Ellie Andrews (Claudette Colbert). Indeed, according to Friz Freleng’s unpublished memoirs (Freleng was one of the most famous Looney Tunes directors), the character of Mr. Andrews was the inspiration for Yosemite Sam.<sup>10</sup> Mr. Andrews is a surly, controlling man, especially regarding his daughter. When told that she is on a hunger strike, he questions his informant loudly: “Well, why don’t you jam it down her throat?”

The second *senex iratus* is King Westley (Jameson Thomas), whom Ellie Andrews marries, mostly to spite her father. Westley marries Ellie Andrews for her money and will only annul his marriage to her if he is bought out handsomely. Both of these men, to one extent or the other, are obstacles to the marriage of the hero and heroine, Peter Warne and Ellie. As Richard Maltby argues in “*It Happened One Night: The Recreation of the Patriarch*,” “*It Happened One Night* describes, quite overtly, the containment of the heroine under patriarchy” (150).

Frye writes: “Ambivalence is apparently the main reason for the curious feature of doubled characters which runs all through the history of Comedy” (181). Ellie has found Mr. Andrews as a father too stifling, and she has married King Westley expressly because her father told her not to marry. So Ellie perhaps thinks King Westley (who is fairly licentious) will give her the freedom that her father does not, that Westley will be a

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<sup>9</sup> There is, further, a third possible *senex* at times. Richard Maltby in his “*It Happened One Night: The Recreation of the Patriarch*” argues that Warne becomes Ellie’s substitute father, because she has left her real one. “Peter assumes, and learns, the role of the authoritative father, to the point of hitting Ellie when she argues with him, repeating the action of her father that led her to run away at the outset” (Maltby 152). However, since Frye unambiguously differentiates between the *senex iratus* and his daughter’s suitor (“a *senex iratus* or other humor gives way to a young man’s desires” (180)), I argue there are only two angry fathers here, although Warne’s behavior shows that he wants to become Ellie’s protector and father figure.

<sup>10</sup> “Trivia for *It Happened One Night*.” *Internet Movie Database*. 1990. August 2002.  
<http://us.imdb.com/Trivia?0025316>

kinder father figure. Of course, she discovers that Westley is much more of a *senex iratus* than her father and worse, unlike her father, Westley cares very little for Ellie.

At the beginning of *It Happened One Night*, Mr. Andrews is trying to annul the marriage of King Westley and Ellie. Ellie, who has refused to eat in protest, eventually dives off and swims away from her father's yacht after Mr. Andrews slaps her. As she attempts to sneak into New York City to see King Westley, she happens to meet Peter Warne (Clark Gable), who has recently lost his job as a journalist (because he submitted one of his news stories in free verse). The two endure a long journey, during which Warne protects Ellie from numerous hazards, ostensibly because Warne can write about his experience with Ellie and, with such a hot story, perhaps get his job back.

However, Ellie eventually admits to Warne that she loves him. While they are only three hours from New York, an ecstatic Warne slips away from Ellie while she is sleeping. Since he has no money, he is hoping to sell his story at his old newspaper, so that he can have some money which he considers necessary to propose to Ellie, and then return before she awakes.<sup>11</sup>

Ellie is awakened during the night by the camp managers who have noted suspiciously that Warne has left. They boot Ellie out of the camp, and she thinks Warne has left her. Ellie then calls her father to pick her up, and the police escort passes Warne, who is driving in a much older, slower car back to the camp. Having stopped before a railroad junction, Warne then sees Ellie in the escort with her father and King Westley. Warne, thinking Ellie has left him, becomes depressed and returns his money to the newspaper.

Both Ellie and Mr. Andrews now think Warne was only a gold-digger. However, Mr. Andrews agrees to allow Warne to see him. In the interview (where Warne only tries to recoup \$34.60 he spent in protecting Ellie) Warne admits to Mr. Andrews that he loves Ellie. Andrews gradually begins to soften toward Warne and, eventually, later, even encourages Ellie to marry him ("He loves you. He told me so," Andrews tells Ellie). Mr. Andrews, who is impressed because Warne had not wanted the \$10,000 reward for Ellie,

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<sup>11</sup> Raymond Carney argues that Warne is the director Frank Capra's alter ego. Like Capra, Warne must, by the movie's end, attempt to market his skills. Warne can no longer write in "free verse" if he expects to be able to support a family. In the same way, Carney writes that Capra had to "convert his inarticulate dreams into the forms of coherent, systematic narrative, in order to make the dreams count at all. Free verse cannot pay the rent" (251).

arranges for a last-minute escape for Ellie when she decides she wants to be married to Warne instead of Westley. Westley receives a \$100,000 payment in return for agreeing to get lost. As Raymond Carney writes in *American Vision: The Films of Frank Capra*, Mr. Andrews sends “a sympathetic telegram to the two lovers waiting in their motel room in Michigan ... as if he were spiritually present with them and as if all three were finally united in one sympathetic family group” (255). Mr. Andrews is happy because he believes his daughter has married somebody who will love her, and the movie ends with Peter Warne and Ellie seemingly very happily married.

Frye writes: “The fact that the son and father are so often in conflict means that they are frequently rivals for the same girl” (180). This can be explained partly as the classic rivalry between the father of the bride—who up until her marriage has been her gallant knight and protector—and her groom for the remainder of her life, her husband. Mr. Andrews is essentially a jealous suitor of Ellie, who won’t let anybody except the perfect man even near her.

“The action of Comedy, like the action of the Christian Bible, moves from law to liberty (181). The law in this case is Ellie’s mistake of wanting to marry King Westley. She is consequently bound by law to that decision. This, of course, would be a big mistake for the rest of her life. The only way for liberty is back out of it, for which Mr. Andrews finally pays Westley \$100,000, a sum Mr. Andrews pronounces cheap.

“In the law there is an element of ritual bondage which is abolished, and an element of habit or convention which is fulfilled. The intolerable qualities of the *senex* represent the former and compromise with him the latter in the evolution of the comic *nomos*” (181). The *senex*, in this case, is Westley, who demands what he believes to be rightfully his, Ellie and his money. Compromise is when Mr. Andrews buys him off for \$100,000. Ellie has her freedom and King Westley still receives money from the Andrews family, which is all he was after in the first place.

Frye writes of the “occasional ‘naughtiness’ of Comedy” (180) specifically in the third phase, and there is no doubt that, for 1934, *It Happened One Night* was naughty. The movie includes a shot of Warne taking his shirt off without an undershirt (which

reportedly led to a huge decrease in undershirt sales),<sup>12</sup> an unmarried man and woman sleeping together in the same room (although in different beds) and other sexual innuendo. Most famous are the “walls of Jericho,” which Warne constructs for privacy as Warne and Ellie have to stay in the same auto-camp room, since they can’t afford two separate rooms. These walls are simply a blanket hanging on a carpet, and, of course, biblically, the walls of Jericho did not prove to be very stable at all.

The movie ends with the camera outside an auto camp room, where Warne and Ellie are staying. There is a trumpet blast, and then the movie ends. The “walls of Jericho,” apparently, have fallen, and that struck a 1934 audience as sexually naughty, which is an aspect of the film perhaps explaining the film’s unexpected success in 1934. Indeed, that scene was completely cut out by the Ohio state censor board (Maltby 136) and was one of the reasons the Legion of Decency considered the movie inappropriate for children and adolescents (Maltby 136-137).

***It Happened One Night Comedy Third Phase Analogue: Irony/Satire Third Phase Irony/Satire Third Phase Characteristics.***

1. Even common sense is seen as a dogma (234).
2. Constant shifts in perspective permeate this phase, so that characters are consistently seen from different angles, close-ups and long-shots, so to speak (234).
3. “[A] giant power rears up (236).

Frye writes: “For common sense too has certain implied dogmas, notably that the data of sense experience are reliable and consistent, and that our customary associations with things form a solid basis for interpreting the present and predicting the future” (234).

Frye writes that the satirist in this phase “often gives to ordinary life a logical and self-consistent shift of perspective” (234). This shift of perspective is found in Peter Warne. It is sometimes difficult to determine whether Warne is a hero or a villain. We first see

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<sup>12</sup> “Trivia for *It Happened One Night*.” *Internet Movie Database*. 1990. August 2002. <http://us.imdb.com/Trivia?0025316>

him drunk, pretending for an audience of fellow drunks behind him that he is lambasting his boss (who has fired him) on the phone when the boss has already hung up.

Common sense, after such churlish behavior, would seem to hint that Warne is not a good man, certainly not a good husband, for anybody. Warne seems (and is) very vicious, conniving, and intemperate, as well as selfish. Yet, we are meant to see him as a hero at the film's end, the perfect spouse for Ellie Andrews towards whom he has (unexpectedly) often been kind and considerate. Even ordinary common sense would have led one to think this is impossible. But at the end, we see Warne from a different perspective, as a good husband. Indeed, Frye writes that satire has a "final victory over common sense" (235).

But Warne is an example of the anti-hero so frequent in 1930s and 1940s screwball Comedy. Wes Gehring believed that Warne, as the anti-hero, showed "the full transition from a rural figure full of wisdom learned through experience to a frustrated urban misfit, more childlike than manly" (10). Gehring continues with five characteristics of the anti-hero "his abundant leisure time, his childlike naivete, his life in the city, his apolitical nature, and his frustration" (10). Such a character, as Gehring notes (10), is the rough opposite of the "crackerbarrel" hero (perhaps best exemplified by Longfellow Deeds (Gary Cooper) in *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* or Jefferson Smith (Jimmy Stewart) in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* with their home-spun, folksy style).

Lastly, Frye writes of a Titan, in Irony/Satire Third Phase, who "would have to bear down his opponent by sheer weight of words, and hence be a master of that technique of torrential abuse which we call invective" (236). "The most typical and obvious sign is the verbal tempest, the tremendous outpouring of words in catalogues, abusive epithets and erudite technicalities" (236). Frye gives, as an example, Goliath's challenge to the Israelites. The corresponding character to Goliath in *It Happened One Night* is Mr. Andrews, whose invectives against his daughter and the men in her life are often atrocious (among other similar remarks, he tells his daughter "You've always been a stubborn idiot"). Penniless Peter Warne, who isn't very compassionate in his remarks either, is metaphorically the David who matches wits with the rich Goliath and is ultimately able to triumph over Goliath by convincing Andrews that he is not a toady

gold-digger out for money (although, of course, there the analogy ends; the triumph is metaphorical; Warne does not kill Andrews).

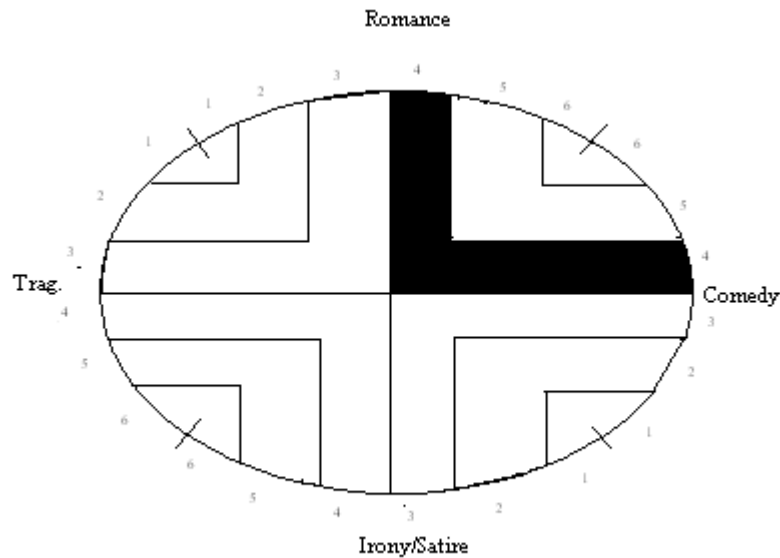


Figure 5: *Comedy and Romance Fourth Phase*

***Mr. Smith Goes to Washington (1939) Comedy Fourth Phase***

**Comedy Fourth Phase Characteristics.**

1. Two social planes, one of which is portrayed as better than the other (182).
2. “A Comedy originates in a “normal world,” enters into a “green world,” changes there, and then “returns to the normal world” (182).
3. The green world contains within it “the victory of summer over winter” (183).
4. The rebirth usually results from the feminine (183).
5. The dream world “collides with the stumbling and blinded follies of the world of experience” (183).

*Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* fits all of the aspects of Frye’s Comedy Fourth Phase perfectly. Jefferson Smith (Jimmy Stewart) finds himself in Washington as an appointed senator, replacing a Senator Samuel Foley who has died. Smith is very idealistic, the head of the state’s Boy Rangers, while Washington D.C. is corrupted by many men like Senator Joseph Paine (Claude Rains) who pander consistently to big money (in Paine’s

case, to filthy rich media mogul Jim Taylor (Edward Arnold)) and political interests in order to be re-elected. Smith is appointed mostly because he is thought to be naive and an easy yes man.

However, while in Washington, Smith wants to propose a bill to establish a boy's camp near Willet Creek. The problem is that, by chance, this is land Taylor owns (under phony names) and wants to profit from in a Senate bill Paine is pushing through to build a dam, with immense profits for Taylor and Paine among others. Smith—once his opposition to the Willet Creek Dam Project is known, and once it becomes clear that he won't be intimidated by Taylor's money and promise of future political success (if he becomes Taylor's yes man)—is framed as owning the land himself and wanting to profit from it. Such allegations are proven by perjured testimony. As Raymond Carney writes: "Smith inhabits a modern world in which .... 'Knowledge' does not exist insofar as it is processed, packaged, and merchandised. Facts and raw data have gone the way of pastoral swains" (302). Smith is convicted by the Committee of Privileges and Elections, and the committee votes for his expulsion from the Senate. Morris Dickstein notes that there are "fundamental narrative archetypes rooted deep in human consciousness. Capra's heroes must undergo a *rite de passage* of trial and frustration before they take their place in society" (34), and this is Smith's.

Disheartened, Smith is about to leave Washington when his secretary, Saunders (Jean Arthur), finds him beside the Lincoln Memorial as he laments the seemingly lost values it represents. Once cynical, she has become highly emboldened by his idealism, and she encourages him to fight against the Taylors and Paines of the world. After all, she says, "your friend Mr. Lincoln had his Taylors and Paines." Suddenly a believer again, Smith asks her where they can go for a drink to talk about their plans to fight the expulsion at the last moment.

Smith attempts a filibuster, in which he can take the floor and continue talking without yielding it in an attempt to buy time to rouse popular support to fight the Willet Creek Dam Project specifically. For roughly a day Smith holds the floor, while the Taylor media machine fights against Smith's Boy Rangers and their small newspaper *Boy's Stuff*. Finally, after roughly twenty-four hours of talking, Smith faints from exhaustion, at which point Paine has a crisis of conscience and rushes onto the Senate

floor, proclaiming that he, himself, along with Taylor, had framed Smith and that “every word that boy said was the truth.” So the movie ends with Smith triumphant, and in Comedy's fourth phase "we begin to move out of the world of experience into the ideal world of innocence and romance" (181-182). Smith's *ideals* are more important to him than any career success for himself, and that viewpoint triumphs.

The consistent contrast in the movie is between Smith's impractical idealism and Payne's corruption. Smith is the martyred senator who has been found guilty of corruption on false charges. Payne is his principal accuser whose supposedly impeccable reputation lends weight to these charges. In Frye, Comedy Fourth Phase is marked by presentation of the “action on two social planes, of which one is preferred and consequently in some measure idealized” (182). Smith is very much the preferred, idealized social plane, and the much larger and more corrupt Washington is the other. As James Palmer and Michael Riley write about the movie:

Capra gave us David and Goliath, and his Goliath was an unmistakable villain, a conspirator if you will, a political boss motivated by greed and lust for power. To a nation pessimistic and apprehensive as a result of both the long Depression and the ominous approach of the Second World War ... much of what engaged us was the clarity of the contest and the simple, even simplistic nature of both the conspiracy and the conspirators. (21)

Frye uses Aristophanes's *The Acharnians* as an example of this phase. *The Acharnians* follows a certain Dicaeopolis (an allegorical name meaning “righteous citizen” or “righteous city” in Greek) as he fights the jingoism resulting from economic greed, which has led to the lengthening of the Peloponnesian War. The other Acharnians are upset because their vineyards have been ravaged by the Spartans as a result of war, and they wish the war to continue interminably to sate their desire for revenge. Dicaeopolis makes his own separate peace treaty for his individual house, and his resulting prosperity is contrasted with the suffering of the others at war. In the *Acharnians*, also, Dicaeopolis has to save himself with a long speech, for which he goes to Euripides for assistance in presenting (Euripides loans him many dramatic accoutrements), perhaps much like Jefferson Smith relies on Saunders' procedural legislative knowledge to succeed in his filibuster attempt. The common Athenians are

convinced by the sincerity of Dicaeopolis's speech, much like the Senate press corps is impressed by the sincerity of Smith's speech. The *Acharnians* ends, like *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, with the triumph of the honest speaker.

"In the rituals and myths the earth that produces the rebirth is generally a female figure" (183). Smith's female figure who leads to his rebirth is Saunders. He has been convicted (with forged documents) of corruption, and he has decided to give up without fighting the charges, disgusted with the Washington political process. Clarissa Saunders (Jean Arthur) convinces him to fight the charges, and inspires him to attempt the filibuster which will save him. Further, without her procedural knowledge, the filibuster would probably have been impossible.

### ***Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* Comedy Fourth Phase Analogue: Romance Fourth Phase**

#### **Romance Fourth Phase Characteristics.**

1. A "happier society is more or less visible throughout the action" (200).
2. The emphasis is on "maintaining of the integrity of the innocent world against the assault of experience" (201). By innocence is meant "the temperate mind [which] contains its good within itself, continence being its prerequisite" (201). By experience, Frye means intemperance, which "seeks its good in the external object of the world of experience" (201).
3. An important image is "the beleaguered castle," (201) apparently representing innocence, assaulted by experience.

All three Romance Fourth Phase characteristics fit *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* very well. In Romance Fourth Phase "the central theme ... is that of the maintaining of the integrity of the innocent world against the assault of experience" (201). As Palmer and Riley write, *Mr. Smith* and movies like it 'affirm our conviction about the importance and power of the individual and our belief in a political process that functions in a democratic society" (26). Jefferson Smith, perhaps because he was appointed to his post

more or less by luck and not corruption, finds it easier to refuse Taylor's promise of future political seats, because his goal is not power for himself but to do the most good for his Boy Rangers.

Frye's example for Romance Fourth Phase is the second book of *The Faerie Queen*, where, as Frye describes it, there is a battle between "Guyon, the knight of temperance" and Acrasia, "the mistress of the Bower of Bliss, and Mammon" (201) (Mammon essentially being worldly possessions). Smith is the knight of temperance, in his restraint from corruption. Paine is Acrasia, in that he is focused on the contentment (bliss) which comes through money (which sometimes is only possible through corruption). Paine says: "This is a man's world. It's a brutal world Jeff, and you've no place in it," by which he means that Jeff has too many ideals. Payne believes somebody who refuses to be corrupted will, practically, be unable to accomplish anything. Payne says: "I compromised—yes. So that all those years, I could sit in that Senate and serve the people in a thousand honest ways."

Frye describes the "difficult theme of consolidating heroic innocence in this world after the first great quest has been completed" (201). Smith's first quest is his bill for a boy's camp. In *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, Smith's bill for a boy's camp is practically defeated when he is accused of secretly owning the same land that he asked the Senate to buy for his boys camp. The boys camp is Smith's "first great quest." Dejected, knowing that he has been framed and thinking there is nothing he can do about it, he heads off to the Lincoln Memorial—"the beleaguered castle" (201) representing innocence which is being attacked by the growing corruption of Washington—one last time.

As mentioned briefly before, Saunders finds Smith there, weeping over the seemingly lost ideals the Lincoln Memorial represents. Smith finally agrees to fight the trumped-up charges against him, after Saunders points out to him that "your friend Mr. Lincoln had his Taylors and Paines. So did every other man whoever tried to lift his thought up off the ground. Odds against 'em didn't stop those men. They were fools that way. All the good that ever came into this world came from fools with faith like that."

Frye writes that "an ironic parody of the same theme forms the basis of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*" (202). This is exactly Jefferson Smith. Like *Lysistrata*, who

convinces the hitherto unobtrusive women to withhold sex from their husbands until those husbands agree to a truce in the Peloponnesian War, Smith is willing to challenge the status quo, because his love for his “children” (the Boy Rangers), like Lysistrata’s love for her children and her desire for peace for them, is what eventually convinces him to fight the inertia of a corrupt, self-interested, self-perpetuating government machine.

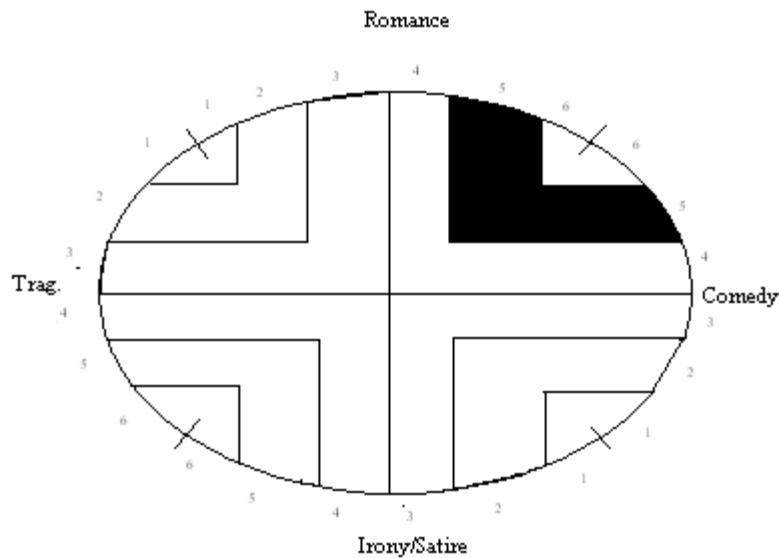


Figure 6: *Comedy and Romance Fifth Phase*  
***Gilligan’s Island* (1964) Comedy Fifth Phase**

**Comedy Fifth Phase Characteristics.**

1. A sad tinge. “[T]he comic ending is less a matter of the way the plot turns out than the perspective of the audience” (184).
2. Contains tragedy (184).
3. The audience views “the action ... from the point of view of a higher and better ordered world” (184).
4. “[T]he usual symbol for the lower or chaotic world is the sea, from which the cast, or an important part of it, is saved” (184).

For Comedy Fifth Phase, Frye writes that “the usual symbol for the lower or chaotic world is the sea, from which the cast, or an important part of it, is saved” (184). An excellent example of all four characteristics of Comedy Fifth Phase would be *Gilligan’s Island*, which is about a group of tourists on a “three hour tour” who run into a storm

which beaches them on a deserted island. “In the fifth phase of Comedy ... we move into a world that is still more romantic, less Utopian, and more Arcadian” (184). The island, of course, is certainly not Utopian in that it has fairly limited resources. It is, however, Arcadian in that it offers a fairly simple, quiet life without any major disturbances ... except for Gilligan (Bob Denver). And despite the hilarity of the situation Comedy, the existence of those stranded does “seem less festive and more pensive” (184), as Frye describes it, because, no matter how much Gilligan makes us laugh, we know he is still stranded on the island.

Frye writes that, in this phase, “the comic ending is less a matter of the way the plot turns out than the perspective of the audience” (184). It is not a very comic thing for people to be stranded on a desert island, but along with the ‘laugh track’ and the clutzy, impulsive behavior of Gilligan, we are taught to laugh at a potentially tragic situation. Essentially, we feel like we can laugh at *Gilligan’s Island*, because the most severe tragedy has been averted. There was a serious storm, where anybody in the storm on the ocean could have been killed, but nobody was killed.

So the tragedy of people stranded on the jungle island doesn’t seem so tragic. In fact, perhaps the tourists are more appreciative of life than they were before the storm. The action moves “from a lower world of confusion to an upper world of order” (184). The lower world of confusion is the sea from which the castaways have been saved. In comparison to that, their life on the island is, as Frye describes this phase, “more romantic” in the Robinson Crusoe *idyllic* sense.

“In this phase the reader or audience feels raised above the action” (184). Indeed, *Gilligan’s Island* was originally viewed, and still is viewed, from the comfort of living rooms, and the audience is able to laugh, largely because being stranded on a deserted island for a long period of time is highly unlikely to happen to them, and so *Gilligan’s Island* is not very threatening. “We see the action, in short, from the point of view of a higher and better ordered world” (184). As Frye writes, there is “not simply ... a cyclical movement from tragedy and absence to happiness and return, but of bodily metamorphosis and a transformation from one kind of life to another” (184). The castaways have essentially lost a highly technological life for a life where they will be exposed to the brunt of nature with its frequent storms.

Gilligan and the Skipper (Alan Hale Jr.) have constructed a rather insubstantial raft in which to set sail and search for help. However, after sharks bite away part of the raft and a storm sinks it, Gilligan and the Skipper find themselves back on the same island, although they don't know it is the same island. At this point, being separated from the other castaways, they think the sounds produced by the other castaways are actually the sounds of the Marubi, a group of head-hunting cannibals the Professor (Russell Johnson) has told them about. Gilligan and the Skipper have started a fire for warmth, and the other castaways think it is a fire begun by the Marubi. The Professor and the other castaways then test their means of communication (in case they are separated) by blowing (rather stupidly) conch shells all in unison. Gilligan and the Skipper think this is a Marubi war cry. As Sherwood Schwartz, the creator of *Gilligan's Island*, writes about the "Two on a Raft" plotline: "Personally, I've always been fascinated by the problems of human communication. Misunderstandings between people, as well as misunderstandings between nations, may turn innocent remarks into insults, and gestures of friendship may be interpreted as acts of war" (194).

Frye writes that the *cognitio*, that is, the moment of realization, introduces "us to a world of childlike innocence which has always made more sense than reality" (184). The *cognitio* in the first episode of *Gilligan's Island*, called "Two on a Raft," involves Gilligan making his normal clutzy mistake which, in this case, actually leads to the reconciliation of the castaways, who have been split apart into two groups. The Professor sets a "trap" for the 'Marubi' outside of a cave by attaching a rope to a bunch of rocks. The rope, when tripped, would supposedly lead to an avalanche of rocks trapping the Marubi in the cave. Through the last part of this first episode, all of the castaways become aware of the rope, as they all run in and out of the cave, thinking the other group of castaways is the Marubi.

However, Gilligan, reminded to not trip the rope, actually does trip it a few seconds later. Gilligan's clumsiness is actually what brings the group together again, at least for a while, because, all trapped in the cave, they must be stationary for long enough to realize that they are simply trying to escape from other castaways, not Marubi. The movie ends with Gilligan, dressed as a Marubi, scaring away the rest of the castaways who are now a

group that he will soon rejoin (the Comedy hero, of a sort, who brings the society together and is later integrated into it).

Frye writes: “The materials of the *cognitio* of *Pericles* or *The Winter’s Tale* ... seem both far-fetched and inevitably right, outraging reality and at the same time introducing us to a world of childlike innocence which has always made more sense than reality” (184). This is exactly Gilligan. His childlike behavior and naïve, clumsy mistakes seem so frequent as to be almost unrealistic. Yet, of course, Gilligan’s clumsiness, which so often keeps the castaways stranded on Gilligan’s Island, makes the show interesting and funny. Essentially, Gilligan’s world is one that we want to make more sense than reality.

#### ***Gilligan’s Island* Comedy Fifth Phase Analogue: Romance Fifth Phase Romance Fifth Phase Characteristics.**

1. Emphasis on the natural cycle being viewed from above (202).
2. “[T]he mood is a contemplative withdrawal from or sequel to action rather than a youthful preparation for it” (202).
3. Erotic experience is “comprehended and not ... a mystery” (202).
4. The true lovers are at the top of the scale, and the scale moves down towards greater and greater lust and perversion (202).

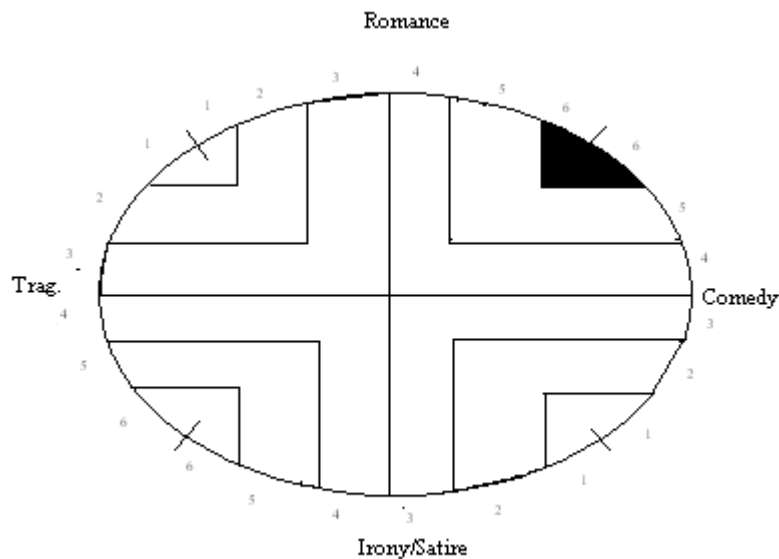
The fifth phase is “a reflective, idyllic view of experience from above, in which the movement of the natural cycle has usually a prominent place” (202). One of the most fascinating aspects of *Gilligan’s Island* is the way the characters consistently find themselves close to death in the first episode “Two on a Raft,” but yet the audience somehow knows instinctively that they won’t die. Perhaps this is because it is the first episode of a Comedy or because of the laugh track, or because Gilligan’s clutzy behavior seems so incongruous with death, or because of the frequently light and silly music (which seems humorously inappropriate in the shark attack scene, for instance). But, for whatever reason, when Gilligan and the Skipper’s raft is being eaten away by sharks or when a storm sinks their raft, or when Gilligan submerges completely under the water

with the anchor he has forgotten to release as the raft begins to set sail, we don't feel like anybody is about to die.

Frye writes that the fifth phase “deals with a world very similar to that of the second phase, except that the mood is a contemplative withdrawal from or sequel to action rather than a youthful preparation for it” (202). Even the other castaways, as they watch the air bubbles of a submerged Gilligan (holding onto the anchor) for quite some time as the raft begins to set sail, do not try to jump in to save Gilligan. They are concerned (“I do believe Gilligan's gone underwater” Mrs. Howell (Natalie Schaefer) says), but it is almost as if all the characters *know* they are characters on the sitcom *Gilligan's Island*, a show on which characters are highly unlikely to die, even if they tried. So *Gilligan's Island* allows for some reflection, because although the characters are in life and death situations, since they aren't about to die, we are not so emotionally or empathetically involved, and we can think reflectively about their experience.

Frye writes that this phase is, “like the second phase, an erotic world, but it presents experience as comprehended and not a mystery” (202). Although *Gilligan's Island* has very little eroticism in it, the one exception is Ginger (Tina Louise), the nightclub singer who has boarded the *Minnow*, as the radio report announcing the *Minnow's* disappearance mentions, in the same dress in which she sang that night. Ginger plays the role of the sexually experienced woman, although, of course, this is not explicitly mentioned, at least in “Two on a Raft.” Sherwood Schwartz wrote that Tina Louise “was definitely in the Monroe mold” (63). Further, quite a few have commented that Ginger is a sexually experienced Marilyn Monroe type (Tina Louise even said, according to Schwartz: “I want to be more like Marilyn Monroe” (141)).

As Gilligan and the Skipper are both about to set out on their raft, Mary Ann (Dawn Wells) and Ginger have tropical fruit necklaces for them. The Skipper especially is grateful and speaks in Hawaiian a phrase which he translates into the English “until we meet again”—an obviously romantic reference. Ginger also responds with a phrase she states she had learned in a Hawaiian nightclub. When asked its meaning, she replies “This bar is off limits to all military personnel.” Ginger is portrayed as the experienced sexual object in the way she dresses provocatively (even on a small tourist cruise boat) in the way she knows how to handle all men, whether they are wild or drunk, like the Hawaii servicemen, or relatively tame, like the Skipper and Gilligan. Regardless of whether she is sexually experienced (at the very least, Ginger is the type who seems to enjoy sexual innuendo), she certainly has quite a bit of experience with the sexual advances of men.



*Figure 7: Comedy and Romance Sixth Phase*

**Network (1976) Comedy Sixth Phase**

**Comedy Sixth Phase Characteristics.**

1. Social units disintegrate into one isolated individual (185).
2. There is the “sense of individual detachment from routine existence,” “secret and sheltered places, forests in moonlight, secluded valleys” (185).
3. Sometimes it is closely connected "psychologically with a return to the womb" (186).

*Network* is the story of a television news anchor, Howard Beale (Peter Finch), whose wife's recent death has led him to drink heavily and to, as a result, lower ratings. Five years after his wife's death, Beale is fired by the news boss, Max Schumacher (William Holden). Upon announcing his leaving the network, Beale promptly states that he will commit suicide in one week's time on the air. "That should give the public relations people a week to promote the show. We ought to get a hell of a rating out of that - a fifty share, easy."

Beale does not commit suicide, and the show continues with his psychotic statements, for which he is heavily criticized by the media. But then Diana Christensen, an up-and-coming management star at UBS, begins to point out the tremendous ratings Howard Beale's rants could generate, despite the fact that they couldn't, properly, be called news. So Beale is given his own show and becomes the "mad prophet of the air waves" with a "42 share."

Beale temporarily runs afoul of the president and chairman of the network company, Arthur Jensen (Ned Beatty), by criticizing one of Jensen's business deals involving the network. Summoned to Jensen's office, Beale is converted to Jensen's "corporate" philosophy. Returning to his news show, Beale begins 'preaching' what Jensen has taught him about the death of democracy and the rise of corporate America.

However, as the unidentified narrative voice says: "Nobody particularly cared to hear his life was utterly valueless." Beale's ratings drop, which causes Christensen and others like her (namely another vice-president, Frank Hackett (Robert Duvall)) lots of angst and lost money for the network. However, neither Hackett nor Christensen can fire Beale, because Jensen now likes Beale's show. Hackett says mournfully: "Arthur Jensen has taken a strong personal interest in the Howard Beale show" because of his "very important message to the American people."

With no other options, the network management decides to kill Howard Beale. They kill him live on the air. Just after Beale is shot dead, the camera crane is raised over him, for a better shot of him as he lies dead. After other news reporters report the incident, the narrator ends the movie with: "This was the story of Howard Beale, the first known instance of a man who was killed because he had lousy ratings."

This movie applies well to Frye's sixth phase of Comedy. Frye writes that this is the "phase of the collapse and disintegration of comic society" (185). There is no doubt that *Network* is about the collapse—indeed, mental breakdown—of Howard Beale. Beale raves about everything to get better ratings. Indeed, Frank R. Cunningham summarizes *Network* aptly when he writes that it uses "television as a metaphor for the growth of a megacorporate state that progressively dehumanizes and makes passive the individual" (222). Beale's promise to commit suicide was only the beginning. At least partly, television society has driven him to this madness. The television brass evaluate programs based on the size of the audience they attract. Even if a program is complete drivel and nonsense, if it attracts a large audience it is considered high quality by "network administration." This is what has created Howard Beale. His disintegration is encouraged (by Christensen, for instance) partly because it brings high ratings on national television. His psychological well-being is ignored.

As Frye points out, "the social units of Comedy" in this phase "become small and esoteric, or even confined to a single individual" (185). The society of the television industry has become a very individual one. Everybody sticks to themselves, because in a world where popularity is the key to success, it becomes very messy to establish alliances that might have to be severed a few weeks later due to poor ratings. Even "love" is something people use to get what they want, and only temporarily.

A perfect example is Diana Christenson. She is solely focused on her own career performance and doesn't know how to interact with others when career isn't involved. She tells Max Schumacher, the head of the UBS news program, on their first date: "All I want out of life is a 30 share and a 20 rating." Anything else is unimportant. Later, she tells Schumacher, when she is breaking up with him, that she "doesn't know how to love" somebody else besides those things.

Christenson is also a perfect example of "the sense of individual detachment from routine existence" (185). Her only world is television, which divorces her from everyday life. She's so focused on just her job that she doesn't know how to love someone. Indeed, Christensen embraces the non-routine, the strange, the devilishly original, because she knows it will lead to higher ratings.

Interestingly, in this phase Frye discusses the love "of the occult and the marvelous," (185), and Howard Beale's news hour (after it is revised for better ratings), actually has an occult specialist in it—Sybil the Soothsayer—as well as, of course, the emphasis on the marvelous and strange in the world (as opposed to what is newsworthy). And this is what the television executives want: not necessarily the informative but only the marvelous. It doesn't matter if people hear the truth or not. It only matters that they hear something interesting.

### ***Network Comedy Sixth Phase Analogue: Romance Sixth Phase***

#### **Romance Sixth Phase Characteristics.**

1. There is a movement from "active to contemplative adventure" (202).
2. "A characteristic feature of this phase is the tale in quotation marks, where we have an opening setting with a small group of congenial people, and then the real story is told by one of its members" (202).
3. "The history is conceived not only as a progression but as a cycle of which the audience is the end, and, as the last page indicates, the beginning as well" (203).
4. There is a "cosmic disaster destroying the whole fictional society except a small group, which begins life anew in some sheltered spot" (203).

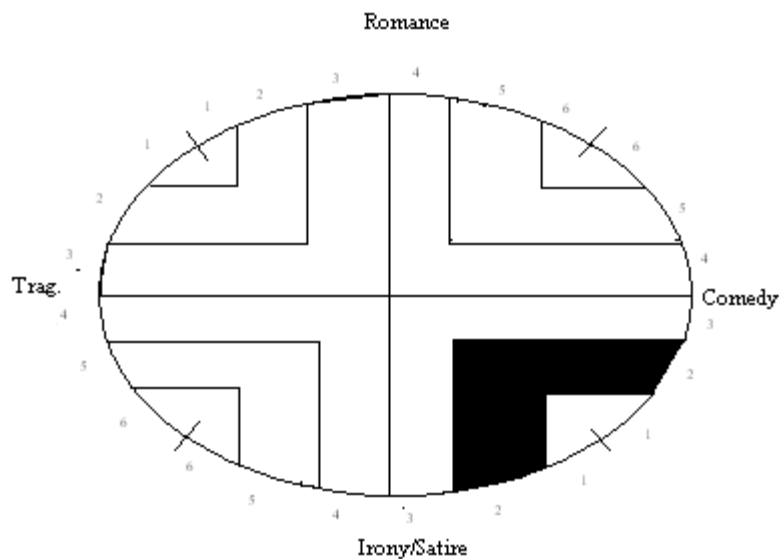
In the analogous sixth phase of romance we see "the comic society breaking up into small units or individuals" (202). Certainly, this is the case in *Network*. "A central image of this phase, a favorite of Yeats, is that of the old man in the tower, the lonely hermit absorbed in occult or magical studies" (202). This is an excellent description of Howard Beale, all alone, drinking booze even while he's working, lonely (his wife having died), working with a medium in his network news hour.

"... [T]he themes of the lonely old men, the intimate group, and the reported tale are linked" (203). Frye later gives the example of the *Decameron*. Max Schumacher and Howard Beale are the "lonely old men." Beale's wife has died, and Schumacher is no longer faithful to his wife, simply because she no longer excites him sexually.

Schumacher and Beale tell stories about their ‘glory days’ in addition to their old jokes (but even Schumacher, for instance, admits: “nobody wants a dumb ... book about the great years of television”).

Further, in *Network*, the unknown narrator frequently interjects his matter-of-fact commentary, as if to help us believe we really saw what just took place on the screen and that we didn’t imagine it. This narrator makes *Network* the “reported tale” (203) that Frye identifies as a characteristic of Romance Sixth Phase. The narration is spoken in an objective, matter-of-fact voice, but the narrator does interpret the story for us by the statements in the narration (i.e. “this was the story of Howard Beale, the first known instance of a man who was killed because he had lousy ratings”). This last statement, of course, is actually criticism of Christensen and Hackett’s actions. The narrator is perhaps there to show us that Christensen and Hackett’s actions are not endorsed in the case, in the media’s profit-driven world, we are tempted to believe the movie is portraying Christensen and Hackett as heroes.

**Other Movies Examined and Categorized According to Frye's Phases**



*Figure 8: Comedy and Romance Second Phase  
Annie Hall (1977) Comedy Second Phase*

### **Comedy Second Phase Characteristics.**

1. The comic hero “does not transform a humorous society but simply escapes or runs away from it, leaving its structure as it was before” or the society surrounding a hero is unable to affect him (180).
2. The hero is usually a whimsical runaway.
3. In lighthearted comedies, the comic ending sweeps “over all quixotic illusions” (180).

*Annie Hall* is based on Woody Allen’s real life early 1970’s romance with Diane Keaton (born Diane Hall) who plays Annie Hall (Allen and Keaton, by 1977, had broken up). According to Frye, Comedy Second Phase is “a comedy in which the hero does not transform a humorous society but simply escapes or runs away from it, leaving its structure as it was before” (180). In *Annie Hall*, Woodie Allen stars as an aging Alvy Singer, who has fallen in love and then broken up with Annie Hall. Much of the movie is about this break-up and, further, the humorous (whimsical) society surrounding Alvie and Annie. This society seems to be an explanation for Alvy’s neuroses. For instance, among other things, Alvy’s family grew up in a house directly underneath a roller-coaster, which Alvy believes might partially explain his neurotic behavior.

In one scene, Alvy is about to ride with his friend Rob (Tony Roberts) in Rob’s car, and Rob dons what seems to be the headpiece of a spacesuit. When Alvy asks him why, Rob replies: “Keeps out the alpha rays, Max [Rob throughout the movie addresses Alvy as Max, although the movie never tells us why<sup>13</sup>]. You don’t get old.” Even with this scene, Rob is not the most eccentric character in a movie filled with habitual drug users, women who habitually smoke marijuana just before having sex (Annie), cocaine fiends, and other assorted eccentric characters. Undoubtedly, this eccentric, highly honest, society surrounding Alvy is very humorous (in the whimsical sense).

There is also a sense in which, in *Annie Hall*, a “society ... constructed by or around a hero ... proves not sufficiently real or strong to impose itself” (180). Alvy is dealing with the classic problem of a life which is sometimes irritating and which, even more often, doesn’t give him what he wants. So, in much of *Annie Hall*, he tries to create for himself the perfect life. For instance, while Annie and Alvy are waiting in line at *The New*

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<sup>13</sup>Peter Cowie tells us "Allen idolised Max Shulman, the writer, when he was young and toyed with adopting Max as his first name" (25-26).

*Yorker* theatre, a highly pretentious academic behind them is making fatuous, trivial remarks about, among other things, Marshall McLuhan. Alvy is becoming increasingly irritated with each remark. Finally, Alvy speaks directly to the camera: “What do you do when you get stuck in a movie line with a guy like this behind you? It's just maddening.” However, Alvy has a solution for the problem. Suddenly, he brings out the real-life Marshall McLuhan, who tells the pretentious academic: “You, you know nothing of my work .... How you ever got to teach a course in anything is totally amazing.”

Of course, this is not a believable event from real life. The Marshall McLuhan cameo is only something that can happen on a film in which Woody Allen has the clout to invite McLuhan for a cameo. In real life, Alvy would simply have to listen to the academic's pretentious statements, without the definitive response of the actual critic. Allen is using the movie as a way for him to live the ideal life temporarily as he can't live it in real life.

As Timothy Dirks (p. 5 par. 27) points out, there is a connection between this McLuhan scene and another scene later in the movie, where Alvy is watching a rehearsal of his own play about his experience with Annie, which includes the same exact lines spoken in the movie when Alvie and Annie break up. However, in the play, they are later reunited. Alvy then turns directly to the camera and says: “You know how you're always trying to get things to come out perfect in art because, uh, it's real difficult in life.” The play, then, is a way for Woody Allen (through Alvy) to self-consciously create a better society than actually exists in reality.

Indeed, the whole movie is that way. It is a way for Alvy to explain why his relationship with Annie didn't work and to repair imaginatively what didn't work practically. It is a “society constructed by or around a hero” but it “proves not sufficiently real or strong to impose itself” (Frye 180). At the movie's end, despite Alvy's attempt to use the movie to work through his relationship with Annie, to listen to all the random advice he gets from the people on the street (which is obviously his own advice being tossed around in his head), Annie and Alvy are still not together.

So in one of many scenes where Alvy is thinking about his relationship problems with Annie, he is immediately approached by a random old lady, who tells him to learn to deal with reality. Of course, this character—whom Alvy doesn't seem to have met before, and who seems to know what he is thinking without even having heard of Alvy and

Annie's story—must simply be a figment of Alvy's mind, a way for him to work through his relationship with Annie in the movie.

Then, confronted by this sudden advice, Alvy suddenly decides to begin asking others on the street for advice. Alvy asks an old man: "With your wife in bed, does she need some kind of artificial stimulation, like, like marijuana?"

The reply: "We use a large, vibrating egg."

Seemingly needing more advice, Alvy approaches a random couple: "You look like a very happy couple .... How do you account for it?"

The woman replies: "I'm very shallow and empty and I have no ideas and nothing interesting to say."

The man's response: "And I'm exactly the same way." Of course, all of these characters are only in Alvy's mind. They are only part of Alvy's thought process, a way for him to struggle with his difficult break-up.

The movie ends with this last statement by Alvy: "This guy goes to a psychiatrist and says, 'Doc, uh, my brother's crazy. He thinks he's a chicken.' And uh, the doctor says, 'Well why don't you turn him in?' And the guy says, 'I would, but I need the eggs.' Well, I guess that's pretty much now how I feel about relationships. You know, they're totally irrational and crazy and absurd and, but uh, I guess we keep going through it ... because ... most of us need the eggs." At the movie's end, Alvy recognizes that his movie is not the only society which he has constructed to deal with his breakup with Annie. For Alvy, romances themselves are constructed to fill a basic need (although they don't have much substance to them) because we need their psychological benefits of companionship.

***Annie Hall* Comedy Second Phase Analogue: Irony/Satire Second Phase  
Irony/Satire Second Phase Characteristics.**

1. A successful "rogue ... makes conventional society look foolish without setting up any positive standard" (229).

2. The emphasis is on surviving in everyday life, as opposed to attempting to understand life philosophically (229).
3. Consequently, this phase does not set up a moral imperative (229).
4. Stereotypes and dogmas are shown to be inapplicable when set against real life (230).

Frye writes: “The central theme in the second or quixotic phase of satire, then, is the setting of ideas and generalizations and theories and dogmas over against the life they are supposed to explain” (230). Alvy has gone through life trying to find an ideal spouse, based on his “ideas and generalizations and theories and dogmas” about what an ideal spouse would be. At the movie’s end, he replaces all these theories with the realization that all relationships are ultimately “totally irrational and crazy and absurd.”

But even that statement, of course, is a theory and dogma just like his previous theories and dogmas about women. As Frye admits in describing this phase: “Skepticism itself may be or become a dogmatic attitude” (230), and perhaps even this theory and dogma will not prove true, but it is Alvy’s theory based on experience, not upon an abstract theory about women. “Insofar as the satirist has a ‘position’ of his own, it is the preference of practice to theory, experience to metaphysics” (Frye 230). Alvy comes to the conclusion that relationships are “totally irrational and crazy and absurd,” because that is what he has experienced, even though there could be theories which explain away even his experiences.

Frye further writes of the characters in *Irony/Satire Second Phase*: “[T]hey had the *ieron*’s distrust of the ability of anyone’s reason, including their own, to transform society into a better structure” (232). Woody Allen (in his monologue before we are introduced to his fictional self Alvy Singer) quotes Groucho Marx: “I would never want to belong to any club that would have someone like me for a member.” Alvy would never want to be considered a member of anything, because that would mean he’d have to probably subscribe to a fixed viewpoint of life. Alvy distrusts anybody’s ability “to transform society into a better structure” (Frye 232).

One of *Annie Hall*’s most interesting characteristics is that Allen is actually criticizing his own conception of romantic relationships, which has been heavily influenced by the Western conception of romantic relationships. Frye describes *Irony/Satire Second Phase* protagonists as “intellectually detached from the conventions they lived with, and ...

capable of seeing their anomalies and absurdities as well as their stabilizing conservatism” (232). Relationships, especially marriage relationships, are a stabilizing force in society, which keep people within the society in a very static, controllable position. But, on the other hand, Alvy (and Allen) both consider a relationship lasting for the rest of one’s life as an absurd situation, because even relatively short relationships (like all of Alvy’s) are “totally irrational and crazy and absurd.” Alvy wants to break up what Frye calls the things “that impede the free movement (not necessarily, of course, the progress) of society” (233). For Alvy, these are relationships.

Finally, as Frye writes: “In *Don Juan* we simultaneously read the poem and watch the poet at work writing it: we eavesdrop on his associations, his struggles for rhymes ... his decisions whether to be “serious” or mask himself with humor” (234). Alvy writes a play within the movie (play) *Annie Hall* in which the only difference is that in the play the relationship works, as opposed to falling apart as it does in the movie (and did in real life). Allen’s remark, mentioned earlier, is that: “You know how you’re always trying to get things to come out perfect in art because, uh, it’s real difficult in life.” So, in Alvy’s play, we have a glimpse of how Woody Allen (Alvy) is working through, in a work of art, his life. Also, the movie is also full of shots where Alvy directly addresses the camera and the audience, while he temporarily steps outside of the world of the story and consciously becomes the auteur.

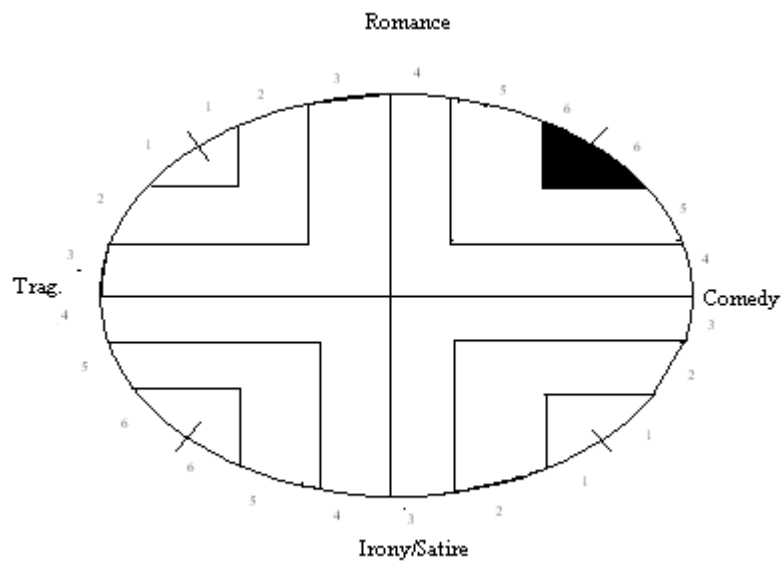


Figure 9: Comedy and Romance Sixth Phase

*Dr. Strangelove, Or I How Learned To Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964)

**Comedy Sixth Phase**

**Comedy Sixth Phase Characteristics.**

1. Social units disintegrate into one isolated individual (185).
2. There is the “sense of individual detachment from routine existence,” “secret and sheltered places, forests in moonlight, secluded valleys” (185).
3. Sometimes this phase is closely connected “psychologically with a return to the womb” (186).

*Dr Strangelove* is the story of the insane nuclear attack of American Brigadier General Jack D. Ripper (Sterling Hayden) on Russia. The Brigadier General, convinced that the Russians are slowly weakening Americans physically by encouraging fluoridation of American water, decides to send all the bombers in his wing (stationed—in case of nuclear war—within two hours of prescribed targets in Russia) to immediately bomb Russia. The bombers are only instructed to abort if they receive a secret radio transmission based on a code only Ripper knows. Ripper then cuts off all communication lines at his base and instructs his soldiers to shoot at any Russians (which Ripper claims would be disguised as American soldiers) trying to infiltrate the base. As Ripper’s planes near their target, the President (Peter Sellers) and his cabinet learn that the Russians have a Doomsday Machine, designed to explode over the entire world’s surface if America attacks Russia with nuclear bombs.

After Ripper, in a fit of depression after his soldiers surrender his base, commits suicide, Ripper’s subordinate Captain Lionel Mandrake (Peter Sellers) discovers the secret radio transmission code and is finally able to advise Washington of it. Almost all of the planes are turned away, except for the plane of Major T.J. Kong (Slim Pickens). Kong’s plane has been hit by a missile and has lost its radio transmission. Unable to receive the signal, the plane drops a nuclear bomb, touching off a nuclear explosion and then, ultimately, the Russian response of the Doomsday Machine, which destroys the earth’s surface.

Frye writes that Comedy Sixth Phase chronicles “collapse and disintegration” (185). Frye writes further that “[i]n this phase the social units of Comedy become small and esoteric, or even confined to a single individual” (185). Individual isolation (very

common in the modern world) is the reason for nuclear destruction in *Dr. Strangelove*. Indeed, the isolation of American individuals in the government and the military, a lack of checks and balances and of mutual interdependence, is what leads to nuclear annihilation. Because Ripper is able to send off his planes on nuclear bombing runs by himself as a mere Brigadier General, the movie presents one man (who is not relatively very powerful compared to the American President, for instance) being able to destroy the entire world.

Further, the advanced technology of the radio on Kong's plane, supposedly leading to greater communication over longer distances, is knocked out by a Russian missile's explosion. Essentially, advanced technology does not always bring human beings closer, because other advanced technology (like the missile) negates the usefulness of advanced technology like the radio. Further, human beings—hubristically assuming advanced technology like the radio would always work—have positioned themselves so that, when the advanced technology does not work, they are isolated from each other (in *Dr. Strangelove*, the bombers poised to respond to Russia's nuclear threat are already pre-positioned at their failsafe points when they receive the Plan R order). Kong's plane is aptly named *Leper Colony*.

Gerald Mast notes how in *Dr. Strangelove* the world's nuclear destruction is unavoidable, because the characters are so concerned with and mired in their trivial situations which isolate them from everybody else: "[A]ll these trivialities become more significant than the destruction of the earth and everyone on it" (337). This is a result of the modern individual isolation. Ripper is portrayed as an isolated man with his own bathroom and his own dark office (with venetian blinds which he often uses) in which he basically lives. He might have avoided his gradual demise into insanity if he had had somebody to talk with him and reason with him about flouride's true purpose. But he has so isolated himself and isolated his base (which he orders "sealed tight") that the order to drop the bomb cannot be stopped. Mast writes: "That mistake in priorities ... will surely lead us to horror. Once we write manuals for dropping the atomic bomb broken down into step-by-step procedures that can be read rationally, dispassionately, clinically, then the bomb will surely fall" (337).

Frye writes: “Secret and sheltered places, forests in moonlight, secluded valleys, and happy islands become more prominent,” as well as “the sense of individual detachment from routine existence” (185). All of the establishing shots for Kong’s plane are flying over wooded mountains, valleys and other geographical details. Interestingly, we never see Kong’s plane flying over a city. The intent is to show us how alone and detached from the (urban) world Kong’s plane is and, therefore, how difficult it will be to stop.

For Frye, this is the world of “the kind of imaginative withdrawal portrayed in Huysmans’ *A Rebours*” (186). Frye writes that Des Esseintes is “a dilettante trying to amuse himself” (186). This seems similar to Major Kong’s attitude. Indeed, Kong’s mission to destroy nuclear sites in Russia seems almost fun to him. As the mission begins, he replaces his pilot’s helmet with a cowboy hat, as if he were riding a familiar horse. At the movie’s end, Kong has to manually repair and open the bomb bay, which he is able to do only just as the bomb is dropped. As the bomb falls from the plane, we see Kong riding it down. He is twirling his cowboy hat in the air, yelling happily as if he were, again, riding a rodeo horse. Yet he is falling, of course, to his destruction and also that of the planet. Mast notes that “[h]e takes the destruction of the earth about as seriously as winning a football game” (335).

Frye writes that, at the end, “[t]he comic society has run the full course from infancy to death, and in its last phase myths closely connected psychologically with a return to the womb are appropriate” (186). Just after the bomb drops, Dr. Strangelove (the German scientist who seems to have greatly influenced American nuclear armament) and the President and his Cabinet are discussing their next move once the Doomsday Machine destroys the planet’s surface. Strangelove proposes using underground mine shafts to repopulate the human race until the earth’s surface radioactivity dwindles. Strangelove says: “Radioactivity would never penetrate a mine some thousands of feet deep, and in a matter of weeks, sufficient improvements in drilling space could easily be provided.” This, of course, is the return to the earth’s womb deep inside it.

*Dr. Strangelove, Or I How Learned To Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb Comedy*

**Sixth Phase Analogue: Romance Sixth Phase**

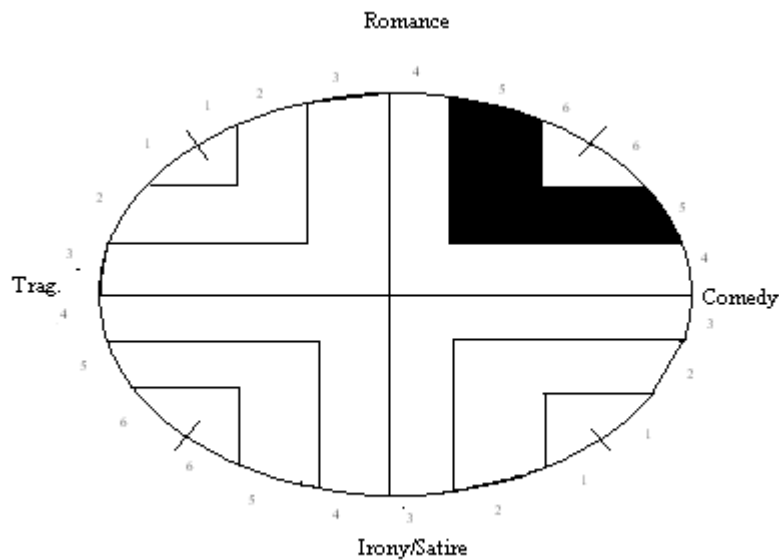
**Romance Sixth Phase Characteristics.**

1. There is a movement from “active to contemplative adventure” (202).
2. “A characteristic feature of this phase is the tale in quotation marks, where we have an opening setting with a small group of congenial people, and then the real story is told by one of its members” (202).
3. “The history is conceived not only as a progression but as a cycle of which the audience is the end, and, as the last page indicates, the beginning as well” (203).
4. There is a “cosmic disaster destroying the whole fictional society except a small group, which begins life anew in some sheltered spot” (203).

Frye writes: “A central image of this phase, a favorite of Yeats, is that of the old man in the tower, the lonely hermit absorbed in occult or magical studies” (202). This is Dr. Strangelove himself. His “occult or magical studies” are his nuclear studies, which, of course, would seem “occult or magical” to many. In a similar way, Kong and his plane represent a modern version of “the old man in the tower” in that nobody outside the plane can communicate to those inside it (once the Russian missile knocks out the plane’s radio communications system).

Further, Frye notes the “increasing popularity of the flood archetype. This usually takes the form of some cosmic disaster destroying the whole fictional society except for a small group, which begins life anew in some sheltered spot” (203). The flood, of course, is the nuclear destruction. At movie’s end, the American leaders and the Russian ambassador are considering how they would use their ‘Ark’ (i.e. mine shafts) in the most pleasant way (in sexual intercourse with specially selected women chosen for their physical attractiveness), while the world is inundated with nuclear activity.

This “brings us around again to the image of the mysterious newborn infant floating on the sea” (203). *Dr. Strangelove* ends with various pictures of nuclear destruction, but there is at least some hope, because a singer croons as the nuclear bombs explode: “We'll meet again, don't know where, don't know when, but I know we'll meet again, some sunny day. Keep smiling through, just like you always do, till the blue skies drive the dark clouds far away.” The implication, of course, is that some have survived, although perhaps not many. Whatever the number of survivors, they certainly would have almost no autonomy on a radioactive, wasteland earth. Their new level of autonomy might only be as much as that of Frye’s “mysterious newborn infant floating on the sea” (203).



*Figure 10: Comedy and Romance Fifth Phase*  
***The Lady Eve* (1941) Comedy Fifth Phase**

**Comedy Fifth Phase Characteristics.**

1. A very sad tinge. “[T]he comic ending is less a matter of the way the plot turns out than the perspective of the audience” (184).
2. Contains tragedy (184).
3. The audience views “the action ... from the point of view of a higher and better ordered world” (184).
4. “[T]he usual symbol for the lower or chaotic world is the sea, from which the cast, or an important part of it, is saved” (184).

*The Lady Eve* is the story of the seduction of Charles Pike (Henry Fonda), a wealthy inheritor of the fortune of Pike's Ale, by Jean Harrington (Barbara Stanwyck), who, on cruise ships, works to help her father Colonel Harrington (Charles Coburn) (a professional cardsharp) swindle wealthy socialites, whom Jean lures into card games with her father.

However, in attempting to lure Charles, Jean actually falls in love with him and convinces her father to restrain himself. Charles and Jean begin planning marriage, but soon Charles is tipped off by his watchful bodyguard Muggsy (William Demarest) that the Harringtons are "professional gamblers." Stunned that Jean has been pretending to be somebody she is not, Charles breaks off contact with her, although she tries to explain to him that she really does love him. "You don't think I was going to marry you without telling you?" But Charles does think exactly that, and he refuses to speak with Jean, leaving the Harringtons behind when he leaves the boat.

Desperately wanting revenge, Jean learns that one of her father's friends (also a professional swindler), who is masquerading as a certain Sir Alfred McGlennan Keith (Eric Blore), is in the same social circle as the Pikes. Plotting to take revenge, she asks Keith for an introduction, and shows up to a Pike dinner party as the Lady Eve Sidwich. "Sir" Keith eventually reveals to Charles that Lady Eve Sidwich has a renegade twin sister, Jean Harrington, who is a well-known swindler. He mentions this to explain the physical resemblance between Lady Eve Sidwich and Jean.

Eventually, Lady Eve Sidwich traps Charles into falling in love with her. He proposes to her, the two marry and, on the honeymoon ride on the train, just before the two consummate their marriage, she begins to list all the men she has slept with. Upset, Charles decides that he wants an annulment. However, Jean/Lady Eve refuses to give it. In later negotiations after Charles has bolted from the train, Lady Eve learns that Charles is on another ship, trying to relax from his difficult experience. Meeting him on the steamship, she is again Jean Harrington and, after his experience with Lady Eve, Charles is ecstatic to see her again. The two almost immediately go to Charles' room. Charles is apparently willing to commit adultery, although, of course, he doesn't know that Jean is actually also his wife the Lady Eve. The movie ends with Muggsy leaving the room

which Charles and Jean have entered alone, apparently to have sex, and Muggsy mutters: “Positively the same dame.”

Frye writes: “In the fifth phase of Comedy, we move into a world that is still more romantic, less Utopian and more Arcadian, less festive and more pensive, where the comic ending is less a matter of the way the plot turns out than of the perspective of the audience” (184). Of course, *The Lady Eve* is actually a story which contains much Tragedy. Professional thieves, who manipulate the rich for money, would be a fairly tragic real-life occurrence. Worse, the professional thieves are never appropriately punished by the movie’s end, as far as we know. Finally, the movie ends with the hero willingly committing what he believes is adultery (although actually it is not). The comic ending is certainly a matter of the audience’s perspective, because the ending actually shows Charles Pike’s corruption (although, technically, as the audience knows but Charles doesn’t, it’s not). As Frye writes, Fifth Phase Comedies “do not avoid tragedies but contain them” (184).

“The action seems to be not only a movement from a ‘winter’s tale’ to spring, but from a lower world of confusion to an upper world of order” (184). Of course, *The Lady Eve* is entirely about confusion. Who exactly is telling the truth about who they are in this movie (besides Charles Pike)? In this case, Charles isn’t even enlightened by the movie’s end, although, of course, it’s implied that he will be enlightened in the very near future after the movie ends. So the movie moves from confusion to order.

Frye writes: “[T]he usual symbol for the lower or chaotic world is the sea, from which the cast, or an important part of it, is saved” (184). Of course, the temptation takes place on a ship in the middle of the sea. Jean even comments, noticing that Charles seems particularly stressed while he drinks at the ship’s bar (he has just discovered that she and her father are professional gamblers), that he must be worried because he has fallen “in love with a girl in the middle of an ocean.” That is, the sea is a dangerous place in *The Lady Eve*, because this is where the cardsharps, like the Harringtons, prey on the rich (we know that yachts are probably a prime hunting ground for the Harringtons, because the criminal file photo of them shows them leaving another, different ship).

Frye writes that “[t]he materials of the *cognitio* of *Pericles* or *The Winter’s Tale* are so stock that they would be ‘hooted at like an old tale,’ yet they seem both far-fetched and

inevitably right, outraging reality and at the same time introducing us to a world of childlike innocence which has always made more sense than reality” (184). Indeed, some of *The Lady Eve* seems unrealistic, especially the fact that Charles is so naïve as to believe that Lady Sidwich is simply a good twin sister of the corrupt Jean Harrington. That he would marry her so quickly, without finding the time to know her sexual history (especially since it seems so important to him when he discovers that she has quite a sexual history), seems psychologically impossible.

However, there is something deeply appealing about Charles’s naivete. We would want there to be more people like Charles, and less like his highly skeptical assistant Muggsy, because people like Charles certainly seem to have more adventure. Charles is somebody who trusts those around him, and, of course, without that naivete, the plot structure of *The Lady Eve* wouldn’t be so interesting. Further, we know that naïve people like Charles certainly seem to make up a good part of the world. Charles’s naivete might sometimes seem psychologically impossible but, of course, it isn’t. There are many people in the news headlines who have been revealed to be that naïve and even more.

### ***The Lady Eve* Comedy Fifth Phase Analogue: Romance Fifth Phase**

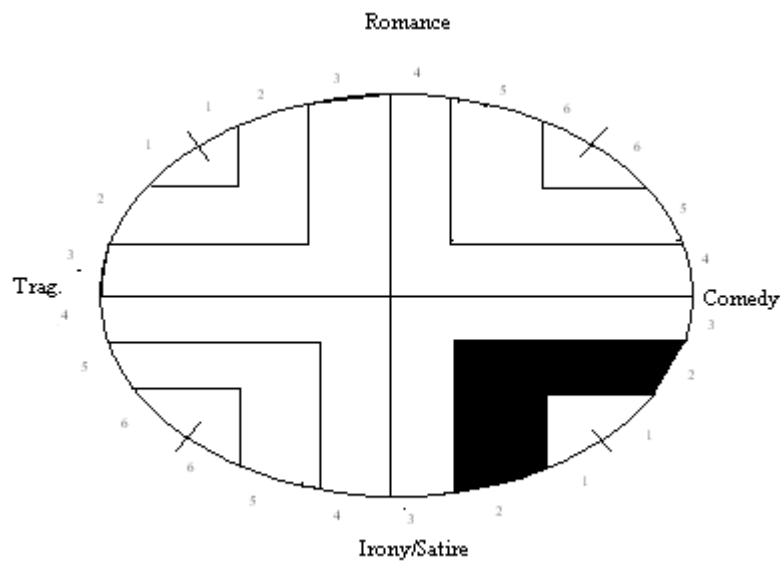
#### **Romance Fifth Phase Characteristics.**

1. Emphasis on the natural cycle being viewed from above (202).
2. “[T]he mood is a contemplative withdrawal from or sequel to action rather than a youthful preparation for it” (202).
3. Erotic experience is “comprehended and not ... a mystery” (202).
4. The true lovers are at the top of the scale, and the scale moves down towards greater and greater lust and perversion (202).

Frye writes that this phase “deals with a world very similar to that of the second phase except that the mood is a contemplative withdrawal from or sequel to action rather than a youthful preparation for it” (202). Jean, at least, has had enough of her dangerous, unsteady, illegal youth and is now ready to settle down. Similarly, Charles has had his

adventure down the Amazon, and also seems ready to find somebody to marry with whom he can build a more stable life (probably not on the Amazon).

Further, Jean explains to Charles, very frankly, her motives for falling in love with him: “If you waited for a man to propose to you from natural causes, you'd die of old maidenhood. That's why I let you try my slippers on.” Jean feels she is getting old, and this is what leads her to be so forward in her advances with Charles. Lady Eve Sidwich tells Charles of her extensive sexual past, but, interestingly, we are never told that she is lying about it, perhaps hinting that sexual intercourse in her marriage to Charles is a “sequel to action rather than youthful preparation for it” (202).



*Figure 11: Comedy and Irony/Satire Second Phase*

***The Seven Year Itch (1955) Comedy Second Phase***

**Comedy Second Phase Characteristics.**

1. The comic hero “does not transform a humorous society but simply escapes or runs away from it, leaving its structure as it was before” or the society surrounding a hero is unable to affect him (180).
2. The hero is usually a whimsical runaway.
3. In lighthearted comedies, the comic ending sweeps “over all quixotic illusions” (180).

*The Seven Year Itch* is also an example of a Comedy Second Phase, in that “the hero does not transform a humorous society but simply escapes or runs away from it, leaving its structure as it was before” (180). The humorous society, in this movie, consists of

Manhattan men whimsically interested in sex when their families leave for summer vacation. The movie opens with a shot of a map of Manhattan island. We are then told that five hundred years ago, men of the Manhattan tribe sent their women away during the hot summer. We then see the Manhattan men turn from watching their women and children leave and immediately follow an attractive squaw walking past them, who apparently has been left behind.

*The Seven Year Itch* narrator points out that not much has changed in hundreds of years. “Manhattan husbands still send their wives and kids away for the summer and they still remain behind in the steaming city to attend to business, setting traps, fishing, and hunting”—the implication is that women are the prey. We see the protagonist Richard Sherman (Tom Ewell) dropping off his wife Helen (Evelyn Keyes) and son Ricky (Butch Bernard) at the train station. After they have left, Sherman notices a kayak paddle, which his son has left behind, but he can’t return it to him, because the train station attendant won’t let Sherman in without a ticket.

The movie is held together by constant reminders from various people that Sherman has an obligation to his son to send him the paddle. He finds this difficult to do while he is engaged in pursuing “The Girl” (Marilyn Monroe), i.e. ignoring his familial responsibility of fidelity which seems to be intertwined with forgetting to send his son his kayak paddle. Whenever Sherman remembers his son’s paddle, he is focusing on sexual faithfulness (as he decides at the very end simultaneously to take his son the paddle and to be faithful to his wife). When he hasn’t thought about the paddle for some time, he has been thinking about marital unfaithfulness.

Then, we see a parallel scene to the earlier one of the Manhattan Indians some five hundred years before, where a group of men, apparently many of whom have just dropped off their wives at the train station, crowd after an attractive brunette who has just walked by. At first, Sherman is about to join them, but then he stops and reminds himself of his obligations to his wife. He is determined (he tells himself) not to give into the temptations of sexual adventures while his wife and son are away.

Just after he has come home to his apartment, he hears his doorbell ring. It is “The Girl,” staying at some friends’ apartment upstairs during the summer, who has forgotten her key and rung Sherman’s doorbell to ask him to buzz her in. Sherman lets her in,

watches her walk up the stairs and then chastises himself for not asking her in for a drink. “Just being neighborly. Make her feel at home.”

Frye mentions that the hero of this phase “is usually himself at least partly a comic humor or mental runaway” (180). Later, as Sherman is reading a chapter of a book by a certain Dr. Brubaker, entitled “The Repressed Urge of the Middle-aged Male: Its Roots and Its Consequences,” he begins to construct the society of which Frye has spoken, as a way to boost his ego. Sherman imagines that his wife is sitting next to him (we actually see the ghost-like shape of Helen Sherman) and that he is explaining to her how many “women have been throwing themselves at me for years. That's right Helen. Beautiful ones. Plenty of them. Acres and acres of them.”

We are then given a string of scenes, obviously imagined, in which women do throw themselves at Sherman. In one, his secretary Miss Morris (Marguerite Chapman), criticized by Sherman for a large number of typos in a document, immediately takes off her dress coat, revealing a racy undergarment, and claims that the mistakes were made because she is distracted by her love for Sherman. In another scene, Sherman is lying on his bed after a surgery when a Nurse Finch (Carolyn Jones) enters and proclaims her enduring love for him. Richard protests, saying that she is taking advantage of his situation, and then he finally rings an emergency bell. Within one or two seconds, there is a storm of feet outside his door, and a large group of doctors and nurses rush into Sherman's hospital room and whisk Miss Finch away.

The incredibly quick response of such a large number of the doctors and nurses shows, of course, that this is a fantasy where everything happens that Sherman would want. There is no basis in reality. Sherman constructs these imaginary women so that he can feel better about himself and his sex-appeal, not because any women have necessarily thrown themselves at him.

On the other hand, Sherman's numerous fantasies about “The Girl” falling in love with him have a stronger basis in life. “The Girl” definitely, whether consciously or unconsciously, encourages him in his fantasies. She brings down a bottle of champagne to drink with him. She asks to spend the night in his house, and when Sherman reluctantly sends her back upstairs with the handiman Kruhulik (Robert Strauss), she takes out the nails from a board which has closed off his stairway from her apartment and

comes down again, hinting with words that she wants to do this all summer. She even kisses Sherman several times.

When Sherman does make passes at her, she refuses to do anything “drastic,” and, ultimately, his fantasies are never realized. Sherman then imagines, in what might be masochistic self-punishment for his behavior, that his wife knows that he has a “blonde” in their apartment, and that she is returning home with a gun to shoot him. He constructs such dreams perhaps as penance, as a way of self-consciously punishing himself for his bad behavior. Although we see a sequence where Sherman’s wife Helen shoots down the door and then shoots him, this turns out to be a dream sequence too.

He is somewhat relieved when he calls his wife and finds that she is still in Maine. But in the call he discovers that his wife has gone on a hayride with an old boyfriend, Tom MacKenzie (Sonny Tufts), who is a notorious dandy. With this information he creates another fantasy situation, imagining that his wife and MacKenzie are sleeping together. He uses this fantasy, for which he does not have much real-life evidence, as an excuse to further develop his relationship with “The Girl,” which leads to a movie date and then the famous scene where Monroe, standing on a subway vent, has her skirt lifted as two subway trains pass by.

Near the movie’s end, “The Girl” tells Sherman that his somewhat plain looks don’t matter. She thinks he is attractive, because he is sensitive and “nice and sweet”—qualities she thinks are more important than any good looks. But, as mentioned before, “The Girl” never sleeps with Sherman. As Frye writes: “we have ... a hero’s illusion thwarted by a superior reality” (180). Sherman’s belief that “The Girl” wanted to sleep with him was a fantasy, but the reality is that he is attractive to women, despite his fairly plain looks, although that attraction is in his caring and sensitivity. So, as Frye writes, “the comic resolution” is “strong enough to sweep over all quixotic illusions” (180).

Near the movie’s end, Tom MacKenzie (Helen’s supposed beau) walks in, looking for little Ricky Sherman’s kayak paddle, which Sherman has forgot to send. Although Sherman finds that MacKenzie didn’t go on the hayride with his wife after all, and that she went with sixty-four other people anyway, Sherman knocks MacKenzie out with rather senseless jealousy. He then declares that he is going to take his son’s kayak paddle to him personally and visit his wife also for an extended period of time (he tells “The

Girl” she can stay in the Sherman apartment in the meanwhile). As mentioned before, remembering his son’s paddle coincides with renewed faithfulness to his wife.

***The Seven Year Itch* Comedy Second Phase Analogue: Irony/Satire Second Phase Irony/Satire Second Phase Characteristics.**

1. A successful “rogue ... makes conventional society look foolish without setting up any positive standard” (229).
2. The emphasis is on surviving in everyday life, as opposed to attempting to understand life philosophically (229).
3. Consequently, this phase does not set up a moral imperative (229).
4. Stereotypes and dogmas are shown to be inapplicable when set against real life (230).

Frye writes: “Anti-intellectual satire proper, however, is based on a sense of the comparative naivete of systematic thought, and should not be limited by such ready-made terms as skeptical or cynical” (230). The intellectual in *The Seven Year Itch* is Dr. Ludwig Brubaker. Sherman is reading Brubaker’s book *Man and the Unconscious* for possible publication by the publishing firm, Brady and Co., the company for which Sherman works.

While reading Chapter Three: “The Repressed Urge of the Middle-aged Male: Its Roots and Its Consequences,” Richard begins to think about his own repressed urges, which he attributes partly to his wife Helen’s beliefs that he is plain and homely. Irritated, he develops fantasies (which he has begun to believe actually happened) about how many women have approached him sexually.

When he had seen “The Girl” earlier walking up the stairs, Richard had thought about asking her down for a drink but decided against it. After reading Brubaker’s work which has focused him on his urges and his resentment for his wife, he seems more bold in approaching “The Girl” upstairs. Although Brubaker’s work isn’t directly what leads Sherman to begin philandering, it undoubtedly has focused his thoughts further on his “repressed urge.” That night he makes a pass at “The Girl.” It seems quite possible that,

subconsciously, Brubaker's highly intellectual book has helped him rationalize his desire to commit adultery (the book is essentially the only external media influence on Sherman throughout the movie).

While in the office the next day, Sherman begins reading Chapter Six, which is about "The Seven Year Itch," the supposed tendency of men after seven years of marriage to long for extramarital flings. Richard explains his problem to Dr. Brubaker, who has come in for an appointment to discuss the book, and Dr. Brubaker's reply seems only meant to egg him on: "If something itches my dear sir, the natural tendency is to scratch." The highly intellectual doctor actually seems to be encouraging Richard toward extramarital escapades, when the final point of the film is that one should remain faithful to one's family—wife and children. So we see how the movie works against the intellectual—especially the intellectual, detached tendency to simply describe patterns in life, such as extramarital "adventures" (which threaten to destroy the Sherman family), as opposed to fighting against them (which is what the movie attempts to do).

Other things Doctor Brubaker says show how he is truly a parody of a psychiatrist. He mentions he is early to his appointment with Sherman because "my 3:00 patient jumped out of the window in the middle of his session. I have been running fifteen minutes ahead of schedule ever since." When Sherman has even begun to contemplate murder as a revenge impulse against Tom McKenzie, Brubaker advises: "Until you are able to commit a simple act of terror, I strongly advise you to avoid anything as complex as murder." Brubaker's detached, intellectual method of looking at life, without considering the moral consequences, actually leads him to advise somebody to "work up" to being a murderer. Undoubtedly, in *The Seven Year Itch*, intellectual objective detachment is associated with immorality.

Frye writes about Irony/Satire Second Phase: "Yet once a hypocrite who sounds exactly like a good man is sufficiently blackened, the good man also may begin to seem a little dingier than he was" (232). Richard Sherman, of course, is somebody who would make most married couples nervous. On the outside, he seems to be a responsible, mature, sincere husband, who wouldn't sleep with somebody besides his wife. However, if he gives into pursuing other women, what about other, seemingly faithful, husbands watching the film, for instance? Might they not also give into the same struggle? Might

not their appearance of fidelity be only an appearance? Such men would feel especially uncomfortable at the point where the psychiatrist Dr. Brubaker writes of the frequency of “The Seven Year Itch,” and certainly would feel somewhat blackened, even if they had never even come close to extramarital affairs.

Frye writes about the characters of this phase: “[T]hey were also intellectually detached from the conventions they lived with, and were capable of seeing their anomalies and absurdities as well as their stabilizing conservatism” (232). This is true of the Manhattan custom of sending the wives and children away from New York in the summer. This tradition gives the man an opportunity for a release of his natural desires, which allows him, after the summer, to settle back with his wife and children in a very disciplined way. Richard sees the absurdity of the convention, but, at least at the movie’s beginning, he also sees how it might make his marriage more stable.

Frye writes about people like Richard: “[H]e has no dogmatic views of his own, but he grants none of the premises which make the absurdities of society look logical to those accustomed to them. He is really a pastoral figure, and like the pastoral, a form congenial to satire, he contrasts a set of simple standards with the complex rationalizations of society” (232). These are the simple standards which Richard’s wife Helen gives him at the movie’s beginning: no smoking, no alcohol, and Richard adds his own ... no extramarital affairs. Of course, holding to these seemingly simple standards becomes very difficult when “The Girl” is living upstairs and makes comments about putting her underwear in the icebox to keep it cool. “[W]e have just seen that it is precisely the complexity of data in experience which the satirist insists on and the simple set of standards which he distrusts (232). *The Seven-Year Itch* is proof, as something of a satire, how it is difficult for a faithful man to adhere to simple standards in a complex world where he has many desires.

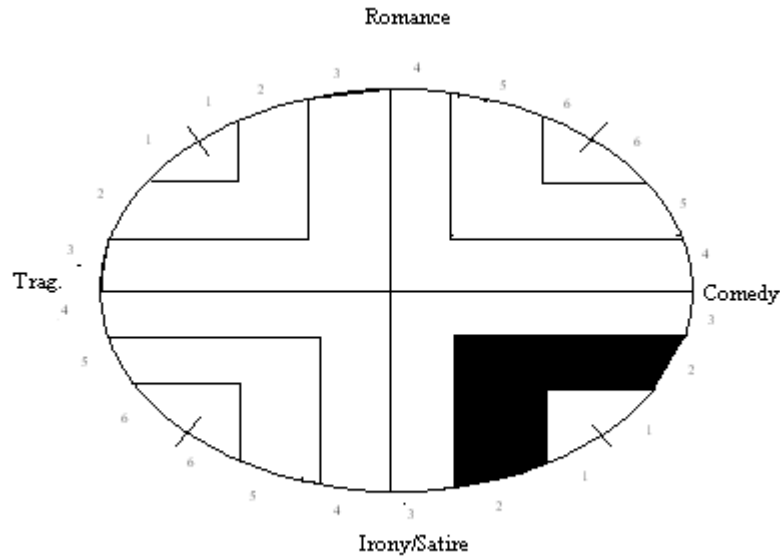


Figure 12: *Comedy and Irony/Satire Second Phase*  
*Some Like It Hot (1959) Comedy Second Phase*

**Comedy Second Phase Characteristics.**

1. The comic hero “does not transform a humorous society but simply escapes or runs away from it, leaving its structure as it was before” or the society surrounding a hero is unable to affect him (180).
2. The hero is usually a whimsical runaway.
3. In lighthearted comedies, the comic ending sweeps “over all quixotic illusions” (180).

*Some Like It Hot* is a story of two musicians’ flight from Chicago mobsters during the Prohibition era. Joe (Tony Curtis) and Jerry (Jack Lemmon) play saxophone and bass, respectively, in a Prohibition speakeasy disguised as a funeral parlor owned by Mafia boss Spats Columbo (George Raft). The speakeasy is busted by the police on a tip from Spats’ rival Mafia boss Toothpick Charlie (George Stone). Joe and Jerry, however, escape the bust through a window.

But now they have no work early in 1929, and both men are desperate. They try to secure jobs through several talent agencies. A secretary at one, Nellie (Barbara Drew) is in love with Joe, but he has stood her up for a date. As a kind of revenge, she tells him that there is an opening for a saxophone and bass in a band going to Florida, but later in the interview Joe and Jerry learn it is actually an opening for a *female* saxophone and

*female* bass. Disgruntled, Joe and Jerry angrily persuade Nellie to agree to loan them her car to play a show in Urbana, as atonement for her bad joke.

The car, however, is parked in the same garage where the famous St. Valentine's Day Massacre occurs, just as Joe and Jerry are having Nellie's car filled with gas. They witness the massacre (where Spats' thugs dressed as policemen shoot Toothpick Charlie and his gang).<sup>14</sup> Joe and Jerry are able to escape only because a wounded Toothpick Charlie tries to reach for the phone just before he dies, and Joe and Jerry exit while Spats and his men have turned their backs to finish off Toothpick Charlie.

Joe and Jerry decide to pose as female saxophone and bass players in order to escape Chicago (where, if they stay, they are sure they will be hunted down and killed). This, of course, is Frye's description of "a Comedy in which the hero doesn't transform a humorous society but simply escapes or runs away from it, leaving its structure as it was before" (180). The humorous society is the Mafia. Movies portray Mafia members, of course, as whimsically murderous, not caring whether those around them live or die. *Some Like It Hot* is no exception. Joe and Jerry can only hope to escape such a society. Mob activity, in this movie (as well as historically), is something which is very difficult to change for the better, perhaps because very few people would want to try to change a mobster.

On the train, dressed as girls named Josephine (Joe) and Daphne (Jerry) they meet the all-girl band's singer and ukelele player, Sugar Kowalczyk (Kane for short) played by Marilyn Monroe. Sugar is an alcoholic who has joined the all-girl band, because she is irresistibly attracted to male saxophone players, who have misused her and maltreated her in many ways. As she tells Joe, who (as a male saxophone player) is deeply interested in this revelation, "That's why I joined this band. Safety first. Anything to get away from those bums." Sugar reveals to Joe that she is going to Florida to hunt a young Millionaire with glasses.

Later, the train arrives in Florida, and Joe pursues Sugar by pretending to be a Shell Oil Millionaire ("Junior") wearing glasses. Daphne, on the other hand, is pursued by a true Millionaire, Charles Osgood III (Joe E. Brown), who desperately wants to marry her

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<sup>14</sup> This is, of course, based on the original St. Valentine's Day Massacre, where Al Capone's men, pretending to be police officers, lined rival Mob boss Bugs Moran's men against a wall and shot them.

and won't be put off for any reason. Joe orchestrates a clever ploy where he sends Daphne out dancing with Osgood, while "Junior" takes Sugar out to Osgood's empty yacht.

Meanwhile, Spats Columbo and his henchmen have arrived at the same resort for a "Lovers of Italian Opera" convention (the convention is simply a front for a Mafia get-together). Eventually, Josephine and Daphne are recognized as the two witnesses of the Valentine's Day Massacre and, after a lengthy chase, Josephine and Daphne hide under two banquet tables. Of course, the mobsters enter the very same room for their banquet, and Spats Columbo sits exactly where Josephine and Daphne are under the table. The leader of the banquet is the head mobster Bonaparte (Nehemiah Persoff), who actually wants revenge for the St. Valentine's Day Massacre. Spats Columbo and his henchmen are then killed by one of Bonaparte's thugs as he bursts out of a cake and machine-guns them to death.

At this point, Josephine and Daphne again try to escape the resort. Daphne tells Osgood she wants to elope with him and for him to wait for her with a getaway boat. Meanwhile, Josephine reveals to Sugar that he is really Junior, and that Junior is actually a male saxophone player named Joe. Sugar, despite Joe's pretension to be a Millionaire, decides (very spontaneously) she can also love him as a saxophone player. Daphne also reveals to Osgood that she is actually a man. Osgood's classic line: "Well, nobody's perfect" ends the movie.

"When the tone is more light-hearted, the comic resolution may be strong enough to sweep over all quixotic illusions" (Frye 180). In *Some Like It Hot*, everybody holds quixotic illusions. Osgood believes Daphne is his soul-mate. Sugar believes Junior to be her perfect man. Of course, neither is the case, but the movie lightheartedly sweeps over that, and the movie ends with both Sugar and Joe, and Osgood and Jerry, riding away into the night, although it is not exactly clear what will follow. Osgood and Sugar are both incredibly "light-hearted" to accept Joe and Jerry, especially when Joe and Jerry have been claiming to be somebody they are not.

***Some Like It Hot* Comedy Second Phase Analogue: Irony/Satire Second Phase Irony/Satire Second Phase Characteristics.**

1. A successful “rogue ... makes conventional society look foolish without setting up any positive standard” (229).
2. The emphasis is on surviving in everyday life, as opposed to attempting to understand life philosophically (229).
3. Consequently, this phase does not set up a moral imperative (229).
4. Stereotypes and dogmas are shown to be inapplicable when set against real life (230).

“The central theme in the second or quixotic phase of satire, then, is the setting of ideas and generalizations and theories and dogmas over against the life they are supposed to explain” (Frye 230). Sugar, in *Some Like It Hot*, has two generalizations about who her ideal lifetime partner will be. He will not be a saxophonist and he will be a rich Millionaire who wears “glasses .... Men who wear glasses are so much more gentle, and sweet, and helpless. Haven't you ever noticed it?” Of course, at movie's end, she has fallen in love with Joe, who is a saxophonist, who is certainly not a Millionaire and doesn't need glasses in real life.

“Anti-intellectual satire proper, however, is based on a sense of the comparative naivete of systematic thought, and should not be limited by such ready-made terms as skeptical or cynical” (230). As we know, Sugar is a fairly naïve person, who seems like a dupe to fall in love with Joe and leave with him, especially since all the time she has known him, until the end, he has been posing as somebody else. Her actions at the movie's end show that she remains as naïve as she was at the movie's beginning.

“Insofar as the satirist has a ‘position’ of his own, it is the preference of practice to theory, experience to metaphysics” (230). Sugar—despite her avowed generalizations that saxophonists are not good for her—still, ultimately, judges Joe individually on her experience with him. Joe (as Josephine and Junior) has seemed fairly likable to her so far, so this trumps her past experience with saxophonists (once again). Even Sugar's song near the end of the movie (which she sings after learning Junior is leaving her) “I'm Through With Love” is a generalization that only lasts for a few moments until Joe kisses her and reveals that he is Junior (as well as Josephine).

A fairly easy criticism to make about *Some Like It Hot*'s ending is that the relationships between Joe and Sugar and Osgood and Daphne are too hasty. They are thinking more about bodily desires and emotions than thinking their relationships through objectively or, similarly, philosophically. The whole movie and its ending privileges bodily desires and emotions, by seeming to present a "happily ever after ending." Even the fact that Daphne is actually a man who has been posing as a woman seems to be no problem to Osgood, when, it should be pointed out, that he has already been divorced "seven or eight times," as he says (so many that he can't remember exactly which), from women who certainly didn't misrepresent themselves as Daphne (Jerry) has done.

But this criticism seems like, as Frye writes, "philosophical pedantry" with the lighthearted ending, where everybody is happy. One feels almost like a grouch pointing out how hastily the movie ends without much realistic thought. Frye writes: "[t]hus philosophical pedantry becomes, as every target of satire eventually does, a form of romanticism or the imposing of over-simplified ideals on experience" (231). The movie encourages us to think simply that everybody is happy, regardless of the likelihood of that happiness lasting. *Some Like It Hot*'s ending affirms a Gerald Mast assertion about Wilder that for him "the essential human function is feeling" (274).

Frye writes that Irony/Satire Second Phase criticizes any rational attitude which, "like all rational attitudes, still refuses to examine all the evidence" (231). Essentially, Joe and Jerry's rational thought process that, by dressing as women to leave Chicago and go to Florida, they can escape Spats Columbo, of course, isn't true, because Spats Columbo shows up at their exact same hotel in Florida. After that, any viewpoint, even a rational one, is suspect.

The fear of death is what drives Joe and Jerry to dress as women to escape Spats. At one point in the movie, when Josephine and Daphne are once more in desperate straits, Josephine suggests, as a means of escape, that Daphne call Osgood, so that they can have a getaway boat. Daphne asks: "What am I gonna tell him?"

Josephine: "You're gonna elope with him."

Daphne: "Elope. Elope! But there are laws, conventions."

Josephine: "There's a convention, all right [referring to the Mafia "Lovers of Italian Opera" convention]. There's also the ladies' morgue." Joe and Jerry are forced to act

like Josephine and Daphne, because death is almost always the alternative. This, as Frye describes the *danse macabre*, is an example of where “the simple equality of death is set against the complex inequalities of life” (233).

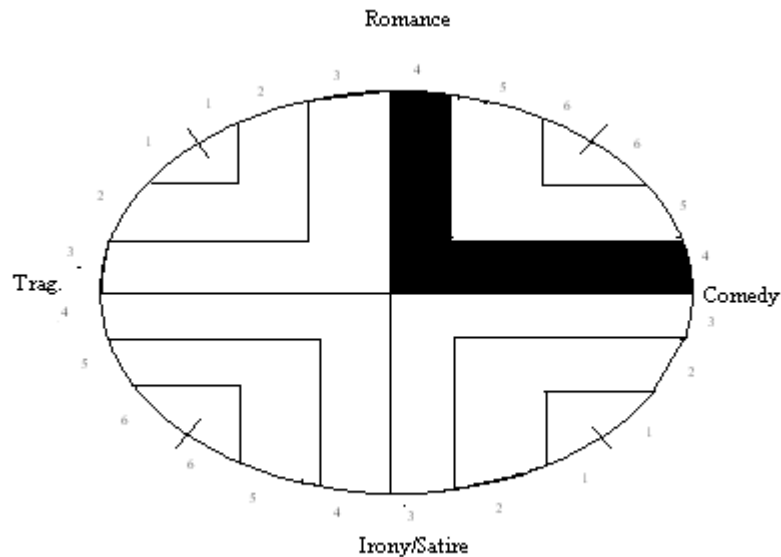


Figure 13: Comedy and Romance Fourth Phase

**Revenge of the Nerds (1984) Comedy Fourth Phase**

**Comedy Fourth Phase Characteristics.**

1. Two social planes, one of which is portrayed as better than the other (182).
2. “A Comedy originates in a “normal world,” enters into a “green world,” changes there, and then “returns to the normal world” (182).
3. The green world contains within it “the victory of summer over winter” (183).
4. The rebirth usually results from the feminine (183).
5. The dream world “collides with the stumbling and blinded follies of the world of experience” (183).

Frye writes that in Comedy Fourth Phase: “[I]t is also possible for a Comedy to present its action on two social planes, of which one is preferred and consequently in some measure idealized” (182). *Revenge of the Nerds* is the story of the tussle in college between a group of highly intellectual “nerds”, led by Louis Skolnick (Robert Carradine) and Gilbert Lowell (Anthony Edwards), and the athletic “jocks” at Adams College—led

by the football team quarterback and fraternity council president, Stan Gable (Ted McGinley). The jocks, all members of the fraternity Alpha Beta, accidentally burn down their fraternity house during a party. The school then forces the freshmen out of their dorm to live in the gym, where basketball practices are held etc., so that the jocks can live in the freshmen dorms. After finding their own house and establishing their own fraternity, the nerds are maliciously terrorized by the jocks (who run pigs through the nerds' house, for instance) and both groups exchange a long string of nasty practical jokes.

Louis has fallen in love with Stan Gable's girlfriend, Betty Childs (Julia Montgomery). At a carnival, Gable has dressed as an ape and made a liaison to meet Betty at a tent, because she tells him that she is feeling "horny." However, Louis steals Gable's ape suit and meets Betty at the tent instead. After the sexual intercourse, Louis reveals himself to be the leader of the nerds and not Stan Gable. Betty, interestingly, decides that she liked him better than Stan and that she wants to break up with Stan and become Louis's girlfriend.

In the climactic scene, after the jocks have trashed the nerd fraternity house once again, Gilbert has decided that he can no longer bear the jocks' intimidation. He marches over to a pep rally and begins the movie's climactic and most important speech, where he proclaims that he is a nerd and that "he's pretty proud of it." Louis, apparently emboldened by his recent experience with Betty Childs, then takes the mike and says: "I'm a nerd too. I just found that out tonight." Louis then asks all those who have ever felt demeaned by others, because they were a nerd, to step forward and join all the nerds around the mike, "because no one's going to be really free until nerd persecution ends." Many of the college students (including Betty Childs) and alumni then step down to join the nerds, and the movie ends with the nerds triumphing over the jocks, because the nerds have the college masses on their side.

Frye gives an example for Comedy Fourth Phase of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, where "the hero Valentine becomes captain of a band of outlaws in a forest" (182). In many ways the nerds are that band of outlaws in the forest, who are in an unfriendly world, where the jocks control even the college administration. Further, Frye writes: "In the rituals and myths the earth that produces the rebirth is generally a female figure, and

the death and revival, or disappearance and withdrawal, of human figures in romantic Comedy generally involves the heroine” (183). This female figure in *Revenge of the Nerds* is Betty Childs. Her desire to become Louis’s girlfriend instead of Stan Gable’s after she has sexual intercourse with Louis gives Louis the confidence he needs to state before all the students and alumni that he is a nerd, because Betty is willing to like him as a nerd. Without Louis’s willingness to be classified as a nerd, the movie would not end with the united appeal of the nerds to the masses and, consequently, the masses acknowledging some of themselves as nerds also.

Frye writes that “[t]he green world has analogies, not only to the fertile world of ritual, but to the dream world that we create out of our own desires. This dream world collides with the stumbling and blinded follies of the world of experience, of Theseus’ Athens with its idiotic marriage law, of Duke Frederick and his melancholy tyranny” (183-184). But then, Frye points out, the dream world “proves strong enough to impose the form of desire on” (184) the world of law. In this case, the dream world for the nerds is social ascendance over the jocks. Of course, in the movie, the college administration (represented by Dean Uhlich (David Wohl)), supports the jocks, even if it means forcing the nerds out of their freshmen housing, when the jocks need a place to stay. This policy is in place apparently because the jocks bring more money to the school than the nerds. The dream world, in the movie’s opening, seems to have been lost to the tyranny of the jocks, until the movie’s end, when the dream world of equality between nerds and jocks finally triumphs.

***Revenge of the Nerds* Comedy Fourth Phase Analogue: Romance Fourth Phase Romance Fourth Phase Characteristics.**

1. A “happier society is more or less visible throughout the action” (200).
2. The emphasis is on “maintaining of the integrity of the innocent world against the assault of experience” (201). By innocence is meant “the temperate mind [which] contains its good within itself, continence being its prerequisite” (201). By experience,

Frye means intemperance, which “seeks its good in the external object of the world of experience” (201).

3. An important image is “the beleaguered castle,” (201) apparently representing innocence, assaulted by experience.

Frye writes: “In romance the central theme of this phase is that of the maintaining of the integrity of the innocent world against the assault of experience” (202). The nerds, led by Gilbert Lowell, represent the innocent world, which is virginal and awkward in sexual encounters, for instance. Both Gilbert and Louis are inexperienced sexually. When Gilbert and Louis enter the Alpha Beta fraternity house (to inquire about the possibility of joining) they are asked whether they have ever “made love” to a woman. Gilbert replies: “No,” but Louis answers “Yes.” After a disbelieving look from Gilbert, Louis finally admits: “No.” Both Gilbert and Louis’s virginity parallels their faint-hearted attitude toward confrontation (especially with the jocks) at the movie’s beginning. Over time, as they become more aggressive toward girls (Louis even pretends to be Stan Gable in his sexual liason with Betty Childs), they also strike back against the jocks, as in the final scene at the Homecoming rally, where they, supposedly, maintain “the integrity of the innocent world” (201).

Frye writes: “A central image in this phase of romance is that of the beleaguered castle, represented in Spenser by the House of Alma, which is described in terms of the economy of the human body” (201). The beleaguered castle in this case is the fraternity house the nerds have had to rent after they have been kicked out of their freshmen dorms. It is one of the important battlegrounds between the nerds and the jocks, when, for instance, the jocks send pigs through the house, breaking up a nerd party. Indeed, the last time the jocks trash the house actually gives the nerds impetus to seize the microphone at the Homecoming prep rally and rally the students and alumni together as nerds.

### **Conclusion**

Frye compares each of his four mythoi to one of the four seasons, and his seasonal analogue for Comedy (the “integration of society” (43), usually, specifically, of the hero) is Spring. This seems largely because an important symbol for Comedy’s ending is the fulfillment of the hero’s desire--what Frye calls the “closing embrace” (164). Frye states that the overcoming of “the obstacles to the hero’s desire” is “the comic resolution” (164),

and Spring, of course, is the season of love. Frye specifically mentions cinema as particularly apt for the consummation of love, because in the movie, "darkness permits a more erotically oriented audience" (164).

Not coincidentally, then, many of this chapter's Comedy films are also love stories or, at least, contain substantial love story elements. As Frye writes: "What normally happens is that a young man wants a young woman, that his desire is resisted by some opposition, usually paternal, and that near the end of the play some twist in the plot enables the hero to have his will" (163). In *It Happened One Night* the *senex iratus*, Mr. Andrews, first resists then ultimately encourages (after seeing Warne's integrity) Peter Warne to marry his daughter Ellie. In *The Lady Eve*, cardsharp Jean Harrington falls in love with Charles Pike, but she can only marry him by ultimately repudiating her father's cardsharp business and so joining the mainstream of responsible citizens. In *Some Like It Hot*, the Mafia functions as a type of *senex iratus*, because without the Mafia ("the obstacles to the hero's desire"(164)) chasing Joe his pursuit of Sugar would be much less complicated. In *Revenge of the Nerds*, Louis Skolnick wins the cheerleader Betty's love over the college quarterback Stan Gable, despite the college administration's (the *senex iratus*) privileging of the athletes over the 'nerds.'

Frye writes that the "tendency of comedy is to include as many people as possible in its final society: the blocking characters are more often reconciled or converted than simply repudiated" (165). Comedy abounds with plots where the protagonist is the blocking character. Gilligan inadvertently creates trouble in almost every episode of the series *Gilligan's Island*. But yet we know by the next episode he has been accepted back into the Gilligan's Island society, even if only because, on a remote island, there is no place else for him to go.

*The Seven Year Itch*'s blocking character is also the movie's protagonist. Richard Sherman's wife and children are vacationing in Maine, while he works in New York City. In the movie, Sherman's thoughts alternate between fidelity to his wife and infidelity with "The Girl" (Marilyn Monroe). Ultimately, he realizes that his intended lovemaking with "The Girl" will separate him from his family, and so he chooses to remain faithful and is integrated back into his family's society. *Our Gang Follies of 1938* is another example of the blocking character as protagonist. Alfalfa is a blocking character in that he refuses to

croon and instead decides his lifelong dream is to sing opera, which Spanky won't let him sing for the Follies. The young girls in love with Alfalfa's crooning chant angrily in response: "We want Alfalfa; we want Alfalfa," and the Our Gang Follies cannot be successful without him. Fortunately, Alfalfa is converted by movie's end to return to crooning.

*Annie Hall* is yet another example of the blocking character as protagonist, with a special twist. Alvy Singer's foibles have become faults in the eyes of his girlfriend Annie Hall. Consequently, their relationship has broken up, which would seem to mean the separation of the hero from society and point to tragedy, not comedy. But, actually, Alvy's basic point at the end is that all relationships, even the best, most sustaining ones, are absurd, and this point functions to place his absurd relationship with Annie back in society's mainstream, because all of society's relationships, even the successful ones, are just as absurd as Alvy's relationship with Annie. Alvy Singer joins billions of human beings who have failed at relationships.

Chaplin's *City Lights* may be an exception to the blocking character's reconciliation. In *City Lights*, the drunken millionaire gives the Tramp the requisite money to pay for a blind girl's operation so that she can see, and then the Tramp is thrown into jail when the millionaire sobers and summons the police, so that the millionaire remains a blocking character even at movie's end. However, the Tramp has been able to give the money to the blind girl before he goes to jail, so that the blocking character is of no permanent significance after the Tramp eventually leaves jail and is reunited with the formerly blind girl.

Frye writes: "The more ironic the comedy, the more absurd the society, and an absurd society may be condemned by, or at least contrasted with, a character that we may call the plain dealer, an outspoken advocate of a kind of moral norm who has the sympathy of the audience" (176). Jefferson Smith is such a plain dealer in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*. Smith's cynical secretary, Saunders, is the first to be converted to Smith's visionary politics. The movie ends with Senator Paine, the senator who led Jefferson Smith's censure in the Senate, admitting to his own corruption, so that the movie's most hypocritical blocking character is converted.

*Network* also exhibits an absurd society in the television network managers, who privilege profit over everything else and, almost absurdly, are willing to kill those, like Howard Beale, who don't give them those profits. *Dr. Strangelove* is another example of such an absurd society, in that the instability and vapidness of the institutional Air Force, the generals who run it, and even the President, are lost somewhere in the gigantic, bureaucratic institution they have created and, therefore, have no control over. The result of such unwieldy institutions is doomsday. Although they might not seem like comedies in the Frye sense, *Network* and *Dr. Strangelove* actually do unite their characters in folly and destruction, and so complete the whole range of Frye's Comedy.