Sufferance: A Source of Humour in Neil Simon’s
The Prisoner of Second Avenue
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Abstract

Humour in the modern world is always identified with laughter and funny lines. Comedy, humour and joke are multifunctional when we try to analyse the situations where they arise and how they are used. Sigmund Freud in his book Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious illustrates the psychology behind the possibility of finding humour in painful moments. He explicates the two sources of comic pleasure. One deals with the technique and the other deals with the purpose. To testify the pleasure sources he takes the tendentious jokes which are implicit regarding the joking intentions. Freud adds that two kinds of obstacles lie in the way towards obtaining satisfaction — the internal obstacle and the external obstacle. The external obstacle, when lifted, may not bring much laughter though helping to comment on the social realities. The internal obstacle, in Freud’s opinion, serves for an important purpose of lifting the psychical “inhibition” (144) and thereby avoiding the further ‘Psychical damming-up’ (Quoted in Freud 144). The research paper attempts to analyse Neil Simon’s play The Prisoner of Second Avenue (1973) in the light of the Freudian concept of the pleasure source. Marvin Neil Simon, the preeminent dramatist of the 20th Century American Broadway, is a celebrated comic writer. He believes that humour is born out of painful moments, most often. The humour in this play tends to satisfy the internal inhibitions of the characters and thereby attempts to relieve the audience too. A traumatic situation at the base becomes a source of humour which is achieved as per the Freudian pleasure mechanism as found in the tendentious jokes. Psychologists also recognize that jokes can be acts of symbolic hostility. Tragedy causes pain, and a joke about a past tragedy recalls that pain forcing us to relieve the hurt (J. Jerome Zolten).

Keywords: Sufferance, Tendentious jokes, Psychical Inhibition, Traumatic, Pleasure Mechanism

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