



The Odd Couple

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Places Discussed

*New York City. A native of New York City's Bronx, playwright Neil Simon placed most of his early plays in New York apartments, and his critics often suggest that these largely uniform urban settings limit his appeal. Others suggest that Simon's comedy transcends place, and the enduring success of *The Odd Couple* in its many manifestations (stage plays, male and female versions, film, and television) would seem to prove this.

Oscar's apartment. In the play's initial stage directions, Simon indicates that Oscar's Riverside Drive address suggests a certain gentility and that the grotesquely untidy state of the apartment seems a recent development given the stylish furnishings of Oscar's wife, who has been away for three months. This subtle visual impression is only reinforced in the dialogue by Oscar's quip in the first scene that the maid quit (after his wife and children left) because cleaning up after him became too difficult. However, Oscar's comic messiness is explicitly contrasted in the play's second act with the extreme tidiness introduced by Felix after he moves in, takes over the housekeeping, and creates the incompatible "marriage." At the end of the play, Felix relinquishes control over the appearance of the apartment and moves out. Oscar's last words imply that he will be tidier in the future.

Bibliography

"Divorce Broadway Style." *Newsweek*, March 22, 1965, 90-91. A contemporary review of the original Broadway production that considered the play limited and predictable, pleasurable but unmemorable and more entertainment than art. Describes the play as "an extended situation with no interior development and with a tacked-on denouement."

"Divorce Is What You Make It." *Time*, March 19, 1965, 66. A contemporary review of the original Broadway production that describes *The Odd Couple* as "an evening of group hysteria" and "an astutely characterized study in incompatibility."

Johnson, Robert K. *Neil Simon*. Boston: Twayne, 1983. A sophisticated book-length treatment of Simon's work. The chapter on *The Odd Couple* argues that in this play Simon was pushing beyond the simpler comedy of earlier plays but that the third act is weaker than the first two.

Kerr, Walter. "What Simon Says." *The New York Times Magazine*, March 22, 1970, 6, 12, 14, 16. A landmark essay on *The Odd Couple*. The only major New York drama critic consistently to champion Simon's work, Kerr considers Simon "to have discovered the exact amount of God's truth a light comedy can properly contain."

McGovern, Edythe M. *Neil Simon: A Critical Study*. 2d ed. New York: Ungar, 1979. The first full-length study of Simon's work. The chapter on *The Odd Couple* asserts that Simon's comedy captures the essence of human incompatibility, irrespective of gender or marital status, and demonstrates that the missing ingredient in such relationships is the inability to compromise.

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