

COMEDY - TRAGEDY

Comedy

This is a composite word, closed linked to three Greek nouns. The first is *kome* (κώμη), 'village', and the second is its derivative *komos* (κώμος), a village revelry, carousal. No doubt these rural binges, once a certain amount of liquid refreshment had been taken, combined the laughter and bonhomie with a bit of a sing-song. And the Greek for a song, *ode* (ὠδή), combined with the word for revelry to produce *komodia* (κωμωδία), a light-hearted amusing stage act. By the seventeenth century this word had been adopted into English as 'comedy'.

Tragedy

It may come as something of a surprise but this word has come down to us from the Greek *tragos* (τράγος), meaning a 'male goat' and the Greek for a song, *ode* (ὠδή).

In ancient Greece competitions were frequently held to see who could write the best play. There are two theories as to how the goat was acquired its association with serious drama as opposed to comedy. The first is that it was custom for actors in plays dealing with serious themes to wear goatskins; the second is that the playwright responsible for the best production was awarded a goat as a prize.

The word entered English in the fourteenth century, applied to dramatic pieces on stage with a disastrous ending; by the sixteenth century it was being used generally outside the theatre to describe any calamitous event.

(From the book *"It's All Greek" Borrowed Words and their Histories*, (2019), by Alexander Tulloch).

revelry – carousal: festivity (especially when it involves a large amount of alcohol), celebration, partying, saturnalia, merrymaking

binge: a period of excessive indulgence in an activity (drinking, eating, or taking drugs)

bonhomie: happiness

calamitous: disastrous, catastrophic