

**“Mmmm. . . Pistol Whip”: An Exploration of Food, Drugs, and Medical  
Devices in *The Simpsons*  
[Redacted Version]**

by: Jennifer D. Cochran, Class of 2004

April, 27, 2004

Submitted in satisfaction of the Food and Drug Law course requirement and the third year written work  
requirement.

“Mmmm. . . Pistol Whip”: An Exploration of Food, Drugs, and Medical Devices in

***The Simpsons***

by: Jennifer D. Cochran

## Abstract

Food and television has been utterly linked since the invention of the TV dinner in 1951. Likewise, drugs and medical devices have always been prominent on television, mostly through advertising. Today, one television program, *The Simpsons*, has further linked food, drugs, and medical devices with television by providing endless examples of their use. Through satire, *The Simpsons* has become one of the most widely viewed and influential television programs of the last several years, and has influenced the way that viewers think about food, drugs, and medical devices. *The Simpsons* has the ability to open the table up for discussion on a wide range of issues revolving around the Food and Drug Administration, and has done so over the past fifteen years with humor and style. Through Homer, Marge, Bart, Lisa, and Maggie Simpson, the world has learned a great deal about food, drugs and medical devices and will hopefully continue to learn as the show lives on.

## Introduction

*The Simpsons* is one of television's longest running series and has been enjoyed by viewers worldwide for fifteen years. In its approximately three hundred and forty episodes, *The Simpsons* has tackled many important issues such as adultery,<sup>1</sup> death,<sup>2</sup> and religion.<sup>3</sup> Yet, throughout the entire series no subject has

---

<sup>1</sup>See e.g. *The Simpsons: Life on the Fast Lane* (FOX television broadcast, Mar. 18, 1990)(Marge contemplates cheating on Homer with her bowling instructor, Jacques); *The Simpsons: The Last Temptation of Homer* (FOX television broadcast, Dec. 9, 1993)(Homer contemplates cheating on Marge with a beautiful coworker).

<sup>2</sup>See e.g. *The Simpsons: Old Money* (FOX television broadcast, Mar. 28, 1991)(Grampa Simpson's girlfriend Bea Simmons dies); *The Simpsons: Round Springfield* (FOX television broadcast, Apr. 30, 1995)(Lisa must deal with the death of her hero, jazz legend Bleeding Gums Murphy); *The Simpsons: Alone Again Natura-Diddily* (FOX television broadcast, Feb. 13, 2000)(Ned Flanders copes with the death of his wife Maude).

<sup>3</sup>See e.g. *The Simpsons: Homer the Heretic* (FOX television broadcast, Oct. 8, 1992)(Homer decides he would rather watch football on Sunday than go to church); *The Simpsons: She of Little Faith* (FOX television broadcast, Dec. 16, 2001)(Lisa decides to become a Buddhist); *The Simpsons: Pray Anything* (FOX television broadcast, Feb. 9, 2003)(Homer angers God by praying for minor things).

been tackled more than the importance of food, drugs, and medical devices.<sup>4</sup> *The Simpsons* provides viewers with a perspective on the joys and dangers of food, the effects of both legal and illegal drug use, and the importance of medical devices through satire. Viewers of the series are asked to contemplate whether they should be indulgent like Homer or health-conscious like Lisa. They are shown the effects of alcohol use and abuse and are forced to question the values of alcohol and the ability to defeat alcoholism. They are shown the effects of drugs, including medical marijuana, steroids, and prescription drugs, such as Ritalin and are forced to ask themselves whether the “benefits” of these drugs are really worth it. Finally, they are shown some of the miracles and humor of medical devices and are forced to think about the importance of medical devices, such as pacemakers, in their lives. Humor can be one of the most powerful methods of communicating and, by consistently showing examples of food, drug, and medical device use, *The Simpsons* opens the floodgates of discussion on a wide variety of issues regarding the items that people use everyday and depend on.

This paper will begin with a discussion of the history and influence of *The Simpsons* in the United States and around the world and will then give short biographies of the pivotal characters on the show, so that one can truly get an understanding of the series. The next section focuses on food in *The Simpsons* and is the longest section of the paper because *The Simpsons* devotes much of its time to a discussion of food. Following the section on food is a discussion of drugs in *The Simpsons*, and finally a discussion of medical devices. Each discussion focuses on relevant examples of the use of food, drugs, and medical devices in *The Simpsons* and includes outside analysis where necessary. In this way, a thorough understanding of how

---

<sup>4</sup>*The Simpsons* has also addressed issues relating to cosmetics, for example, Marge consistently dyes her hair a shocking color of blue. See *The Simpsons: Secrets of a Successful Marriage* (FOX television broadcast, May 19, 1994). Homer uses deodorant on his entire body, including his groin. See *The Simpsons: Trilogy of Error* (FOX television broadcast, Apr. 29, 2001). Sporting events in *The Simpsons* feature such things as a free lotion giveaway and free squirts of “Blowhole,” a cologne with “ground-up whale in it.” See *The Simpsons: The Bart Wants What it Wants* (FOX television broadcast, Feb. 17, 2002); *The Simpsons: Helter Shelter* (FOX television broadcast, Dec. 1, 2002). Additionally, celebrities often endorse cosmetic products on *The Simpsons*, including Meryl Streep, who has a perfume called “Versatility.” See *The Simpsons: A Streetcar Named Marge* (FOX television broadcast, Oct. 1, 1992)(Tagline: “Smell Like Streep for Cheap!”). The use of cosmetics in *The Simpsons*, however, is much more rare than the use of food, drugs, and medical devices, so it is not necessary to enter into a full discussion regarding cosmetics in this paper.

pervasive food, drugs, and medical devices are in *The Simpsons* and how the portrayal of food, drugs, and medical devices may affect viewers can be achieved.

### History of *The Simpsons*

Before beginning a discussion of food, drug, and medical device references in *The Simpsons*, it is important to examine the origins of and inspiration for the series. In 1980, Matt Groening began drawing his “Life in Hell” comic strip. The strip featured “one and two-eared rabbits [and] a pair of gay male fez-wearing lovers named Akbar and Jef.”<sup>5</sup> The comic strip quickly became popular with a “punk/bohemian” readership and was quickly syndicated in nation-wide alternative newspapers.<sup>6</sup> One of the readers of “Life in Hell” was James L. Brooks, a producer on *The Tracey Ullman Show*, a comedy sketch show on the then burgeoning FOX Network.<sup>7</sup> Brooks approached Matt Groening in 1986 and asked him to create a series of short animated spots to air on *The Tracey Ullman Show*.<sup>8</sup> Groening’s initial idea was to animate his “Life in Hell” characters for the shorts, but he changed his mind out of the fear that his inexperience with animation could “taint the comic strip – which was doing just fine.”<sup>9</sup> Groening instead decided to create characters that were a bit closer to him personally. Groening drew the Simpson family in fifteen minutes and named the characters (except for Bart) after his immediate family.<sup>10</sup> Forty-eight of the shorts aired on *The Tracey Ullman* show and after testing the shorts with mainstream audiences in movie theaters, the network and Groening decided to create a thirty-minute series.<sup>11</sup>

The first thirty-minute episode of *The Simpsons* aired on December 17, 1989, as a Christmas special.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup>Jay Babcock, *Meet the Maker: Matt Groening*, at <http://www.jaybabcock.com/groening.html>

<sup>6</sup>*See id.*

<sup>7</sup>*See id.*; Kristine McKenna, *Matt Groening: Matt Groening May Look Like Your Average Guy, But Remember, He’s Got Homer and Bart Simpson Living in His Head*, MY GENERATION, May-June 2001, 48-52, 54, available at <http://www.snpp.com/other/interviews/groening01a.html>.

<sup>8</sup>*See* Kristine McKenna, *supra* note 7.

<sup>9</sup>Jay Babcock, *supra* note 5.

<sup>10</sup>Newsgroup alt.tv.simpsons Question and Answer with Matt Groening, Prodigy, June 1993, available at <http://www.snpp.com/other/interviews/groening93b.html>.

<sup>11</sup>*See* Kristine McKenna, *supra* note 7; Jay Babcock, *supra* note 5.

<sup>12</sup>*See* The Simpsons Official Homepage, Episode Guide, *The Simpsons: Simpsons Roasting on an Open Fire*, at [http://www.thesimpsons.com/episode\\_guide/0101.htm](http://www.thesimpsons.com/episode_guide/0101.htm).

While the thirty-second shorts succeeded at “introduc[ing] the family’ [sic] distinct personalities: Homer’s temper, Bart’s mischievousness, Lisa’s precociousness, etc.,” Matt Groening was excited by the prospect of being able to “tell a story” and “go for real emotions.”<sup>13</sup> His concept for the show was “to go for moments of real emotion like they did in Disney cartoons while still going for the really hard-edged slapstick of Warner Brothers cartoons.”<sup>14</sup> Under this concept, Groening and co-producer Sam Simon wrote most of the early episodes and the series became an “immediate hit.”<sup>15</sup> Today, the show is not written by Groening, but instead by a team of writers, though Groening is still involved in almost every aspect of the show’s creation.<sup>16</sup> For inspiration, the show’s writers usually look to the news, which gives *The Simpsons* its real-life relevance.<sup>17</sup> As of this writing, *The Simpsons* is in the middle of its fifteenth season and the series consists of approximately three hundred and forty episodes, making the show the longest running comedy in television history.<sup>18</sup> The show is scheduled for at least sixteen seasons, though the cast of the show may be causing trouble with demands for a salary increase from \$125,000 per episode to \$360,000 per episode each, which may affect the future of the series.<sup>19</sup> However, even if the future of the show is uncertain, fans might be treated to a feature film, though currently there are no definite plans.<sup>20</sup>

### Understanding the Pervasiveness of *The Simpsons*

As a show that is currently in its fifteenth season, with at least sixteen seasons planned, the success and popularity of *The Simpsons* is unquestionable. Many young people in the United States are hard-pressed to remember a time without Homer, Marge, Bart, Lisa and Maggie Simpson. The reach of the series does not

---

<sup>13</sup>Jay Babcock, *supra* note 5.

<sup>14</sup>*Id.*

<sup>15</sup>Kristine McKenna, *supra* note 7.

<sup>16</sup>See Newsgroup alt.tv.simpsons, *supra* note 10.

<sup>17</sup>See Marshall Fine, *Still D’oh-ing Strong*, THE JOURNAL NEWS, April 1, 2004, at G1.

<sup>18</sup>*Id.*; Joanna Doonar, *Homer’s Brand Odyssey*, BRAND STRATEGY, February 11, 2004.

<sup>19</sup>Andrew Gumbel, *Dough! Make it \$360,000 an Episode or We Quit the Series, Say Springfield Six*, THE INDEPENDENT – LONDON, April 2, 2004.

<sup>20</sup>*Simpsons to Hit Big Screen*, THE BIRMINGHAM POST, April 8, 2004.

end with the United States, however, as *The Simpsons* is the “most watched TV show in the world.”<sup>21</sup> *The Simpsons* is currently broadcast in seventy markets and has seventy million viewers worldwide.<sup>22</sup> Viewers are able to enjoy the show in languages ranging “from Swahili to Albanian.”<sup>23</sup> Matt Groening himself seems surprised at the worldwide success of the show, but comments that “I can’t tell you how amazing it is to me that people in Nigeria know who the Simpsons are.”<sup>24</sup> One question that comes to mind is just how a cartoon became so popular with both children and adults. Theories abound, but one explanation given by George Meyer, a previous head writer for the series, is that the show’s success is due to the fact that, “it’s like a Trojan horse that gets past people’s radar because it’s superficially conservative. The show’s subtext, however, is completely subversive and wild.”<sup>25</sup> This theory seems to have a great deal of truth to it given the raging debates about the value of the show, especially among self-proclaimed religious conservatives.<sup>26</sup> Matt Groening offers a simpler explanation for the show’s success, stating that Homer Simpson is the reason that the show is so popular.<sup>27</sup> “He’s completely driven by impulse. . . We’re all momentarily driven by impulse, but we manage to put the brakes on, and its fun to watch a character who just doesn’t have any brakes.”<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup>Kristine McKenna, *supra* note 7.

<sup>22</sup>Joanna Doonar, *supra* note 18.

<sup>23</sup>Andrew Gumbel, *supra* note 19.

<sup>24</sup>Jay Babcock, *supra* note 5.

<sup>25</sup>Kristine McKenna, *supra* note 7.

<sup>26</sup>Some religious leaders, in particular a minister in the United Kingdom, have begun using episodes of *The Simpsons* to teach issues of morality. The minister acknowledges that not all of the moral choices made by the family are what he would consider right, but says a great example of correct moral teaching in *The Simpsons* occurred when both Marge and Homer were tempted to cheat on each other and both turned the opportunity down. He stated that “you can’t get much more of a Christian message than that.” *Features: Religion Instruction Dysfunction*, THE PHILADELPHIA DAILY NEWS, April 7, 2004. On the other hand, George Bush Senior was once quoted as saying that American families should be “more like the Waltons and less like the Simpsons.” Joanna Doonar, *supra* note 18. Many Christians seem to share George Bush’s view on *The Simpsons* and feel that it is disrespectful to Christianity and dangerous for children to watch because the children on the show are often disrespectful to adults. See World Magazine Blog, *Simpsons Paradox Solved*, March 30, 2004, at <http://www.worldmagblog.com/archives/002537.html>. A study of religion and *The Simpsons* was done during the show’s twelfth season by sociologist John Heeren. Heeren analyzed seventy-one episodes and found that sixty-nine percent of episodes contained at least one religious reference, with eleven percent of episodes centering on a religious issue. Heeren desired to answer the ultimate question about whether the religious messages of the show were “good or bad” and ultimately concluded that:

[*The Simpsons* is] really about the religion that we see through the filter of the movies and television . . . [s]o we are dealing with a copy of a copy . . . This only raises a bigger question. When you have a satire of a satire does that mean that you are actually being positive?

Terry Mattingly, *The Gospel According to the Simpsons*, THE CINCINNATI POST, 2000, [http://www.beliefnet.com/story/55/story\\_5590\\_1.html](http://www.beliefnet.com/story/55/story_5590_1.html).

<sup>27</sup>Kristine McKenna, *supra* note 7.

<sup>28</sup>*Id.*

Another theory of the show's success is that the Simpsons are a more realistic reflection of the American family than families seen on other shows. Matt Groening said that the Simpson family is really "my memories of my family and my friends' families combined with all the TV sitcoms I watched growing up."<sup>29</sup> If the Simpsons resemble Matt Groening's family and he identifies with them, then chances are they resemble the families of many Americans, and the ability of the audience to identify with Homer, Marge, Bart, Maggie, and Lisa (not to mention the legions of secondary characters on *The Simpsons*) creates a desire to watch each week. Regardless of the truth of such theories, it cannot be denied that "[t]he show's influence is massive and historic; in a small but pervasive way, it has altered and infected the world."<sup>30</sup>

The influence of *The Simpsons* does not end with the television program, however. Over the last fifteen years, fans of *The Simpsons* have spent over 1.65 billion dollars on products from the show.<sup>31</sup> In the early years of merchandizing for *The Simpsons*, the products licensed were mostly T-shirts and underwear, soon followed by gifts for adults, such as chess sets and mouse pads. This was followed by a huge launch into toys and games, resulting in such items as dolls (or action figures) and board games such as *Simpsons Monopoly*, *Clue*, *Operation*, and *Life*.<sup>32</sup> This extensive merchandizing brings *The Simpsons* even more into the lives of viewers and shows just how much influence a television show can have on one's everyday life.

---

<sup>29</sup>Jay Babcock, *supra* note 5.

<sup>30</sup>Robert Lloyd, *Life in the 31<sup>st</sup> Century: Matt Groening: Past, Present*, Futurama, LA WEEKLY, March 26-April 1, 1999, available at <http://www.laweekly.com/ink/99/18/tv-1lloyd.php>. There are several examples of just how *The Simpsons* has altered the world. For instance, in 1999 Bart Simpson was named one of the top one hundred entertainers of the century by *Time* magazine, and in 2000 the Simpson family received a star on the Hollywood walk of fame. See Joanna Doonar, *supra* note 18. In addition, Homer's trademark phrase, "D'oh" (appearing in the show's script as "annoyed grunt") has been added to the Oxford English Dictionary. See Andrew Gumbel, *supra* note 19. Homer and Bart are not the only members of the Simpson family who have had an impact on real life. Marge Simpson was recently voted the United Kingdom's favorite mother, beating out the likes of Cherie Blair (Prime Minister Tony Blair's wife) and Elizabeth Hurley. See *Features: Profile: Marge Simpson: One Big Mother, The Nation's Most Popular Mother is a Two-Dimensional Character with Very Tall Hair*, THE SUNDAY TELEGRAPH, March 21, 2004. Lisa Simpson has also made a real world name for herself by being honored by environmentalists with an Environmental Media Award. See W. Reed Moran, *Lisa Simpson Animates Environmental Awards*, USA TODAY.COM, 2001, at <http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/spotlight/2001-11-15-simpsons.htm>. Finally, perhaps the strangest indication that *The Simpsons* has changed the world comes from a play adapted from the Quentin Tarantino film *Pulp Fiction*, in which the author traded the drug addiction in the film for an unquenchable addiction to *The Simpsons*, which the author states, "plays on our dependence on . . . 'The Simpsons.'" Charlotte Cripps, *Preview - Theatre - Warning - Live and Dangerous*, THE INDEPENDENT - LONDON, March 18, 2004.

<sup>31</sup>Joanna Doonar, *supra* note 18.

<sup>32</sup>*Id.*

In addition to apparel, gift, and toy merchandising, *The Simpsons* seems to have a special influence in the area of food merchandising. In the United Kingdom alone, the Fox Network has approximately twenty licenses for food, ranging “‘from doughnuts (one of Homer’s favorite foods) through to Friij milkshake.’ Biscuits, snacks and pasta shapes have also been licensed and Fox is the only company worldwide to have launched two branded breakfast cereals. Eat My Shorts and No Problemos are both Kellogg’s cereals named after Simpsons’ catchphrases.”<sup>33</sup> Food products featuring the Simpsons have also been marketed in the United States, including Butterfinger candy bars shaped like Bart Simpson, Brach’s fruit snacks in the shape of the Simpsons, Kraft Macaroni and Cheese in fun Simpsons shapes, and two limited edition Kellogg’s cereals, Bart Simpson Peanut Butter Chocolate Crunch and Homer’s Cinnamon Donut (see picture) [redacted].<sup>34</sup> Food products are especially fitting for marketing in conjunction with *The Simpsons*, because The “Simpsons is so much about food.”<sup>35</sup> In this way, Homer, Marge, Bart, Lisa, and Maggie influence what consumers eat, not only through the cartoon program itself, but also through direct product marketing and advertising. It is clear that *The Simpsons* has gained remarkable popularity both as a cartoon series and as a merchandizing machine. This illustrates just how pervasive the show is today, not only in the United States, but also all over the world. Because of this pervasiveness, *The Simpsons* can influence the way people think and feel, not only about food, drugs and medical devices, but also about the world in general.

## The Characters

Finally, before beginning a full discussion of food, drugs, and medical devices in *The Simpsons*, it is important

---

<sup>33</sup> *Id.*

<sup>34</sup> See Collecting Simpsons! *Household: Kitchen, Bath and Bedroom*, at <http://www.bartfan.com/kitchen.htm>.

<sup>35</sup> Joanna Doonar, *supra* note 18.

to understand exactly who the characters on the show are and what their primary motivations are, especially those characters who play a pivotal role in the areas of food, drugs and medical devices.

## The Simpson Family

*Homer Simpson*: Homer Simpson is the patriarch of the Simpson family and is approximately thirty-eight years old.<sup>36</sup> Homer is now definitively the main character of the series and has led his family through an endless string of adventures. Homer, who barely managed to graduate from high school, works as the safety inspector at the local nuclear power plant, which he has referred to as the “nucleon plant.”<sup>37</sup> One episode indicates that Homer has an IQ of 55,<sup>38</sup> which under current IQ theories would put Homer in the “very dull” category.<sup>39</sup> Homer is also an alcoholic by many accounts, including that of creator Matt Groening, who classifies Homer as having a “compulsive beer drinking disorder.”<sup>40</sup> Homer is also a glutton with a particular weakness for donuts, which occupies a large part of his daily life (along with various other foods to be discussed later) (see picture) [redacted]. Despite being fat, bald and stupid, however, Homer has his

---

<sup>36</sup>See *The Simpsons: New Kids on the Bleech* (FOX television broadcast, Feb.25, 2001) (we learn that Homer himself refers to thirty-eight as about his age).

<sup>37</sup>*The Simpsons: Children of a Lesser Clod* (FOX television broadcast, May 13, 2001)(Homer proclaims that his “life would be nothing without the nucleon plant”). In addition to working at the nuclear power plant, however, Homer has had an unusually large number of jobs on the show. “You know I’ve had a lot of jobs: boxer, mascot, astronaut, imitation Krusty, baby proofer, trucker, hippie, plow driver, food critic, conceptual artist, grease salesman, carny, mayor, grifter, bodyguard for the mayor, country western manager, garbage commissioner, mountain climber, farmer, inventor, Smithers, Poochie, celebrity assistant, power plant worker, fortune cookie writer, beer baron, Kwik-e-Mart clerk, homophobe, and missionary.” *The Simpsons: Poppa’s Got a Brand New Badge* (FOX television broadcast, May 22, 2002).

<sup>38</sup>See *The Simpsons: HOMR* (FOX television broadcast, Dec. 21, 2000) (Homer learns that he can have an operation to remove a crayon that is lodged in his brain, which will increase his IQ by fifty points. Later in the episode he feels surrounded by morons and wonders if there is any place in this world for a man with an IQ of one-hundred and five, placing his original IQ at fifty-five).

<sup>39</sup>See Richard J Herrnstein and Charles Murray, *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life*, 120-21 (Free Press Paperbacks 1996).

<sup>40</sup>See Newsgroup alt.tv.simpsons, *supra* note 10. See also *The Simpsons: Co-Dependent’s Day* (FOX television broadcast, Mar. 21, 2004) (worker at a rehabilitation clinic informs Homer that he is a chronic alcoholic).

moments as a truly devoted husband and father.<sup>41</sup>

*Marge Simpson:* Marge is the matriarch of the Simpson family, and is a housewife in the classic style.<sup>42</sup> Marge is utterly convinced that she can mold Homer into the ideal husband through gentle nagging and the occasional groan.<sup>43</sup> Marge is the grounding force in the family. Her main duties include cooking meals and cleaning up after Homer and the kids. When Marge is not around havoc often ensues, especially where food is involved.<sup>44</sup> [picture redacted].

*Bart Simpson:* Bart Simpson is the oldest child in the Simpson family and he is notoriously bratty. Bart's life revolves mostly around his hero, television clown Krusty.<sup>45</sup> Bart also has a love of skateboarding, video games, making fun of nerds, and candy. Despite being a mischievous brat, however, Bart loves his family and will always help them when he is needed.<sup>46</sup> [picture redacted].

*Lisa Simpson:* Lisa is the middle child in the Simpson family. She is also the most intelligent and thoughtful member of the family. Lisa's moral principles are often in conflict with the sins of Bart and Homer, and in

---

<sup>41</sup>See e.g. *The Simpsons: Bart the Daredevil* (FOX television broadcast, Dec. 6, 1990)(Homer stops Bart from jumping over Springfield Gorge on his skateboard); *The Simpsons: The Last Temptation of Homer* (FOX television broadcast, Dec. 9, 1993)(Homer nearly cheats on Marge with a beautiful co-worker, but refuses to do so in the end); *The Simpsons: Skinner's Sense of Snow* (FOX television broadcast, Dec. 17, 2000)(Homer risks his life to save the children, who are snowed in at school).

<sup>42</sup>Although Marge rarely works outside of the home, she has had several jobs over the course of the series. For example, early in the series she got a job working with Homer at the nuclear power plant. See *The Simpsons: Marge Gets a Job* (FOX television broadcast, Nov. 5, 1992). Marge has also worked selling pretzels, as a policewoman, and as an oven mitt model. See *The Simpsons: The Twisted World of Marge Simpson* (FOX television broadcast, Jan. 19, 1997); *The Simpsons: The Springfield Connection* (FOX television broadcast, May 7, 1995); *The Simpsons: Large Marge* (FOX television broadcast, Nov. 24, 2002).

<sup>43</sup>See *The Simpsons: It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad Marge* (FOX television broadcast, May 14, 2000)(Marge is convinced that she has molded Homer into the perfect husband through "gentle nagging" that is the "background noise of [their] relationship").

<sup>44</sup>See e.g. *The Simpsons: A Streetcar Named Marge* (FOX television broadcast, Oct. 1, 1992)(while Marge is at rehearsal for a play Homer eats raw hot dogs dipped in mustard because he cannot cook them and does not know where the buns are); *The Simpsons: Springfield (Or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Legalized Gambling)* (FOX television broadcast, Dec. 16, 1993)(with Marge gone Homer makes himself a breakfast of cloves, Tom Collins mix and a frozen pie crust).

<sup>45</sup>See *The Simpsons: I Love Lisa* (FOX television broadcast, Feb. 11, 1993)(Bart is such a huge Krusty the Klown fan that he even owns the Krusty Brand Home Pregnancy Test).

<sup>46</sup>See e.g. *The Simpsons: The Great Money Caper* (FOX television broadcast, Dec. 10, 2000)(Bart helps Homer earn money to pay for car repairs by grifting); *The Simpsons: Little Girl in the Big Ten* (FOX television broadcast, May 12, 2002)(Bart helps Lisa win back the school after they all get mad at her).

one episode, Lisa is seen as the only member of the family who could get into heaven.<sup>47</sup> Since the seventh season of the show, Lisa has been a vegetarian<sup>48</sup> and since the thirteenth season of the show, she has been a Buddhist,<sup>49</sup> making her the moral center of the Simpson family. [picture redacted].

*Maggie Simpson:* Maggie is the youngest member of the Simpson family. She has only spoken once,<sup>50</sup> but has managed to create a lot of havoc in the family. Maggie has a special penchant for causing injury. In one episode, she shoots Homer's boss Mr. Burns<sup>51</sup> and in another, she deftly shoots a whole gang of mobsters in the shoulders to stop them from killing Homer.<sup>52</sup> Maggie also loves her pacifier, which she is rarely seen without. [picture redacted].

## The Residents of Springfield

*Moe Szyslak:* Moe is Springfield's local bartender, and because of his occupation, a friend to Homer. In his past life Moe was a boxer<sup>53</sup>, but was horrible at it, so he attended Swigmore University and became a bartender.<sup>54</sup> Moe also has difficulty with women because he is the ugliest person in Springfield.<sup>55</sup> Moe truly does believe that alcohol cures all ailments and he has a genuine love of "getting people loaded."<sup>56</sup> [picture redacted].

---

<sup>47</sup> See *The Simpsons: Simpsons Bible Stories* (FOX television broadcast, Apr. 4, 1999).

<sup>48</sup> See *The Simpsons: Lisa the Vegetarian* (FOX television broadcast, Oct. 15, 1995).

<sup>49</sup> See *The Simpsons: She of Little Faith* (FOX television broadcast, Dec. 16, 2001).

<sup>50</sup> See *The Simpsons: Lisa's First Word* (FOX television broadcast, Dec. 3, 1992)(Maggie's first and only word was "Daddy").

<sup>51</sup> See *The Simpsons: Who Shot Mr. Burns?* (FOX television broadcast, Sept. 17, 1995).

<sup>52</sup> See *The Simpsons: Poppa's Got and Brand New Badge* (FOX television broadcast, May 22, 2002).

<sup>53</sup> See *The Simpsons: The Homer They Fall* (FOX television broadcast, Nov. 10, 1996).

<sup>54</sup> See *The Simpsons: Homer the Moe* (FOX television broadcast, Nov. 18, 2001)(Moe takes a trip back to Swigmore University, his alma mater).

<sup>55</sup> In one episode Moe gets plastic surgery and becomes handsome, but in the end a television set falls on his face and it goes back to the way it always was. See *The Simpsons: Pygmoelian* (FOX television broadcast, Feb. 27, 2000).

<sup>56</sup> *The Simpsons: Homer the Moe* (FOX television broadcast, Nov. 18, 2001).

*Barney Gumble*: Barney is Homer’s best friend, and they have known each other at least since high school.<sup>57</sup> Until season eleven Barney was the town drunk and spent all day, every day at Moe’s bar.<sup>58</sup> Currently, Barney is a productive member of society and regularly attends Alcoholics Anonymous meetings.<sup>59</sup> Barney has, however, replaced his addiction to beer with an addiction to double tall mocha lattes.<sup>60</sup> **[picture redacted]**.

*Apu Nahasapeemapetilon*: Apu runs the local Kwik-E-Mart convenience store, the scourge of healthy food in Springfield. Apu was born in India, but came to the United States to study and is now a U.S. citizen.<sup>61</sup> Apu and his wife Manjula have octuplets and lead a very harried life.<sup>62</sup> Apu and Manjula are also strict Hindus and thus vegan, but Apu still sells items at the Kwik-e-Mart like “heat-lamp dogs” and microwave seafood burritos.<sup>63</sup> **[picture redacted]**.

*C. Montgomery Burns*: Generally referred to as Mr. Burns, C. Montgomery Burns is Springfield’s local billionaire. Mr. Burns owns the Springfield nuclear power plant, which makes him Homer’s boss. In typical billionaire style, Mr. Burns spends his days behind the desk in his office at the nuclear power plant and spends his nights sitting in his sprawling mansion, a glass of brandy in his shriveled hand.<sup>64</sup> Mr. Burns, who has been described as “a decrepit monkey skeleton”<sup>65</sup> is generally considered the most sinister man in Springfield. At various times he has plotted to increase his wealth by blocking out the sun so that the nuclear power plant would have to provide more power,<sup>66</sup> convincing the church to sell advertising space so he could

---

<sup>57</sup>See *The Simpsons: The Way We Was* (FOX television broadcast, Jan. 31, 1991)(flashbacks show Homer and Barney as best friends in high school).

<sup>58</sup>See *The Simpsons: Days of Wine and D’Ohses* (FOX television broadcast, Apr. 9, 2000).

<sup>59</sup>See *The Simpsons: Pray Anything* (FOX television broadcast, Feb. 9, 2003)(Barney attends AA meetings at the local church).

<sup>60</sup>See *The Simpsons: Days of Wine and D’Ohses* (FOX television broadcast, Apr. 9, 2000).

<sup>61</sup>See *The Simpsons: Much Apu About Nothing* (FOX television broadcast, May 5, 1996).

<sup>62</sup>See *The Simpsons: Eight Misbehavin* (FOX television broadcast, Nov. 21, 1999).

<sup>63</sup>See Newsgroup alt.tv.simpsons, *supra* note 10 (Matt Groening says that his favorite foods mentioned on *The Simpsons* are the Kwik-e-Mart “heat lamp dogs” and microwave seafood burritos).

<sup>64</sup>See *The Simpsons: Monty Can’t Buy Me Love* (FOX television broadcast, May 2, 1999).

<sup>65</sup>See *The Simpsons: A Hunka Hunka Burns in Love* (FOX television broadcast, Dec. 2, 2001).

<sup>66</sup>See *The Simpsons: Who Shot Mr. Burns (Part One)?* (FOX television broadcast, May 21, 1995); *The Simpsons: Who*

run off with the profits,<sup>67</sup> stealing a trillion dollar bill from the United States government after World War II,<sup>68</sup> and turning a recycling operation into a manufacturing plant for “L’il Lisa’s Patented Animal Slurry,” made from mostly dolphins and other sea creatures.<sup>69</sup> Mr. Burns does, however, have a soft spot for his childhood teddy bear, named Bobo, proving that he is not quite as cold-hearted as it would first appear.<sup>70</sup>

[picture redacted].

*Waylon Smithers:* Mr. Smithers is Mr. Burns’s personal assistant and has worked for Mr. Burns for as long as he can remember.<sup>71</sup> Mr. Smithers is an utterly dedicated employee who loves both his job and his employer.<sup>72</sup> Mr. Smithers also has the world’s largest collection of Malibu Stacy dolls, Springfield’s equivalent of Barbie,<sup>73</sup> and has turned his love of Malibu Stacy into art by writing and starring in “Malibu Stacy: The Musical.”<sup>74</sup> Though Mr. Burns often derides Mr. Smithers, the fact is that Mr. Burns is completely lost without the guidance of Mr. Smithers.<sup>75</sup> [picture redacted].

*Principal Seymour Skinner:* As the principal of Springfield Elementary School, attended by Bart and Lisa Simpson, Seymour Skinner is a strict disciplinarian who loves punishing Bart Simpson. Skinner still has

---

*Shot Mr. Burns?* (FOX television broadcast, Sept. 17, 1995).

<sup>67</sup>See *The Simpsons: She of Little Faith* (FOX television broadcast, Dec. 16, 2001).

<sup>68</sup>See *The Simpsons: The Trouble With Trillions* (FOX television broadcast, Apr. 5, 1998).

<sup>69</sup>See *The Simpsons: The Old Man and Lisa* (FOX television broadcast, Apr. 20, 1997).

<sup>70</sup>See *The Simpsons: Rosebud* (FOX television broadcast, Mar. 18, 1993)(Mr. Burns tries any and all means to get his childhood teddy bear back from Maggie Simpson, but when he sees how happy it makes her he lets her keep it).

<sup>71</sup>See *The Simpsons: The Blunder Years* (FOX television broadcast, Dec. 9, 2001)(After Waylon Smithers Sr. was killed in a nuclear accident at the plant, Mr. Burns raised the then infant Waylon Smithers Jr.).

<sup>72</sup>There is much controversy over whether Waylon Smithers is actually in love with Mr. Burns. In one episode Smithers fantasizes about Mr. Burns jumping out of a cake and singing “Happy Birthday Mr. Smithers” like Marilyn Monroe. See *The Simpsons: Rosebud* (FOX television broadcast, Mar. 18, 1993). In another episode Mr. Smithers dreams that Mr. Burns is flying through his window toward his bed. See *The Simpsons: Marge Gets a Job* (FOX television broadcast, Nov. 5, 1992). When Mr. Smithers’s computer is turned on it shows a nude Mr. Burns saying “Hello Smithers. You’re good at turning me on.” *The Simpsons: Lisa vs. Malibu Stacy* (FOX television broadcast, Feb. 17, 1994). When Mr. Smithers thinks the world is about to end he kisses Mr. Burns on the lips. See *The Simpsons: Lisa the Skeptic* (FOX television broadcast, Nov. 23, 1997).

<sup>73</sup>See *The Simpsons: Lisa vs. Malibu Stacy* (FOX television broadcast, Feb. 17, 1994).

<sup>74</sup>See *The Simpsons: Homer vs. Dignity* (FOX television broadcast, Nov. 19, 2000).

<sup>75</sup>See e.g. *id.* (When Mr. Smithers takes a trip to New Mexico to star in his Malibu Stacy musical chaos ensues as Mr. Burns begins paying Homer to pull increasingly crazy pranks); *The Simpsons: The Old Man and Lisa* (FOX television broadcast, Apr. 20, 1997)(When Mr. Burns has to go grocery shopping by himself he says that he is way over his head when he has to choose between Ketchup and Catsup).

flashbacks about his days in Vietnam, including one where his entire platoon is eaten by an elephant.<sup>76</sup> Skinner quite possibly has Springfield's most pathetic love life (though he may have some competition from Moe) and at least as of season eight he was still a virgin.<sup>77</sup> This may largely be because he still lives with his overbearing mother. However, Skinner's luck may be changing because he recently proposed to Bart's teacher Edna Krabappel (pronounced Cra-bopple).<sup>78</sup> Despite Principal Skinner's love of rules and order, he does have one deep dark secret, which is that he stole the real Seymour Skinner's identity and is actually an orphaned street tough named Armin Tamzarian, though Skinner's name has now legally been changed to Seymour Skinner and "no one will ever mention it again under penalty of torture."<sup>79</sup> **[picture redacted]**.

*Lunch Lady Doris:* Though rarely seen, and even more rarely heard, Lunch Lady Doris controls the utterly disgusting cafeteria at Springfield Elementary. Lunch Lady Doris does seem to love serving slop to the children of Springfield and occasionally feels pride in her choice of meals because, for example, "more testicles mean more iron."<sup>80</sup> Lunch Lady Doris is one of Springfield's few chain smokers (along with Marge's sisters Patty and Selma), and is often seen smoking while preparing cafeteria lunches.<sup>81</sup> **[picture redacted]**.

*Otto:* Otto is the bus driver for Springfield Elementary and has also held down jobs as a bloodmobile driver<sup>82</sup> and the Springfield Poolmobile driver.<sup>83</sup> Otto is best known, however, as Springfield's local stoner, who smokes marijuana regularly, even when he is driving the bus.<sup>84</sup> At one point in the series it seemed that Otto did not do any "needle drugs,"<sup>85</sup> however this has recently been called into question because Otto

---

<sup>76</sup> See *The Simpsons: Skinner's Sense of Snow* (FOX television broadcast, Dec. 17, 2000).

<sup>77</sup> See *The Simpsons: Grade School Confidential* (FOX television broadcast, Apr. 6, 1997).

<sup>78</sup> See *The Simpsons: Special Edna* (FOX television broadcast, Jan. 5, 2003).

<sup>79</sup> *The Simpsons: The Principal and the Pauper* (FOX television broadcast, Sept. 28, 1997). Note, however, Skinner's real identity has been mentioned at least once recently by Lisa Simpson, so the people of Springfield have not forgotten who Skinner really is. See *The Simpsons: I, (Annoyed Grunt)-Bot* (FOX television broadcast, Jan. 11, 2004).

<sup>80</sup> *The Simpsons: Sweet Seymour Skinner's Baadasssss Song* (FOX television broadcast, Apr. 28, 1994).

<sup>81</sup> See e.g. *The Simpsons: I Love Lisa* (FOX television broadcast, Feb. 11, 1993); *The Simpsons: Treehouse of Horror V* (FOX television broadcast, Oct. 30, 1994); *The Simpsons: Lisa the Vegetarian* (FOX television broadcast, Oct. 15, 1995).

<sup>82</sup> See *The Simpsons: Blood Feud* (FOX television broadcast, Aug. 11, 1991).

<sup>83</sup> See *The Simpsons: Bart After Dark* (FOX television broadcast, Nov. 24, 1996).

<sup>84</sup> See *The Simpsons: The Strong Arms of the Ma* (FOX television broadcast, Feb. 2, 2003).

<sup>85</sup> See *The Simpsons: It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad Marge* (FOX television broadcast, May 14, 2000) (Otto's fiancé Becky is

admits that his mother checks his arms, so an injection would have to be given between his toes.<sup>86</sup> [picture redacted].

*Krusty the Clown:* Krusty the Clown is a beloved children’s entertainer in Springfield, and is rarely seen without his clown make-up. Krusty’s real name is Hershel Krustofski and he is the son of the prominent Rabbi Krustofski.<sup>87</sup> When Krusty is off camera his addictions to cigarettes, alcohol, and nicotine gum flair up.<sup>88</sup> Such addictions probably led Krusty to have a heart attack, requiring him to have a pacemaker.<sup>89</sup> Krusty is also illiterate,<sup>90</sup> but this has not stopped him from creating a marketing empire with Krusty Brand products which span from food (including Krusty Brand Pork Products,<sup>91</sup> Krusty Brand Imitation Gruel,<sup>92</sup> and the Krusty Brand Slender Vittles microwave dinner<sup>93</sup>) to personal care products (including Krusty Non-Toxic Cologne<sup>94</sup> and the Lady Krusty Mustache Removal System<sup>95</sup>) to drugs (Krusty Brand Non-Narcotic Children’s Cough Syrup<sup>96</sup>) to his own chain of fast food restaurants, Krusty Burger. [picture redacted].

*Dr. Julius Hibbert:* Dr. Hibbert is Springfield’s jolly physician and has been the physician for the Simpson family since Marge first learned she was pregnant with Bart.<sup>97</sup> Dr. Hibbert laughs at everything and is Springfield’s number one dispenser of drugs. Dr. Hibbert is usually a competent doctor and has managed to help many of Springfield’s residents recover from ailments,<sup>98</sup> but he has still had his share of mishaps.<sup>99</sup>

happy to marry him because he does not do any “needle drugs”).

<sup>86</sup> See *The Simpsons: Co-Dependent’s Day* (FOX television broadcast, Mar. 21, 2004).

<sup>87</sup> See *The Simpsons: Like Father Like Clown* (FOX television broadcast, Oct. 24, 1991).

<sup>88</sup> See *id.*

<sup>89</sup> See *The Simpsons: Krusty Gets Busted* (FOX television broadcast, Apr. 29, 1990).

<sup>90</sup> See *id.*

<sup>91</sup> See *id.*

<sup>92</sup> See *The Simpsons: Kamp Krusty* (FOX television broadcast, Sept. 24, 1992)(“Nine out of ten orphans can’t tell the difference).

<sup>93</sup> See *The Simpsons: A Streetcar Named Marge* (FOX television broadcast, Oct. 1, 1992).

<sup>94</sup> See *The Simpsons: Like Father Like Clown* (FOX television broadcast, Oct. 24, 1991)(“The Smell of the Big Top!”).

<sup>95</sup> See *The Simpsons: Homie the Clown* (FOX television broadcast, Feb. 12, 1995).

<sup>96</sup> See *The Simpsons: Flaming Moe’s* (FOX television broadcast, Nov. 21, 1991).

<sup>97</sup> See *The Simpsons: Bart Gets Hit By a Car* (FOX television broadcast, Jan. 10, 1991).

<sup>98</sup> See *e.g. id.* (Dr. Hibbert helps Bart recover after he gets hit by a car); *The Simpsons: Homer Simpson in: “Kidney Trouble”* (FOX television broadcast, Dec. 6, 1998)(Dr. Hibbert saves Abe Simpson’s life by giving him a kidney transplant).

<sup>99</sup> See *e.g. The Simpsons: One Fish, Two Fish, Blowfish, Blue Fish* (FOX television broadcast, Jan. 24, 1991)(Dr. Hibbert incorrectly tells Homer that he only has twenty-four hours to live); *The Simpsons: A Tale of Two Springfields* (FOX television

[picture redacted].

*Dr. Nick Riviera:* Dr. Nick is Springfield's *other* "doctor." It is still unclear whether Dr. Nick has a medical degree. The degrees on his office wall read, "Mayo Clinic Correspondence School," "Club Med School," and "Female Body Inspector."<sup>100</sup> In another episode, he claims to have gone to "Hollywood Upstairs Medical School."<sup>101</sup> Dr. Nick's patients generally include those too desperate or poor to go to Dr. Hibbert, and his walk-in clinic has a line specifically for people carried in on wheelbarrows.<sup>102</sup> Dr. Nick is known for giving out horrible advice, including how to gain enough weight to get on disability.<sup>103</sup> [picture redacted].

## Food in The Simpsons

**Homer: Hey Apu, got any of those potato chips that give you diarrhea? I need to do a**

*little spring cleaning.*

*Apu: They are in the safety cabinet. I'll get the key.*<sup>104</sup>

Food is an integral part of all lives. Nothing (except maybe sleep) is more important for sustaining life and for making life enjoyable. This truth is something that is rarely witnessed on television, for food is rarely the

---

broadcast, Nov. 5, 2000)(Dr. Hibbert takes a bet that he cannot do heart surgery in the dark); *The Simpsons: Tennis the Menace* (FOX television broadcast, Feb. 11, 2001)(Dr. Hibbert decides to do surgery outside and his patient is killed when a tennis ball flies into his open chest).

<sup>100</sup>*Id.*

<sup>101</sup>See *The Simpsons: King-Size Homer* (FOX television broadcast, Nov. 5, 1995).

<sup>102</sup>See *The Simpsons: My Sister, My Sitter* (FOX television broadcast, Oct. 11, 1996).

<sup>103</sup>See *The Simpsons: King-Size Homer* (FOX television broadcast, Nov. 5, 1995)(Dr. Nick's advice to Homer is "remember, if you're not sure about something, rub it against a piece of paper. If the paper turns clear, it's your window to weight gain").

<sup>104</sup>*The Simpsons: Days of Wine and D'Ohses* (FOX television broadcast, Apr. 9, 2000).

focus of television programs. *The Simpsons* is a rarity in this respect because food is as much a part of the Simpsons' lives as it is for the millions of viewers around the world who enjoy the show. Food is consumed or mentioned in every episode of *The Simpsons*. In fact, food is so integral to the series that the Simpsons' home is even decorated with food (the curtains in the family kitchen are covered with ears of corn). Food is used in the series most often as a source of humor, but also creates dramatic moments (such as one where Homer believes he is going to die in twenty-four hours because he ingested poisonous fish<sup>105</sup>) and is most often seen just as in the real world, being eaten at the dinner or breakfast table while discussion is going on.

Because food is so prevalent on *The Simpsons*, the eating habits of the characters have created controversy regarding what kind of influence the show may be having on viewers' diets, especially the diets of children. A study of the health-related messages on *The Simpsons* done by scientists at Rutgers University attempted to prove whether the show "casually promote[s] an unsafe diet."<sup>106</sup> Scientists studied sixty-three random episodes of the show and determined that "beer was the most popular item among characters, representing 39 percent of all foods consumed on the show."<sup>107</sup> Homer Simpson was found to be the worst offender, being solely responsible for twenty-one percent of all food consumption on *The Simpsons*.<sup>108</sup> The study concluded that most of the food and health related messages on the show were negative, though Guy Baehr, the associate director of the Journalism Resource Institute felt that the effect the negative messages might have on viewers "could be disputed," because Homer is "not a character that people want to imitate."<sup>109</sup> On the other hand, those involved directly in marketing *The Simpsons* food products have found that healthy food products with *The Simpsons* name attached to them do not sell. For example, the launch in the United Kingdom of *The Simpsons* chilled yogurts failed, and marketers speculated that it was "because

---

<sup>105</sup> See *The Simpsons: One Fish, Two Fish, Blowfish, Blue Fish* (FOX television broadcast, Jan. 24, 1991).

<sup>106</sup> Andrew Moon, *Rutgers U.: Rutgers Focuses Study on 'Simpsons,'* U-WIRE, April 7, 2004, available at, 2004 WL 74977036.

<sup>107</sup> *Id.*

<sup>108</sup> *Id.*

<sup>109</sup> *Id.*

these products are good for you and that's not what Simpsons is about. It's about indulgence."<sup>110</sup> Whether or not the eating habits of the Simpsons influence the way people choose to eat and whether people want to be like Homer, or simply feel that they already *are* like Homer, the bottom line is that food is an important part of our lives, and it is an important part of the lives of the Simpsons. In watching *The Simpsons* viewers see both accurate and outrageous reflections of the way food is thought about and consumed. *The Simpsons* makes statements about food that all people can identify with, and this is one of the reasons why the show is so popular and so influential.

After establishing just how prevalent and important food is in *The Simpsons*, this paper will delve into specific types of commentary that *The Simpsons* makes about food, and where appropriate, how such commentary reflects on the Food and Drug Administration, other governmental agencies responsible for food in the United States, and even the standards of other countries. *The Simpsons* not only reflects how many people think about food, it also reflects how many feel about the government's role in the world of food.

### **The Importance of Food Generally: Just How Important is Food to Homer and the Other Characters on *The Simpsons*?**

*I want you to sit there, look through the window and watch me eat a ham. Marge, prepare the emergency ham!*

*-Homer Simpson (to Santa's Little Helper, the family dog, as a punishment for eating his hamburger)<sup>111</sup>*

To truly understand the food related messages in *The Simpsons*, one must first understand the messages the show sends about the importance of food in the daily lives of the residents of Springfield, especially Homer. First, Homer, like many humans will do almost anything for food. Homer

---

<sup>110</sup>Joanna Doonar, *supra* note 18.

is willing to sell things that are incredibly important to him for the smallest amounts of food. In one episode, Homer actually contemplates selling the family home for three crayons and a chocolate milk.<sup>112</sup> In another episode, Homer has to be stopped from selling Maggie's teddy bear, which would break her heart, to Mr. Burns for "a drink."<sup>113</sup> Perhaps less drastically, Marge, while attempting to fix the family's defective, doorbell is upset by the fact that Homer "traded our tools for M&M's again."<sup>114</sup> APPARENTLY, M&M's are so important to Homer that he would trade his tools for them more than once. Perhaps the most shocking (and least realistic) depiction of Homer trading important items for food occurs in *The Simpsons* fourth Halloween special, where Homer sells his soul for a solitary donut.<sup>115</sup> In this episode, Homer is at work where he discovers that all of the donuts are gone from the break room. He rushes back to grab his "emergency donut," but in its place is simply an IOU from himself. In a frenzy, Homer offers to sell his soul for a donut and Satan is quick to appear. Once in Hell, Homer's eternal punishment is being forced-to eat donuts for eternity, which does not bother him at all. As Homer gets fatter and fatter, the only thing he can say is, "more."<sup>116</sup> Homer's willingness to sell his soul for a donut, and his uncanny ability to eat a never-ending stream of donuts, is clearly an exaggeration, even going beyond regular episodes of *The Simpsons* because it is in a Halloween episode. In fact, Homer does not have a bottomless pit for a stomach, and does get full.<sup>117</sup> What these examples do illustrate, however, is that Homer is willing to trade a lot for food, and most people would also trade almost anything for food, after all what is a house, a teddy bear, or tools really worth if you are starving?

While Homer is the character most willing to give important items up for food, he is not the only character in *The Simpsons* that loves food enough to trade something important for it. For example, Chief Clancy

---

<sup>112</sup>See *The Simpsons: Mr. Spritz Goes to Washington* (FOX television broadcast, Mar. 9, 2003).

<sup>113</sup>See *The Simpsons: Rosebud* (FOX television broadcast, Mar. 18, 1993).

<sup>114</sup>*The Simpsons: Maximum Homerdrive* (FOX television broadcast, Mar. 28, 1999).

<sup>115</sup>See *The Simpsons: Treehouse of Horror IV* (FOX television broadcast, Oct. 28, 1993).

<sup>116</sup>*Id.*

<sup>117</sup>See *The Simpsons: Maximum Homerdrive* (FOX television broadcast, Mar. 28, 1999)(While in a steak-eating contest Homer cannot finish his sixteen-pound steak, proclaiming "What's happening to me? There's still food but I don't want to eat it. I've become everything I've ever hated.").

Wiggum, the local fool of a police chief, who just happens to resemble a pig, has proven that he can be bribed with nothing more than a sack of “elephant grade peanuts.”<sup>118</sup> In an episode where Bart is shown a vision of his future, the adult Bart and his band agree to do a gig at a local nightclub even though they can only be paid in popcorn shrimp.<sup>119</sup> In fact, Lisa Simpson is likely the only person in Springfield who cannot easily be bribed with food. In an episode where Lisa decides to become a Buddhist Marge attempts to bring Lisa back to Christianity by saying, “Around here Buddhists don’t get any desserts in their lunches,” to which Lisa replies, “A Buddhist wouldn’t want any.”<sup>120</sup> In the same episode, Lisa turns down Marge’s bribe of Christmas cookies.<sup>121</sup> These examples illustrate just how important food can be, but also show that at least one member of the Simpson family, Lisa, has the willpower to resist the temptation of food when her religious beliefs are at stake.

*The Simpsons* also shows the importance of food by showing just how preoccupied Homer is with food at virtually all times. Homer often misunderstands what people say, turning their words into food. For example, when a hybrid car saleswoman tells Homer that the car is better for the environment, Homer replies, “What kind of mint?”<sup>122</sup> Similarly, when Apu refers to his wife as “sweet Manjula,” Homer drools and says, “sweet mint julep,” and rushes to Moe’s bar.<sup>123</sup> Homer also loves to use food metaphors. In an episode where he becomes a missionary in the South Pacific, he informs Marge that he has “some civilization to spread like butter on the English muffin that is these people, with all of their little nooks and crannies.”<sup>124</sup> Homer tends to think things are food when they actually are not, which not only illustrates his preoccupation with food, but is a further indication of his stupidity. In an episode where a judge informs him that she is going to garnish his wages Homer replies, “Mmmm. . . garnish.”<sup>125</sup> In another episode, Homer gets a coupon for a

---

<sup>118</sup> See *The Simpsons: Eight Misbehavin* (FOX television broadcast, Nov. 21, 1999).

<sup>119</sup> See *The Simpsons: Bart to the Future* (FOX television broadcast, Mar. 13, 2000).

<sup>120</sup> *The Simpsons: She of Little Faith* (FOX television broadcast, Dec. 16, 2001).

<sup>121</sup> See *id.*

<sup>122</sup> *The Simpsons: Beyond Blunderdome* (FOX television broadcast, Sept. 26, 1999).

<sup>123</sup> *The Simpsons: I’m With Cupid* (FOX television broadcast, Nov. 14, 1999).

<sup>124</sup> *The Simpsons: Missionary Impossible* (FOX television broadcast, Feb. 20, 2000).

<sup>125</sup> *The Simpsons: Barting Over* (FOX television broadcast, Feb. 16, 2003).

free colonic, and is excited to enjoy a nice, refreshing colonic. He then wanders out of the house singing, “If you like piña colonics.”<sup>126</sup> Finally, Homer’s love of food often results in fantasies and dreams about food. In one episode, Homer, under the influence of carbon monoxide fantasizes that he is an Arabian king with a large harem, and his first order is for them to bring him his ranch dressing hose.<sup>127</sup> Homer was once kidnapped by local criminal Snake who threatens to pistol whip him. Homer’s response is a daydream in which he is eating cool whip out of a giant tub with a pistol, after which he says, “Mmmm. . . pistol whip.”<sup>128</sup> Homer’s most famous food fantasy is probably one in which he dreams that he is skipping through a land of chocolate, taking a bite out of everything from a chocolate lamppost to a bouncing chocolate Scotty dog.<sup>129</sup> Homer’s constant preoccupation with food is not completely unrealistic, as people, especially when hungry, often cannot keep their minds off of food. The difference between Homer and most people is that Homer is always hungry.

Building on Homer’s hunger, throughout the series Homer has proven that he will eat almost anything. His favorite food is arguably donuts, but in one episode Marge decides to cook Homer his favorite meal, in which “all three courses are dessert,” and “dessert is three desserts” (a gelatin mold with chocolate cake, a slice of pie and brownies in it).<sup>130</sup> Homer’s love of food is not limited to desserts. However, he grows addicted to kidney mush and liquid Lay’s potato chips in an episode in which he stays with his father and the Springfield Retirement Castle, a fairly disheveled nursing home.<sup>131</sup> Perhaps Homer’s most unusual love of food is seen in an episode where he becomes a missionary in the South Pacific and chooses to eat ox testicles, which he finds more appealing than the coconut that the natives offer him.<sup>132</sup>

---

<sup>126</sup> *The Simpsons: Sunday, Cruddy Sunday* (FOX television broadcast, Jan. 31, 1999).

<sup>127</sup> *See The Simpsons: Skinner’s Sense of Snow* (FOX television broadcast, Dec. 17, 2000).

<sup>128</sup> *The Simpsons: A Hunka Hunka Burns in Love* (FOX television broadcast, Dec. 2, 2001).

<sup>129</sup> *See The Simpsons: Burns Verkaufen Der Kraftwerk* (FOX television broadcast, Dec. 5, 1991).

<sup>130</sup> *See The Simpsons: Poppa’s Got a Brand New Badge* (FOX television broadcast, May 22, 2002).

<sup>131</sup> *See The Simpsons: The Two Mrs. Nahasapeemapetilons* (FOX television broadcast, Nov. 16, 1997).

<sup>132</sup> *See The Simpsons: Missionary Impossible* (FOX television broadcast, Feb. 20, 2000).

While Homer seems infinitely hungry and infinitely preoccupied with food, like everyone there are foods that he does not like, which makes him more realistic and allows audiences to identify with him. In one episode, Homer grimaces when Native Americans tell him that he is drinking bear urine, but he does not spit the liquid out until they laugh and tell him that it is really Fresca.<sup>133</sup> Homer has also shown that he was not impressed with the quality of prime rib in a can that he ate while in a bomb shelter.<sup>134</sup> Homer indicates that he would not eat quiche because it something that homosexuals enjoy.<sup>135</sup> Homer is also disgusted by Muslix, a European cereal, and tells Marge that it is “crappy.”<sup>136</sup> Finally, Homer is repulsed by coleslaw with pineapple in it and screams like a little girl at the thought of German potato salad.<sup>137</sup>

*The Simpsons* also often illustrates the importance of food in ways that do not involve eating. In *The Simpsons* food is used in several instances to save lives. In an episode where Homer begins challenging everyone in town to duels, a dueling champion from the South decides to accept the challenge and Homer knows that he cannot possibly win. What ultimately saves him is one of Marge’s mincemeat pies, which is so tempting to the southern gentleman that he decides he does not have to go through with the duel.<sup>138</sup> In another episode, Homer saves the life of Apu, who is being held at gunpoint in the Kwik-e-Mart by dousing the perpetrator with hot “nacho cheez.”<sup>139</sup> A final example of food being used to save lives can be seen in an episode where Homer begins working as a baby-proofer. One of his baby-saving techniques is filling a swimming pool with gelatin dessert, so that babies will bounce out of the pool instead of drowning.<sup>140</sup>

While most people would not wish to have a swimming pool full of gelatin, these examples show that food

---

<sup>133</sup>See *The Simpsons: Dude, Where’s My Ranch?* (FOX television broadcast, Apr. 27, 2003).

<sup>134</sup>See *The Simpsons: Treehouse of Horror VIII* (FOX television broadcast, Oct. 26, 1997).

<sup>135</sup>See *The Simpsons: The President Wore Pearls* (FOX television broadcast, Nov. 9, 2003).

<sup>136</sup>*The Simpsons: Trilogy of Error* (FOX television broadcast, Apr. 29, 2001).

<sup>137</sup>See *The Simpsons: Simpsons Bible Stories* (FOX television broadcast, Apr. 4, 1999).

<sup>138</sup>See *The Simpsons: E-I-E-I-(Annoyed Grunt)* (FOX television broadcast, Nov. 7, 1999).

<sup>139</sup>See *The Simpsons: Poppa’s Got a Brand New Badge* (FOX television broadcast, May, 22, 2002).

<sup>140</sup>See *The Simpsons: Bye Bye Nerdy* (FOX television broadcast, Mar. 11, 2001).

on *The Simpsons* is not only useful as sustenance, but can also help protect life in a unique way.

*The Simpsons* also shows viewers the dangers of eating things that are not meant to be eaten. One episode introduces the audience to “Paint Drinking Pete,” who, as the name implies, pleases crowds by drinking paint. After chugging down a whole can of paint, Pete falls to the ground and begins to have a seizure.<sup>141</sup> Homer also teaches audiences what not to eat when he has a fantasy about what his life would be like if he owned a horse that could dive for pearls. Homer sleeps in a bed made of pearls, has a butler that is a giant pearl, and consumes “Pearl-O’s” for breakfast, which after one mouthful shatter all of Homer’s teeth.<sup>142</sup> While it may seem clear to most viewers of the show that people should not ingest paint or pearls, Homer and “Paint Drinking Pete” illustrate the point wonderfully.

Food is as important and as versatile in *The Simpsons* as it is in the real world. While *The Simpsons* is obvious satire in which everything is exaggerated, including Homer’s hunger, Lisa’s ability to resist Christmas cookies, the damage caused by hot “nacho cheez,” and the instantly violent reaction to paint that “Paint Drinking Pete” has, there are realistic aspects to these food-related tales. Many people are almost as hungry as Homer is. Others share Lisa’s ability to avoid sweets, “Nacho cheez” really can scald, and drinking paint can kill the drinker. In watching the Simpsons and how they value and use food, audiences will always see a reflection of their own values.

### **Dangerous and Deadly Foods in *The Simpsons***

*Shopkeeper: Take this object, but beware, it comes with a terrible curse.*

*Homer: That’s bad.*

*Shopkeeper: But it comes with a free frogurt!*

*Homer: That’s good.*

*Shopkeeper: The frogurt is also cursed.*

*Homer: That’s bad.*

*Shopkeeper: But you get your choice of toppings.*

---

<sup>141</sup> See *The Simpsons: Hungry, Hungry Homer* (FOX television broadcast, Mar. 4, 2001).

<sup>142</sup> See *The Simpsons: Saddlesore Gallactica* (FOX television broadcast, Feb. 6, 2000).

Homer: *That's good.*  
Shopkeeper: *The toppings contain potassium benzoate.*  
Homer: *(Stares blankly at the shopkeeper)*  
Shopkeeper: *That's bad.*<sup>143</sup>

The importance of food in *The Simpsons*, especially to Homer, has been established, and because of the role that food plays in the show it is particularly interesting to see instances where food becomes dangerous or deadly on *The Simpsons*. Because much of the obligation of the Food and Drug Administration and other government agencies is to protect the public from dangerous foods, it is particularly interesting to see how effective the writers of *The Simpsons* feel the government is at doing its job. As with every subject tackled by *The Simpsons*, some issues regarding dangerous food are treated in a joking manner, while others are treated more seriously, but the audience always finds a bit of truth in the treatment of dangerous foods on *The Simpsons*.

The first subcategory of dangerous foods that several episodes of *The Simpsons* focus on are foods that cause hallucinations. In one episode, Bart encourages Homer to eat a box of baking soda that has been in the refrigerator since the Simpsons moved into their home.<sup>144</sup> Homer, being the fool that he is, consumes the entire box and goes on what Lisa refers to as an “antacid trip.”<sup>145</sup> Homer, head down on the table, foaming at the mouth, hallucinates about the millions of flavors contained in the baking soda and sees visions of a hamburger from the 1990’s, a pie from the 1970’s, and a submarine sandwich from the 1960’s. While baking soda (or sodium bicarbonate) is listed as GRAS (generally recognized as safe) by the FDA,<sup>146</sup> clearly the

<sup>143</sup> *The Simpsons: Treehouse of Horror III* (FOX television broadcast, Oct. 29, 1992).

<sup>144</sup> See *The Simpsons: Worst Episode Ever* (FOX television broadcast, Feb. 4, 2000).

<sup>145</sup> *Id.*

<sup>146</sup> See Food and Drug Administration, EAFUS: A Food Additive Database, at <http://vm.cfsan.fda.gov/%7Edms/eafus.html>

government cannot protect those foolish enough to eat an entire container of what may be forty-year-old baking soda.

Another example of hallucinogenic food in *The Simpsons* appears in an episode where Homer enters a steak-eating contest and attempts to eat the “Sirloin-a-lot,” a sixteen-pound steak.<sup>147</sup> After eating four pounds of the monstrous steak, Homer sees two cows sitting at a table; martini glasses in their hooves. The cows mock him for being too pathetic to finish the steak and Homer becomes determined to show them what he can do.<sup>148</sup> Homer’s hallucination is likely not caused in this episode by the meat itself, but quite possibly from lack of oxygen to his brain, as he comments that his sinuses are filling with beef.<sup>149</sup> Once again, this is an exaggerated scenario for comedic effect, but the lesson to viewers is that one should not attempt to eat a sixteen pound piece of meat.<sup>150</sup> **[picture redacted]**.

In “El Viaje Misterioso de Nuestro Jomer (The Mysterious Voyage of Homer),” hallucinogenic food is shown in more detail, as the episode is dedicated almost entirely to the results of Homer’s ingestion of several Guatemalan insanity peppers.<sup>151</sup> Homer, while at the annual Springfield chili cook-off, coats his tongue with wax and shoves the insanity peppers down his throat to impress everyone in the town.<sup>152</sup> Homer quickly begins hallucinating from the peppers, seeing the people around him in caricature form, his skin moving on his body, and the sky and landscape becoming psychedelic.<sup>153</sup> Eventually Homer meets a talking coyote who tells him that he is his spirit guide and that Homer needs to find his soul mate, which Homer attempts to

---

<sup>147</sup> *The Simpsons: Maximum Homerdrive* (FOX television broadcast, Mar. 8, 1999).

<sup>148</sup> *See id.*

<sup>149</sup> *Id.*

<sup>150</sup> This message is reinforced in the episode because Homer’s opponent in the steak-eating contest finishes his steak and immediately dies. Dr. Hibbert attributes the death to “meat poisoning.” *Id.*

<sup>151</sup> *See The Simpsons: El Viaje Misterioso de Nuestro Jomer (The Mysterious Voyage of Homer)* (FOX television broadcast, Jan. 5, 1997) (The peppers are described as “the merciless peppers of Quetzlzacatenango, grown deep in the jungle primeval by the inmates of a Guatemalan insane asylum”).

<sup>152</sup> *See id.*

<sup>153</sup> *See id.*

do for the remainder of the episode.<sup>154</sup> According to Dr. Frank Etscorn of the University of New Mexico, chili peppers are not hallucinogenic, but they can cause alter one's state of consciousness because extreme heat causes the body to release endorphins.<sup>155</sup> This means that chili peppers can be addictive because the body desires the creation of more endorphins.<sup>156</sup> The hallucinogenic peppers consumed by Homer have no real life counterpart, so there are no worries about people going on hallucinogenic quests for their soul mates after eating peppers.

*The Simpsons* also frequently shows foods that are dangerous not because they cause hallucinations, but because they can cause illness. For example, on a trip to the thirty-three cent store, Homer decides to eat a can of plankton.<sup>157</sup> Lisa quickly informs him that "according to the Mexican Council of Food this expired two years ago," to which Homer replies, "Sure, by *their* standards, but we live in America."<sup>158</sup> Lisa continues to inform Homer that the Mexican government has also concluded that the canned plankton can cause "red tide poisoning." Meanwhile, Homer is breaking out in a sweat and turning a distressing color of red, but continues to dine on the expired plankton because "it's so cheap."<sup>159</sup> While all in good fun, this is perhaps the most blatant jab at the FDA in any episode of *The Simpsons*, with the clear implication not only that U.S. standards are lower than those of Mexico, but also that the FDA would allow food into this country that caused disease. Of course, humans generally do not consume plankton other than through the ingestion of fish.<sup>160</sup> Additionally, the FDA has adopted a research plan to study the effect of plankton toxins in fish and keeps a close eye on the toxin level of fish consumed in the United States.<sup>161</sup> Even though these

---

<sup>154</sup>See *id.*

<sup>155</sup>The Veiled Chameleon, *Chili Peppers and Endorphins*, April 21, 2003, at <http://www.veiled-chameleon.com/archives/000042.html>

<sup>156</sup>*Id.*

<sup>157</sup>See *The Simpsons: 30 Minutes Over Tokyo* (FOX television broadcast, May 16, 1999).

<sup>158</sup>*Id.*

<sup>159</sup>*Id.*

<sup>160</sup>However, one form of zooplankton, Antarctic Krill, is being processed for human consumption by a few countries. See University of Miami: Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Science, Nutrition Question and Answer, at <http://www.rsmas.miami.edu/support/lib/seas/seasQA/QAs/n/nutrition.html>.

<sup>161</sup>See National Food Safety Initiative: Three Year Research Plan, Project No. 7: Characterization of Pathonogenic Aquatic Eucaryotes and Their Toxins, May 2001, updated in 2002, available at <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/3fs3re07.html>.

precautions are in place, Homer simply teaches that it is important not to eat expired food from foreign countries at the thirty-three cent store.

A second example of food causing illness in *The Simpsons* plays on the common misconception that eating too much sugar can cause diabetes. In “They Saved Lisa’s Brain,” the members of the Springfield community are treated with free samples of “Grandma Plopwell’s low-fat pudding.”<sup>162</sup> The distributor of samples informs everyone that “our new hypersugar gives you three-hundred percent of your minimum daily sweetness requirement.”<sup>163</sup> Promptly after eating the pudding, Carl, a friend and co-worker of Homer, begins shaking and is diagnosed with diabetes by Dr. Hibbert.<sup>164</sup> If accurate, clearly, the new “hypersugar” is not safe to ingest, though earlier in the episode the audience learns that “Grandma Plopwell’s” is “the low-fat pudding that’s approved for sale by the government!”<sup>165</sup> Once again, the wisdom of the FDA is called into question because the show indicates that the agency would approve a product for sale that would cause an illness as severe as diabetes.

The final, and most fun examples of dangerous foods in *The Simpsons* are those that actually cause death. Some characterizations of foods that are deadly in *The Simpsons* are clearly for laughs, for example, in a special Halloween episode, Homer is killed by eating a piece of broccoli.<sup>166</sup> After confirming the cause of death, Dr. Hibbert informs Marge and the children that broccoli is “one of the deadliest plants on earth,” and “it tries to warn you with its terrible taste.”<sup>167</sup> This of course is meant to be humorous, though it could give children ammunition to use at the dinner table. Other examples of food causing death in *The Simpsons* are more serious. As already mentioned above, *supra* note 150, Homer’s opponent in a steak-eating contest dies from what Dr. Hibbert classifies as “meat poisoning” after eating a sixteen pound steak.<sup>168</sup> While,

---

<sup>162</sup> *The Simpsons: They Saved Lisa’s Brain* (FOX television broadcast, May 9, 1999).

<sup>163</sup> *Id.*

<sup>164</sup> *See id.*

<sup>165</sup> *Id.*

<sup>166</sup> *See The Simpsons: Treehouse of Horror XI* (FOX television broadcast, Nov. 1, 2000).

<sup>167</sup> *Id.*

<sup>168</sup> *The Simpsons: Maximum Homerdrive* (FOX television broadcast, Mar. 8, 1999). The man also consumed an entire lamb

there is probably no such thing as meat poisoning, the fact is that eating a sixteen pound steak, if possible, probably could kill a man, perhaps not immediately, but in the long run, by raising one's cholesterol and increasing the chances of heart disease.

The most interesting and most realistic instance of deadly food in *The Simpsons* occurred in the second season of the show when Homer consumes what he is lead to believe is poisonous blowfish at a sushi restaurant.<sup>169</sup> In the episode, Homer is convinced by his family to try something new and they go out for sushi.<sup>170</sup> Homer discovers that he loves sushi and becomes determined to try everything on the menu, including the rare Fugu (blowfish).<sup>171</sup> The waiter informs Homer that if not cut correctly, Fugu can be poisonous, but Homer will not hear it and insists on trying the delicacy.<sup>172</sup> Of, course, to make things exciting, the expert chef of the restaurant is occupied with Mrs. Krabappel in the parking lot of the restaurant and the inexperienced, junior chef is left to prepare Homer's Fugu.<sup>173</sup> After ingesting the fish, Homer is informed that he should go to the hospital because he may have been poisoned and once there Dr. Hibbert informs him that he likely ingested the poison of the blowfish and has approximately twenty-four hours to live.<sup>174</sup> Of course, it turns out that Homer did not ingest any of the fish's poison.<sup>175</sup> Unlike many examples of food in *The Simpsons*, this episode is quite realistic. Fugu is a blowfish native to the Pacific Ocean and is considered a delicacy in Japan and The Philippines.<sup>176</sup> Fugu contains tetrodotoxin, which is 1200 times deadlier than cyanide.<sup>177</sup> One blowfish contains enough toxin to kill thirty full-grown men.<sup>178</sup> The FDA's Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition has found that:

---

before beginning the competition. *See id.*

<sup>169</sup> *See The Simpsons: One Fish, Two Fish, Blowfish, Blue Fish* (FOX television broadcast, Jan. 24, 1991).

<sup>170</sup> *See id.*

<sup>171</sup> *See id.*

<sup>172</sup> *See id.*

<sup>173</sup> *See id.*

<sup>174</sup> *See id.*

<sup>175</sup> *See id.*

<sup>176</sup> *See* Mushashi, *Fugu, the Deadly Delicacy*, Destroy All Monsters.com featured article, at <http://www.destroy-all-monsters.com/fugu.shtml>

<sup>177</sup> *Id.*

<sup>178</sup> *Id.*

From 1974 through 1983 there were 646 reported cases of pufferfish poisoning in Japan, with 179 fatalities. Estimates as high as 200 cases per year with mortality approaching 50% have been reported. Only a few cases have been reported in the United States, and outbreaks in countries outside the Indo-Pacific area are rare.<sup>179</sup>

The symptoms of Fugu poisoning can include numbness in the facial area, nausea, diarrhea, vomiting, and gastric pain, leading eventually to almost complete paralysis and respiratory distress, though the victim is often lucid until shortly before death.<sup>180</sup> To prevent the harmful effects of Fugu in the United States, the FDA attempts to prevent any product containing Fugu from entering the United States by allowing detention without inspection of all items possibly containing the blowfish.<sup>181</sup> Additionally, the FDA has an agreement with the Japanese government to allow pufferfish into the United States on a few occasions each year as long as it is processed by licensed Fugu chefs to remove the toxin prior to shipment and is certified as legally processed by Japanese health officials.<sup>182</sup> Because of these precautions, what happened to Homer in *The Simpsons* is not likely to occur in the United States. In the episode, the blowfish was whole when prepared by the inexperienced chef,<sup>183</sup> which would not be possible under current FDA standards. Homer Simpson was lucky, probably because he is the main character of the show and could never be killed off (except in a Halloween episode) and probably because he is fictional. Fugu is a deadly delicacy, but the FDA is aware of the danger inherent in eating blowfish and has taken precautions to prevent scares like that seen in *The Simpsons* from occurring.

When it comes to dangerous and deadly foods, *The Simpsons* often uses misconceptions and plain exaggeration for humor. Most of the foods in *The Simpsons* that are seen as dangerous or deadly could not actually cause harm, either because humans do not actually consume them or because the FDA has taken precautions to prevent such harm from occurring, as is the case with Fugu. The series, does however, tell audiences in a

---

<sup>180</sup> *Id.*

<sup>181</sup> See Food and Drug Administration, *Import Alert #16-20: Detention Without Physical Examination of Puffer Fish and Foods that Contain Pufferfish*, Oct. 28, 2003, available at, [http://www.fda.gov/ora/fiars/ora\\_import\\_ia1620.html](http://www.fda.gov/ora/fiars/ora_import_ia1620.html).

<sup>182</sup> See *id.*

<sup>183</sup> See *The Simpsons: One Fish, Two Fish, Blowfish, Blue Fish* (FOX television broadcast, Jan. 24, 1991).

general way that food can be dangerous, which can be a very valuable lesson.

### **Foreign and Ethnic Foods in *The Simpsons***

*So hard to resist . . . mesquite grilled onions, jalapeno relish. Wait a minute, those are Southwestern ingredients! Mango lime salsa? That's the kind of bold flavor they enjoy in Albuquerque!*

- *Homer Simpson*<sup>184</sup>

The writers of *The Simpsons* love to poke fun at ethnic people through their eating habits and often put the Simpson family in a position to enjoy ethnic or foreign foods. In doing so, the show sends signals about foreign and ethnic foods, which are sometimes negative, but always humorous.

The Japanese people have been singled out the most in *The Simpsons* as having unique eating habits. The above mentioned episode where Homer nearly dies from an encounter with Fugu is the primary example,<sup>185</sup> but in “30 Minutes Over Tokyo,” the Simpsons travel to Japan and get a taste of Japanese food from the front lines.<sup>186</sup> Upon arriving in Tokyo Lisa wishes to visit a traditional Japanese tea house, but the family vetoes this idea and decides to go to “America Town,” a restaurant recommended by the hotel’s technologically advanced toilet.<sup>187</sup> Marge comments that she would “like to see the Japanese take on the club sandwich,” because she “bet[s] it’s smaller and more efficient.”<sup>188</sup> Aside from having “smaller and more efficient” food, Japan is also seen as being incredibly expensive. For example, Homer pays one hundred and fifty dollars for a square watermelon from a street vendor.<sup>189</sup> Homer also buys a pretzel for fifty dollars at a Sumo wrestling

---

<sup>185</sup> See *The Simpsons: One Fish, Two Fish, Blowfish, Blue Fish* (FOX television broadcast, Jan. 24, 1991).

<sup>186</sup> See generally, *The Simpsons: 30 Minutes Over Tokyo* (FOX television broadcast, May 16, 1999).

<sup>187</sup> See *id.*

<sup>188</sup> *Id.*

<sup>189</sup> See *id.*

match, but the price does not seem to bother him, as his response is, “Mmmm. . . fifty dollar pretzel.”<sup>190</sup> The family also encounters the conditions in which fish are prepared in Japan when they get jobs at the Osaka Seafood Concern gutting fish.<sup>191</sup> In a setting unimaginable in the United States, hundreds of workers stand waist-deep in fish, gutting them one-by-one (see picture) [redacted].<sup>192</sup> Finally, the Simpsons realize just how strange Japanese food can be when they are confronted with Japanese orangeade that is “loaded with wasabi.”<sup>193</sup> The overall food-related message that viewers get from the episode is that Japanese food is expensive, strange, and possibly prepared in unsanitary conditions.

*The Simpsons* does not limit itself to a discussion of Japanese food, however, as the foods of many other cultures are consumed on the show. In one episode, the family enjoys a meal at “Big Bob’s Buddha” restaurant in Springfield’s Chinatown where Bart quickly orders the “Shark Butt with Butt Sauce” from the menu.<sup>194</sup> In another episode, Homer quickly decides to order Polpenlügen with Düdelmunch at a Swedish furniture store snack bar.<sup>195</sup> In yet another episode, Marge and Homer are introduced to Indian food when they eat dinner with Apu and Manjula.<sup>196</sup> Marge says that the food is delicious and is told that one dish contains “chickpeas, lentils, and rice” while the other contains “chickpeas and lentils” and should be eaten with rice.<sup>197</sup> Overall, the Simpson family, especially Homer enjoys the foreign and ethnic foods that they try, but, like many Americans, are wary of trying new things. The show plays on these fears and paints a picture of many foreign foods as strange, but often in an unrealistic way, which is not likely to influence how viewers feel about foreign foods, after all, does a shark even have a “butt”?

### **Vegetarianism in *The Simpsons***

---

<sup>190</sup> *Id.*

<sup>191</sup> *See id.*

<sup>192</sup> *See id.*

<sup>193</sup> *Id.*

<sup>194</sup> *The Simpsons: A Hunka Hunka Burns in Love* (FOX television broadcast, Dec. 2, 2001).

<sup>195</sup> *See The Simpsons: Eight Misbehavin* (FOX television broadcast, Nov. 21, 1999).

<sup>196</sup> *See The Simpsons: I’m with Cupid* (FOX television broadcast, Nov. 14, 1999).

<sup>197</sup> *Id.*

**Lisa:** [The Slaughterhouse restaurant]’s decorated with hanging steer carcasses and a fountain of blood.

*Marge:* Oooh... I heard about that place on the Red Grocer.

*Lisa:* The worst part is, you pick out your own cow and they kill it right in front of you.

*Marge:* Well, maybe the animals don’t mind honey. They might like being the center of attention.

*Bart:* I think I read somewhere that cows like being killed.

*Homer:* Wait, there’s a place like that in Springfield? Then why are we here eating this crap?<sup>198</sup>

*The Simpsons* often jokes about subjects such as ethnic foods and dangerous foods, and also does not pull any punches when it comes to the subject of vegetarianism, but Lisa Simpson always promotes a serious moral message concerning vegetarianism that can, and perhaps should, influence the decisions viewers make about their food choices. As was previously mentioned, Lisa Simpson became a vegetarian in the show’s seventh season.<sup>199</sup> Lisa’s decision to stop eating meat is based on moral principle, rather than on health. In “Lisa the Vegetarian,” the family takes a trip to the petting zoo where Lisa falls in love with an unbelievably cute lamb (see picture) [redacted].<sup>200</sup> At the dinner table that night, Lisa realizes that she cannot consume a lamb chop, knowing where it came from, and from that moment on, she is a staunch vegetarian.<sup>201</sup> Initially, Lisa’s goal was to turn the whole family, and maybe all of Springfield into vegetarians. She ruins a barbeque that Homer throws by launching Homer’s spit, complete with a roast suckling pig, down a hill.<sup>202</sup> By the end of the episode, however, Lisa is taught by the staunchly vegan Apu (along with guest stars Paul and Linda McCartney) that being a vegetarian is fantastic, but it is best to “tolerate others rather than forcing

---

<sup>199</sup> See generally, *The Simpsons: Lisa the Vegetarian* (FOX television broadcast, Oct. 15, 1995).

<sup>200</sup> See *id.*

<sup>201</sup> See *id.*

<sup>202</sup> See *id.*

[your] beliefs on them.”<sup>203</sup>

Since Lisa decided to become a vegetarian she has continued to fight against those who choose to eat meat, but she does not attempt to “force” her beliefs on others. Lisa instead has chosen a political forum to encourage others, to eat vegetarian, and even vegan. Recently, Lisa ran for class president on a platform of requiring vegan lunch options in the elementary school cafeteria.<sup>204</sup> She also considered becoming a vegan after meeting an activist for the environmental group “Dirt First,” who tells her, “I’m a level five vegan. I won’t eat anything that casts a shadow.”<sup>205</sup> Lisa’s philosophy regarding morality has always been to lead by example,<sup>206</sup> which is what she continues to do in the context of vegetarianism. To date, Lisa has failed to prevent her family from eating meat, especially Homer, who does not even seem to recognize that animals have names other than those given to their meat. He tells Marge, “You know me, I love animals . . . beef, chicken, veal.”<sup>207</sup> Other members of the Springfield community also still have a somewhat negative impression of vegetarians. In one episode, when local movie star Ranier Wolfcastle (a character based largely on Arnold Schwarzenegger, Austrian accent and all) enjoys dinner with the Simpson family, he responds to Lisa’s request for a vegetarian dish with: “Why, Homer, I see your daughter is one of those wave-kissing, Dukakis-hugging, moon maidens.”<sup>208</sup> Even Marge is not convinced that vegetarianism is the right choice for Lisa and admits that she “sneak[s] a little meat juice into [Lisa’s] vegetables.”<sup>209</sup> Despite her limited level of success at enlightening the residents of Springfield, Lisa has had a great amount of impact on the real-world vegetarian community, who view her as a rare television character.<sup>210</sup> *The Simpsons* illustrates

---

<sup>203</sup> *Id.*

<sup>204</sup> See *The Simpsons: The President Wore Pearls* (FOX television broadcast, Nov. 9, 2003).

<sup>205</sup> *The Simpsons: Lisa the Tree Hugger* (FOX television broadcast, Nov. 19, 2000).

<sup>206</sup> One early example of Lisa’s philosophy at work can be seen in the second season of the show. When Homer decides to steal cable, Lisa is worried that he will be punished by God for breaking the Eighth Commandment. Instead of lecturing and trying to convince Homer that he should give up the illegal cable connection, Lisa merely refuses to watch television until the connection is removed. By the end of the episode, Homer agrees to cut the cable because Lisa’s non-violent protest convinced him that she was right. See *The Simpsons: Homer vs. Lisa and the Eighth Commandment* (FOX television broadcast, Feb. 7, 1991). This may indicate that Lisa’s attempt to lead through example with vegetarianism is not completely fruitless.

<sup>207</sup> *The Simpsons: When You Dish Upon a Star* (FOX television broadcast, Nov. 8, 1998).

<sup>208</sup> *The Simpsons: The Bart Wants What it Wants* (FOX television broadcast, Feb. 17, 2002).

<sup>209</sup> *The Simpsons: It’s a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad Marge* (FOX television broadcast, May 14, 2000).

<sup>210</sup> See generally, Reed Moran, *supra* note 20.

just how vegetarianism is seen in the United States. Many people are like Homer, who refuses to think about the animals that meat comes from.<sup>211</sup> Many others are like Bart, who likes to pretend that cows and other animals enjoy being killed. Finally, many people identify with Lisa, the moral vegetarian, and it is important that a television show creates such a rarely seen character to help the audience understand vegetarianism.

### Cafeteria Food in *The Simpsons*

*May I interest you in a Jello brick sir? There's a grape in the middle.*

- *Principal Seymour Skinner (to Superintendent Chalmers)*<sup>212</sup>

Because much of Lisa's fight for vegetarianism takes place in the elementary school cafeteria,<sup>213</sup> it is appropriate to continue with a discussion of cafeteria food in *The Simpsons*. The cafeteria at Springfield Elementary School is undoubtedly the source of the most horrifying and disgusting food in Springfield. The cafeteria tends to serve strange entrees like "Salisbury Soup"<sup>214</sup> and a strange beverage called "Malk."<sup>215</sup> At other times, it appears that the only food available to be served to the students is condiments, such as relish and mayonnaise.<sup>216</sup> The food situation at the Springfield Elementary cafeteria has at times gotten so bad that Lunch Lady Doris was reduced to serving "Grade F Meat," the label of which proudly states, "Mostly circus animals, some filler."<sup>217</sup> In another episode, the budget cuts require Lunch Lady Doris to resort to making

<sup>211</sup>Homer is so blind to reality that he does not even realize that pork chops, bacon and ham all come from the same animal. See *The Simpsons: Lisa the Vegetarian* (FOX television broadcast, Oct. 15, 1995).

<sup>212</sup>*The Simpsons: Whacking Day* (FOX television broadcast, Feb. 29, 1993).

<sup>213</sup>For example, Lisa asks Lunch Lady Doris if there is anything in the cafeteria that does not have meat in it. Lunch Lady Doris tells her that the meatloaf may not have any meat. When Lisa demands a vegetarian option she is given a hot dog bun and told that it is "rich in bunly goodness." *The Simpsons: Lisa the Vegetarian* (FOX television broadcast, Oct. 15, 1995).

<sup>214</sup>See *The Simpsons: Lisa the Simpson* (FOX television broadcast, Mar. 1, 1998).

<sup>215</sup>See *The Simpsons: The PTA Disbands* (FOX television broadcast, Apr. 16, 1995).

<sup>216</sup>See *The Simpsons: Skinner's Sense of Snow* (FOX television broadcast, Dec. 17, 2000)(When the children are snowed in at school they are forced to survive on rations of pickle relish and mayonnaise).

<sup>217</sup>*The Simpsons: Treehouse of Horror V* (FOX television broadcast, Oct. 30, 1994).

food from ground-up newspapers and gym mats.<sup>218</sup> Her response is simply, “there’s very little meat in these gym mats.”<sup>219</sup> Principal Skinner on the other hand justifies serving the children newspaper by concluding that “shredded newspapers add much needed roughage and essential inks.”<sup>220</sup> Yet another shocking food served at the Springfield cafeteria is the milk of rats.<sup>221</sup> In “Mayored to the Mob,” the local mob boss, Fat Tony, obtains a contract to sell milk to Springfield Elementary School, and to save money he uses milk from rats, which he conveniently milks in his hideout.<sup>222</sup> Luckily, Homer finds out about the plot and reveals everything, so at least the youngsters at Springfield Elementary are no longer drinking rats’ milk. Ironically, the most nutritious meals ever served at the school cafeteria were in a Halloween episode where Lunch Lady Doris and Principal Skinner begin killing and eating students who are sent to detention (once again because of budget cuts).<sup>223</sup> The first victim is a school bully, Jimbo, who is quickly turned into Sloppy Jimbos, followed by the death of Uter, the German exchange student, who rapidly becomes Uterbraten.<sup>224</sup> The teachers at the elementary school get so obsessed with eating the children that they begin keeping both caged and free range children.<sup>225</sup> While this is obviously done for the sake of satire, and is a Halloween special, it is sad to note that the children probably received more nutrition from eating Sloppy Jimbos and Uterbraten than they ever received from eating shredded newspaper or “Grade F Meat.” *The Simpsons*, in showing what goes on in the Springfield Elementary School cafeteria has quite possibly turned many viewers off cafeteria food.

### **Fast Food in *The Simpsons***

*Nooo! It was finger Ling-Ling good!*

---

<sup>218</sup> See *The Simpsons: The PTA Disbands* (FOX television broadcast, Apr. 16, 1995).

<sup>219</sup> *Id.*

<sup>220</sup> *Id.*

<sup>221</sup> See *The Simpsons: Mayored to the Mob* (FOX television broadcast, Dec. 20, 1998).

<sup>222</sup> See *id.*

<sup>223</sup> See *The Simpsons: Treehouse of Horror V* (FOX television broadcast, Oct. 30, 1994).

<sup>224</sup> See *id.*

<sup>225</sup> See *id.*

-Homer Simpson (upon witnessing the destruction of the “KFP: Kentucky Fried Panda” restaurant)<sup>226</sup>

Another place where completely unhealthy food can be found in Springfield is at the local fast food restaurants, especially the Krusty Burger chain. *The Simpsons* features the Krusty Burger chain, but also has a few other fast food restaurants such as the “KFP: Kentucky Fried Panda,” mentioned above,<sup>227</sup> and “Der Krazy Kraut.”<sup>228</sup> The fast food restaurants serve food to the Springfield community that is only slightly more appealing than that served at the Springfield Elementary School cafeteria. The Krusty Burger menu consists of, Mutton Buttons, Snout Snips, Gravy Scrape’ems, Buffalo Things, Fiesta Globbs, the Triple Double Burger, Twisty Lard, Chicken Lungs (spicy or mild), and, for the heart healthy choice, a “Hot Lettuce Injection.”<sup>229</sup> To appeal to children and senior citizens, Krusty Burger offers “Laughy Meals,” and “Nostalgia Meals,” the latter of which consists of two ration stamps and an artillery shell full of olio.<sup>230</sup> The most interesting exploration into the world of Krusty Burger is in an episode where Homer becomes addicted to Krusty’s new sandwich, the “Ribwich” (see picture) [redacted].<sup>231</sup> The commercial for the Ribwich announces that Krusty Burger takes “letter grade meat, and process[es] the hell out of it.”<sup>232</sup> Homer instantly runs to the nearest Krusty Burger to get his hands on a Ribwich, and becomes instantly addicted.<sup>233</sup> When he finds out that the Ribwich is only available for a limited time he embarks on a cross-country journey to follow the Ribwich promotion through each city.<sup>234</sup> Ultimately, Krusty is forced to announce that the Ribwich will no longer be made because the animal it was made from has become extinct.<sup>235</sup> The crowd then learns that it was not made from a cow, but rather something “smaller,” and with “more legs.”<sup>236</sup> Not only was the

---

<sup>226</sup> *The Simpsons: Lisa the Tree Hugger* (FOX television broadcast, Nov. 19, 2000).

<sup>227</sup> *See id.*

<sup>228</sup> *See The Simpsons: It’s a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad Marge* (FOX television broadcast, May 14, 2000).

<sup>229</sup> *See The Simpsons: Diatribe of a Mad Housewife* (FOX television broadcast, Jan. 25, 2004).

<sup>230</sup> *See The Simpsons: Little Girl in the Big Ten* (FOX television broadcast, May 12, 2002).

<sup>231</sup> *See The Simpsons: I’m Spelling as Fast as I Can* (FOX television broadcast, Feb. 16, 2003).

<sup>232</sup> *Id.*

<sup>233</sup> *See id.*

<sup>234</sup> *See id.*

<sup>235</sup> *See id.*

<sup>236</sup> *Id.*

creation of the Ribwich likely in violation of the Endangered Species Act, but it may also be an inherently dangerous food product because of its highly addictive quality<sup>237</sup> and likely high fat and cholesterol content. Luckily, production of the Ribwich had to be halted and the people of Springfield will no longer be forced to trade items like cars for a “fix.”<sup>238</sup>

### **Alcohol in *The Simpsons***

*To alcohol! The cause of and solution to all of life's problems!*

*-Homer Simpson*<sup>239</sup>

No discussion of food in *The Simpsons* would be complete without a discussion of alcohol. As was noted earlier, a study done by Rutgers University found that beer constituted approximately thirty-nine percent of food consumed on the show.<sup>240</sup> *The Simpsons* quite possibly sends more messages to viewers regarding alcohol than it does on any other single subject. Almost every major character in Springfield has been shown drinking, including Bart and Maggie, though both were accidental.<sup>241</sup> Marge rarely drinks, but on at least two occasions she has almost developed an addiction to wine.<sup>242</sup> Other members of the Springfield community also love to drink. For example, Principal Skinner and Groundskeeper Willy (the elementary school groundskeeper) plan on drinking margaritas all day while the children are on a field trip,<sup>243</sup> Krusty the

---

<sup>237</sup>Homer exhibits classic “junkie” style behavior upon consuming the Ribwich, including dilation of the pupils, and the shakes. See *id.*

<sup>238</sup>See *id.* (a man trades Homer his sports car for the last Ribwich ever made).

<sup>239</sup>*The Simpsons: Homer vs. The Eighteenth Amendment* (FOX television broadcast, Mar. 16, 1997).

<sup>240</sup>See Andrew Moon, *supra* note 106.

<sup>241</sup>See *The Simpsons: Homer vs. The Eighteenth Amendment* (FOX television broadcast, Mar. 16, 1997)(During a St. Patrick’s Day parade Bart accidentally ingests some free beer being squirted from a Duff Brewery float); *The Simpsons: Mr. Spritz Goes to Washington* (FOX television broadcast, Mar. 9, 2003) (When airplanes start flying over the Simpson family home, they cause everything on the dinner table to shift. Homer’s beer ends up in front of Maggie who innocently picks it up and takes a sip).

<sup>242</sup>See *The Simpsons: You Only Move Twice* (FOX television broadcast, Nov. 3, 1996)(When Marge has no housework to do, she begins drinking at least two glasses of wine every afternoon); *The Simpsons: Co-Dependent’s Day* (FOX television broadcast, Mar. 21, 2004)(Marge learns that she can have a lot of fun going out drinking with Homer and almost becomes hooked on alcohol).

<sup>243</sup>See *The Simpsons: Guess Who’s Coming to Criticize Dinner* (FOX television broadcast, Oct. 24, 1999).

Klown refuses to miss “schnapps night” and the Friar’s Club,<sup>244</sup> Groundskeeper Willy gets drunk and rides his tractor into a swimming pool near the school,<sup>245</sup> Mr. Burns constantly has a large supply of cognac and brandy on hand,<sup>246</sup> and even Comic Book Guy, the local nerd who runs the comic book store and thinks that “beer is the nectar of the nitwit,” is more than happy to drink cranberry schnapps.<sup>247</sup> Homer even gives his cat, Snowball II, Kahlúa and cream as a reward for saving his life.<sup>248</sup> The family dog, Santa’s Little Helper is also so talented at drinking beer that he briefly becomes the spokesdog for the Duff Brewing Company, “Suds McDuff.”<sup>249</sup> Even the ultra-Christian neighbor of the Simpsons, Ned Flanders, has a basement bar, complete with his own kegerator.<sup>250</sup> It would appear that the only two people, or animals, in Springfield that do not drink are Lisa and Barney, who as discussed above is a recovering alcoholic. This illustrates just how important alcohol is to the people of Springfield, and on multiple occasions, the entire town has been known to go crazy without alcohol.<sup>251</sup>

The most prominent form of alcohol on *The Simpsons* is beer, and the brand of choice is Duff (see picture [redacted]). Homer is rarely seen relaxing without a beer in his hand, and spends an inordinate amount of time at Moe’s, drinking beer. Moe gets enough business just from serving beer that he finds it unnecessary to serve anything else.<sup>252</sup> Springfield has also hosted a number of events dedicated solely to beer. One such event is “Duff Days,” which is a festival for the entire family. Children are encouraged to enjoy “The Alco-Hall of Fame,” populated by animatronic drunk Babe Ruth, Ulysses S. Grant, and Benjamin Franklin robots, who all babble somewhat incoherently.<sup>253</sup> Children are also enticed to see what it is like to feel drunk

---

<sup>244</sup> See *The Simpsons: Like Father, Like Clown* (FOX television broadcast, Oct. 24, 1991).

<sup>245</sup> See *The Simpsons: The President Wore Pearls* (FOX television broadcast, Nov. 9, 2003).

<sup>246</sup> See *The Simpsons: The Mansion Family* (FOX television broadcast, Jan. 23, 2000).

<sup>247</sup> *The Simpsons: Worst Episode Ever* (FOX television broadcast, Feb. 4, 2000).

<sup>248</sup> See *The Simpsons: Old Yeller-Belly* (FOX television broadcast, May 4, 2003).

<sup>249</sup> See *id.*

<sup>250</sup> See *The Simpsons: Dead Putting Society* (FOX television broadcast, Nov. 15, 1990).

<sup>251</sup> See *The Simpsons: Rosebud* (FOX television broadcast, Mar. 18, 1993) (When Mr. Burns cuts off the beer supply to Springfield the residents of the town riot); *The Simpsons: Homer vs. The Eighteenth Amendment* (FOX television broadcast, Mar. 6, 1997) (When the town discovers that a Prohibition law is on the books everyone nearly goes mad).

<sup>252</sup> See *The Simpsons: Worst Episode Ever* (FOX television broadcast, Feb. 4, 2000) (Moe informs Comic Book Guy that his only choices to drink are beer or “egg soakings”).

<sup>253</sup> See *The Simpsons: Pygmoelian* (FOX television broadcast, Feb. 27, 2000).

by riding the “Topsy-Whirl.”<sup>254</sup> The whole event culminates with a “best bartender” contest.<sup>255</sup> Springfield has also hosted an Oktoberfest, in which residents can order beers nearly as tall as they are.<sup>256</sup> Springfield is also a host to the Duff Gardens theme park, which includes such attractions as, the Whiplash (to be completed in 1994), the Washing Machine, The Beer-Quarium, the Contusion, the Beer-amid, the Duff Hall of Presidents, the Fermentarium, and the Barrel Roll.<sup>257</sup> The park also has the “Seven Duffs,” including Topsy, Queasy, Surly, and Remorseful.<sup>258</sup> Either beer is so important to the people of Springfield, or the Duff Corporation is so powerful that they can control most of the events in the town. Either way, beer and beer-related events are abundant in Springfield.

The Duff corporation is probably best known for their mascot, Duffman (see picture), who is always ready to party and says “Oh yeah!” to nearly everything. Though Duffman was once replaced, first by the Simpsons’ dog and then by a drunken shark (“Duff McShark”),<sup>259</sup> he was rehired by the company and still does promotional work for them.<sup>260</sup> Duffman’s true identity remains a mystery, as his name has changed from Larry,<sup>261</sup> to Sid,<sup>262</sup> to Barry Duffman,<sup>263</sup> but this may all have been explained by Duffman himself. When asked if he died of liver failure Duffman responds, “Duffman can never die, only the actors who play him, oh yeah.”<sup>264</sup> It is not surprising that those who play Duffman would die from liver failure, as he most likely receives an unlimited amount of Duff from his employer. [picture redacted].

---

<sup>254</sup> See *id.*

<sup>255</sup> See *id.*

<sup>256</sup> See *The Simpsons: Co-Dependent’s Day* (FOX television broadcast, Mar. 21, 2004).

<sup>257</sup> See *The Simpsons: Selma’s Choice* (FOX television broadcast, Jan. 21, 1993).

<sup>258</sup> See *id.*

<sup>259</sup> See *The Simpsons: Old Yeller-Belly* (FOX television broadcast, May 4, 2003).

<sup>260</sup> See *The Simpsons: Co-Dependent’s Day* (FOX television broadcast, Mar. 21, 2004)(Duffman works the crowd at Duff’s Oktoberfest).

<sup>261</sup> See *The Simpsons: Pygmoelian* (FOX television broadcast, Feb. 27, 2000).

<sup>262</sup> See *The Simpsons: Hungry, Hungry Homer* (FOX television broadcast, Mar. 4, 2001).

<sup>263</sup> See *The Simpsons: Old Yeller-Belly* (FOX television broadcast, May 4, 2003).

<sup>264</sup> *The Simpsons: Jaws Wired Shut* (FOX television broadcast, Jan. 27, 2002).

The most telling episode of *The Simpsons* with respect to alcohol, is “Homer vs. The Eighteenth Amendment,” in which it is discovered that there is a prohibition law on the books in Springfield.<sup>265</sup> When the town decides to follow the law, all of the beer is taken to the local dump and, in an attempt to stay afloat, the Duff corporation releases “Duff Zero,” non-alcoholic beer, which is such a failure that the company goes out of business in thirty minutes.<sup>266</sup> Homer decides that he needs to be able to drink beer, so he and Bart remove all of the beer from the town dump and store it in the basement of the family home.<sup>267</sup> To get the beer to Moe’s (now fronting as a pet shop, Homer builds a system of tubes under the lanes of the local “Barney’s Bowl-o-Rama” so he can fill bowling balls with beer and simply bowl them to Moe’s.<sup>268</sup> Of course, the trouble really starts for Homer when the beer runs out.<sup>269</sup> Homer, however, with his undying love of, and need for, alcohol is determined to find a way to keep the town of Springfield liquored up.<sup>270</sup> Homer begins making his own alcohol and manages to produce bathtub rye, gin, beer, cognac, twelve-year-old scotch, and mint juleps.<sup>271</sup> Unfortunately, Homer’s skills with the stills leave something to be desired, and he loses all of the alcohol as each still explodes. Finally, with the town completely dry for the first time, the words of Marge Simpson (“Prohibition has cost us our freedom! Our freedom to drink!”), and the realization by all in Springfield that they need to have alcohol, convinces them to repeal the law.<sup>272</sup>

The depiction of prohibition in Springfield is accurate in many ways and inaccurate in others. In Springfield, the prohibition law actually increased the amount of alcohol being consumed, at least according to Homer.<sup>273</sup> In reality, national prohibition reduced the amount of alcohol consumed in the United States

---

<sup>265</sup> See *The Simpsons: Homer vs. The Eighteenth Amendment* (FOX television broadcast, Mar. 6, 1997).

<sup>266</sup> See *id.*

<sup>267</sup> See *id.*

<sup>268</sup> See *id.*

<sup>269</sup> See *id.*

<sup>270</sup> See *id.* (Homer says, “At first I thought prohibition was a good thing. People were drinking more and having a lot more fun. But without beer prohibition doesn’t work. Alcohol is a way of life. Alcohol is *my* way of life, and I aim to keep it”).

<sup>271</sup> See *id.*

<sup>272</sup> *Id.* (Of course, the town then discovers that if they had finished reading the whole law they would have seen that it had already been repealed).

<sup>273</sup> See *id.* (“People were drinking more and having a lot more fun”).

by approximately sixty percent.<sup>274</sup> What is partially accurate in the episode is the problem with enforcing prohibition, which is often one of the reasons cited for the ineffectiveness of national prohibition.<sup>275</sup> The Springfield police are completely unable to stop people from consuming alcohol, and even a hotshot enforcer from out of town, Rex Banner, cannot catch Homer, as the “Beer Baron.”<sup>276</sup> The other generally accurate depiction in the episode is the unwillingness of the people of Springfield to obey the prohibition law.<sup>277</sup> It is generally thought that the national prohibition laws were often flouted, especially by the middle and upper classes who could still afford alcohol.<sup>278</sup> “Homer vs. The Eighteenth Amendment” shows viewers how and why prohibition fails in a town such as Springfield, where alcohol is so important.

As *The Simpsons* has progressed, messages concerning alcohol have changed, however. The days where everyone in Springfield drank are over and the show has paid more attention to the importance of cutting back on alcohol use. This is best reflected in the episode where Barney decides to give up drinking and begins going to Alcoholics Anonymous meetings.<sup>279</sup> Barney, who only on rare occasion was seen sober prior to this episode, sees a video of himself drunk in which he dresses up like Marge Simpson and sucks spilled beer out of the Simpsons’ carpet.<sup>280</sup> He is also inspired to give up drinking in order to take helicopter flying lessons that Moe gave him as a gag birthday present.<sup>281</sup> In the end, with Homer’s help, Barney is able to defeat his desire for alcohol and even save the lives of the Simpson children with his helicopter.<sup>282</sup> “Days of Wine and D’Ohses” is an important episode because it shows that alcoholism is a serious problem, but that it can be overcome. The episode even promotes programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous, which may be important for some viewers to see, especially considering the often negative messages regarding alcohol

---

<sup>274</sup> See David E. Kyvig, *REPEALING NATIONAL PROHIBITION* (University of Chicago Press 1979), available at <http://www.druglibrary.org/schaffer/history/rnp/RNP2.html>.

<sup>275</sup> See generally, *Id.*

<sup>276</sup> See *The Simpsons: Homer vs. The Eighteenth Amendment* (FOX television broadcast, Mar. 6, 1997).

<sup>277</sup> See *id.*

<sup>278</sup> See David E. Kyvig, *supra* note 274.

<sup>279</sup> See *The Simpsons: Days of Wine and D’Ohses* (FOX television broadcast, Apr. 9, 2000).

<sup>280</sup> See *id.*

<sup>281</sup> See *id.*

<sup>282</sup> See *id.*

seen on the series. It even appears that Barney may be having an effect on Homer, as Homer recently agreed to give up all clear alcohols, even Zima,<sup>283</sup> which may indicate that Homer is becoming less dependent on alcohol and *The Simpsons* is beginning to promote more positive messages about alcohol use.

### **The Ultimate in Food on *The Simpsons*: Tomacco**

*I'm not crazy about the plutonium or nicotine, but it's very nice to see Bart eating his vegetables.*

*-Marge Simpson (on Bart's addiction to tomacco)<sup>284</sup>*

Audiences and viewers are given many messages about food from *The Simpsons*, and in some cases viewers may even make decisions based on what they have seen on the show. The clearest illustration of life imitating the art of *The Simpsons*, however, is seen with the case of tomacco. In “E-I-E-I-(Annoyed Grunt),” Homer Simpson and family travel to Homer’s father’s farm and Homer attempts to grow vegetables of some sort.<sup>285</sup> Homer discovers quickly that farming is not as easy as he thought it would be, and using his knowledge accumulated from 1950’s science fiction films, decides that the only way that he can make something grow is by planting everything he possibly can (including tomato seeds, tobacco seeds, kernels of corn, and candy corns) and by coating the field with plutonium.<sup>286</sup> Amazingly, Homer’s experiment works and the farm begins to produce tomacco (a hybrid between a tomato and tobacco).<sup>287</sup> From a glance the fruit looks just like a tomato, but the inside contains a gooey brown substance that, according to Ralph Wiggum, the

---

<sup>283</sup> See *The Simpsons: Co-Dependent’s Day* (FOX television broadcast, Mar. 21, 2004). Homer has also shown that he can give up beer if he puts his mind to it. In an early episode of the show Homer gives up beer for thirty days at Marge’s request. Instead of celebrating his thirty successful days of sobriety with a beer Homer goes for a bike ride with Marge. See *The Simpsons: Duffless* (FOX television broadcast, Feb. 18, 1993).

<sup>284</sup> *The Simpsons: E-I-E-I-(Annoyed Grunt)* (FOX television broadcast, Nov. 7, 1999).

<sup>285</sup> See *id.*

<sup>286</sup> See *id.*

<sup>287</sup> See *id.* Unfortunately Homer wanted to create the “hugest, juiciest, possibly super intelligent vegetables man has ever known,” but instead he ended up with tomacco. *Id.*

mentally deficient son of Springfield's police chief, "tastes like grandma."<sup>288</sup> After one bite everyone who tastes tomacco becomes instantly addicted and Homer gets the idea to sell the fruit at a roadside stand.<sup>289</sup> Unfortunately for Homer, and probably fortunately for humanity, the local farm animals ravage Homer's farm and devour every tomacco plant except one.<sup>290</sup> The Laramie cigarette company offers to purchase the last remaining tomacco plant from the Simpson family with the intent of marketing the fruit to children.<sup>291</sup> When Homer demands too much money, however, the sneaky tobacco executives steal the plant and on the way back to civilization crash their helicopter, finally putting an end to the existence of tomacco.<sup>292</sup> [picture redacted].

The tomacco plant is an aberration for several reasons. First, it is most likely radioactive because Homer doused the field with plutonium to make his precious plants grow.<sup>293</sup> While the residents of Springfield seem to rarely be harmed by eating radioactive products,<sup>294</sup> real people would likely not do well eating a fruit laced with plutonium. Second, the tomacco is a genetic modification of the tobacco and tomato plants.<sup>295</sup> The issue of genetically engineered food has recently been mentioned on *The Simpsons* in an episode where Marge decides to feed her family only homegrown vegetables because the giant genetically modified vegetables that she bought at the store are aggressive,<sup>296</sup> but tomacco is the clearest example of genetically altered food on *The Simpsons*. Finally, the danger of the tomacco is uncertain because of its

---

<sup>288</sup> *Id.*

<sup>289</sup> *See id.*

<sup>290</sup> *See id.*

<sup>291</sup> *See id.* (One tobacco executive tells the Simpsons that, "Kids are crazy about tobacco, but the politicians won't let us sell it to them. . . . But there's no law against selling kids tomacco. That little "m" is worth a lot of money to us").

<sup>292</sup> *See id.*

<sup>293</sup> *See id.*

<sup>294</sup> *See id.* (Before spraying the field with plutonium Homer tastes it); *The Simpsons: Hello Gutter, Hello Fadder* (FOX television broadcast, Nov. 14, 1999)(As a punishment, Mr. Burns makes Homer eat barrels of nuclear waste).

<sup>295</sup> *See The Simpsons: E-I-E-I-(Annoyed Grunt)* (FOX television broadcast, Nov. 7, 1999).

<sup>296</sup> *See The Simpsons: Weekend At Burnsie's* (FOX television broadcast, Apr. 7, 2002)(Lisa's potato starts attacking and eating her carrot).

possibly high nicotine content. Those who ingest the tomacco on the show do not die, even when the fruit is ingested in very large quantities, but at least some of the nicotine from the tobacco plant must be present in the fruit, as indicated by its addictiveness.<sup>297</sup>

The most interesting thing about tomacco is that this is a case where life truly has imitated art. A scientist in Oregon, Rob Baur, recently created a tomacco plant by grafting the roots of a tomato plant onto the roots of a tobacco plant.<sup>298</sup> Baur was inspired by what he felt was an anti-smoking message in “E-I-E-I-(Annoyed Grunt)” and wanted to draw attention to that message by creating his own tomacco plant.<sup>299</sup> Originally, Baur feared that the fruit of his tomacco plant may have lethal levels of nicotine,<sup>300</sup> but has since had the fruit tested, which confirmed that only the plant contained nicotine, not the fruit.<sup>301</sup> Baur said that he was going to give one tomacco fruit to the writer of “E-I-E-I-(Annoyed Grunt),” Ian Maxtone-Graham, and sell the other fruit on Ebay, though he does not expect to receive a bid of one-hundred and fifty million dollars, which is what the Laramie Tobacco Company offered Homer for his tomacco plant.<sup>302</sup> Though it appears that the fictional tomacco and the real-life tomacco vary in significant respects (radioactivity, possible addictiveness), Baur’s experimentation illustrates how influential *The Simpsons* can be. If it were not for the appearance of tomacco on *The Simpsons*, Baur would never have created his new “delicacy.”

The real-world existence of tomacco brings up questions of safety that could possibly be relevant to the FDA. One major problem with the regulation of tomacco, however may be jurisdictional because the FDA does accept jurisdiction over tobacco, at least in the form of cigarettes.<sup>303</sup> The FDA has, however, exercised

---

<sup>297</sup> See *The Simpsons: E-I-E-I-(Annoyed Grunt)* (FOX television broadcast, Nov. 7, 1999)(Bart remarks that the tomacco tastes terrible, “but it’s smooth and mild and refreshingly addictive,” after which he consumes so many he begins to gain a great deal of weight).

<sup>298</sup> See Ted Katauskas, *You Say To-Ma-To, I Say To-Bac-Co; Tigard Scientist Rob Baur Becomes a Star By Bringing to Life a Version of a Tomato-Tobacco Hybrid Seen on The Simpsons*, THE OREGONIAN, Jan. 12, 2004, 2004 WL 58852349.

<sup>299</sup> See *id.*

<sup>300</sup> See Kristen Philipkoski, *Simpsons Plant Seeds of Invention*, WIRED NEWS, Nov. 7, 2003, at <http://www.wired.com/news/medtech/0,1286,61091,00.html> (noting that Baur believed the fruit might contain a toxic amount of nicotine).

<sup>301</sup> See Ted Katauskas, *supra* note 298.

<sup>302</sup> See *id.*

<sup>303</sup> See *Action on Smoking and Health v. Harris*, 655 F.2d 236, 655 (D.C. Cir, 1980).

regulatory authority over products similar to tomacco, including gum with nicotine in it.<sup>304</sup> In the end, however, tomacco is unlikely to cause any trouble for the FDA because, just as in *The Simpsons*, it probably tastes terrible.

### **Drugs in *The Simpsons***

*All of our founding fathers, astronauts, and World Series heroes have been either drunk or on cocaine.*

*-Chief Clancy Wiggum<sup>305</sup>*

Drugs are not as prevalent in *The Simpsons* as food is, but drugs still make up a large part of the daily lives of the people of Springfield. How drugs are used and the effects of taking drugs as depicted on the show can send a message to audiences about the appropriate role for drugs in modern society.

### **Illegal Drugs on *The Simpsons***

*Ruth Powers: Steroids aren't drugs, they occur naturally in the body, like sweat . . . or tumors.*

*Marge: But aren't there side effects?*  
*Ruth: Yes, their main side effect is greatness!*<sup>306</sup>

Illegal drug use is not a common occurrence on *The Simpsons*, though it is mentioned fairly often and seen every once in a while. The worst offender regarding illegal drugs is Otto the school bus driver, who, as previously mentioned, clearly enjoys smoking marijuana and may enjoy other drugs as well. Other characters

<sup>304</sup> See Peter Barton Hutt and Richard A. Merrill, *FOOD AND DRUG LAW*, 381 (Foundation Press 1991)(1980).

<sup>306</sup> *The Simpsons: The Strong Arms of the Ma* (FOX television broadcast, Feb. 2, 2003).

that have done illegal drugs are Marge, when she becomes a female bodybuilder and begins taking steroids,<sup>307</sup> Jimbo Jones, a local bully, who smokes marijuana and is fascinated by aluminum foil at the Kwik-E-Mart,<sup>308</sup> and the mayor of Springfield, Joe Quimby, who is accused of smoking marijuana and does not deny it.<sup>309</sup> Homer also admits in one episode that he may have a “stash.”<sup>310</sup> Marge’s use of steroids is the most shocking use of illegal drugs in the show because Marge has a staunchly anti-drug platform. Marge comments at first that she has so many anti-drug stickers on her car that taking steroids would make her bumper a liar.<sup>311</sup> The results of Marge’s steroid use are that she grows a great deal of body hair, sacrifices her period, and becomes extremely aggressive (she gets into a barroom brawl and defeats at least ten men).<sup>312</sup> Overall, *The Simpsons* does not tend to show the use of illegal drugs in a positive light. Marijuana smoking is often handled casually, but the use of hard drugs is rarely seen, and when it is, as with Marge’s use of steroids, it reveals the negative aspects of using illegal drugs.

### **The Unorthodox Use of Legal Drugs on *The Simpsons***

*Homer: I need something that’ll keep me awake, alert, and reckless all night long.*  
*Store Clerk: Well, Congress is racing back to Washington to outlaw these (hands Homer a bottle of “Stimu-Crank”).*

*Homer: Sold! (He swallows the entire bottle of pills).*  
*Store Clerk: Hey, you can’t take that many pep pills at once!*  
*Homer: No problem. I’ll balance it out with a bottle of sleeping pills (He swallows a whole bottle of sleeping pills).<sup>313</sup>*

---

<sup>307</sup> See *id.*

<sup>308</sup> See *The Simpsons: I’m With Cupid* (FOX television broadcast, Nov. 14, 1999).

<sup>309</sup> See *The Simpsons: Sideshow Bob Roberts* (FOX television broadcast, Oct. 9, 1994).

<sup>310</sup> See *The Simpsons: Lisa the Tree Hugger* (FOX television broadcast, Nov. 19, 2000).

<sup>311</sup> See *The Simpsons: The Strong Arms of the Ma* (FOX television broadcast, Feb. 2, 2003).

<sup>312</sup> See *id.*

More common than the use of illegal drugs on *The Simpsons* is the unorthodox, and often illegal, use of legal (prescription and over-the-counter) drugs. Homer Simpson, just as in the food context, is the foremost consumer of drugs on *The Simpsons*. Homer's love of over-the-counter and prescription medications quite possibly started because, as a young child, his father would give him Nyquil before bed at night.<sup>314</sup> Homer has also taken drugs intended for a resident at his father's nursing home,<sup>315</sup> has taken "Churchill Downers" muscle relaxants to eliminate his anger problem,<sup>316</sup> has taken fertility pills, commenting that they tasted like strawberry and were "ovulicious,"<sup>317</sup> has taken a "rare powerful aphrodisiac" made from the pockets of the pocket fox to enhance his sex life,<sup>318</sup> has enjoyed drinking "cat ear medicine," which he thought was beer,<sup>319</sup> and has a love of licking toads for the effect.<sup>320</sup> Homer also takes every opportunity that he can to get drugs from Dr. Hibbert, especially morphine. In one episode, Homer hurts his knee playing basketball and when Dr. Hibbert asks him how it happened Homer says, "maybe a little morphine would refresh my memory."<sup>321</sup> Dr. Hibbert quickly obliges, but Homer says that he is still "a little hazy" to encourage Dr. Hibbert to give him yet another dose.<sup>322</sup> Finally, when Homer is told by Dr. Hibbert that he needs to have surgery immediately, he makes one more ploy for morphine, saying, "maybe a little morphine would get me there faster."<sup>323</sup> In fact, Homer Simpson has such an affinity for prescription drugs that he has even appeared in a commercial for a prescription drug, "Viagragaine, the topical rub for bald, impotent men."<sup>324</sup>

Homer is not the only character on *The Simpsons* who has a love of over-the-counter and prescription

<sup>314</sup> See *The Simpsons: Homer Simpson in "Kidney Trouble"* (FOX television broadcast, Dec. 6, 1998).

<sup>315</sup> See *The Simpsons: The Two Mrs. Nahasapeemapietons* (FOX television broadcast, Nov. 16, 1997).

<sup>316</sup> See *The Simpsons: I Am Furious Yellow* (FOX television broadcast, Apr. 28, 2002).

<sup>317</sup> See *The Simpsons: Eight Misbehavin'* (FOX television broadcast, Nov. 21, 1999).

<sup>318</sup> See *The Simpsons: A Hunka Hunka Burns in Love* (FOX television broadcast, Dec. 2, 2001).

<sup>319</sup> See *The Simpsons: Treehouse of Horror VIII* (FOX television broadcast, Oct. 26, 1997).

<sup>320</sup> See *The Simpsons: Missionary Impossible* (FOX television broadcast, Feb. 20, 2000) (When Homer is trapped on an island with no beer, he resorts to licking toads); *The Simpsons: How I Spent My Strummer Vacation* (FOX television broadcast, Nov. 10, 2002) (When Homer becomes determined to get drunk without getting beer from Moe he goes to the local pet store and begins licking toads).

<sup>321</sup> *The Simpsons: Children of a Lesser Clod* (FOX television broadcast, May 13, 2001).

<sup>322</sup> *Id.*

<sup>323</sup> *Id.*

<sup>324</sup> *The Simpsons: Barting Over* (FOX television broadcast, Feb. 16, 2003). Sadly, Homer thought that Viagragaine was for bald, important men. See *id.*

medications. Bart's best friend, Milhouse, has to take a prescription, "Repressitol," to make it through days at school without reliving painful childhood memories.<sup>325</sup> Barney, in the days when he was not sober, was so desperate to get a buzz that he drank the fluid out of a tranquilizer dart.<sup>326</sup> To calm his nerves, Krusty the Clown takes a combination of "Pepto and Xanax."<sup>327</sup> Mr. Burns needs to use ether to stop the pain of getting his nails trimmed.<sup>328</sup> Even Lisa, in an effort to stay awake to study, once became addicted to "Trucker's Choice" brand pep pills.<sup>329</sup> However, the best example of prescription medication taken by a resident of Springfield is in "Brother's Little Helper," where Bart is put on "Focusyne," a Ritalin-like drug that helps him concentrate in school.<sup>330</sup>

"Brother's Little Helper" examines the choices parents make in choosing to put their children on drugs for Attention Deficit Disorder, as well as on the effects of those drugs on children. In the episode, after Bart's principle encourages Marge and Homer to put Bart on Focusyne, a wary Marge insists on talking to the scientists who created the drug.<sup>331</sup> She is convinced that the drug may be good for Bart when the scientists show her how guinea pigs react to the drug: they instantly file into a miniature classroom and cannot take their eyes off of a puppet teacher.<sup>332</sup> Homer notes that the guinea pigs, "become your slaves," and the scientists say, "yes, but it's not about slavery. It's about helping kids concentrate."<sup>333</sup> Bart is convinced by Marge to take the drugs and instantly becomes a changed student. He studies constantly, and "feel[s] an urge to straighten up and fly right."<sup>334</sup> However, after several days on the drug, Bart gradually becomes paranoid and eventually hides in his room, covered in tin foil, convinced that he is being spied on by a Major League

---

<sup>325</sup> See *The Simpsons: Bye Bye Nerdy* (FOX television broadcast, Mar. 11, 2001).

<sup>326</sup> See *The Simpsons: Much Apu About Nothing* (FOX television broadcast, May 5, 1996).

<sup>327</sup> *The Simpsons: Mr. Spritz Goes to Washington* (FOX television broadcast, Mar. 9, 2003).

<sup>328</sup> See *The Simpsons: Team Homer* (FOX television broadcast, Jan. 6, 1996).

<sup>329</sup> See *The Simpsons: The Canine Mutiny* (FOX television broadcast, Apr. 13, 1997).

<sup>330</sup> See *The Simpsons: Brother's Little Helper* (FOX television broadcast, Oct. 3, 1999).

<sup>331</sup> See *id.*

<sup>332</sup> See *id.*

<sup>333</sup> *Id.*

<sup>334</sup> *Id.*

Baseball satellite.<sup>335</sup> Marge runs back to the scientists asking how she can take Bart off the drug, and learns that “[Bart] can’t just go off Focussyne,” but that perhaps he can be eased “onto one of its sister drugs, like Clorhexanol . . . augment[ed] with some Phenylbutamine.”<sup>336</sup> Finally, Bart takes a large dose of Focussyne to garner all of his powers of concentration, steals a tank from the local Army base, and shoots the Major League Baseball satellite out of the sky.<sup>337</sup> Even though Bart was correct about the spying activities of Major League Baseball, by the end of the episode the whole family is relieved to take him off Focussyne and put him back on Ritalin, which he had apparently been taking before this episode.<sup>338</sup> “Brother’s Little Helper” illustrates the concerns of many parents when making the decision to put their children on drugs. Marge is worried that her son is somehow going to change, which he does while on Focussyne.<sup>339</sup> The episode does, however, show some of the good effects of such prescription drugs. Bart becomes a very good student and becomes perceptive enough to discover that Major League Baseball was spying on everyone in Springfield.<sup>340</sup> Of course, not all of the results of Bart’s Focussyne use were good. He became extremely paranoid and spent so much time studying that he had no time to spend with his family.<sup>341</sup> In showing both the positive and negative effects of placing children on prescription drugs, such as Ritalin, *The Simpsons* shows viewers that the subject is not an easy one to think about and that parents need to be wary of making such a decision on a whim.

### Medical Marijuana in *The Simpsons*

*Whether you suffer from glaucoma or you’ve just rented The Matrix, medical marijuana can make things fabulous . . . medically.*

---

<sup>335</sup> See *id.*

<sup>336</sup> *Id.* (Bart comments that he “need[s] every brain cell blazing to outwit [his] invisible enemies”).

<sup>337</sup> See *id.*

<sup>338</sup> See *id.* It seems that all of the children at Springfield elementary are on Ritalin because the cafeteria serves “Malk: Now with Vitamin R,” a slang term for Ritalin. See *The Simpsons: The PTA Disbands* (FOX television broadcast, Apr. 16, 1995).

<sup>339</sup> See *The Simpsons: Brother’s Little Helper* (FOX television broadcast, Oct. 3, 1999).

<sup>340</sup> See *id.*

<sup>341</sup> See *id.*

The final, and most controversial occurrence of drug use seen in *The Simpsons* is in an episode where Homer Simpson is given a prescription for medical marijuana after his eyes are damaged by some crows.<sup>343</sup> At first Homer is worried about the consequences of smoking marijuana, but after he is reassured by Dr. Hibbert that it is perfectly legal in Springfield and will help his eyes, he jumps right in.<sup>344</sup> After smoking marijuana Homer has psychedelic hallucinations, in which his razor smiles at him and donuts come out of the nuclear reactor at work.<sup>345</sup> Homer suddenly becomes fascinated with what used to bore him, including Lisa's saxophone playing and the Bible (he lets his neighbor Ned Flanders read him the whole thing in one sitting).<sup>346</sup> He also becomes even more obsessed with food than usual, asking Marge to cook him ten thousand veggie burritos and changing the lyrics of a Jimmy Hendrix song to "I am hungry for a candy bar. I think I'll eat a Mounds."<sup>347</sup> Homer also impresses Mr. Burns by laughing at all of his jokes and gets a major promotion, which he loses after he stops smoking marijuana at the end of the episode.<sup>348</sup> Finally, Homer is so stoned at one point that he actually signs a petition to criminalize medical marijuana in Springfield.<sup>349</sup> **[picture redacted]**.

Homer's use of medical marijuana on *The Simpsons* sparked controversy, especially among medical marijuana advocates. Some advocates of medical marijuana felt that the episode created a negative and inaccurate depiction of medical marijuana use. "They made it seem as if medical pot was a joke. . . . [T]he episode

---

<sup>342</sup> *The Simpsons: Weekend at Burnsie's* (FOX television broadcast, Apr. 7, 2002).

<sup>343</sup> *See id.*

<sup>344</sup> *See id.*

<sup>345</sup> *See id.*

<sup>346</sup> *See id.*

<sup>347</sup> *Id.*

<sup>348</sup> *See id.*

<sup>349</sup> *See id.*

totally stereotyped pot use and didn't show any of its medicinal benefits.”<sup>350</sup> The episode does seem to contain many inaccuracies about the use of medical marijuana, especially Homer's hallucinations, but *The Simpsons* is still practically in a league of its own in doing an entire episode about medical marijuana. One must also remember that Homer's use of medical marijuana did help heal his eyes, so the depiction was not entirely ridiculous or negative. If nothing else, Homer's use of medical marijuana sparked a great deal of discussion and may have introduced a new audience to issues surrounding medical marijuana.

## Medical Devices in The Simpsons

*Why I could wallop you all day with this surgical two-by-four without ever knocking you down.*

*-Dr. Julius Hibbert*<sup>351</sup>

References to medical devices in *The Simpsons* are more rare than references to drugs, but there are several episodes that have medical device references, and medical devices are even necessary to the lives of some residents of Springfield, particularly Krusty the Clown, who has a pacemaker. Some medical device references are quite strange. For example, Dr. Hibbert seems to have a stash of surgical two-by-fours, one of which he uses to show Homer how he can withstand continuous blows to the head because of a special medical condition known as “Homer Simpson Syndrome.”<sup>352</sup> Dr. Hibbert also keeps a mechanical button applicator

<sup>350</sup>Dana Larsen, *Simpsons Sell-Out?*, CANNABIS CULTURE MAGAZINE, Jul. 2, 2002, available at, <http://www.cannabisculture.com/articles/2493.html>.

<sup>351</sup>*The Simpsons: The Homer They Fall* (FOX television broadcast, Nov. 10, 1996).

<sup>352</sup>*Id.*

in his office, which he uses to scare Bart so that he will sweat and melt superglue off his face.<sup>353</sup> Dr. Hibbert also keeps a suicide machine in his office, though it is not particularly effective because when Homer attempts to use it, Dr. Hibbert tells Marge, “Don’t worry, on a man his size that just provides sexual release.”<sup>354</sup> Dr. Hibbert also orders Bart to live in a bubble after he contracts the rare “Panda Virus” from a mosquito bite.<sup>355</sup> Bart grows attached to the bubble, partially because “it makes everything shimmer and glow.”<sup>356</sup> After Bart finally gets out of the bubble, he has a severe case of agoraphobia.<sup>357</sup> Luckily, these medical devices are not often used by doctors in the real world and few people have to worry about being pummeled with a surgical two-by-four to illustrate “Homer Simpson Syndrome.”

Medical devices in *The Simpsons* are also occasionally a part of implants and transplants. In one episode we learn that a bartender at a nearby tourist attraction “got [a] metal ass in ‘Nam.”<sup>358</sup> In the same episode, Homer learns that his father will die without a kidney transplant and offers to let Dr. Hibbert use the artificial kidney he invented.<sup>359</sup> Of course, because Homer invented the kidney, it is merely a beer can with a whistle glued to it.<sup>360</sup>

Despite Homer’s failure to invent an adequate artificial kidney for his father, some interesting medical devices have been presented on *The Simpsons* through the power of invention. In one episode Artie Ziff, Marge’s ex-boyfriend from high school, invents the “Snore Converter.”<sup>361</sup> The device, when attached to Homer’s face at night converts the sound of his snores into music (fittingly “Sweet Dreams” by the Eurhythmics).<sup>362</sup> There is no doubt that many viewers wish they could have a snore converter of their own to make both their sleep and their relationships better. Unfortunately Artie Ziff’s version, because it was specially made

---

<sup>353</sup> See *The Simpsons: Lost Our Lisa* (FOX television broadcast, May 10, 1998).

<sup>354</sup> *The Simpsons: Jaws Wired Shut* (FOX television broadcast, Jan 27, 2002).

<sup>355</sup> See *The Simpsons: Little Girl in the Big Ten* (FOX television broadcast, May 12, 2002).

<sup>356</sup> *Id.*

<sup>357</sup> See *id.*

<sup>358</sup> *The Simpsons: Homer Simpson in: “Kidney Trouble”* (FOX television broadcast, Dec. 6, 1998).

<sup>359</sup> See *id.*

<sup>360</sup> See *id.*

<sup>361</sup> See *The Simpsons: Half-Decent Proposal* (FOX television broadcast, Feb. 10, 2002).

<sup>362</sup> See *id.*

to allow Marge to sleep soundly, sends her subliminal messages and includes a hidden camera (Artie is still in love with Marge and pines for her).<sup>363</sup> In another episode, Homer redeems his inventive abilities, though by accident, when he invents the “Spine-o-Cylinder.”<sup>364</sup> When Homer injures his back at a prison rodeo, he manages to fix it by falling on a trashcan in his front yard, which then becomes the shape of his fixed spine.<sup>365</sup> He quickly uses the new medical device in his garage chiropractic business, “El Clinico Magnifico.”<sup>366</sup> Unfortunately, things never really work out for Homer and real chiropractors, mad at him for taking their business, steal and smash the “Spine-o-Cylinder” before his very eyes.<sup>367</sup>

The treatment of medical devices in *The Simpsons* is rarely serious and usually involves strange, new medical devices that do not exist in real life. Viewers are introduced to a world where people have prescription pants<sup>368</sup> and where Homer freely uses a defibrillator on himself and others with no consequences.<sup>369</sup> Medical devices on *The Simpsons* are used more for humor and less-realistically than either food or drugs and provide a purely satirical perspective on an often-life saving subject.

## Conclusion

Food, drugs, and medical devices are as prevalent in *The Simpsons* as they are in the real world, which makes

---

<sup>363</sup> See *id.*

<sup>364</sup> See *The Simpsons: Pokeymom* (FOX television broadcast, Jan. 14, 2001).

<sup>365</sup> See *id.*

<sup>366</sup> See *id.*

<sup>367</sup> See *id.*

<sup>368</sup> See *The Simpsons: It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad Marge* (FOX television broadcast, May 14, 2000)(Marge steals Comic Book Guy's prescription pants when she is trying to hide after escaping from a mental institution).

<sup>369</sup> See e.g. *The Simpsons: Homer the Moe* (FOX television broadcast, Nov. 18, 2001)(The Simpson family buys a defibrillator, which Homer uses on himself every time he has chest pains); *The Simpsons: A Hunka Hunka Burns in Love* (FOX television broadcast, Dec. 2, 2001)(Homer has to use a defibrillator on Mr. Burns when he dies while on a date).

*The Simpsons* unique among television programs. Each episode of *The Simpsons* sends messages to viewers about the importance, danger, and often humor of food, drugs, and medical devices. Through satire, the Simpsons and the other residents of Springfield have shown audiences around the world a unique perspective on food, ranging from what foods can kill a person (broccoli, a sixteen pound steak, and Fugu), to what foods can be created through the magic of plutonium farming (tomacco). *The Simpsons* often pokes fun at foreign and ethnic foods by showing viewers what people eat in Japan (small, efficient club sandwiches, square watermelons, and orangeade packed with wasabi), what is served in Springfield's Chinatown (shark butt), and what is in apparently all Indian dishes (chickpeas, lentils, and rice). Audiences learn that their elementary school cafeteria was probably healthy and sparkling compared to that of Springfield Elementary School and that fast food really can be addictive, especially when made from a small, many-legged, extinct animal. *The Simpsons* also creates much discussion regarding the moral aspects of vegetarianism through Lisa and her plight to rid Springfield of meat by example. It is important that the show balances the gluttony of Homer with the health-conscious messages of Lisa and the vegan Apu. *The Simpsons* has also shown viewers a range of perspectives on the use of alcohol. Alcohol is abundant in Springfield and most residents drink with few repercussions, however, a message of sobriety appears through Barney's decision to stop drinking and through Homer's recent decision to give up "clear alcohols."

Drugs are also abundant in Springfield, and virtually no character has failed to take some form of drug, whether illegal, prescription, or over-the-counter. Homer shows viewers the effects of taking too many over-the-counter pep pills and sleeping pills at the same time, and Marge shows exactly what happens to women who combine steroids with estrogen blockers. Most importantly, *The Simpsons* has tackled the issue of putting children on drugs for Attention Deficit Disorder and the consequences of making an uninformed decision. The show has also taken up a discussion of medical marijuana. Though some may feel that *The Simpsons* takes these important issues too lightly others will argue that at least the show encourages

discussion of the issues because *The Simpsons* is such a widely viewed and well-respected television program. Finally, *The Simpsons* often uses medical devices for humor. Medical devices are often made-up, such as Dr. Hibbert's "surgical two-by-four" and mechanical button applicator. Others are exaggerated for effect, such as Bart's bubble, which he can freely roll around in, and Dr. Hibbert's suicide machine that only gives a large man such as Homer "sexual release." *The Simpsons* also opens the eyes of viewers to new and interesting medical devices, such as Artie Ziff's "Snore Converter" and Homer's "Spin-o-Cylinder," and gives the audience hope that they too could invent a medical device that might change the world for the better. *The Simpsons* never fails to give a fresh and funny perspective on the world, especially on the world of the FDA: that of food, drugs, and medical devices. Because of this, viewers laugh at Homer's nearly unquenchable thirst for beer, Bart's addiction to tomacco, Lisa's love for a sickeningly sweet little lamb, and Marge's use of steroids, but viewers also learn a little bit about the real world while they are laughing. Fugu actually can kill a man and tomacco really can be made by grafting a tomato root onto a tobacco plant. Lifelong alcoholics such as Barney Gumble can stop drinking and get into a program such as Alcoholics Anonymous. Deciding to put children on drugs is a serious matter that should not be taken lightly. Yet, in the end, the message is that food, drugs, medical devices, and life are great, so take just a moment to be like Homer and have a donut. "Mmmm. . . donuts."<sup>370</sup>

---

<sup>370</sup> *The Simpsons: Homer at the Bat* (FOX television broadcast, Feb. 20, 1992); *The Simpsons: Simpson Tide* (FOX television broadcast, Mar. 29, 1998); *The Simpsons: Lisa the Tree Hugger* (FOX television broadcast, Nov. 19, 2000); *The Simpsons: Treehouse of Horror XIII* (FOX television broadcast, Nov. 3, 2002).