

***The inescapable narrative structure of the TV Sitcom.***

Beyond its television 'half-hour' time-limit, the sitcom is commonly distinguished from drama or soap-opera by having what is described as a closed or "circular" narrative structure. Narrative theory explores the relationship between character actions, traits and story, and how together they enable the narrative structure (Chatman 1978). If the narrative is the sum of the character's actions this paper will examine the plot points where the character's actions advance the narrative and determine the effect of their choices at those points. The objective is to explore *how* the key character generates the unique shape.

Lisa Trahair, in her text *The Comedy of Philosophy: Sense and Nonsense in Early Cinematic Slapstick* (2007) in utilising psychoanalytic theory demonstrates that comicality is enabled through the tension arising between the pleasure principle and primary processes that drive the character and in opposition to the reality principle that comes to bear on the character through the narrative. Extending on my presentation at the 2015 SRN conference that examined the nature of the characters in the sitcom, I now observe that, in response to the diegetic reality brought to bear through the narrative, key characters make choices that maintain their idealisation; in so doing they contribute to the definitive closed narrative structure of the sitcom and reinforce their entrapment.

This paper will examine the comic operation of the sitcom at the level of the narrative in order to extend our understanding of how the plot reinforces the key character's psychical tension; further how their choices at certain points ensure the re-situation and 'perpetual entrapment' and the 'closed narrative'.

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