

## Some introductory notes for a psychoanalytic literature of “The Simpsons”

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### **Abstract**

In an excursus on the psychoanalytic literature that has addressed the relationship between creativity and art, the authors want to highlight how the animated sitcom "The Simpsons" can now be configured as an artistic production of high symbolic value can provide significant explanatory models, suitable to "read" like a case or of a literary classic, precise dynamic unconscious.

This reflection is emphasized as ways of expressing the popular series will serve as a record and a language more refined than those normally offered by the television production that enable reading and interpretive possibilities similar to those offered by the film industry.

**Key words:** the Simpsons, psychoanalysis, art, symbolism, creative process

### **Introduction**

Use an artistic production - be it literary, arts and cinema - for the purposes of a psychological discourse is not a stretch to ideological or metapsychological, an arbitrary act which can promote psychologism ends in themselves or inflate the applicability of psychology to any existential phenomenology around us.

We believe that the sense of the potential of psychology applied to different forms of art is and should be another.

Historically there are numerous examples in which popular psychology theorists have made use of “material” proper “art” to better illustrate important conceptual steps, perhaps those most difficult to understand to those that do not directly affect the psychological or who are interested in psychology for a cognitive pleasure.

Cinema and Psychoanalysis born almost simultaneously in the late nineteenth century.

In 1926 the works of Freud had already outlined the basic principles of psychoanalytic theory and technique, providing a coherent and innovative concepts can understand the human soul and the individual and collective behavior on the basis of the study and analysis of Unconscious.

In the same year, the interest for psychoanalysis of cinema found its expression in the film *Secrets of the Soul* of G. W. Pabst, created with the help of collaborators of Freud's,

C. Abraham and H. Sachs<sup>1</sup>, which reflect the major themes of psychoanalytic research and the development of Freudian thought.

The man is the center of interest, is the art of cinema as psychoanalysis; both in investigating the hidden areas of the human soul seeking the motivations that led him to various behaviors.

The unconscious productions are inherently artistic expression, since they always refer to other meanings to make sense of the message.

Cinema and psychoanalysis also refer to the same parameters: sounds, images, words, timing, tone of voice, albeit with different objectives, highlight the link between creative thinking and psychoanalytic thought. The main contribution of psychoanalysis to the study of art is concerned, according to several authors, not so much the specific details of the theme because its very conception and development of psychic, so this contribution varies with the changing of general psychoanalytic theory.

At first, the interest of psychoanalysts in the creative process is linked to the discovery of the unconscious psyche, and this phase is characterized by the identification of the various bodies that make up the psychic apparatus and the description of the concept of energy, which led to the study the psychic apparatus under the dynamic and economic point of view as well as structural metapsychology.

In this period the works of art were used by Freud to support his clinical data highlighting certain issues so that confrontational and defensive are always present in different cultures. Freud postulated that the artist had a "flexibility of the removals" that would allow him to enter more easily into contact with his unconscious contents. Freud thought that artists were the only precursors of psychic knowledge. In 1907 he wrote: "The poet constructs his own world, or rather to his delight a new order of things in the world" (Freud, 1907, p. 375).

The second phase of the interest of psychoanalysis to the art, characterized by the study of ego functions, its mechanisms of defence, its origins, has led to significant developments in these areas, but according to Winnicott analysts who have addressed these issues have focused on "making observations secondary and tertiary, ignoring everything that can be called primary" (Winnicott, 1971, p. 126).

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<sup>1</sup>It should be noted that Freud, perhaps too tied to cultural elements of the previous century, had not shown a particular attention to the emerging art form, coming to refuse an offer of \$ 100,000 from the manufacturer S. Goldwyn to collaborate on writing a movie about Cleopatra, on this occasion, Freud wrote to Abraham: "I do not see the possibility of being able to represent our abstractions from the graphical point of view so respectable." (09/06/1925); Abraham himself, tried to convince Freud, who had rejected the proposal of manufacturer H. Neumann himself to work on the film by Pabst, believing that this would be accomplished anyway and that would be so good that he had made use of expert advice, but he did not share and in a letter to Ferenczi, he dissociated himself from the initiative "the movies are so stupid things. The society that has seduced Abraham Sachs could, of course, not to refrain from proclaiming my "approval" to the world. I protested strongly with Sachs and now the Neue Freie Presse published a retraction. Meanwhile it turns out that Bernfeld and Storfer are involved in such an undertaking. Do not try to stop them, as the film seems so inevitable, as the pageboy haircut that is fashionable, but I do not want to be combed that way, and do not want my name to be matched with any film." (14/08/1925). (Source Freud Museum).

Studies that have focused on this problem following two different orientations: one believes that creativity originates in traumatic childhood experiences in the mother-child relationship, the other, whose chief proponent was Kris, who considers the ability of artistic expression is based on factors relating to the structure of the character and, in particular, to a sufficient degree of autonomy of the Ego (Kris, 1953).

Psychoanalysis has always continued to work on the study of creative expression (Rank, Jones, Abraham, Ferenczi, Bonaparte). Sachs, who was the first training analyst in the institute of psychoanalysis in Berlin, argued that candidates for access to training should demonstrate a high artistic and aesthetic sensitivity.

The psychoanalytic studies have explored the art, rather than studying the work of art, the artist's personality, the characteristics of his inner life, that reconstruct scientifically unconscious creative processes that generated the work of 'arts. Later, a contribution was made by the study of mental preconscious of psychoanalytic Ego psychology and object relations of childhood (Klein, Bion).

These studies were done to understand the importance that, in the survey, awareness of the creative aspects. More knowledge is due to studies on primitive object relations and primitive of mental phenomena, which show the early formation of the Self and the object from Non-self education. Through these studies, Winnicott was able to reach the source of creativity. The first creative, magical and omnipotent, is seen as the creation of the Self. This first form will affect all future creativity. One can say that this need for starting self-making, not sufficiently achieved, will be the creative force for the entire existence.

Winnicott has shown that the first manifestation of thought of the child is an image created by the child to compensate for the lack of something which, although outside (the breast of the mother), is not perceived as such, in this sense Gaddini states that "*the special nature of human thought, primitive, archaic, rudimentary is to be creative*" (Gaddini, 1960, p.74, author italics). Gaddini refers to the creativity that characterizes each of us: the creativity that allows the man to get in touch with the sense of self, and that helps him find his identity. Moreover, the author continues, the hallucinatory image and satisfaction with normally connected to it are experienced by the child as a single thing that he is the author.

Winnicott notes, "the breast is created by the infant over and over again out of the infant's capacity to love or (one can say) out of need. A subjective phenomenon develops in the baby, which we call the mother's breast. The mother places the actual breast just there where the infant is ready to create, and at the right moment" (Winnicott, 1951, p. 286); this coincides with the sense of infantile omnipotence, which is necessarily favored by the rewards that come from the outside.

The hallucinatory image is followed by the game that, fortunately, does not cease with childhood. From this point on, the fundamental task of development is to move away from this magical creativity to the objective perception of reality; this step, far from

complete in childhood, gives rise to a conflict is always present and characteristic of the human being.

According to Fornari (1979) the unconscious meaning is dynamically primary and decisive in the production of signs. And yet, to become conscious, it must connect to the conscious meanings, in the same manner in which the characters of a representation (unconscious meanings) need actors (meaning conscious) to be staged.

The unconscious is thus endowed with power to imbue the language itself, which becomes a crossroads of affect and cognition, because the linguistic signs are combined matrices with symbolic affective antecedents with the elementary units of knowledge (representations of word and thing produced from the experience). So the language is structured like the unconscious.

A signifier generates each meaning. Art leads near the borders of signification, the original sentimental, the *Pathos*, *Logos* generates. In psychoanalysis is the transfert that is the crucial moment, the point of encounter between an unconscious (*Pathos*) and a conscious representation (*Logos*).

### **The Simpsons and Psychology**

It is known that the "phenomenon of The Simpsons" has attracted the attention of philosophers, sociologists, anthropologists, and also psychologists.

The undoubted potential symbolic and representative information characterizing the Simpsons if, on the one hand, on several levels have catalyzed the interest of contemporary western culture, other, more or less consciously, transformed from a simple cartoon entertainment program for the undisputed cultural product of our age, expressed and made public through a biting satirical art, which spans the decades, generations, geographical, social and political.

The artistic quality inherent in every single episode, in addition to the enormous effort of writing and editing of its filmmakers<sup>2</sup>, goes beyond the simple characterization "aesthetics" of the characters or stories about them as protagonists, and may be related to the amplification subject to the vicissitudes of daily life and the universal message of which the citizens of Springfield, and especially Homer, Marge, Bart, Lisa and Maggie, are the trustees and promoters.

The Simpsons have appeared for the first time in 1987 in a television talk show, like short films lasting only one minute. The resounding success immediately got convinced their creator, Matt Groening, to transform them into half-hour episodes: the first of these, *Simpsons Roasting on an Open Fire*, was aired in America on 15/12/1989. Since then it has been more than twenty years and the favor of the public continues unabated, as the passion of fans for the many gadgets they inspired.

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<sup>2</sup>It is estimated that the timing of implementation for each episode, which usually works a group of 16 writers, should be around six months and that the production cost per episode is about \$ 1.8 million (*Source Wikipedia*).

The television series *The Simpsons* uses very sophisticated techniques of expression, when compared to television production, and often uses language borrowed from the film, features such as lighting, photography, installation refer to a use of the techniques that make a famous series hybrid product that combines elements characteristic of the classic American sitcom with the cartoons, with references to other modes of expression, it passes by elements of popular culture such as talk shows, music, pop-rock to stretches of a culture that is high with frequent references to poetry, the language of science and theatre.

The same reference to the language of cinema constantly oscillates between references to popular movies, b-movies, blockbusters and quotes from great works of authorship and classic. The examples are countless: from *King Kong* to *Freaks* of Tod Browning; from *Star Trek* to Stanley Kubrik (*The Shining*, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *Dr. Strangelove*, *Barry Lindon*, *A Clockwork Orange*, *Full Metal Jacket*); from *An Officer and a Gentleman* to A. Hitchcock (*The Birds*, *Rear Window*, *Psycho*, *Vertigo*, *North by Northwest*)<sup>3</sup>.

Among the references to the world of television we can mention *Happy days*; *X files*; *The Flintstones*; *South park*; *The twilight zone*; *Telethon*; *Steamboat Willie* (first cartoon of Mickey Mouse); *Twin peaks*; *Dallas*; *Lassie*; *The Jefferson*; *Melrose place*; *Laverne & Shirley*; *Cheers*.

Among the quotations from the music scene: Sonic Youth; Cypress Hill, Smashing Pumpkins; The Doors; Tom Jones; Stewie Wonder; Tom Petty; The Ramones; U2; The Beatles; The rolling stones; Aerosmith; Eltohn John; Carpenters; Steve Miller Band; Barry White; Chico Puentes.

From the literature: Steinbeck (*The Grapes of Wrath*); E. A. Poe (*The Raven*); T. Williams (*A Steetcar Named Desire*); A. Ginsberg (*Howl*); J. Kerouac (*On the road*); *The odyssey* of the Humerus, R. Frost.

And then the foray into the world of science, among others, the astronomer Janssen, Fermat the mathematician, physicist Einstein, Astrophysicist Hawking, Darwin, the naturalist. The Simpsons may be defined as an animated sitcom whose characters, following the classical scheme of this format, is a traditional middle-class American family. So, in all these years we know and love the members of this family.

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<sup>3</sup>And then: *Lawrence of Arabia*; *The Wizard of Oz*; *It's a Wonderful Life*; *The Godfather*; *Gone With the Wind*; *The Terminator*; *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*; *E.T.*; *Rocky*; *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*; *Goodfellas*; *Frankenstein*; *The Wild One*; *Deliverance*; *Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark*; *The Great Escape*; *The French Lieutenant's Woman*; *Night of the Living Dead*; *Chariots of Fire*; *Butch Cassidy*; *Batman*; *Cape Fear*; *Citizen Kane*; *Dracula*; *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World*; *Jurassic Park*; *Alien*; *A Christmas Carol*; *The Graduate*; *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*; *Love story*; *One Hundred and One Dalmatians*; *Rebel Without a Cause*; *The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly*; *The Fly*; *Thelma & Louise*; *Rain man*; *Reservoir Dogs*; *Pulp Fiction*; *007*; *JFK*; *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *Apocalypse now*, just to cite some examples, the most famous.

The fat and lazy Homer; clerk at the local nuclear power plant sector 7-G, loves gorging of pork chops and donuts and Duff beer brand, is completely unreliable and incomplete in his professional role as a father and husband while showing a lot to love his family.

Marge, a housewife, is the glue of the family, seemingly stable and irreproachable, at the same time do not hesitate to engage in risky enterprises, has had a few occasions in trouble with the law and fell victim to alcoholism and compulsive gambling.

Bart, the firstborn from the questionable conduct and disappointing academic results however capable of making himself altruistic gestures and terrific insights.

Lisa, his second daughter, mature, sensitive, intelligent, ecologist, is the criticism of the American way of life in which Bart and Homer are blissfully immersed. At the same time, like his father and brother, fond of trash TV and sometimes does not hesitate to set aside its values.

Finally the little Maggie, unable to speak and walk, perpetually attached to his pacifier, but that appears to know the formula  $E = mc^2$ .

Already, thanks to a brief description shows how the various roles are not rigidly characterized, thus facilitating the possibility of identification with the main characters<sup>4</sup>. Along with their grandfather Abraham and the entire town of Springfield with his sample well (or poorly) assorted human variety, where, often, the defects have the best quality<sup>5</sup>.

The large number of contexts and secondary characters - much higher than those found in other television products - and their nuanced characterization that allows them to become the protagonists of some episodes is a cause for added versatility in the series<sup>6</sup>.

But who are *The Simpsons*, and what they really represent?

If the prestigious *Times* investigation into the basic figures of the twentieth century has put them at par, or nearly so, Einstein, Roosevelt, Gandhi, Picasso<sup>7</sup> and the Beatles and even a magazine like *The Economist* believes that "any phenomenon can said to be joined in mass culture only after it has been represented in *The Simpsons*",<sup>8</sup> it is evident that the artistic value of *The Simpsons* is in line with what Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote in the note that "art is the power of humanizing nature, of instill the thoughts and passions of man in all that is the object of his contemplation" (Coleridge, 1798, p. 73).

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<sup>4</sup>Cf. Neumann, A. W., 1999.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. Paronuzzi, A., 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Within the family, the sisters of Marge, Patty and Selma, and Homer's mother, Mona, the dog Santa's Little Helper and the cat Snowball II; between friends, the sanctimonious Ned Flanders with sons Rod and Tod and his wife Maude, the sidekick of Bart, Milhouse, the alcoholic Barney, Moe the bartender, Apu the manager of the market; in the school, principal Skinner, Willie the gardener, the teachers Caprapall and Hoover, Superintendent Chalmers, the psychologist Pryor, the driver Otto Mann, the bullies Jimbo "Corky" Jones, Dolph, Kearney and Nelson, the nerd Martin; in the work the director of the nuclear plant, Burns, the secretary, Smithers, the employees Lennie and Karl and then the cops Winchester, Eddie and Lou, mayor Quimby, the Reverend Lovejoy, Krusty the presenter, the doctors Hibbert and Riviera, the "slack-javed yokel" Cletus and many other characters to a number not less than 500!

<sup>7</sup>Cf. Michelone, G., 2009.

<sup>8</sup>Cf. Malaspina, M., 2007.

Like all art forms, also, *The Simpsons* has the unique ability to make "unsaturated" their own potential representative: in reviewing an episode already know you have the idea that there is always something "new" that was previously escaped our attention.

The artistic value of *The Simpsons*, also seems justified by a kind of archetypal attitude inherent in the ability to create "mythical" "characters", to quote one of the most famous expressions of Homer, who through the years and areas for social become a major icon of unscrupulous human vicissitudes and the most common feelings of modern man.

After more than two decades of television scene, Springfield, the city "popular" par excellence<sup>9</sup>, therefore, is no longer a limited microcosm, a *hortus clausus* inaccessible and why compulsive "fairy" or too specific to the reality being addressed and which is produced.

Springfield is the mirror of our contemporary Western society.

The famous characters of *The Simpsons* are now overwhelmingly part of our collective imagination, come into our three-dimensional reality - as in the episode *Homer cubed* in *Treehouse of horror VI* (3F04, 1994) - convey and humanize "psychological issues", individual and group, highly complex, never routine and seemingly mundane, in living their passions cast as a sort of spell on viewers and live under the collective memory of the items that seem beyond or are independent from those which are usually is holding their own fame.

The magic that made them so "family" and so popular - and probably will make them immortal - is implicit, almost magnetic, representatives of existentialism and psychology that amplifies their own characterization, embody a way of life which we can not refuse to interest but at the same time is unlikely to emulate, to blame or accept uncritically.

Protagonists often overwhelming experience, these same characters emerge from the surface articulated narrative threads and never superficial from the beginning of each episode, becoming icons of a way to "perceive" the reality of ethical, social and psychological support of our times that often goes up to limit, never touching the absurd without falling into a whole unrealistic.

If so there is no doubt that many characters from *The Simpsons* move the sympathies of an audience that they "hate" them and "love" at the same time, it is important to emphasize that they are their own weaknesses - in every way human - to make them both fascinating: in other words, the flow rate through *The Simpsons* appears on the scene a sort of explanatory metaphor of society and in humans, of which the

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<sup>9</sup>Springfield is the name of the town in which they are set episodes of "The Simpsons". The name Springfield has historically been used to name several U.S. cities (there are 71 in 36 different states), the objective of returning series to act as a parody of the average U.S. citizen. The authors wanted to figure out where Springfield is located. In fact, in the episode where Apu has to take American citizenship (*Much Apu about nothing*, episode 3F20 of 1996), the map is covered with Bart, Lisa and Apu is to see in what state Springfield is located. The location of the city has never been made known: the authors have included several clues in the cartoon, but many of them are contradictory. In the shield with the symbol of the city of Springfield, emblazoned with the "*Corruptus in extremis*" or the same sentence of the founder Jebediah Springfield Melody Obedhia Zechariah: "*A noble spirit embiggens the smallest man*" (Source Wikipedia).

psychological and unconscious, is artistically disguised through the label and the form of "cartoon" and is conveyed by a particular model of humor and sarcasm that succeeds brilliantly designed to conceal and to "render harmless" psychological and sociological conflicts (just think of the many episodes which discusses the themes of politics, education, nuclear, recycling of waste , crime, just to name a few) very deep and exceptionally rooted in contemporary Western culture.

A reflection on the psychic functioning, having taken as a reference point, the inner life and personality characteristics of Homer, Marge, Bart and .. what's his name? .. Ah, Maggie Simpsons<sup>10</sup> finds comfort in the importance that psychoanalysis has right from the start to the study of art and the creative process and therefore can not but draw inspiration from the cultural and scientific history of the movement begun by Sigmund Freud in the late nineteenth century.

In this excursion are numerous examples in which an artwork is associated with psychological research and, as a "clinical case", is used for explanatory purposes.

For example, on the occasion of the speech for the celebration of his seventy years, Freud recognized that: "The poets and philosophers before me discovered the unconscious, what I discovered was the scientific method that allows the study" (Freud, 1926, p. 342).

Likewise, the psychic universe of what the early twentieth century could be regarded as "modern man" had been investigated by psychoanalysis in its hidden aspects, in the sphere of individual deeper and hidden, which play a primordial instincts and impulses fundamental role in the possibility of an expression of neurotic or psychotic personalities. When Freud spoke what looks like an act of "humble" recognition than philosophical and literary arts of which his science had treasured, paradoxically, psychoanalysis was acquiring in Europe and the United States, the frieze and the status of autonomous scientific discipline<sup>11</sup>.

It therefore seems curious that Freud intended to reaffirm the importance of disciplines independent of psychology and medicine to the development of his scientific view of man and the world, echoing another famous bibliographic references dating back to the dawn of psychoanalysis, when, in 1895, with *Studies On Hysteria.*, was emerging a new clinical method, distinct from that which was marked by the doctor on the psychiatry of: "The clinical stories I write have to be read like short stories ... a detailed representation, as has been accustomed to seek it by the poet, I can through the use of a few psychological formulas to achieve a comprehensive view" (Freud, 1892-1895, p. 239).

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<sup>10</sup> As is well known to fans of the series, Homer constantly forgets the name of the third child.

<sup>11</sup> While subject to revision in subsequent partial since its first formulation, psychoanalysis still represents one of the most important cultural centers of contemporary Western society, and keeps alive a theoretical and technical, as a reference in The Interpretation of Dreams in 1899, has over 110 years.



After this date, in 1897, in a letter to Wilhelm Fliess, Freud explicitly expressed interest in two works of art, belonging, albeit at different times in the history of literature, *Oedipus the King* by Sophocles and Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.<sup>12</sup>

The attention given to these great "classics" seemed to be justified on at least two levels of interpretation: first, the complex narrative threads that characterize *Oedipus the king* and *Hamlet* will lead to a "reading" of psychoanalysis, a 'textual analysis, historical and interlacing of the characters, revealing itself as an explanatory model of precise dynamic unconscious, was no less important then for Freud, the great cathartic value of the two tragedies that capture the attention so exciting the viewer and at the same time, "shaking" his love life awakening "an emotion that gives the coveted sense of elevating the tone of psychic tension." (Freud, 1905, p. 235).<sup>13</sup>

These two levels of interpretation are equally suitable and useful in the intention of reading *The Simpsons* through a psychological paradigm.

It's no doubt that *The Simpsons* has become one of the finest cultural products of our times, or at least, one of the most interesting art forms from the psychological point of view and, therefore, worthy of scientific attention<sup>14</sup> because of the implicit symbolic resonance that has allowed to bypass cultural differences, to overcome the flow of time and "touch" the collective unconscious instances.

The "extravagance" of *The Simpsons* is never of such magnitude as to promote a sense of reality and not seconded ever slips into representations "delusional" such as occurs in other "adult cartoons".

The characterization of *The Simpsons* does not exist a talking dog (Bryan) as they *Family Guy*, an alien pet (Roger) as in *American Dad* or a child who dies in every episode (Kenny) and then revive in the next, as in *South Park* (for mention only the most famous cartoons, of which *The Simpsons* was a prototype).

Except for the representation and hyperbolic parody of some scenes and *Halloween specials*,<sup>15</sup> the reality principle according to which moves the *Simpsons* family is always

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<sup>12</sup>In this letter dated October 15, 1897 Freud, tells Wilhelm Fliess, self-analysis have found evidence that "love for the mother and jealousy of the father" represent "a general phenomenon of early childhood" and that the evidence brought in support this generality is represented by "the palpating interest" for a play, *Oedipus the King*. Freud also argued that it is possible to affirm that "the same thing can be the basis" of *Hamlet*, by providing a rapid interpretation of the character and his activity.

<sup>13</sup>It's also important to remember that in 1916 in line with previous statements, and perhaps most obvious, Freud emphasizes that when clinical material is presented "opaque" for its theoretical explanation, for the purposes disclosed to the clinician can refer to literary works belonging to popular culture.

<sup>14</sup>Examples are essays like *The Simpsons and Philosophy* (1999) by W. Irvin, M. Conrad and A. Skoble, *The Simpsons and the Society* (2004) by S. Keslowitz, *The Gospel According to The Simpsons* religious journalist Mark Pinsky (1999), *The Psychology of The Simpsons* (2006) of A. Brown and C. Logan, *The Science of The Simpsons* (2007) by M. Malaspina, to name only the most famous.

<sup>15</sup>"*The Halloween specials*", otherwise known as "*The Treehouse of horror*", are transmitted once a year and a mini-series of three "short" featuring performances satirical fantasy-horror.

clear. In our idea, *The Simpsons* became, therefore, useful and significant explanatory models, suitable for "reading", like a clinical case, precise dynamic unconscious.

Their value "three dimensional" is enshrined in the symbolic load that achieves perfect harmony with the surrounding social reality and intersubjective.

Unveiling partially masks the *Unconscious*, *The Simpsons* sanction the possibility of identifying a deep level with highly complex characterizations - if only for the number of seasons they have arrived at its authors (when writing in America is airing the twenty-third season, which includes the five hundredth episode of the series, and the news of the confirmation of two more seasons, which will bring the number to increase to twenty-five, while in Italy the last broadcast was the twenty-second) - with people immersed in an experience emotional, often swirling, an affective dimension dominated by the same passions that every man feels called to express the turbulent relational game of his life.

Perhaps the most important consideration that emerges from the psychology of the now famous characters of Springfield is that *The Simpsons* are, series after series, episode after episode, a "factory of symbols" virtually inexhaustible and, therefore, interpreted through different, but not incompatible directives of analysis.

Without detracting from the undisputed validity of the various settings criticism (literary, journalistic, sociological, philosophical) through which over the years it is perhaps more frequently looked at the human universe created by *The Simpsons*, is with the use of psychological paradigm and psychoanalysis that is possible to understand better the dynamics staged by one of the most popular television *sitcoms* in the world - that the astrophysicist Stephen Hawking *considers* "the best program ever broadcast on TV" - trying to unravel what is the motive that characterizes the deep "human dimension" and the actions of characters, both humorous and light-hearted as deep in an existential dimension dominated by conflict and the most common emotions of modern man.

One of the goals of psychoanalysis applied to art and literature is to explore the artistic canons by which the *unconscious* tends to "dress up" its masks, so that it can find space in a more "acceptable" - and then represented - the intimate dynamic between consciousness and the latent dimension of the Self and the psychic world.

This methodological choice makes it possible to avoid the erroneous tendency, both in theory and in principle, to approve the complexity of the artwork to the simple expression of a neurotic symptom. After all, what is clear from the first studies on Freud, is that psychoanalysis applied to art should avoid the risk of being too invasive, that is aimed to consider forms of artistic representation as a direct manifestation of psychopathology or intrapsychic conflict.

Such an interest would, on the one hand, to distort the message of the work of art, second, to reduce the possibility of typical hermeneutic psychoanalytic discourse itself.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>This concept is expressed, albeit in different form, by F. Orlando, in the preliminary chapter of reading *Freudian reading of "Phedre"* (1971), in which the author emphasizes that every student of literature should be used to derive from Freud's

As S. Freud made clear in a letter to Richard Flatter in March 1930: "I should like to say that one is hardly entitled to expect from a poet a clinically correct description of a mental illness. It should be enough that our feelings are at no point offended and that our so-called popular psychiatry enables us to follow the person described as abnormal in all his deviations" (Freud, 1930, in Zabel, 1951, p.141).

Our intent is to highlight how *The Simpsons* can be seen as a reflection of the paradigm of the modern western individual psychology, always in tension between a desired reality and sometimes illusory - made up of passions and ideals - and a daily reality - made up of contradictions, family conflict, working, ethical and social - that creates psychological unease.

In this sense, the nature of existential conflict in which the individual faces, as is clear from contemporary society, which seems to be more properly represented in the same ironic Homer in one of his famous monologues: "I can't live the button-down life like you. I want it all: the terrifying lows, the dizzying highs, the creamy middles. Sure, I might offend a few of the bluenoses with my cocky stride and musky odors - oh, I'll never be the darling of the so-called "City Fathers" who cluck their tongues, stroke their beards, and talk about "What's to be done with this Homer Simpson?"<sup>17</sup>

Following the message and the "moral" of *The Simpsons*, this inevitable tension could be better addressed through awareness and integration of their limitations and resources. Beyond its different theoretical models, psychology teaches us to accept our and others "boundaries" always coincides with an experience of "maturity" intrapsychic.

Of all this is a good example Marge, who often forgives the "weaknesses" of her husband Homer, and her son Bart because he is aware of the spontaneous "authenticity" of good faith and basic moves that even when both players are acts of social despicable. It's no doubt that many of the actors of *The Simpsons* characters are "breaking" but at the same time, by virtue of a personal ethical base, are often engaged in actions "reparative" toward what or who has been harmed by them. In psychoanalytic terms, one has the sense of like Homer or Bart, albeit with difficulty, able to balance intrapsychically destructiveness of *Thanatos* (self-and hetero-directed) with the implicit constructiveness of *Eros*.

In *The Simpsons* this process of integration is facilitated through the use of humor that, following the approach of psychodynamic Eiguer Alberto, "exits winners from the 'battlefields' of intersubjective where every day we are called to confront as reveals the supremacy of the ego and pleasure, ensuring the attenuation of the emotional drama." (Eiguer, 2010, p. 32)

For all these reasons, it is very likely that, for a deeper analysis, the lesson "psychological" that we can capture from *The Simpsons* is often manifested more

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work, not so much a proper psychology of the author, the public or characters, because the models related to the internal consistency of a language that has more than something to be shared with that of the human unconscious.

<sup>17</sup>*Homer Simpson in Lisa's rival, episode 1F17, September 11, 1994.*

reassuring, profound and useful than they expend a lot of professionals who appear on TV today and crowd the TV lounges are always ready to provide the public a series of empty and generalist interpretations of the contemporary malaise and its solution.

This is still the psychology presented in *mass media*.

The substantial difference is in presentation mode.

In this regard, there is a chance that often, in various shades, *The Simpsons* psychology is always treated through a clear and relentless cynicism conveyed through a representative selection of type of parody.

It is a comprehensive example, the aforementioned Dr. Marvin Monroe, who appears in 1990 in the first and fourth episode written for the first series, a psychiatrist known for having founded the "*Family Therapy Center*" in Springfield, Dr. Foster, a psychiatrist in charge the "Calmwood Mental Hospital" and inventor of an "unlikely" clinical-psychological method called "*University of Minnesota Spankalogical Protocol*"<sup>18</sup> or Dr. Zweig, psychoanalyst, it is addressed to Marge in the episode *Fear of Flying* (2F08, 1994), is particularly proud of its wall full of qualifications (specific representations of psychology and psychologists in *The Simpsons* will be discussed extensively in subsequent chapters).

As noted by Guido Michelone (2000), in *The Simpsons* psychologists, like all the characters who occupy positions in institutions (doctors, lawyers, policemen, teachers), are basically portrayed as inept.

In these cases, the sarcasm is especially bitter and "common evil" cannot justify the "halved".

Through incarnations such as Marvin Monroe, Dr. Foster and Dr. Zweig, a parody of psychology (and the intrusiveness of psychoanalysis and psychiatry), is strong, brutal and merciless, as if to boost the representation that equates to the psychologist a religious confessor, a professional featured in all its intellectual futility and a massive and dominant interest in the economic and commercial aspect of his work.

And, is somewhat relieved that this transpire, not so much confidence in the discipline of reference, but because of the indiscriminate use that people will do, thanks to subtle invitations of the *mass media*.

In this type of psychological culture, emerging in Italy especially in the context of popular *talk shows* and in case of incidents of crime, it would perhaps be better to replace that which oozes from the humorous story of the Simpsons family, if only because, as Freud argued:

"Humor is not resigned but rebellious, not only represents the triumph of the ego, but also the pleasure principle, which here knows assert against the actual circumstances of adversity" (Freud, 1905, p. 234).

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<sup>18</sup>The experimental therapy, consisting of eight months of uninterrupted spanked, to which a young Ned Flanders is subjected to handle his tantrums, many years later you find that the anger was simply suppressed (episode 4F07 - Hurricane Neddy)

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