

An Analysis of The Simpsons

The Simpsons is a very successful animated sitcom. Sitcom is an abbreviation of situation comedy. A sitcom is a comedy in which you have different storylines every episode. Other famous animated sitcoms are Family Guy, Futurama and South Park.

The Simpsons is the brainchild of Matt Groening (rhymes with complaining) and started off as 30 second sketches on the Tracy Ullman Show. They proved so successful that the Fox Network decided to produce a half hour long version and so on December 1989 The Simpsons as we know and love was born.

Before The Simpsons was introduced many sitcoms were quite bland and a perfect reflection of family life. Matt Groening decided to make a programme that reacted against these middle class, formulaic sitcoms.

The purpose of The Simpsons is above all to entertain otherwise no one will watch it, however The Simpsons also exposes stereotypes and satirises aspects of mainstream cultures and institutions that are wrong as a way of ridiculing them.

The main appeal of The Simpsons lies with its target audience. My younger sister enjoys watching The Simpsons as she enjoys seeing Bart and Lisa getting into trouble and also because it has a lot of funny moments that even children will enjoy, for example when Barney rolls into everyone during the soccer riot. Me and my parents enjoy it as it has adult jokes and adult themes such as when Patty and Selma are seducing the repairman. Many other animated sitcoms like South Park have failed to equal The Simpsons wide age range and that is a reason why they don't match The Simpsons' accomplishments.

In 'The Cartridge Family', Homer buys a gun to protect his family after a 'citywide orgy of destruction' but it causes friction with Marge who feels guns will endanger the family and therefore issues Homer an ultimatum. Your family or your gun.

In The Simpsons, nearly all the characters subvert or conform to stereotypes. This is done to show stereotypes are just lazy generalizations that are used as a way of keeping people down.

In 'The Cartridge Family' violent Scottish football fans wearing tartans and with red hair worsen a soccer riot. They say 'Call this a soccer riot' and bring out weapons. These fans are conforming to the stereotype of Scottish people and British hooligans. This stereotype has been exaggerated so that it can be brought to our attention and so we realize how silly the stereotype is.

On the other hand the father stereotype is being subverted in 'The Cartridge Family'. When the 'Ex-Con' salesman comes over Homer doesn't listen to a word he says. Instead he shouts 'Lets get that' in a very excited manner with his eyes wide open. This is subverting the stereotype because the father should be calm and have good judgement.

The father should know what is best for the family. Homer doesn't. Matt Groening could be trying to tell us that all fathers are not clever or have good judgement. He could be poking fun at the fact that the father is supposed to be wise and intellectual even though this is not always the case.

The Simpsons also satirises some aspects of American mainstream culture. The main aspect criticised in this episode is the gun culture.

In this episode, The Simpsons is trying to persuade us that guns are dangerous because in America many people own guns. To do this The Simpsons exaggerates that guns put your family at a lot of risk instead of protecting them. For example when Bart almost shoots Millhouse. The Simpsons points out that a gun owner is hypocritical. When Homer says 'Piece of mind is what you shall have' to Marge there is a juxtaposition of scenes to highlight this hypocrisy. After reassuring Marge, straight away we see Homer ask the shopkeeper for his deadliest gun. By doing this Matt Groening hopes people will think twice about keeping guns in the house. He also shows how silly it is to keep guns to protect your family by showing the gun going off and shooting Marge's photo. Even though this is unlikely to happen in real life it shows accidents do happen and that guns endanger instead of protecting.

In 'The Cartridge Family' law and politics are criticised a lot. Matt Groening feels there are several aspects of American law and politics that have to be changed.

Mayor Quimby is supposed to epitomize the politician and because of this he leads a very seedy and corrupt private life. Mayor Quimby comes into Marge's room with a blonde woman and asks if Marge needs the room for the whole night. This is showing that politicians often abuse their power and are very dishonest because there are some real life Mayor Quimbys. For example Bill Clinton.

The Simpsons also satirises the legal world by focusing on the Five Day Waiting law. Homer must wait five days before he can be issued a gun. This is done to ensure that proper checks can be undertaken on whether someone is eligible to carry guns. However The Simpsons claims that five days is not enough to determine if someone is fit to carry guns, as this could be a life or death decision. This is highlighted by the fact that Homer says 'Five days! I'm mad now'. This is saying that often people buy guns on an impulse and that they do not really think about what they are getting themselves into. Also the law is portrayed as not being very effective. Homer is an 'alcoholic', has a 'mental problem' and has beaten up important people, however this only limits Homer to 3 guns. This is ridiculing the law as it is not working. If it were working America would not have such a high crime rate.

Unlike English mainstream culture, America does not view soccer that highly. Americans consider it boring as it is 'low scoring' and has 'draws'. Because of this The Simpsons makes fun of our soccer culture. The Simpsons satirise the fact that soccer supporters get overly emotional about the 'Beautiful Game'. Before the match, Homer turns to Marge looking very worried and claims that he will 'kill himself if Portugal win'. Matt Groening

is trying to say some supporters treat soccer as a life or death situation and get too intense about their team. The Simpsons also tries to imply football is all hype. The expectation of the crowd is tremendous during the build up to the match but it all fizzles out once the boring match kicks off. The Simpsons is saying that football does not live up to the hype and euphoria created by the media.

The Simpsons parodies certain median genres or styles to show how cheesy or formulaic they are. In 'The Cartridge Family' Homer says to Marge 'There is so much I want to tell you'. This is imitating corny romance films in which a character says 'There is so much I want to tell you'. Changing the tell to yell not only makes it funny but also shows how predictable and unoriginal these films have become. The Simpsons is trying to show us that we should not accept these identical and unimaginative films because The Simpsons is successful as it is not unimaginative or formulaic.

In addition The Simpsons satirises the power of the media and the TV. During 'The Cartridge Family' everyone is watching the television silently. The Simpsons is pressing home the depressing truth that the whole family only gets together to watch TV. They do not come together for each other. Also when the whole family is watching the TV all we see is the television screen. This is suggesting that (kids especially) become very influenced by what they see. All they can see is what TV says to do and nothing else. This is also the case when Bart and Lisa run to Homer and ask to be taken to the soccer game, however they know nothing about soccer and they never would have wanted to go to the match if they had not seen the advert.

The final thing The Simpsons makes fun of is the American consumer culture. This is done as Matt Groening is unhappy that society as a whole think they need lots of things or possessions to be happy even though they don't. When the salesman comes to Homer's house, Homer agrees to buy 'Lucite' and a 'pretty alarm' even though it is obvious that those things are not needed. Groening is saying that often we don't think we need something until someone suggests it. It could be the TV or other people who suggest it but once we hear about it we feel as if it's essential to have. The Simpsons is doing this to say things aren't important. The important things are your friends and family.

In conclusion the main purpose of 'The Cartridge Family' is to persuade us not to keep guns in our possession as they are very dangerous and cause a lot of problems. The title of the episode gives this away. There is a pun on words because 'The Cartridge Family' sounds like 'The Partridge Family', which is a sitcom about a perfect family. However a cartridge reminds us of a gun.

On the whole I think this episode was quite successful as it has strong images such as the gun falling into Bart's hands and then Bart nearly shooting his best friend when he has the gun. These ideas stick in our minds so we think twice about buying guns. However the episodes strongest feature is the comedy it can generate over as sensitive a subject like keeping guns in the house

An interesting point is that The Simpsons contradicts itself. Firstly it has become what it is against. 'The Cartridge Family' makes fun of celebrities being used to sell products and the public buying these things by using the example of Pele endorsing Crestfield Wax Paper, however I have seen The Simpsons lend it's name to all sorts of products like cereal and ready meals. So in a way either inadvertently or deliberately it has become a contradiction. However I find it hard to believe that someone as clever as Matt Groening would be naïve enough to accidentally let The Simpsons become the contradiction it now is.

Another point is that The Simpsons criticises the very medium it uses which is TV. Matt Groening satirises TV for making people want things they don't need however I have seen a lot of kids go and buy Simpsons toys and games after watching The Simpsons. Because of this I find it hypocritical for The Simpsons to criticise other things for doing the same thing it (indirectly) does.