

Comedy in Science

Frey (1964) identifies four different story types: comedy, tragedy, romance, irony/satire. Concentrating on the first type as the only alternative, we can start with Lahm's description.

"In Comedy, we meet the hero as an ordinary person, often an underdog. Existing society, represented by an elderly person, precludes the hero from acquiring something he wants: the beautiful princess. On his journey the hero is not alone; he has travel companions, helpful characters. The end resolves the tensions: the hero wins the princess, which means that "new" replaces "old." A new order is born and this transformation is symbolized by some kind of festivity: a party or a wedding. Friends and foes are invited. Comedy is a story about inclusion; everybody participates in the happy ending."
(Lahm, S. 2016)

This description can, for me, be applied to much academic writing. I would then re-write it as:
In academic writing as a form of comedy, we meet the researcher/research team as ordinary people. Existing society, represented by currently understood state of affairs, precludes the heroes from acquiring something they want: the truth/the answer to a dilemma/.... On their journey, the heroes are not alone; they have travel companions, helpful characters: participants/new findings from other researchers/.... The end resolves the tensions: the heroes win the princess (the truth), which means that "new" replaces "old." A new order is born. Comedy is a story about inclusion; everybody participates in the happy ending. In this story, it is clear that the researcher(s) are the protagonist (the central figure of any story).

However, other interpretations of this story are possible, and it is here where, for me, the creativity of the writer is stretched. For example, the story could read as
In academic writing as a form of comedy we meet the hero, the current structure from Clyne (1987), as the ordinarily accepted structure. Existing society has so far precluded any changes to this structure, but new facts have come to light that do not fit this accepted structure. Luckily, the hero's travel companions (the researchers) are helpful characters who use various techniques (other helpful characters) to re-align the structure and help it acquire the "truth". The end resolves the tensions: the structure becomes re-aligned, which means that "new" replaces "old." A new order is born.
In this story, the protagonist is the accepted structure.

But how does one identify the protagonist if it isn't the researchers or an accepted structure/model? One way of looking at it would be to take Schimel's idea (2012) that the lead actors (protagonists) are the questions, the larger issues being addressed. The data are the supporting actors in the story. Then the story above might look like this:

In Comedy, the lead actor is the question/problem, often an anomaly. Existing society, represented by what has been known until now, precludes the question/problem from being answered/solved and thus from finding the new truth (the beautiful princess). On his journey the lead actor (question) is not alone, it has travel companions, new data. The end resolves the tensions: the question is answered, which means that "new" replaces "old." A new order is born and this transformation is symbolized by some kind of festivity - a publication on the research.

Remember: Comedy is a story about inclusion; everybody participates in the happy ending (the publication). The text must therefore be understandable to as many readers as possible.

References

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