# The Concept of Family in Neil Simon's Plays

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Marvin Neil Simon was born in The Bronx, New York City on the fourth of July, 1927. Simon's childhood is far from being described as "happy". Family unity meant much to a playwright whose family was far from being united. His family, composed of the father Irving Simon – a garment salesman – and the mother Mamie Simon – a housewife- and an elder brother, Danny, was the epitome of disintegration and consequently unhappiness. His father walked out on the rest of the family many times, leaving his fragile family exposed to misery, disappointment and frustration. He describes his family as 'dysfunctional'[1]. It is no doubt, then, that a playwright with such a frustrating background, that left indelible marks on his life, looks at marriage and family life as highly respectable and even sacred. They have the center position in his plays; i.e., they are the major salient themes of the majority of his plays.

Neil Simon is a renowned American dramatist. The Alvin Theater at 250 W. 52nd Street on Broadway was renamed the Neil Simon Theater on June 23, 1983 in tribute of his contributions to the theater. For he is, after William Shakespeare, the most performed playwright of all time. He is so prolific that from the early 1960s till the 1990s, he seems to have written almost one play every year without interruption. His plays are so replete with humor that nearly every single line of his plays may be regarded as comic. However, for no obvious reasons critics seemed to have ignored him. There is some kind of consensus that he has not received as much critical attention as he deserves[2].

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The only two full-length studies of his works are: *Neil Simon: A Critical Study*, by Edythe M. McGovern; and Neil Simon, by Robert K. Johnson; the latter is published under Twayne's United States Authors Series. Other than these, one may find scattered reviews here and there and that's all. Moreover, most critical works of Simon tend to oversimplify his works and accordingly minimizing his stature in the realm of drama, denouncing him as "a writer whose plays and film scripts contain strings of gags recited by one-dimensional characters"[3]. Critics seem to have been taken by the commercial success of his plays. He is, in commercial terms, the most successful dramatist in the American theater, and probably in the history of the world. He quickly established himself as such by creating an unparalleled string of Broadway hits beginning with *Come Blow Your Horn*. During the 1966/67 season, four of his works – *Barefoot in the Park*, *The Odd Couple*, *Sweet Charity* and *The Star-Spangled Girl* – were all running simultaneously. During the 1970/71 season, Broadway theatergoers had their choice of *Plaza Suite*, *Last of the Red Hot Lovers*, and *Promises, Promises*. And yet, regrets Gerald M. Berkowitz, "he has been accorded the least critical and academic study of any major American playwright, for a reason that says more about literary criticism than the plays"[4]. Seldom, as McGovern puts it, have they "recognized what depths really exist in the plays of Neil Simon". Critics seemed to have failed to see the profundity of his themes. They merely discarded him as a 'writer of gags' and 'king of one-liners'[5].

Personally speaking, however, never in my life have I been encountered by such an outstandingly sarcastic style forcing me to

laugh and even giggle. However, beneath such an exterior of superficially humored and lightly-natured style, lies utter seriousness in the manipulation and handling of his extremely profound themes. Perusing any of his plays, one is profoundly touched by his deep concern with family life and thereabouts. In his early formative years, he seemed to have been dying for leading a normal life with a happy, or at least a normal family; however that little dream seemed to have been far-fetched and even impractical and impossible. In his *Rewrites: A Memoir*, Simon tells us that during his childhood, his father left and separated from his mother at least eight times " being away anywhere from a month to a year at a time". He recalls his early childhood with a "recollection distorted by the pain and ugliness and fury of their clashes"[6]. McGovern delves deep into Simon's works to reach the conclusion that "he is very concerned about family relationships and deals with some of the problems most common in this area: sibling rivalry, prejudgment of one generation by another, marital infidelity, and divorce"[7]. As a child, Simon had lived the most miserable childhood due to his family circumstances which epitomized family disintegration at its worst. In his *Memoir*, he bitterly remembers:

> I always had mixed feelings about my father. It was hard to get a permanent fix on a man who so often left my mother, and in so doing, left me and my brother as well, often with hardly enough money to feed us.[8]

He recalls his marriage ceremony with a mixed feeling of sarcasm and bitterness; even at such an occasion his parents cannot behave as normal parents; because at the time, they were separated and did not speak to each other, at least not in the first person , anyway. "At the end of the ceremony," Simon recalls, "the best my father could manage to my mother was 'Congratulations to her.' My mother nodded

back, looking in the opposite direction." "From moments like this,' Simon concludes, "the seeds of comedy are born"[9]. The human experience captured his imagination throughout his life. He was keen on communicating this human experience and its serious connotations through the vehicle of comedy; i.e., he makes use of the comic mode as a remedial, instructive and corrective. Simon epitomizes that experience:

> I grew up seeing the torment of broken families, broken lives, and broken hearts, and although I always found the absurdity of how we live our lives, I always looked for the pain when I wrote about it. Writing about it in a play... doesn't lessen the pain, but it allows you to look at it from a distance, objectively instead of subjectively, and you begin to see a common truth that connects us all.[10]

One gets the feeling that Barney Cashman, the protagonist of Simon's *Last of the Hot Red Lovers* is the playwright's mouthpiece when he cries: "We're not indecent, we're not unloving, we're *human*"[11] (italics mine). Like renowned playwrights, such as Ben Jonson , Moliere , and George Bernard Shaw, Neil Simon is a playwright who used the comic mode to reveal human weaknesses and chicanery. According to Edythe M. McGovern,

> Playwrights in the tradition of Ben Jonson, Moliere and George Bernard Shaw successfully raised fundamental and sometimes tragic issues of universal and therefore enduring interest without

> eschewing the comic mode , and it is my firm conviction that Neil Simon should be considered a member of this company. To my mind, close analysis of his work will make clear that an invitation to "join the club" is long overdue.[12]

Simon makes use of comedy as a façade for serious themes and points of view, what may be described as a seriocomic look at life; for communicating deeply profound themes; his plays are attempts at exploration of the deeper nuances of the human conditions. Regrettably however, as McGovern puts it, "seldom has even the most astute critic recognized what depths really exist in the plays of Neil Simon"[13]. Family is the main *raison d'etre* of the whole society.

One serious idea -that Simon is keen on communicating- is the significance of the family as an important unit in the building of a wholesome society. His plays are known for their family-based New York settings, where world-weary characters use one-liners to hide often-fractured psyches. In the ensuing pages, I will endeavor an attempt at the investigation of three of his plays: *Come Blow Your Horn*, his first attempt in the realm of playwriting (1961), *Barefoot in the Park* (1963) , and *The Prisoner of Second Avenue* (1971) ; two of his most brilliant plays; Neil Simon has been a much prolific playwright and one finds the urgent need to be highly eclectic and selective. I have selected his first play as well as two of his magnificent repertoires of plays to prove that from the outset of his career, Neil Simon has been much preoccupied with the family unit as the basic constituent of a wholesome society; and such a preoccupation has become even an obsession due to his own family background which was far from being happy or even normal. With

even his first attempt at playwriting, *Come Blow Your Horn* (1961), he knew, from the outset, he was going to write about his family. That play was centered on the relationship of two parents and their two sons, one son being eight and a half years older than his brother, just as Simon's own family. It centers, in particular, on two brothers, Alan and Buddy Baker, who may be taken as parallel, if not identical portraits, of Danny and Neil Simon; the former is the playwright's own elder brother. Neil Simon makes it clear from the outset that his concern is purely domestic in nature: "I was writing about a ... family in Manhattan, with a father who was in the wax fruit business; all he wanted was for his older son to get married and carry on his name in the great tradition of wax fruit entrepreneurs"[14]. Commenting on his first play, *Come Blow Your Horn*, Simon emphasizes the parallel: "It was clearly our family up there on the stage"[15]. His own family was at best devoid of love and harmony; at worst, it was, to use Neil Simon's own words, "dysfunctional"[16]. His first tryout, debut, in the realm of theater - *Come Blow Your Horn* - testifies to his being obsessed with the theme of family life. The idea that is reiterated, recurrent and reinforced throughout the play is the extreme importance of the institution of the family as a unit. Simon seems to convey the message that a loveless unhappy family cannot breed happy or even normal offspring. Simon recalls the circumstances of writing *Come Blow Your Horn*:

> Having read a lot of books on playwriting, I knew that you should write about what you know. I figured, OK, I know my family, so I'll do something about how my older brother Danny and I left home and took our first apartment.[17]

The title of the play had been changed twice, till Simon settled on the choice of a line from a nursery rhyme in which an optimistic note rings audibly about "Little Boy Blue" – a foil of Alan Baker, the play's protagonist- though neglectful of his duties at the outset of the piece, he is to resume them at the end; in other words, he will undergo a favorable change as he reaches maturity[18]. In every line of the play, the scrutinizing reader senses a deep concern with the solidarity of family members which is to reflect in the solidarity of the society at large. The title, as indicated earlier, is indicative of a promising reformation of the protagonist(s). The play revolves round a typical American family, whose main concern is to be united in face of troubles. However, such a dream is being disturbed first by Alan's leaving home and settling in an apartment of his and now even Buddy, the younger son, is planning to follow in his footsteps; i.e., to copy his freewheeling style. He is fed up with being treated like a baby by his tyrannical father and overindulgent mother. He wants to quit this suffocating and depressing atmosphere. Both sons are to a great extent immature due to the way they have been brought up. As too much pressure leads to explosion, Buddy , who has been first seen as really naïve and earnest, goes to the extremely opposite direction. When Alan asks him what he would like to drink, he goes for scotch and ginger ale. The former is extremely amazed; his immediate response is: "they must know you in every bar in town"[19]. Buddy wants to move out because as he says,

> Gee whiz, there's a million more important things
> Going on in the world today .... It's different for
> you , Alan. You're outside all day. Meeting

people. Human beings. But I'm inside, looking at
petrified apples and pears and plums. They never
rot, they never turn brown, they never grow old.
It's like the fruit version of 'The Picture of Dorian
Gray.'[20] (23)

The last line is a direct reference to Oscar Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* where the protagonist wants to enjoy eternal youth while symptoms of age occur to his picture. In other words, this is unnatural, typical of Buddy's life. Buddy apparently looks at his elder brother as a model and even a paragon of excellence. He wants to imitate his life style.

. The father, Harry Baker is bound to prevent this from happening; angrily he goes to Alan's apartment to talk Buddy out of his decision. The latter cowardly disappears and a hot discussion ensues between the furious father and his elder son; Alan Baker, nevertheless is no less furious:

Alan: ... What good does it do coming in? You don't need me. You never ask my advice about the business, do you?
Father: What does a skier know about waxed fruit?
Alan: You see. You see. You won't even listen.
Father: Come in early. I'll listen.
Alan: I did for three years. Only then I was 'too young' to have anything to say. And now that I have got my own apartment, I'm too much

of a 'bum' to have anything to say. Admit it, Dad.
You don't give me the same respect you give
the night watchman.
Father: At least I know where he is nights. (29)

That last line is charged with sarcasm, and bitterness. Harry Baker, the father, has a deeply rooted belief that if one is past thirty and unmarried, he is automatically a wastrel. Mr. Baker represents the older generation, where such an opinion is a familiar, if not typical, attitude adopted by them. The father has neither faith in nor respect for his elder son. Through that confrontation scene, one may sense a type of abnormal relationship where trust and love are missing. . Such values are the solid basis on which the foundation of the edifice of a happy family life is laid. One serious idea rings audibly and comes through in clear-cut terms; i.e., the significance of the family as a basic unit in the construction of a wholesome society. Simon apparently holds family life in high esteem.

The family's work in the wax fruit business is highly symbolic; that artificial product symbolizes their own life which is void of emotions and sentiment. The waxed fruit is even symbolic of the rigidity of the father whose tyrannically stiff nature compels the elder son to leave the house and the younger one to try to follow in his footsteps.

Mr. Baker is completely unaware of his younger son's plans. He always describes him as "good son". The father holds a comparison between both sons and he taints Alan that Buddy is far much better than him. Upon a hint from Alan that Buddy will be like him, the father bursts out uproariously and threateningly, though in a comic way typical of Neil Simon, "the day your brother becomes like you, I throw myself in front of an airplane"(27). Simon's comic scenes are always born within the milieu of serious circumstances.

Buddy, however, is adamant in his pursuit of hedonistic pleasures, away from the firm grip of his father. He is determined to break all the walls and fences that may obstruct achieving his goals; to be independent and free. However, young as he is, he is keen on attaining his parents' approval of his recent decision. That is why he wrote a notification letter or what is comically described as "Declaration of Independence" to his father and entrusted it to his mother. His mother, out of curiosity, tore it open and knew its contents. She did her best to dissuade him but in vain. The mother is afraid of her husband's anger, that she desperately tries to talk her younger son, Buddy, into abandoning his idea and returning to his parents' house. The mother, Mrs. Baker, is typical of mothers who care only for their families' welfare and nothing more; their realm and kingdom are surrounded by their homes' borders. The mother's world is so based on her family members that her younger son's plans of leaving the house seem to shatter all her dreams into pieces. That is why she literally begs him to retreat but Buddy is adamant in his decision.

Now comes the father; in their confrontation, there seems to be a lack of mutual understanding. One may sense a generation gap. Buddy's father cannot understand why his son wants to be independent at the age of twenty one; the latter reminds him respectfully that at such an age he –the father- had been a married man. The father's response reflects a great disparity between both generations. Harry Baker's justifications are put in clear-cut terms: "Those days were altogether different. I was working when I was eleven years old." Such a scene is highly revealing of how important family ties are to the father. He has been trained and graduated in the school of hard life and he does not want his son to be exposed to its hardships.

Buddy's attempts to convince his father that the field of manufacturing artificial fruit does not at all suit him, and that he is inclined to be a writer, go in vain as they become a cry in the

wilderness. The father seems to be proud of his trade. When his younger son expresses his wish to quit it for writing for the theater or the television, the father retorts with a kind of twisted logic; however, to him this seems axiomatic: " Plays can close. Television you turn off. Wax fruit lays in the bowl till you 're a hundred." What makes Mr. Baker hope that Buddy will listen and respond favorably to his wishes is the great difference between him and his elder brother, Alan. As contraries set off each other, both brothers are , in every respect, contrasted to one another in character. As children, and till the moment of Buddy's decision to move out, Buddy , who is almost twelve years younger than Alan, has been obedient, shy and introvert while Alan has been self-willed, obstinate, outgoing and extrovert.

In their confrontation scene, Buddy has exerted extraordinary efforts to convince his father to trust him. However, Alan's upstairs-neighbor appears and makes things up side down. Her appearance convinces the father that his younger son has followed in his elder brother's footsteps. Upon reaching such a conclusion, the father is not just surprised but distracted as well. He leaves spiteful and depressed. He goes out ominously reticent, but before he quite disappears, he makes the strangest and saddest vow; heart broken and utterly vexed, he addresses Alan in presence of Buddy:

> May you and your brother live and be well. God bless you, all the luck in the world, you should know nothing but happiness. If I ever speak to either one of you again, my tongue should fall out.

Instantly and furiously, he goes out. In a spell of sadness and fury, he leaves his wife, their mother, and decides to stay with his sister Gussie. The mother calls her sons pleadingly to go back and Alan does, at least for a night; he returns to his old boyhood room. His

deeply concerned mother asks him what he wants for dinner. His return, though transient and temporary, seems to have rescued her from a nervous breakdown.

Such care for family members and family union is transparently clear and even clear-cut throughout the proceedings of *Come Blow Your Horn*, Simon's first theatrical attempt. The concept of the family unit permeates through the tissue of the play. Even a cursory reading of the play is bound to leave the reader with a confirmed belief that Simon has been primarily interested in and concerned with such a concept. After a profound analysis of the play, Robert K. Johnson reaches and justifies such a conclusion:

> That Simon upholds the concept of the family unit is demonstrated in his implied approval of the fact that -- despite their parents' attempts to control them and despite Mr. Baker's particularly overbearing nature – Alan and Buddy do not at any time want to break off relations with their mother and father completely. Mr. Baker's tyranny is so powerful that even when the boys are living in their own apartment, they are very conscious of their father's influence on their lives...the boys still want to create a healthier ,

less stifling relationship with their parents and to win their father's approval.[21]

Talking about play structure, Neil Simon once stated: "Every scene I write has to have a conflict."[22] Internal as well as external conflict are at their best in Act II. Alan's relations with girls are frothy and frivolous. The only one that seems serious is Connie and we sense his being serious about her when more than once he calls his upstairs neighbor, Peggy Evans, Connie. Alan tells Buddy that Connie is a really nice girl: "She's different. She's not like .... Well, she is different." Upon a suggestion from his younger brother that he has become serious, Alan totally denies and he vows to change her to fit the pattern of other girls; his plans towards her as well as towards other girls are totally dishonorable. However, deep down, we sense a profound conflict between his whims and his deep respect for her. On another level, Alan is torn between two opposing wishes: his desire for outgoingness at any cost, and his reticent concern to please his parents. Such a conflict reaches its climactic point in Act II , where events get extremely complicated. Family relations are at their worst; distraction and chaos prevail. The father is totally appalled and disgusted with both sons. Connie Dayton feels humiliated and leaves Alan to an unknown destination. Everything seems upside down.

Act III, however, puts everything in its perspective; with it comes the denouement. In that Act, Buddy and Alan seem to have exchanged roles. Typical of a light comedy, everything ends happily. Alan reforms; he changes favorably to the best wishes of his parents. He leaves the libertine life for good and nicely and gently proposes to Connie Dayton. He abandons the life of playboy and becomes a real man, that matches Simon's definition for men and manhood. As Robert K. Johnson puts it, "For Simon, a man is someone who asserts his independence and experiments with a variety of life's offerings,

but who ultimately does not ignore the traditionally richest human experiences founded on love, marriage, and family." Alan, Johnson goes on, "gradually comprehends that his play boy life has ceased to nurture his maturity and has become, instead, a means of his avoiding maturity any further."[23]

Both Buddy and Connie exercise a great influence on Alan to the effect of his changing favorably. The former shocks him into realizing fully that his innate and basic values are essentially conservative, and that he must cherish and honor such good values in his private life. The latter, through her naiveté and innocent nature, offers a positive contrast to all the girls he had known. Her seriousness and innocence force him to consider changing for the better. His serenely nice and sincere proposal to her testifies to the change.

Marriage is stressed as a sacred bond that leads to a happy family as opposed to the illegal relations with girlfriends or one-night stands. Those who accept to be indulged in such illegal and indecent relations, are trivial , frothy , silly, and immature type of girls. Connie Dayton is a seriously nice girl. Even Alan ,who has always been a womanizer, highly appreciates her taste and self confidence. He holds her in a high esteem. Although Connie gives Alan free choice: either to marry her or to live together without the wedding ring, Alan - who at first opts for the latter choice – is at last overwhelmed by her seriousness, self-respect , and a sincere wish to please his parents. As such, he nicely and gently proposes to her. The now betrothed couple and the happily united parents go out for dinner. There is a profound sense of reconciliation and an optimistic note that rings audibly with the concluding lines of the play. Alan apologizes for his father and admits his, father's, being right about many things all along.

It is quite apparent that the four main characters of *Come Blow Your Horn* are based on Neil Simon's parents, his brother, Danny, and Simon himself. It is also quite obvious that Simon uses comedy as conduits through which he communicates serious themes.

Throughout the play, the concept of the family unit is of great thematic importance.

Neil Simon's primary concern with family is even more apparent in his second play, *Barefoot in the Park* (1963). He himself has been married four times. According to Simon, legal marriage is the cornerstone of a happy family. Traditional and conventional concept of 'family' is the yardstick against which he gauges how far such a family is a great success or an utter failure. *Barefoot in the Park* revolves around Corie and Paul Bratter, who are on the threshold of establishing a new family , based on mutual love and reciprocal trust; basic values that are mandatory for bringing about a happy family. As they are newlyweds, they are encountered by many hardships, on top of which living in an extremely tiny , *sans ascenseur* building. They are apparently in love. It is assumed that such a sentiment is bound to help them overcome any trouble that may arise.

There is so much concern and care among family members in *Barefoot in the Park;* which is highly indicative of a great sense of family solidarity. Even after marriage, which signifies independence, Corie is very much concerned about her mother's opinions of everything; primarily, of her tiny apartment . She laments the fact that furniture has not arrived yet:

> It's ugly in here without furniture, isn't it?
>
> She (Mother)'s just going to hate it (the apartment), won't she?[24]

She is so concerned about and mindful of her mother's opinion that she even instigates her husband to lie about the rent, decreasing it to sound eligible according to the standards of her mother:

Corie. … Paul, promise me one thing. Don't tell her about the rent. If she asks, tell her you're not quite sure yet.

Paul. …Not sure what my rent is? I *have* to know what my rent is. I'm a college graduate.

Corie. … Can't you lie a little? For me? (26)

Such a concern about her mother's opinions even after marriage, and consequently being independent of her, is indicative of a profound familial solidarity; not only on the basic family unit but on the extended family level as well. The sense of concern and responsibility seems to permeate through the whole drama. Being so worried about her mother's loneliness, especially after her (Corie's) marriage, she arranges a blind date with their upstairs neighbor, Victor Velasco , hoping it may end up in marriage. However because of Velasco's hedonism and epicurean attitude towards life, Paul accuses his wife of being unconcerned about her mother.

In a fit of anger, Paul bursts out: "I don't understand how you can be so unconcerned about this." Corie's response is highly revealing:

Unconcerned … I'm plenty concerned. Do you think I'm going to get one wink of sleep until that phone Rings tomorrow? *I'm scared to death for my mother* (italics mine).But I'm grateful there's finally

the opportunity for something to be scared about. (90)

The mother, in turn, is worried not only about her daughter but also about her son-in law as well. In a motherly tone, replete with care, love and concern, she addresses Corie:

I worry about you two. You're so impulsive.
You jump into life. Paul is like me. He looks
first. (35)

In other words, she is hinting at the difference in personality between both. She directs her as to how to reconcile the disparities and reach a compromise. At one point of the drama, Corie is so concerned and worried about her husband; She addresses Paul caringly and lovingly: "What I'm really concerned about is *you*" (90). A deep sense of love and concern permeates the whole play. Mother lavishly buys wedding gifts for her daughter. The latter is so concerned about her mother's 'extravagance'. The mother's response reveals a genuine motherly sentiment:

It's my pleasure, Corie.... It's a mother's greatest
Joy to be able to buy gifts for her daughter when
She gets married. You'll see someday. I just hope
Your child doesn't deprive *you* of that pleasure.
(37)

Throughout the play, Simon seems to reiterate a frequently recurrent theme; i.e., the great importance of love and philanthropy as basic foundations for a sound familial relationship. In response to her daughter's opinion that she should spend the money on herself, Mother genuinely exclaims: "Myself? What does a woman like me need? Living all alone ... way out in New Jersey;"(38) implying that her primary concern , center of attraction and sole source of happiness is her daughter. Mother cares a lot about family life with all its requirements and burdens. The following exchange is so profoundly meaningful in that particular respect:

> Corie. ... What would you like to do?
> Mother. (*Considers*) I'd like to be a grandmother. I think that would be nice. (39)

After marriage, it is now the turn of the daughter to be concerned and even worried about her now lonely mother. According to Robert K. Johnson, " Corie's wish that her mother stop living alone and fall in love again derives from a change in Corie that is central to the whole play."[25] She tells her mother that her honeymoon week was "wonderful;" that she found "spiritual, emotional, and physical love," and that she "does not think anyone on earth should be without it" (40).

To the modern American, Simon's views may seem conventional, traditional and even out-of date; yet, he communicates such views confidently and proudly as they are the only ways out to save such an honorable institution- i.e. family- from collapse and destruction. There is a great lesson to be learned: for the preservation of the family as a unit, there are familial rules that must be observed on top of which comes a shared sense of responsibility. Keeping a

family is a common responsibility of both husband and wife. The lack of responsibility on the part of Corie leads her to ask for a divorce at the first hint of familial problems. She seems to adopt an epicurean hedonistic philosophy that regards marriage as signifying only pleasures, while denouncing any responsibility that such an honorable institution may entail.

Neil Simon is a firm believer in the traditional family. According to him, legal marriage is the outlet for initiating and launching such a great institution. A lady – as we saw with Connie Dayton in *Come Blow Your Horn* and Corie Bratter here – is to keep her virginity till marriage. One may also observe that all the heroines of his plays are housewives , rather than working women which easily made him a target for attack by feminists and women libbers. The following exchange is highly meaningful in this particular respect as it delineates expressively and in clear-cut terms the role of the woman in the family:

> Velasco. What are you, a folksinger?
> Corie. No. A wife. (45)

Being a wife is Corie's job of which she is apparently proud. Being a housewife- according to Simon – is not an idle work; rather, it is a major role, pertaining caring for family members, which is bound to create an atmosphere of love and sacrifice deemed necessary and even indispensable for the construction of a happy family. Apparently, Simon sees man as the breadwinner of the family while the woman is dependent on him , not passively, however, but in an extremely active and contributive manner. Both man and woman are to complement one another. The woman has a great role- and aim- in life; i.e. to please her husband, to bring up her kids and to share actively in an extremely happy and stable familial life. In the stage directions of Act

Two, Simon tells us that "*each piece* (of furniture) *was selected with loving care*". Corie's greatest aim in life is "*to spend as much time as possible alone with Paul*;" that is why "*she has designed the room to suit this purpose*" (53).

Simon looks upon family as sacred and as such he satirizes all abnormal vogues such as the so-called same-sex families! He cannot acknowledge these so-called families, such as homosexuals; to him , these are abnormal aberrations and deviations from the straight life patterns and , as such , they are target for his sharp criticism, and even satire; as they are weirdoes and crazy. In the following exchange, Paul, the protagonist, seems to be Simon's mouthpiece:

> Corie. *Are* all the neighbors crazy?
> Paul. ... I just had an interesting talk with the man down in the liquor store... Do you know we have some of the greatest weirdoes in the country living right here, in this house?
> Corie. Really? Like who?
> Paul. (*Gathering his strength, he paces to the right*) Well, like to start with, in apartment One-C are the Boscos ... Mr. and Mrs. J. Bosco.
> Corie. Who are they?
> Paul. (*Paces to the left*) Mr. and Mrs. J. Bosco are a lovely young couple who just happen to be of the same sex and no one knows which one that is.

(41-42)

Marriage is a great institution that should be based on solid foundations. A husband and wife should do their best to preserve it from any evil wind that may harm such a noble institution. However,

such attempts and endeavors are bound to succeed only if the couple is serious, aware of the uniqueness of their sacred relationship and far from being self-centered or frivolous. The forthcoming exchange is highly revealing in this particular respect:

Corie. You will *not* go to sleep. You will stay here and
fight to save our marriage.
Paul. If our marriage hinges on breathing fish balls and
poofla- poo pie, it's not worth saving. (95)

Amidst a familial fight, Paul wisely decides to withdraw. However, his zealous wife insists that he stay to save their marriage from collapse. Paul however is adamant in his withdrawal. His justification is that marriage is a lofty , elevated , heightened and noble relationship. It should be based on solid foundations. If it hangs in the air, it is exposed to hazards; it is , then, like a castle on sand ; i.e., vulnerable and liable to be shattered into pieces, incarnating the epitome of tragedy , not only for the family as a basic unit of society, but also for the society itself at large.

The heroine, Corie Bratter, undergoes a crystallized moment of disillusionment that shatters her illusions into pieces. On the outset of the drama, she was heedless of her husband's precious pieces of advice. Now, she regrets that and cries in a moment of disillusionment and serene contemplation: "He was right... Paul was right about so many things (124)." There is a crescendo effect in this highly dramatic turning point where Corie reiterates: "Paul was right. He was right about so many things"(125). Through ordeals, the wife seems to have gained maturity and mental growth. She is apt to face dilemmas in a serener way; however, she has to admit her mistakes first; that she does. In response to her mother's complaints -about her being

humiliated as a consequence of the blind date set by her daughter, Corie, against the wish of her husband, Paul- she pacifies her mother:

> Corie: Don't blame yourself...It's my fault. *I* did it. I did this to you. (126)

In response to her mother's reassuringly comforting remark, "It couldn't have been all your fault," she retorts:

> No? ...No?? ... Because of me you're running around without your clothes and Paul is out there on the streets with a cold looking for a place to sleep. Who's (sic) fault is that? (134)

Corie meditates on her rashness and temerity that led to dismissing her husband , who has a severe cold, out of the house and to ask for divorce. She is devastated. Her mother, in Victor Velasco's bathrobe, size forty eight, cannot understand why he left. Corie admits regretfully:

> He (Paul) had a perfectly good reason. I *told* him to get out. *I* did it. Me and my big stupid mouth. (134)

The core of the theme of the family is epitomized towards the end of the drama which also marks its denouement. This is crystallized in the daughter's asking her mother for advice about how to achieve a happy, blessed and blissful marital life.

Corie: I love him (her husband) ... Only I don't know what he wants. I don't know how to make him happy ... Oh, Mom, what am I going to do? (134)

The mother's answer is impressively revealing. It delineates wonderfully a straight path to familial happiness that depends on altruism and mutual love and respect. To the scrutinizer, this sounds a traditionally conventional way; however, according to Simon , this is the only way out of familial problem and into marital felicity. Corie's mother seems to be Simon's spokesperson:

It's very simple. You've just got to give up a little of you for him. Don't make everything a game. Just late at night in that little room upstairs. But take care of him. And make him feel important. And if you can do that , you'll have a happy and wonderful marriage ... Like two out of every ten couples ...But you'll be one of the two, baby. (134)

These golden pieces of advice are typically reminiscent of that wise Arab Mother**26** who gave her daughter, on the night of the latter's wedding, precious pieces of advice as to how to lead a happy marital life. Such pieces of advice have been so precious that they have become maxims in Arab literature.

In such a mood and in her disturbed psychological state of mind, Corie is more than willing and ready to carry out those 'golden'

instructions. Before listening to these wonderful aphorisms, she wanted her husband to be drunk and irresponsibly bohemian. She even tainted him about his manly stances. Because of his dignity and propriety, she called him names; she even described him as a "stuffed shirt" (94). She saw every meritorious quality of her husband as a vice that needs to be eradicated. At one point, she put it outright: "I'm beginning to wonder if you're capable of *having* a good time" (91). She misinterprets his sense of propriety and responsibility as a lack of adventure. She goes into extreme with her unimaginably weird cry: "You're always dressed right, you always look right, you always say the right things. You're very close to being perfect!!!!!!!" (*Interjection mine*) (92).

Now that she is enlightened by her mother's precious advice, her visions are no longer blurred. She sees everything in its proper perspective. Upon his dismissal of the house, Paul does his best to match her definition of a 'gentleman'. He gets drunk and even walks 'barefoot in the Park'. He has got a fever and he wants to wake all the people in the building up. He even indulges, due to his being drunk, in a terrible physical fight with his wife. To protect herself against him, "*she gives him an elbow in the stomach and dodges away through the kitchen....Corie keeps the couch between her and Paul....*" At last, "*running up the stairs to the bathroom, she barricades herself in the bathroom*" (139). Corie is scared to death from her drunken husband. She cries hysterically: "I want the old Paul back" (140). Paul cannot believe this. He wonders amazed:" That fuddy duddy?"(140). Corie's answer reflects the drastic change in her personality due to her heedfulness of her mother's invaluable advice. She retorts:

> He's not a fuddy duddy. He's dependable and he's strong and he takes care of me and tells me how much I can spend and protects me from people

like you...(*Paul suddenly has a brain storm and with great glee sneaks off into the bedroom*) And I just want him to know how much I love him... And that I'm going to make everything here exactly the way he wants it ... I'm going to fix the hole in the skylight ... and the leak in the closet ...And I'm going to put in a bathtub and if he wants ,I'll even carry him up the stairs every night ... Because I want him to know how much I love him. (140)

Paul, in a terrible state of mind being utterly drunk, climbs the top of the building and is about to commit suicide. Corie does her best to save him:

Paul: I want to be a nut like everyone else in this building.

Corie: No! No, Paul! ... I don't want you to be a nut. I want you to come down. (140-41)

Her call of love is so sincere that she convinces him to keep there, thus saving him from a desperate end. She toils and endeavors vigorously to climb there and get him down. The play ends on an optimistic tone that rings audibly with the curtain fall. Paul is singing the Albanian folk song *Shama Shama* and Corie zealously ,full of prowess , stamina and a real gusto, stretches her hands to save him.

Thus, through love, mutual respect and reciprocal altruism, a family is saved from wreckage and collapse.

*The Prisoner of Second Avenue* (1971) presents a family of a couple that has been married for over twenty years (that concept itself of remaining strictly monogamous for more than two decades is alien to many westerners). They even support their daughters, who are university students , financially and emotionally. Unlike the newly weds of *Barefoot in the Park*, the couple in *The Prisoner of Second Avenue* seems experienced with ordeals and marital problems and more than willing to face any problem that may arise. There is also a great disparity between the types of problems both couples encounter. The newly weds are faced by trivial problems compared with the extremely serious problems of the dwellers of Second Avenue.

Despite the frustration and even depression that leads to a nervous breakdown of the protagonist, Melvin (Mel) Edison, there is a notably optimistic note that permeates the whole work and rings audibly throughout the whole drama. Simon seems to incarnate the notion that through familial love, solidarity and unison, the couple is apt to face any problem that may arise. Family solidarity is bound to vanquish any evil that may threaten its welfare and prosperity.

Simon again uses comedy as healing through exposing evil. Edythe M. McGovern puts it in clear-cut terms:

> It may be that this very funny play dealing with crowding, crime, and unemployment makes more cogent comment on the ills of twentieth century society than many plays...
>
> In addition to these broad problems of social concern, Simon also considers here relationships within a family, *always a universal theme*. (Italics mine)[27]

McGovern further elaborates:

> It was Moliére who conceived of comedy's function as the means by which to correct men's vices, and, of course, society is made up of men and women so that it reflects collectively their individual behavior. However, in the aggregate, their inconsequential errors become magnified so that the total group (society) seems far more evil than the mere sum of its members' sins. At any rate, if Moliére's statement that "It is a vigorous blow to vices to expose them to public laughter"
>
> can be taken literally, Neil Simon has scored a knockout in *Prisoner of Second Avenue*.[28]

The Edisons are a slice of society. As a family, they are one of its basic units. The society undergoes a great change to the worst; with the spread of crime and the high percentage of unemployment. Mel Edison is one of the victims of the society at large. He cannot cope with the quick tempo of life. He has been an employee in the same company for twenty-two years and now, at forty seven, he is frightened, and even terrified, at the thought of losing his job. Everything is turned upside down; everything is working on his nerves: the air conditioner which keeps the apartment too cold for comfort; the ever celebrating airhostesses that live next door; the bad smell of the garbage that has not been collected because of a strike; the noise of the cars , audible to him on the fourteenth floor; a barking dog; even his stomach that seems to protest the 'health food'. Deep down, we become conscious of more serious problems underneath; problems that lead to his insomniac state of mind. We elicit this when he tells Edna, his wife:

Something is happening to me .... I'm losing control. I can't handle things anymore. The telephone on my desk rings seven, eight times before I answer it.... I forgot how to work the water cooler today. I stood there with an empty cup in my hand and water running all over my shoes.[29]

Mel is losing control; he begins to feel valueless and worthless; feelings that are bound to destroy man's prowess and stamina on the verge of middle-agedness. As a good wife, Edna does her best to alleviate the situation and relieve the tension evoked by the present situation. As an obedient loving wife, she pacifies her husband. She cannot sleep while her husband is staying up. In response to her husband's repeated calls to go to bed, she sincerely responds:" I cannot sleep when you're tense like this"(5). She goes on to assert:" I cannot sleep if I know you're up here walking around having an anxiety attack" (9). She is willing to do anything to help her distressed, frustrated and depressed husband. Complaining about the air-conditioner, she offers a suggestion:

We could leave the air conditioner off for an hour. Then when it starts to get hot, we can turn it back on.

Her husband deems such a suggestion impractical and even implausible:

Every hour? Seven times a night? That's a good idea.

I can get eight minutes sleep in between working the air conditioner. (4)

However, Edna's reply is far more reassuring; it even signifies self sacrifice, philanthropy and altruism:

*I'll* do it. *I'll* get up. (4)

She tells her husband that she is going to do anything for him; about the air-conditioner, she asks Mel:" What do you want me to do, Mel? You want me to turn it off? You want me to leave it on? Just tell me what to do" (5). Her suggestions for helping her husband are endless; "Would you rather sleep in here? I could make up the cot" (5). On the other hand, Mel's series of complaints is endless. He complains about the harsh pillows that hurt his back and make him restless on the chair. Edna answers:" I'll take the pillows off" (6). He complains about his pajamas, being dirtied as a consequence of opening the door to the terrace for only ten seconds, Edna:(*Anything to please*) "Give them to me, I'll get you clean pajamas" (6).

Edna Edison seems an ideal wife, reminiscent of Desdemona in *Othello*[30], who does her best to please her husband. She seems to have a solution for every problem. She always seeks excuses. She proves that attitudes make a world of change and that if one cannot change his/her reality, at least one can change his/her attitude about it. She goes on trying to find a reason for his present dilemma; she wants to fathom the depths of his perturbed mind. She tries to simplify matters: "You're probably just hungry. Do you want me to make you something?"(10). The play is the epitome of family solidarity at its best; a husband and wife do share everything, not only in times of felicity and bless , but also – and more importantly – in times of ordeals and calamity. In time of distress, Mel confides in his wife that

he is 'unraveling' and 'losing touch'; "I don't know where to grab. Edna, I'm slipping, and I'm scared" (12). Edna suggests seeing the analyst again. Mel's response is highly revealing, especially that he spent twenty three thousand dollars on a psychiatrist to no avail:

> Mel. I don't know where or who I am any more. I'm disappearing, Edna. I don't need analysts, I need
>
> Lost and Found. (13)

Edna's repertoire of suggestions knows no end:

> Listen ... Listen ... What about if we get away for a
>
> couple of weeks? A two-week vacation? Some place
>
> in the sun, away from the city. You can get two weeks'
>
> sick leave, can't you, Mel? (13)

Mel is so frightened to take the initiative by asking for a leave, lest the company officials should take it a chance for firing him. One is highly impressed at the marvelous role played by the wife in lightening the tension and alleviating the pain and suffering, due to the complexity of the situation. Her husband is deeply involved in his thoughts; he is on the verge of insanity for the mere thought of losing his job. That threatening ghost, of being unemployed, appears to him a dragonlike giant. The wife, on the other hand, does her best to attenuate such a threat; she is impressively calm and self-controlled. She exercises a surprisingly deep sense of self control. The following exchange is highly revealing:

Mel. They closed the executive dining room. Nobody goes out to lunch any more. They bring sandwiches from home. Top executives, making eighty thousand dollars a year, eating egg-salad sandwiches over the wastepaper basket.

Edna. Nothing has happened yet, Mel. There is no point in worrying about it now.

Mel. No one comes to work late any more. Everyone's afraid if you're not there on time, they'll sell your desk.

Edna. And what if they did? We'd live, we'd get by. You'd get another job somewhere.

Mel. Where? I'm gonna be forty-seven years old in January. Forty-seven! They could get two twenty-three-and-a-half-year-old kids for half my money.

Edna. All right, suppose something *did* happen? Suppose you *did* lose your job? (*Sic*) It's not the end of the world. We don't have to live in the city. We could move somewhere in the country, or even out west.

Mel. And what do I do for a living? Become a middle-aged cow-boy? Maybe they'll put me in charge of rounding up the elderly cattle ... What's the matter with you?

Edna. The girls are in college now, we have enough to see them through. We don't need much for the two of us.

Mel. You need a place to live, you need clothing, you need

food. A can of polluted tuna fish is still eighty-five cents.

Edna. We could move to Europe. To Spain. Two people could live

for fifteen hundred dollars a year in Spain. (14-15)

The exchange goes on and on ; on the same pattern . The husband is depressed and even desperate while the wife is vigorous, vital and hopeful of a better morrow. However such vigor, vitality and real gusto for life cannot eradicate or even lessen Mel's anxiety and despair. Edna cries angrily: "What is it they have here that's so damned hard to give up? *What is it you'll miss so badly, for God's sake?*" (15). She reminds him that they have nothing to lose as 'those who are down should fear no fall;' they live like 'caged animals' in a Second Avenue zoo. Simon presents Edna Edison as a paragon-of-excellence for those wives who want badly to lead a happy life, but they simply do not know how. Such wives do their best to please their husbands; they do not know anything about wars of the sexes; their role is to complement, not to contradict, one another. Such values are the basics of a happy life. Simon is preoccupied with the happy family as a major theme in his plays. Having experienced what it means to live in an unhappy family, he endeavors to expose the ills of familial troubles, through making them targets for his comedy and ridicule; and simultaneously, shedding lights positively on the brighter ,more refulgent side. In his biography, *Rewrites: A Memoir*, Simon reflects on the reasons that pushed him personally to undergo psychic analysis:

> When an audience laughed, I felt fulfilled. It was a sign of approval, of being accepted. Coming as I did from a childhood where laughter in the house meant security,

but

was seldom heard as often as a door slamming every time
my father took another year's absence from us, the laughter
that came my way in the theater was nourishment. The more
I heard, the more I needed. There was never enough ...
there was a hurt coming from my yesterdays that made me
feel frightened and abandoned.[31]

Memories of his miserable, wretched family remained to haunt him; that is why he is concerned with that major theme, wishing people to avoid his unhappy circumstances, as a prerequisite for a wholesome society. The heroine of *Prisoner of Second Avenue* seems to be Simon's spokesperson in her outcry:

I will go anywhere in the world you want to go, Mel.
I will live in a cave, a hut or a tree. I will live on a raft
in the Amazon jungle if that's what you want to do?
(16)

In the second scene, things get further complicated and worsened with the robbery of the Edisons' apartment. What aggravates the situation is the actual firing of Mel. Having blamed her for leaving the house to buy food, thus giving thieves a chance to rob the house, her husband asks her: "Why didn't you call up and have them send it (the food)?"(26) Edna's reply reveals how spendthrift and economic she is, doing her best to save up and to spend her husband the trouble of facing financial problems. She is far from being extravagant:

Because I shop in a cheap store that doesn't deliver.
I am trying to save us money because you got me so

worried the other night. I was just trying to save us money ...

Look how much money I saved us.

(*Edna starts to pick up things*) (26)

Ordeals teach them to turn to one another for help. They get experience through suffering. Friends desert them; and they have none but themselves. Mel seems a sage with the following maxim: "When you're looking for help, you'd be surprised how many people are out to lunch at ten-thirty in the morning,"(29) proving the truthfulness of the aphorism: 'A friend in need is a friend indeed'. This is also reminiscent of the Arab aphorism: 'A shade never follows you in darkness; neither do people'. However, such terrible circumstances with their ensuing shocking experiences enhance and promote the sense of family solidarity; they add to their familial growth and maturity, deepening their sense of need to one another. Shrouded by such foggy clouds, at least they have 'the silver lining' that they may turn to one another:

Mel. I'll be all right, Edna. I don't want you to worry about me.

I'll be all right.

Edna. I know you will, Mel. I know it.

Mel. I'll find another job, you'll see.

Edna. Of course you will ... Oh Mel, we'll be all right. We will.

(30)

Edna, as a loving and faithful wife, does her best to comfort her husband; she pleads with him not to worry about the money. She assures him that they are not extravagant. Simon makes that family a symbol of the whole society; this is natural as family, to him, is the

basic unit of society. He stresses the magnificent role of family in social solidarity. Now the couple thinks thoughtfully about ways to cut the expenses to the minimum. For his part, Mel suggests quitting the gym and not buying magazines which he considers 'garbage'. He has a lengthy list of things to dispense with; things that sound ridiculous to a person in financial troubles; this is reminiscent of the golden financial rule that says: "If you buy what you do not need, you will sell what you need". He undergoes a moment of disillusionment; it is as if he wakes up after a long stupor. All these things people call luxuries; Mel discovers they are no more than 'garbage'. In a moment of deep reflection, Mel condemns "the garbage! The garbage that we buy every year. Useless, meaningless garbage that fills up the house until you throw it out there and it becomes garbage again and *stinks* up the house" (32). Amidst a fit of wrathful anger, Mel elaborates furiously on this issue:

> Two dollars' worth of food that comes in three dollars' worth of wrapping. Telephone calls to find out what time it is because you're too lazy to look at a clock The food we never ate, the books we never read, the records we never played. (*He picks up a little thing off the bar*) Look at this! Eight and a half dollars for a musical whiskey pourer. *Eight and a half dollars!* ... Toys! Toys, novelties, gimmicks, trivia, garbage , crap...
>
> (32)

Through ordeals, Mel is learning tough economic principles and he is intent on living by them. One of these dicta is: 'When you buy needless commodities, you are going to have to sell essential ones'. Both Mel and Edna persist in their attempts at surviving the dilemmatic present. Edna does her best to support and encourage her

husband on all possible levels. Upon Mel's being hit with a torrent of water , obviously from a large bucket, thrown by an angry upstairs neighbor , Edna does her best to quieten her deeply-perturbed husband. Act I closes on an optimistic tone with Edna's zealous attempts at consoling the now-sobbing Mel, revealing her true love and deep feeling for her husband as she says:

> You mustn't get sick. You mustn't get sick and die because I don't want to live in this world without you ... I don't like it here! ... I don't want you to leave me alone here ... We'll show them, Mel. We'll show them all. (35)

Act II proves *Edna* a lady of her words; i.e., a lady of principles. She is now a working woman. According to Simon, a lady's role is essentially at home; viz, a housewife. However, she may exchange the roles with her husband in time of need and necessity. Now that Mel is fired, Edna assumes the role of the breadwinner. Working, for Edna, does not mean quitting her primary role and responsibility as a housewife. On the contrary, though she works full time, she takes the lunch hour to come back home to fix lunch for her husband. She takes that daily troublesome routine to hit two birds with one stone: to take the chance to stay with her husband for an hour or so and to save them money through cooking the food instead of eating out which is far more costly. She now pays the rent, buys the food and even buys gifts for her husband. However, she never shows any sign of disrespect towards Mel. Upon the first hint of Mel's complaining about her work, Edna retorts politely:

> I thought we agreed about my working. I thought we agreed it was all right for me to take this job until something came through for you. (45)

She even reassures him , emphatically, that she will do as he pleases:

> Do you want me to quit, Mel? Do you want me to leave the

job? I'll leave the minute you say so, you know I will. (45)

Her being involved in work with all its burdens does not mean, at all, neglecting her husband. Upon noticing a glimpse of his being psychologically disturbed, Edna suggests earnestly seeing a doctor: "Mel, listen to me. Listen to me very carefully. I want you to see a doctor ... I don't want to put it off any more, Mel, I want you to see a doctor as soon as possible. Today, Mel. Now" (54). The crescendo effect, evoked with the last utterance, reflects the sincerity and devotion of Edna towards her ailing husband. She even decides not to go to work to stay beside her husband: "I won't go to work this afternoon, Mel. If he (the doctor)'s free, I'm going to take you myself ... Don't stand near the window, Mel"(54).

Familial solidarity is portrayed at its best with the visit of Mel's three sisters- Pauline, Pearl and Jessica- and brother, Harry, who came long way to their brother, Mel, to ask about his health and to decide upon what they should do to help him. They gather together at Mel's house to discuss prospective ways of aiding their ailing brother. Harry, the eldest brother, is their spokesperson. He sets it outright:

The man (Mel) needs help. Who else can he turn to but us?
This is my suggestion. We make Mel a loan. (62)

The critical reader may like to linger long in meditating on Harry's rhetorical question: "Who else can he turn to but us?" It is highly revealing of a deep concern for familial solidarity. Harry goes on to assert that it is their "obligation, as his only living relatives ... to bear the financial responsibility of that burden" (65). Pauline addresses her sister-in-law, Edna; she is eager to know what is wrong with her brother: "You can tell us. We're his family" (66). Harry reassures his Edna that they all care for their brother and that they will never desert him in the midst of such an ordeal. Harry puts it outright: "We're all very concerned, Edna. Very concerned. After all, he's our brother" (67). The real meaning of brotherhood and sisterhood is epitomized in

this particular scene. The sense of philanthropy and altruism is overflowing with Harry's sincere appeal to his sister-in-law:

We're very concerned. We appreciate that you're his wife, you're going to do all you can, but we know it's not going to be enough. We want to help. We've talked it out among

ourselves and ... we're prepared to take over the financial burden of the doctor. ...We'll pay the doctor bills. Whatever they come to. (67)

He goes on to assert that meaning in clear-cut terms, emphatically reassuring Edna: "I don't care what it's going to cost. ... If it's fifteen, if it's twenty, if it's twenty-five thousand, I'll see that it's taken care of, as long as Mel has the best medical treatment... That's all I have to say" (68). Edna is overwhelmed and deeply touched by the offer which indicates a deep sense of familial solidarity. This is a wonderful chance for the extended family to reconcile and to start anew, seeking excuses to one another. Edna says apologetically: "Maybe I haven't tried to understand you. Maybe you haven't tried to understand me. Anyway, I appreciate it more than you can imagine" (69). Mel's health improves upon seeing his sisters and brother. He is extremely pleased to see them. Addressing his brother ,Harry, and speaking about his sisters' presence, Mel wonders: "Why shouldn't they come to see me? They're my own sisters, aren't they? Who has better sisters than I have?(*He opens up his arms to great them*" (73). Mel, though sick himself, shows great concern for his elderly brother: "You don't look well to me, Harry. You're working too hard;" He goes on to give him precious pieces of advice: "Don't work so hard, Harry.... You have to relax more." As a caring sage addressing his disciple parentally, Mel gives his brother his experience in that respect, hopeful that Harry will never be exposed to such experiences; "three things I learned at the doctor's, Harry. You have to relax, you mustn't take the world too seriously ... and you have to be very careful of what you say when you go out on the terrace"(75).

The last scene of the last act of the play (Act II, Scene iii) epitomizes the denouement of the play. It proves that 'the darkest hour is that before the dawn' and ' every cloud has a silver lining. Mel's health improves drastically. He is now progressing on his own; he does need the help of doctors. He puts it straightforwardly: "I'm not going back to that doctor. He's a quack. Her sits there cleaning his pipe, playing with his watch fob, and doesn't know what the hell he's talking about(76-7). He does not want to add a financial burden to his exhausted wife. He comforts her about his health: "If I'm getting better, I'm doing it myself... I'm working my *own* problems out. ... I'm curing myself, I'm telling you." One cannot miss the sincere care for and deep concern about his wife. He knows that she will just do anything for him and he cannot tolerate to see her burning for his sake. In a happy family, egoism and selfishness give way to altruism , philanthropy, selflessness and self-denial. Mel's words penetrate the heart as they are charged with emotions and replete with truthfulness and sincerity; He addresses his wife in a caressing tone:: " I see how you look when you come home every night. Killing yourself, breaking your back and for what? To give forty dollars an hour to a pipe cleaner? I can't take it any more, Edna. I can't see you turning yourself into an old woman just for me" (77). But Edna's company went out of business and as such she lost her job. It's now Mel's turn to console his distracted wife. Ordeals again unify the couple in a touchingly emotional way. Mel assures his wife that if they lose the whole world , at least they have one another. Edna is still desperate. She cannot imagine what is happening. The following exchange is charged with emotions:

Edna (*sobbing*) I thought we were such a strong country, Mel. If You can't depend on America, who can you depend on?

Mel Ourselves, Edna. We have to depend on each other. (78)

Mel does his best to comfort his wife: "It's just a job, Edna. It's not your whole life" (78). There is a parallel structure between the first

and the last scene of the play, with only a reverse of roles. It sounds like patient-doctor relationship; with Mel as the patient at the beginning while the play closes on him assuming the role of the healer. The parallel sounds identical with even tiny details. The image of Mel at the first scene -with his empty cup in his hand and water running all over his shoes, forgetting how to work the water cooler- is paralleled at the last scene by the image of Edna in the bus unable to open her pocketbook; a little boy had to help her. Her feeling of having no strength left is paralleled by her husband's earlier feeling of 'losing control'. Simon wants to emphasize that life is always a matter of ups and downs. A couple's real metal is shown in time of ordeals and catastrophes. The play closes on an optimistic tone that rings so audibly. We , as audience, know for sure that Mel will do his best to support his wife on all various levels and we know that he is apt and competent. The crucible of ordeals and dilemmas produced a lovely trustworthy couple.

Mel's elder brother, Harry, adds a gigantic dimension to the optimism on which the play closes. He comes far away from the country to New York to pay his brother a visit. One cannot miss the fraternally affectionate tone in Harry's words:

> I brought you some apples from the country. (*He opens his attaché case*)You always loved apples, I remember ... are you allowed to eat them now? (80)

He then offers him a twenty-five-thousand-dollar check to buy himself a summer camp. Although Harry is not wholly convinced of the project, he – together with his sisters – do this just to please Mel. To Harry , who sincerely loves his brother, the criterion is: " If that gives you (addressing Mel) pleasure, then this gives me pleasure" (81). Upon Mel's refusal to take the money, Harry feels miserable. He bursts out in a sincere fit of anger: " Why don't you let me do this for you? Why won't you let me have the satisfaction of making you happy?" (82) He even feels insulted. In a morose tone , Harry blames

his brother:" Why am I always excluded from the family?" (82) Mel , on the other hand, pacifies him ; he informs him that his good intention are more than enough, and that he highly appreciates his brother's cordial feelings. The problem for Mel is that he cannot take the money; he is simply self-made; he does not like to be dependent on others. With the end of the play, there is a strong visual indication that Mel has been cured and can stand strongly on his two strong feet. For the second time , he is being hit by a bail of water- by an upstairs neighbor, this time, his wife; However, his reaction is totally different. He is no longer sobbing. His only comment is that: "They did it again". Edna's final speech is highly revealing of a totally changed perspective towards her husband. She is very much proud of him, especially that minutes ago she tainted her neighbor saying :"Your husband isn't half the man my husband is"(85). Now that her husband is being drenched again, taking it stoically, she is highly impressed:

I think you 're behaving very well, Mel. I think you're taking it beautifully this time ... That shows real progress, Mel. I think you have *grown* through this experience, Mel, I really do. ... Maybe you're right. Maybe you really *don't* have to go back to the doctor any more ... I'm so proud of you, Mel, so proud ... Because you're better than them ... Better than all of them, Mel.

Edna uses the short name for Melvin , as always, which indicates love , affection and intimacy. In that final speech she uses this short name as much as five times. She really loves him; she actually cares about him and is fond of him. More than that, she is very proud of him which means that he is trustworthy and dependable. With that and the fall of snow, the play closes leaving us with a sense of relief , knowing that such a family can pull itself together in face of any trouble that may arise. Furthermore, we discern glimpses of happiness, felicity and bliss that will engulf that trustworthy family. The fall of the snow is indicative of another crisis that may arise. Mel is prepared to face

such a crisis with "*one hand holding his shovel, the other around Edna's shoulder, a contemporary* American Gothic"(86-7). There is a hint that family is the basic unit of society and that its welfare means the felicity of the whole society at large. Simon wants to say that the solidarity of the society starts with the family. As unemployment was a dilemma in which the Edisons proved their real mettle , heavy snow, forty-three inches, is a chance to prove the solidarity of the society at large. As such, "Snow plows were ordered out on the streets and *city residents* were asked to get out their shovels in *a joint effort* to show how *New Yorkers* can *live together* and *work together* in *a common cause*" ;'Italics mine' (87).

The analysis of the above-mentioned plays has been meant to show that Simon has been obsessed with the concept of family in his plays. This deep concern for such a concept is , by no means, limited to these plays. Rather, it is more or less extant in all his plays. If such an idea is so stressed in the aforementioned plays, what about the so-called biographical plays? Such a concept is certainly profusely abundant. These are the smash hits ; now-classic autobiographical trilogy that began with *Brighton Beach Memoirs* (1985) and continued with Tony Award-winning *Biloxi Blues*(1986) and came to a wondrously memorable conclusion with *Broadway Bound* (1987). The last, for instance, revolves round two brothers; Eugene Jerome and his older brother, Stanley who stand for Neil Simon and his brother Danny. In this play, the brothers learn abut "brotherhood, family and friendship – and about the vulnerability, and dignity, of human beings".[32] It is even more significant, in this particular respect, that Simon's dedication of the play reads as: "For my mother, father, and brother".[33] Apparently, throughout his literary career, Neil Simon has been preoccupied with the concept of family. He uses his comedy not only to edify, but also to delectify. His plays are far from being just epicurean or hedonistic in nature; they are simply delectably and delightfully edifying.

*Notes:*

1. Neil Simon, *Rewrites: A Memoir*, New York: Simon & Schuster Inc.,1998.
2. Robert K. Johnson, *Neil Simon* , Boston, M.A.: Twayne Publishers, 1983,p.xi.
3. *Ibid*, ix.
4. Gerald M. Berkowitz, *American Drama of the Twentieth Century*, London and New York: Longman Publishing, 1992, p.154.
5. Edythe M. McGovern,, *Neil Simon: A Critical Study*, New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1979, p.1.
6. *Rewrites*, p.120.
7. McGovern, p. 11.
8. *Rewrites*, p.119.
9. *Ibid*, p.18.
10. *Ibid*, p.126.
11. Neil Simon, *Last of the Red Hot Lovers*, NY: Samuel French, Inc., 1970, p.66.
12. McGovern, p.1.
13. *Ibid*,p.1.
14. *Rewrites*, p.54.
15. *Ibid*, p.124.
16. *Ibid*, p.121.
17. Lawrence Linderman," Playboy Interview: Neil Simon," *Playboy* 26 (February 1979): 68.
18. McGovern, p.15.
19. All page references are to *Come Blow Your Horn* in *The Comedy of Neil Simon* (New York: Random House, 1971), p.21.
20. Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, New York: Modern Library, 1998.

*21.* Johnson, p.5.

*22.* Alan Levy "Doc Smith's Rex for Comedy," *New York Times Magazine*, 7 March 1965,pp.42-3.

*23.* Johnson, p.4.

*24.* Neil Simon, *Barefoot in the Park*, New York: Random House, 1964, p.24. All page references to the play are to this edition.

*25.* Johnson, p.12.

*26. Umamah bint al-Harith*

*27.* McGovern, p.98.

*28. Ibid*, pp.105-6.

*29.* Neil Simon, *The Prisoner of Second Avenue*, New York: Random House, 1972. All page references to the play are to this edition.

*30.* William Shakespeare, *Othello*, Essex, England: New Swan Shakespeare Advanced Series, Longman, 1968.

*31. Rewrites*, p.221.

*32.* Neil Simon, *Broadway Bound,* New York: Random House, 1987.

*33. Ibid*, p.iv.

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