

## Group Discussion of *The Skin of Our Teeth*

Spokesperson \_\_\_\_\_ Group Members \_\_\_\_\_

Procedure: One of you volunteer to be spokesperson and note taker. Try to find at least one quote for to illustrate one or more of the criteria. Just see which of the criteria seem to apply; not all will & some overlap. Spokesperson: Write your group's comments below (use back if necessary). Turn in this sheet at end of class.

### Eric Bentley on Farce

Farce is filled with aggression, hostility, violence.

But it's a pressure valve, a release, cathartic; gratifies forbidden wishes; imaginary freedom.

Farce = art of escape; fleeing social problems, moral responsibility, conscience, law courts of the mind.

2 kinds of jokes: aggressive and non-aggressive; aggressive = a) to destroy, b) to expose (unmasking).

The Family is the seedbed of neurosis, vice, crime; wishes to damage the family; Oedipal conflict.

Farce taps infantile sources of pleasure: highest ecstasy in lowest thoughts.

Dialectic of Farce: gaiety & gravity; widest possible contrast of tone & content;

brings together the direct & wild fantasies and the everyday & drab reality.

Mischief, fun, misrule is the equivalent of fate.

Knaves and fools; knave = prankster, spirit of mischief, misrule;

knave is the equivalent of the villain in melodrama; knave/fool = comedian/straight man.

Something spastic (manic, mad, speeded up) about farce generally. Tempo, tempo, tempo.

Farce = the quintessence of theatre; depends upon being acted well; concentrates itself in actor's body.

Man created in the image of the ape; human nature part of nature generally; an animal whose little intelligence is dedicated to violence, to plotting violence, to dreaming violence.

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### Northrup Frye on Comedy: The Mythos of Spring

Youth triumphs over age (usually parental obstacles); comedy = subversive.

A new society is formed out of an old society signaled by party, festival, dance, wedding;

includes as many people as possible; blocking character converted or expelled (scapegoat) or just disappears.

*Cognito* = comic discovery (e.g., of true identity allowing for marriage); other providential, miraculous actions.

Thus, happy ending = a wish fulfillment: desirable but not true or realistic.

Saturnalia occurs: temporary reversal or inversion of social standards, roles, groups.

Character types: *alazon* (blocking, e.g. *senex iratus* or heavy father) vs. *eiron* (hero, tricky slave, vice);

*bomolochoi* (buffoons or jester/fool/clown) vs. *agroikus* (churl, straight man, refuser of festivity)

Comedy moves characters into an ideal green world where metamorphosis occurs (conflicts resolve, characters refreshed) before moving back into real world. Triumph of life & love over the wasteland, summer over winter.

Comic movement is like ritual (rite of passage). Skip six phases of comedy.

OR

### Wilder on Farce

Farce based on extreme improbability and spectacle of someone's mental and physical anguish.

Seems intended for childlike minds touched with grossness but actually is an intellectual exercise.

Based on logic & objectivity (once audience concedes playwright 2 or 3 wild improbabilities).

Thus, pleasures of farce = development, pattern, logic.

Cites Bergson's theory of humor that pretentious man reduced to an automaton is funny (e.g., repetition); man who prides himself on reason and free will is victim of same forces that govern things.

Skip his summary of Freud; same concept is in Bentley.

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### COMEDY (Comic Vision or Spirit)

optimistic, positive  
 affirms  
 life, eros  
 triumph over forces  
 survival  
 birth or rebirth  
 consolidation of life  
 from chaos to order  
 evolution, progress  
 growth, fertility, fecundity  
 innocence (pre-Fall)  
 heaven  
 reconciliation  
 change, can learn  
 hope  
 benevolent universe

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### TRAGEDY (Tragic Vision)

pessimistic, negative  
 repudiates  
 death, thanatos  
 defeated by forces  
 destruction  
 death  
 dissolution of life  
 from order to chaos  
 entropy, decline  
 decay, barren, sterility  
 corruption (after Fall)  
 hell  
 alienation  
 human nature constant  
 despair  
 malevolent