

THE SECRET LIFE OF JOKES

with David Misch

The well-known comedian George Orwell said “The aim of a joke is not to degrade the human being but to remind him he’s already degraded.” Okay, that’s one explanation. But gagsters like Sigmund Freud, Immanuel Kant and Thomas Hobbes all had theories about humor, which means jokes are Really Important, not just a way to make someone snort up their milk.

I like to call jokes “comedy in miniature.” (I like to call my cat “No! Not on the rug!”, but that tends to be situational.) Seen in a certain way – the way I see it – comedy uses the same basic components as all art forms: tension-and-resolution, pattern recognition, misdirection and surprise. For jokes, the big difference is they’re small, which makes them easier to pull apart, to see what makes them tick and why they make us laugh.

Topics covered include the Rule of 3 (Why are things funnier in threes? Really, why? I mean, why?); Is humor inherently hostile?; How jokes are related to Japanese haiku poetry; Why jokes make you smarter; Dirty jokes that aren’t dirty; and The Official Funniest Joke In The World.