

The Simpsons.



In 1989 Fox Network bought the American animation ‘The Simpsons’. The Simpsons started out as a small sketch on the Tracey Ullman show, that’s where the Simpsons were born. Their creator Matt Groening gave new life into the old American family cartoon (like the classic Flintstones and the Jetsons) and he turned it into a satire of the typical modern American family. The Simpsons has been running for over a decade now and has not lost any of its charm.

Even though the Simpsons are a huge success with people from all over the world and a success with all ages, they have been taken to court a few times and there’s been numerous insults thrown at the makers because of the material that it contains. Former president of the United States, George Bush, made one such complaint in which he claimed “the Simpsons is a bad influence on the children of today”. It is the humour in the Simpsons which attracts the unwanted attention of the law, but this is the main aspect of the show out of the many things that make the Simpsons so unique and funny. In this essay I will be analysing one such particular Simpson episode, ‘Lisa’s first word’, this features many jokes and it has some good examples of how it satirises the American family.

In this episode the Simpsons try and coax Maggie to say her first word. Homer tries in vain to get her to say “daddy”, but she only burps. Marge recalls Barts first words, “aye crumba,” and when Lisa asks what her first word was, Marge flashes back to 1983 when she first learned that she was pregnant with Lisa. At the beginning of the first part of the episode when Homer tries to get Maggie to say “daddy”, and all that she is capable of doing is to let out a burp. Homer leads himself to believe that Lisa says ‘burlap’. This is an example of how the Simpsons satirises the American father figure in this case it’s showing how the father is primitive, basic, very slow and dim witted.

With a second baby on the way, Homer and Marge search for a bigger house. The year 1983 gives way to 1984, and the summer Olympics begin. Krusty Burger offers free burgers to customers who pick Olympic events won by the U.S. on their game cards. However, the games included in the promotion are the ones that the Russians have traditionally won. When the Russians boycott the Olympics, the Americans win every event, and Homer gets a steady supply of free Krusty burgers. In this next chapter you see Krusty Burger filled with the other overweight members of Springfield (which is practically the whole town) trying to push to the front of the line to get their food. This is trying to make fun of the people of America implying that they are all

overweight. Matt Groening is also satirising the fact that Krusty the clown is trying to con money out of the public using the Olympic scheme. I think that he is satirising big corporations, which make these offers, and he would like to see their plan back fire on them, which he has done in this episode to Krusty.

When Lisa finally arrives, Bart has a difficult time adjusting. Jealous of all the attention she is getting, he decides to run away. However, when Lisa toddles into his bedroom and says her first word “Bart” he changes his mind. Homer tries to get Lisa to say “Daddy”. But she can only say Homer. Back in the present, Homer carries Maggie up to bed, turns out the light, and leaves. Alone in her bedroom Maggie utters her first word “Daddy”. In this last chapter Bart does a lot of mischievous acts like spilling his drink, then wiping it up with Lisa and writing on the wall then giving Lisa the blame. His final misbehaving moment in this chapter is cutting off all of Lisa’s hair. Meanwhile Lisa is sitting smiling innocently. Matt Groening is showing us the typical four year old and what a four year old gets up to. He is also showing us an early example of Bart’s evilness because he wants to get across the picture that Bart Simpson is the evil one and that Lisa is the good one which is the case in most stereotypical family the son is bad and the daughter good.

The Simpsons is based on obvious comedy. Like the antics of Bart, such as the famous phone pranks made to Moe’s tavern.

Bart makes a call to Moe’s tavern:

Moe: Moe’s tavern

Bart: Hello, is Al there?

Moe: Al?

Bart Yeah, Al. Last name Coholic.

Moe: Lemme check...(calls out) phone call for Al. Al coholic. Is there an alcoholic here? (Bar flies snigger) Wait a minute (back on the phone) Listen, you yellow bellied rat jackass, if I ever find out who you are, I’m gonna kill you!

This level of humour, like the visual sight gags .i.e. homer falling down he side of a cliff repeatedly, Homer dancing around childlike and times when he strangles Bart. It can also include other forms of humour, like the simplistic use of repetition, such as catch-phrase comedy. Many of the characters have catch phrases, which are repeated wherever possible. The most famous of these are Homer’s “D’oh!” To show you how much of an impact the Simpsons has had on us they have included Homers catch phrase in the English dictionary.

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Another gag from a different episode, which can be seen as satire of the American family is when at the end of the episode, when grounds keeper Willie's home video has saved Homer, he sits down to watch Rock Bottom. It shows grounds keeper Willie calling him depraved.

Homer: Oh, that man is sick!

Marge: Grounds Keeper Willie saved you, Homer.

Homer: but listen to the music! He's evil Marge evil!

Marge: hasn't this experience taught you, you can't believe everything you hear?

Homer: Marge my friend, I haven't learnt a thing. (Homer hugs the television) Lets never fight again.

This I think is satirising the stereotypical American family, how much they depend on the televisions sets, implying they believe everything that they hear and satirises the way they are easily manipulated by the media. In this example they show by giving a bit of music in the background of the show to say things like 'this man is evil' or in kiddies programmes they use different music then horror programmes. Mat Groening is satirising the American family saying that they are couch potatoes they are dim witted and can be easily fooled.

I conclude that 'The Simpsons' does satirise the American family in a big way. I haven't given many examples in this short essay because I could go on and on because Matt Groening does this a lot and not only in his cartoon the Simpsons but also in another of his cartoons Futrama. I think that he does this to make people laugh and maybe they don't realise that they are like this but I think that it is very clear and if the Americans can't see that they wouldn't mind the cartoon and they should be shown what they are like so they can smarten up, but the majority of the population who watch The Simpsons must find it humorous either because they know that they don't do that and they think it's not about them or they know that they do it and laugh it off. I just think it's funny but in other countries they might have a different sense of humour so they might not see what is funny and maybe they like it because of another type of humour in The Simpsons. My summary of The Simpsons being a satire of the American family is that it is a satire not only on the American family but on the concept of good and bad. For example Bart and Lisa. and that Matt Groening has great sense of humour in which he can talk about his country people because he must have realised that the idea would either flop or rise to success like it has and he deserves all the praise for what he has done.