



All Theses and Dissertations

2015-06-01

Where Are Those Good Old Fashioned Values? Family and Satire in Family Guy

Reilly Judd Ryan

Brigham Young University - Provo

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd>

 Part of the [Film and Media Studies Commons](#), and the [Theatre and Performance Studies Commons](#)

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Ryan, Reilly Judd, "Where Are Those Good Old Fashioned Values? Family and Satire in Family Guy" (2015). *All Theses and Dissertations*. 5583.

<https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/5583>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.

Where Are Those Good Old Fashioned Values?

Family and Satire in *Family Guy*

Reilly Judd Ryan

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Darl Larsen, Chair
Sharon Swenson
Benjamin Thevenin

Department of Theatre and Media Arts

Brigham Young University

June 2015

Copyright © 2015 Reilly Judd Ryan

All Rights Reserved

ABSTRACT

Where Are Those Good Old Fashioned Values? Family and Satire in *Family Guy*

Reilly Judd Ryan
Department of Theatre and Media Arts, BYU
Master of Arts

This paper explores the presentation of family in the controversial FOX Network television program *Family Guy*. Polarizing to audiences, the Griffin family of *Family Guy* is at once considered sophomoric and offensive to some and smart and satiric to others. Though neither judgment of the show is necessarily mutually exclusive, the intention of this study is to reconcile those disparate viewpoints in order to measure the show's purposefulness. After all, if *Family Guy* succeeds in its satire, it is full of social purpose, offensiveness notwithstanding.

This thesis focuses on arguably the main point of contention in *Family Guy*: the family. Those critical of the show denounce the Griffins for their less-than-exemplary behavior. Proponents of the show—while not exactly disagreeing with that perception of the Griffins—differ in their approach, as they consider the Griffins satiric characters meant to be models of misbehavior. Reformative in nature, satire attacks vice and folly directly and indirectly, and it is in its combined use of direct and indirect satire that *Family Guy*, at times, misses the mark. By directly satirizing other families in its trademark cutaway transitions, *Family Guy* places its own family, the Griffins, in a position of superiority, which complicates matters when the Griffins indirectly become objects of satire. Especially regarding the relationship between Griffin family patriarch Peter and his daughter Meg, *Family Guy* oftentimes presents an imbalanced “satire” that would best be described as “abuse.”

Keywords: *Family Guy*, family, satire, animation, television, FOX Network, cutaway, indirect satire, direct satire

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For the completion of this thesis, I am most indebted to my wife, May, whose unwavering love and support helped me stay on task over the past year. I am grateful for Darl Larsen and his expertise in animation, satire and television; as my thesis chair, he provided constant helpful feedback to my work. The other members of my committee—Sharon Swenson and Benjamin Thevenin, as well as Amy Jensen, who was not on my committee—were invaluable in providing me the support and the theoretical frameworks for this thesis. Lastly I would like to thank the members of my cohort—Bob Bauer, Emily Flinders, Mindy Nelsen and Amy Roskelley—who have struggled together with me over the past two years.

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
Chapter One.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Purpose.....	1
The Family and Satiric Misunderstanding.....	6
Satire: Contexts, Definitions, and Production.....	11
Subsequent Chapters.....	20
Chapter Two.....	24
The Subversive Look and Feel of <i>Family Guy</i>	24
The Anarchic History of Animation.....	25
<i>Family Guy</i> 's Anarchic Essence.....	34
Chapter Three.....	42
Other Families in <i>Family Guy</i>	42
Cutaway Parodies.....	44
Cutaway Satires.....	48
Cutaway Abuse/Lampoon.....	58
Conclusion.....	65
Chapter Four.....	67
The Griffin Family as Indirect Satire.....	67
Poor Behavior as a Means to a Satiric End.....	68
Peter and Meg.....	73
Summary.....	85
Chapter Five.....	90
Conclusion.....	90
Bibliography.....	105

Chapter One

Introduction

Lois Griffin: It seems today that all you see is violence in movies and sex on TV...

Peter Griffin: ...but where are those good old-fashioned values...

Griffin Children and Brian: ...on which we used to rely?

Griffin Family: Lucky there's a family guy...¹

In tongue-in-cheek fashion, the theme song of *Family Guy* presents the Griffin family as an antidote to the ills of modern media debauchery. Anyone familiar with the program, though, easily recognizes irony in the song, having witnessed the less-than-exemplary qualities of Peter, Lois and company. The family that longs for “good old-fashioned values” is the same family that sells their daughter to pay off a pharmacy tab; they are the same family in which father nearly marries son, because the latter has recently inherited a large sum of money; perhaps most famously, they are the same family in which a diabolical baby schemes to murder his mother, at one time seemingly accomplishing his goal.² The extremity of such acts suggests the Griffin family should not be taken at face value. Their outrageous actions veer into the symbolic, the satiric. However, does *Family Guy* hit its satiric target? Those critical of the show—most notably, the Parents Television Council—point to the Griffins’ depravity as a sign of society’s and the media’s increased desensitization and looser morals.³ Neither critics nor fans of the show can argue that the Griffins are a good family; what is debatable, though, is whether there is a purposefulness to the Griffins. This analysis will examine the presentation of the family on *Family Guy*—via the Griffins—in an attempt to reconcile the disparate viewpoints of the program and to analyze the effectiveness of its seeming satiric intentions.

Purpose

The conflict that forms the basis of this research centers on two opposing viewpoints of *Family Guy*, one being that the show is brilliant, and the other that it is reprehensible. Our study

intends to uncover the diverse factors that lead to such varied responses. The debate about whether a media text is good or bad, helpful or harmful, is not a new one. In recent history, one can find *Family Guy*'s close correlative with another family of five, whose dysfunctional behavior gained equal numbers of fans and foes during its emergence on network TV in the early 1990s—*The Simpsons*. Prominent among its early detractors were then-President and First Lady of the United States, George H.W. and Barbara Bush. During the 1992 Republican National Convention, President Bush promised to strengthen traditional values if re-elected, by making families “a lot more like the Waltons and a lot less like the Simpsons.”⁴ Barbara Bush seconded her husband’s opinion, calling *The Simpsons* “the dumbest thing [she] had ever seen.”⁵

Those coming of age during this period may remember the dilemma many parents faced in deciding whether or not to let their children watch this new, crude cartoon, the first of a kind, and the first cartoon to be shown in a prime-time lineup since *The Flintstones*.⁶ American children of the 1990s might not remember the Bushes’ critical comments of *The Simpsons*, but they likely remember debates within their own communities—and even families—regarding the inappropriateness of the show. In “We Hardly Watch That Rude, Crude Show: Class and Taste in *The Simpsons*,” Diane F. Alters describes varied viewpoints about *The Simpsons* held by parents. The couple she gives most coverage to—“Susan” and “Bob”—serve as a microcosm of the series’ polarizing effect. Susan strongly dislikes the show and does not want her children to watch it; Bob, on the other hand, is a fan of *The Simpsons* and often lets the children watch with him. Because Susan does not find the show “socially uplifting,”⁷ she does not believe it has any value. However, Bob considers the show “sophisticated,” albeit “sophisticated *adult* animation,”⁸ and explains that he lets his children watch mostly because he likes to watch it and the kids seem to enjoy it.

Considering the case of Susan and Bob, their argument does not technically hinge on whether *The Simpsons* is appropriate for children; rather, the crux of it deals with the *value* of the show. Specifically, Susan and Bob each represent different positions of a binary, one of which is *The Simpsons as socially bereft*, the other, *The Simpsons as socially beneficial*. Since the 1990s, time has arguably sided with the latter position. As *The Simpsons* has become an institution, it has gained fans as politically diverse as former Great Britain Prime Minister Tony Blair and activist/perpetual third-party U.S. presidential candidate Ralph Nader.⁹ Once a target of the religious right, *The Simpsons* over the years “has...been embraced and praised by many conservative commentators and viewers.”¹⁰

Within educational circles, *The Simpsons* belongs to the large and ever-expanding corpus of popular-culture texts that continue to receive more attention in public school classrooms. The “insightful social commentary”¹¹ of *The Simpsons* makes it a prime example of *emancipatory popular culture*, a term coined by media scholar Douglas Kellner, who claims that such texts have an oppositional power, “[challenging] the institutions and way of life of advanced capitalist society.”¹² Despite the profit-centered modes of production and distribution that make emancipatory texts available to the public,

Emancipatory popular culture subverts ideological codes and stereotypes, and shows the inadequacy of the rigid conceptions that prevent insight into the complexities and changes of social life. It rejects idealizations and rationalizations that apologize for the suffering in the present social system, and, at its best, suggests that another way of life is possible.¹³

Mary E. Reeves cites *The Simpsons* as the type of media text that effects liberation and betterment on behalf of the viewer. Her focus, specifically, is representation of education on *The Simpsons*. She says: “The high level of viewership among children, who are still in school, and young adults, who attended public school at the same time as the writers and who may have

children of their own in school, makes *The Simpsons* important in any study of education and popular culture.”¹⁴ As a result of watching and studying *The Simpsons*, she “[laughs] at the exposure of the failings of school, and [feels] compelled to continue to search for a better way to educate [herself] and others.”¹⁵

Because the subject of this study is *Family Guy*, the attention to this point given to *The Simpsons* may seem unusual. However, the short history of *The Simpsons*, including the culture wars surrounding it in its early years and changing perceptions of it since, has been included to establish a precedent for the type of debate at the center of our study of *Family Guy*. Controversy surrounding *The Simpsons* has abated in recent years, due to a number of factors: for one, it has been on the air so long that the public has arguably grown accustomed to its content and style, both of which seemed more shocking in the early days of the series. Relatedly, in terms of shock value, *The Simpsons* has been upstaged by “harder-edged animated shows”¹⁶ on Fox, including *Family Guy*, *American Dad*, *Bob’s Burgers*, and *Allen Gregory*. Finally, the enduring popularity and influence of *The Simpsons* gives the series some validity—catchphrases from the show have become part of the American lexicon;¹⁷ diverse groups have identified with—even defined themselves by—this program described as a “stealthy, subversive smart bomb sitting in the middle of prime time,” offering a “sustained critique of mainstream society.”¹⁸

Are perceptions and opinions of *Family Guy* today simply an extension of those held earlier about *The Simpsons*? One could argue that the Griffins of *Family Guy* have displaced *The Simpsons* as America’s most popular animated family—cumulative Nielsen ratings for the last five seasons of *Family Guy* are slightly higher than those of *The Simpsons*, both overall and in the 18-49-year-old demographic.¹⁹ Like *The Simpsons* earlier, *Family Guy* claims a large number of admirers and haters. TV critics occupy both positions: Frazier Moore of *The Seattle Times*

calls it “breathtakingly smart,”²⁰ while longtime *Entertainment Weekly* critic Ken Tucker describes it as “*The Simpsons* as conceived by a singularly sophomoric mind that lacks any reference point beyond other TV shows.”²¹ Family advocacy groups often denounce it,²² while celebrity fans openly petition to be involved in the show.²³

While controversy surrounding *Family Guy* is similar to that of *The Simpsons* in days past, the two series are very distinct. Stylistically, *Family Guy* is much faster paced, its signature transition being “a cut away from a story line for a non sequitur gag,”²⁴ such as a pop-culture parody or celebrity spoof. *Family Guy* is also thematically cruder than *The Simpsons*, a claim best supported by the crossover episode of the two series, “The Simpsons Guy.”²⁵ The simple fact that *Family Guy* is its own show makes it worthy of a critical analysis. This study takes a critical approach to *Family Guy* in order to form a supportable value judgment of it—is it a fitting example of emancipatory popular culture or is it something else? The alternative to emancipatory popular culture—to be explained in more detail later—is a popular culture that maintains the status quo, designed “to teach us how to fit in with the dominant norms, values, and practices of contemporary American society.”²⁶

More important than the verdict on the text, though, is the critical approach taken—i.e., the media literacy strategies one uses. One may or may not find a text to be valuable after performing an effective critical analysis; however, value surely comes from knowing how to use media literacy strategies, which allow us to critique the ideological and institutional forces that shape culture and to “formulate alternative cultural perspectives.”²⁷ Whether this study determines that *Family Guy* is an effective or ineffective satiric program—an exemplar of emancipatory popular culture or not—one will benefit from using the critical approach in this essay not only in an analysis of *Family Guy*, but in related programs, too. To be fair, this

section's treatment of *The Simpsons* has been too easy on the program, relying entirely on audience reception as a means of validation. The implication of *The Simpsons* as a valuable text is an assumption, included simply as an example to compare and contrast with our text of focus, *Family Guy*.

Audience response to *Family Guy* among both critics and viewers is only a small part of this study. The primary focus of this analysis is on one of the most prominent features of the show—its treatment of the family. In order to understand representation of family in *Family Guy*, one need understand the multifaceted nature of the series. *Family Guy* belongs to multiple genres and modes, including satire, animation, and television. This critical analysis of *Family Guy* requires a contextualization of the series into each of those traditions. In order to determine whether the Griffin family is a purposeful satiric family, concrete definitions of satire must be provided and maintained. Additionally, a substantial amount of background regarding animation and the sitcom must be established in order to understand all of the working parts of the show. The remainder of this chapter and Chapter Two set the foundation of satire, animation and television necessary for a critical analysis of the family in *Family Guy*.

The Family and Satiric Misunderstanding

Of all the institutions *Family Guy* targets—organized religion, politics, the media, etc.—its satire of the family is the most ubiquitous. Whether an episode involves Peter Griffin creating his own mock-religion, lobbying congress for looser cigarette laws, or founding his own TV channel that pushes the limits of decency,²⁸ the focus of the show almost always revolves around the Griffin family and their exploits. The type of criticism levied against *The Simpsons* by George and Barbara Bush has only amplified with regard to the raunchier *Family Guy*. For all the controversy *The Simpsons* has generated, it has never been criticized for allusions to incest,

necrophilia, pornography, or masturbation, as *Family Guy* has been by the conservative publication *Human Events*. Those perversions, in fact, earned *Family Guy* the second spot in the publication's list of the "Top 10 Worst Anti-Family Shows on Television" in the year 2000.²⁹

The Parents Television Council, a longtime foe of *Family Guy*, offers a fairly indisputable description of the Griffin family on its website:

Peter is a selfish, dim-witted lout. Peter's wife, Lois, tries unsuccessfully to keep order in the house. Peter and Lois have three children: Meg, an anxiety-prone sixteen-year-old outcast; Chris, a lazy thirteen-year-old dolt; and Stewie, a precocious toddler bent on world domination. Rounding out this dysfunctional family is Brian, the Griffins' acerbic, hard-drinking dog.³⁰

The PTC's disdain of the show is not surprising, considering their Mission statement—"To protect children and families from graphic sex, violence and profanity in the media, because of their proven long-term harmful effects"³¹—and their Vision—"To provide a safe and sound entertainment media environment for children and families across America."³²

At the risk of splitting hairs, the designation of "Worst Anti-Family Show," should more accurately be titled "Least Appropriate Show for Children." After all, to label the show "anti-family" may miss the point of the show's satiric purposes. Just because a disagreeable family is prominently featured in their own program does not mean they are intended as exemplars. In *Satire: A Critical Reintroduction*, Dustin Griffin offers a traditional definition of satire:

"According to [the old] consensus, satire is a highly rhetorical and moral art. A work of satire is designed to attack vice or folly. To this end it uses wit or ridicule. Like polemical rhetoric, it seeks to persuade an audience that something or someone is reprehensible or ridiculous."³³ It follows, then, that "the characters and their actions come to stand for what the satirist is attacking."³⁴ Both proponents and opponents of *Family Guy* will agree that Peter Griffin and company are often reprehensible and ridiculous in their actions. What arguably differs between

the two groups are their expectations of a television sitcom. Opponents of *Family Guy* might oppose it on the grounds that it does not fit the “didactic model of domestic normalcy” they so desire in a TV program, while proponents see it as a “subversive vision of family life.”³⁵ Each group represents a different paradigmatic view of television. In simple terms, the former want a program that provides good moral lessons through exemplary characters and stories; the latter want a program that *tells it like it is*.

George A. Test succinctly describes one problematic aspect of satire: “to understand some satire, the audience has to bring certain kinds of information or knowledge, a demand that cannot or may not always be met.”³⁶ The absence of necessary background knowledge creates a potential paradoxical interpretation on the part of the ignorant reader. Rather than recognize the satiric elements of a text as an attack on vice and folly, one may interpret the satire as a promotion of said vice and folly. Animation scholar Paul Wells describes this occurrence in audience reception of the works of Ralph Bakshi: “[Bakshi’s] representation of the freeing of sexual inhibitions, the street-culture of the civil rights movement and the ambivalent place of art in the mid-1970s was profoundly important, and in being *about* anxiety, alienation and change, was misunderstood as *promoting* fear and conservatism.”³⁷

In some ways, the idea that something about Bakshi’s satires invites contrary interpretations is a moot point; almost *all* satire invites contrary readings, being dependent as it is on the audience’s knowledge of outside texts. However, do factors pertaining to some satiric texts make contrary interpretations more likely? By virtue of its medium, *Family Guy* appeals to a certain population—children—who largely lack the knowledge to understand satire. Additionally, some scholars claim *Family Guy*’s use and style of satire invites contrary readings. In “Funny or Harmful: Derogatory Speech on Fox’s *Family Guy*,” LaChrystal D. Ricke relates

the program's use of hateful language to "issues of dominant-group power, inequality, oppression, and subordination" and attempts to find a link to cultivation of harmful language in children.³⁸ She paraphrases one of the show's writers, who rationalizes *Family Guy*'s use of hateful language by "[suggesting] the show has managed to poke fun at every race, color, creed, interest group, political affiliation, and even the disabled."³⁹ Poking fun at everyone may help one feel less discriminatory, but does it make for effective satire? In "*Family Guy: Undermining Satire*," Nick Marx continues this argument, citing the creative personnel behind *Family Guy*, who feel "everyone is made powerless because everyone is made fun of equally."⁴⁰ According to Marx, the consequence of such an approach to comedy and satire is a possible reinforcement of already dominant social groups, which is antithetical to the purpose of satire. Ultimately, can a show be an "equal offender" when the targets themselves are on unequal footing? To make fun of white collar crime is fundamentally different than making fun of the handicapped. *Family Guy*, though, places jokes about groups as diverse as those side by side, which, according to Marx, effectively compromises "the program's ability to create meaningful satire."⁴¹ The problem with joke after joke in rapid succession in *Family Guy* is the uneven way in which power relations are represented: "there is a difference between joking about a celebrity death and joking about the violent racist oppression of millions of Americans,"⁴² although *Family Guy* might treat both topics equally.

The struggle in writing about satiric representation in a text is in finding a balance between both what the text offers and what the audience brings to the table. Questions such as "is the text a bad influence?" or "is the text subversive?" are oversimplifications. Of course *Family Guy* can be a negative influence to some, and surely the controversy it generates proves its subversiveness, but to what or whom?

In a study of satire—or any media text—one cannot deny the amount of control on the part of the reader to make meaning of a text. Stuart Hall explains how individuals make meaning from a media message in his influential 1973 essay “Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse.” Hall posits three hypothetical decoding positions of an audience: dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional. In the dominant-hegemonic position, “the viewer takes the connoted meaning from [a] programme full and straight, and decodes the message in terms of the reference code in which it has been encoded.” Hall describes this position as the “ideal-typical case of ‘perfectly transparent communication.’” In the negotiated position, the viewer’s reading “contains a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements,” legitimizing hegemonic definitions while also making his/her own ground rules at a situational level. In the oppositional position, the viewer “[understands] both the literal and the connotative inflection given by a discourse but [decodes] the message in a *globally* contrary way.”⁴³

Hall uses a newscast as his example text of the three decoding positions; the implication throughout his descriptions of each position is the smarter, more critical viewer reads from an oppositional, or at least negotiated, position. Despite having both denotative and connotative encodings, a newscast is a fairly literal text in which potential interpretations fit nicely onto these three positions. The complexity of a satiric text certainly upends the description of each position, but Hall’s point remains: a media text has intentions, blatant or otherwise, but individual viewers are free to choose *how* they interpret the text’s messages.

Taking into account the subjectivity of the audience, the following are better questions to ask about *Family Guy*: in its representation of family, who/what is *Family Guy* subverting? Is *Family Guy*’s subversive treatment of the family actually satire, or is it more accurately using a different literary device? What is the meaning behind family dynamics in the Griffin family?

This study will address these questions by looking for patterns across *Family Guy*'s corpus of twelve-plus seasons, including more than 240 episodes. To effectively evaluate the representation of family in *Family Guy*—whether to praise it or pan it—one must understand how satire functions within it. The following section provides definitions necessary for the claims of this study as well as a brief description of each of the subsequent chapters.

Satire: Contexts, Definitions, and Production

A proper analysis of satire in *Family Guy* requires us to go beyond the definition provided earlier from *Satire: A Critical Reintroduction*. Defining satire is not an easy task; because of its vast history and various styles and practitioners, George A. Test says, “it is little wonder that attempting to define satire has been like trying to put a shadow in a sack.”⁴⁴ Ancient as satire is, and varied as its styles have been, it is difficult to assign a specific purpose or point of view to it. It can be “conservative, looking back at a better time from a decadent era as Juvenal’s does, or it [can be] liberal, attacking what is entrenched and stifling...calling for a change for the better.”⁴⁵ To further contextualize *Family Guy* as heir to a particular American style, it is helpful to look at Linda A. Morris’s definition from “American Satire: Beginnings through Mark Twain:”

Satire is understood to be work that relies upon humor to expose both human and institutional failures. Often the humor builds upon a sense of authorial indignation targeted at any number of possible human and/or institutional shortcomings: greed, self-indulgence, drunkenness, incompetence, hypocrisy, intolerance, corruption, excesses, or partisanship. Most satire, in spite of the anger that may lie behind it, depends for its success upon a sense of restraint and underlying, almost unspoken, sense that there is some hope that exposing society’s excesses might lead to reform.⁴⁶

Exposing human failure echoes Dustin Griffin’s description of “[attacking] vice and folly,” but a key distinction between the two definitions lies in the additional phrase “institutional failures.” Agreement about a familiar target—institutions—has typified American satire since Mark

Twain, at least according to Morris. In *Revel With A Cause: Liberal Satire in Post-War America*, Stephen Kercher describes this type of satire as “*liberal*, because as a whole it corroborated the outlook and agenda of mid-twentieth century liberalism and of the left wing of the Democratic Party in particular.”⁴⁷ The goal of the satirist, according to cartoonist Walt Kelly, is to act as a “watchdog” for society. “In Kelly’s opinion, satire—or as he occasionally labeled it, ‘true humor’—was one of the most effective vehicles for communicating ‘truth’ and conveying the ‘real.’”⁴⁸

Among other institutional targets, this brand of satire took aim at the institution of family, “particularly relationships between husbands and wives and parents and children,” which had been portrayed as overly saccharine in a new format, the television sitcom.⁴⁹ One such group that satirized the family was the Chicago-based Second City troupe of the early 1960s, which sought to lay bare “the ‘brutal truth’ behind traditional middle-class marriage,” by highlighting the “misunderstanding, alienation, and pain” of belonging in a family, rather than the “togetherness” ideal “highly touted in 1950s American consensus culture.”⁵⁰

Sitcoms themselves soon followed suit, arguably “[reflecting] changes within society.”⁵¹ In *Television Sitcom*, Brett Mills explains the different stages in the evolution of the sitcom: the 1950s sitcom presented the stable family unit, exemplified by the Andersons of *Father Knows Best* and the Nelsons of *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*; the 1960s, the surreal family, such as those from *Bewitched* and *The Addams Family*; the 1980s, the secure families—a reflection of the Reaganite era—of *Family Ties* and *The Cosby Show*, and the surrogate, workplace families of *Cheers* and *Taxi*.⁵² Coincidental to Mills’s list is that of Michael V. Tueth, who describes the evolution of sitcom families from “normal families” to “funny families” to “subversive families” in his essay “Back to the Drawing Board: The Family in Animated Television Comedy.”⁵³ The

latter category, he claims, was made possible by animation, thanks to its ability “to include as many characters as they wanted and to switch scenes as often as possible,” and for its potential of increased “physical comedy, rapid dialogue, and plot twists than live-action comedy could ever manage.”⁵⁴ Essentially, animation can do whatever it wants, thus offering new potential for how it presents the family to the viewing public.

In short, *Family Guy* belongs to a satiric tradition that strives to subvert—or undermine the power and authority of—established institutions, one of which is the family, by undermining the ideas *about* family that come from on top. Essentially, all TV families—including those categorized earlier—can be split into two camps: those created to promote hegemonic, if not conservative, values, and those created to rebut the hegemony. The most extreme version of the former is the *Father Knows Best* family, the Andersons. In a typical episode of *Father Knows Best*, Jim Anderson “enters his comfortable home, greets his attractive and sensible wife, Margaret, changes from his business suit to more casual attire, and spends the evening calmly dealing with the day-to-day concerns of their three growing children.”⁵⁵ Despite the enviable serenity of family life displayed by the Andersons, critics have accused the show of being “disturbingly traditional,” pointing to the “patriarchal leanings in its title,”⁵⁶ and criticizing the sexist implications of the show’s humor: women are ridiculed unless they conform to a “humble but noble calling in life—housewife and mother.”⁵⁷

The idea that real, “traditional” families were like the Andersons has also been challenged. Quoting historian Elaine Tyler May, Stephanie Coontz argues in *The Way We Never Were* that “normal” TV families of the 1950s were not the “last gasp of ‘traditional’ family life, but rather “the first wholehearted effort to create a home that would fulfill virtually all its members’ personal needs through an energized and expressive personal life.”⁵⁸ By extension,

real families that liken themselves to the “normal” Andersons and Nelsons are simply knockoffs of families that were false to begin with. To borrow a page from Jean Baudrillard, the family that models itself after the traditional TV family is a simulacrum, which in this case is a copy of an institutional lie.

Like the Second City Troupe, *Family Guy* and other programs that satirize the family take aim at the like of the Andersons, even sixty years later. The multiplicity of family types featured on television since the 1950s have given modern satires even more fodder. While later families differ greatly from the “normal” television families of the 1950s, they still contain hegemonic ideals, both hidden and obvious. Different as they may be from the Andersons, the Huxtables, among others, are arguably the 1980s version of the “normal” family, for they, too, reflect the hegemonic ideal of their era. In its hyper-allusive style, *Family Guy* attacks the television family holistically, sparing no era or family type.

With *Family Guy* placed in a satiric context that includes, among other things, the family as a target, it is now necessary to further concretize our definition of satire by explaining how it works in general. In *Satire: Spirit and Art*, George A. Test offers up criteria for satire that arguably encompasses and reconciles disparate styles of satire. Satire is comprised of four elements: aggression, judgment, play, and humor.⁵⁹ *Aggression* in satire is the *attack*, “probably the least debatable claim that one can make about [satire].”⁶⁰ This aggression in satire “may be direct or indirect. It may be as obvious as name-calling or epithet-slinging; it may be as subtle as a beast fable or other allegory.”⁶¹ *Play* is used “to yoke the symbolic aggression of satire.”⁶² Horace encapsulates *laughter’s* importance to satire in the following adage: “There’s no law against telling the truth with a smile.”⁶³ Test explains, “For Horace the smile is a sugarcoating that makes the truth more palatable than the naked truth.”⁶⁴ Without either *play* or *laughter*,

direct satire would become a direct attack, “being unadulterated verbal aggression.”⁶⁵ Lastly, “the ingredient that activates and directs [aggression, play, and laughter] is *judgment*, turning satire into a weapon, blunt or penetrating, combining judgment with the other elements in a unique mix.”⁶⁶ *Judgment* is the moralistic and/or idealist component of satire, but it can also be used maliciously, enviously, or in spite.⁶⁷

The benefit of this “quadripartite approach,” as he calls it, is that it “allows for distinctions among closely related forms and expressions such as parody, travesty, spoof, comedy, and burlesque.”⁶⁸ An extreme imbalance, or altogether absence, of aggression, judgment, play, or humor turns what would otherwise be satire into a different device. *Parody*, “a playful imitation or a humorous reworking of another text for comic effect,”⁶⁹ is high on play and humor, but without attack or judgment; *spoof*, or “nonsatiric burlesque and travesty,” also contains a high amount of play and laughter, “[leaving] no room for attack and judgment,” “*comedy* also emphasizes play and laughter, contains some judgment but very little if any aggression.”⁷⁰

Concerning aggression, “*invective* is a general term indicating direct verbal attack on a person, place or thing through the use of vituperative language or ridicule, often in verse form”⁷¹—not entirely applicable to the sitcom format. However, *abuse*, which is also “direct, usually spontaneous, verbal attacks against a person...most often [takes] the form of prose,”⁷² thus distinguishing itself from *invective*. *Diatribes*, a type of *abuse*, “is the term used to describe a particular work of verbal attack, usually against a group, an institution, or kind of behavior;” its tone is “bitter or polemical.”⁷³ Lastly, “*lampoon* may be thought of as a specialized version of *invective* in that it is a satiric attack on an individual.”⁷⁴

These distinctions are vital to our analysis of satire in *Family Guy*, for an imbalance of any of the four elements reclassifies a *satire* as something else, thus thwarting its seeming intentions of reform. Based on the contexts and definitions given, we can safely say that satire is more socially purposeful than any of its close relatives, such as parody, burlesque, comedy, or lampoon.

For the purpose of this *Family Guy* analysis, several additional satiric terms will prove helpful, among them *direct* and *indirect* satire, *persona*, *trickster*, and *carnival*. Direct satire is satire “at the simplest and most direct, the satirist [speaking] to the audience through a voice or a persona who indicates what is wrong with society.”⁷⁵ Debate exists about whether the persona, including his or her statements, should be attached to the poet/author’s person or if the persona should be viewed as an objectified character.⁷⁶ Either way, the persona, from a position of superiority, is the source of the explicit attack and judgment. On the other hand, the satirist who uses indirect satire symbolically projects “an unattractive and undesirable reality” through characters who “[act] out those emotions that are potentially socially disruptive and therefore strongly frowned upon.”⁷⁷ As opposed to direct satire, characters in indirect satire “become distinguishable from the satirist in ways that personae may not always be.”⁷⁸ “In short, the characters and their actions come to stand for what the satirist is attacking.”⁷⁹ Lacking a persona—a critic sitting in a position of superiority—the indirect satirist “puts the target on the defensive by making it appear inferior.”⁸⁰

Test argues that a certain satiric device utilized for centuries in diverse cultures is that of the trickster. Storytellers in oral and folk traditions “were free to satirize in stories so long as they did not name names and so passed off their tales as make-believe.”⁸¹ Often in the form of an animal, the “trickster makes a comic game of pomposity, power, and prestige; gods and kings are

favorite targets for derision.”⁸² Unlike the self-righteous persona, though, the trickster “may also become what he attacks.” “By being or becoming what he attacks, the trickster-satirist reduces the distance between the folly and vice out there among others and the folly and vice in here in ourselves.”⁸³ The trickster makes it possible for us to see ourselves as the objects of satire.⁸⁴ The role of the trickster was succeeded by the fool in medieval and later times, and by the stand-up comedian in modern times.⁸⁵ The modern comedian—Test cites Lenny Bruce as an example—shocks audiences and breaks taboos as a means to tell the truth and expose institutional hypocrisy, the stage being his sanctioned platform to act the trickster.⁸⁶ What the comedian says on the stage is often not acceptable in normal social interactions, for example.

One important term not mentioned by Test that expands the concept of *trickster* is *carnival*. Often associated with Mikhail Bakhtin, who wrote about it in his landmark Renaissance treatment *Rabelais and His World*, the concept of carnival has been appropriated by other scholars to better explain works as diverse as those of Bunuel, Fellini, Godard, Monty Python, Mel Brooks, and the Marx Brothers.⁸⁷ Carnival was a medieval form of comedy, enacted by the masses in the marketplace, not unlike Mardi Gras is today.⁸⁸ As opposed to the satirist who “places himself above the object of his mockery,”⁸⁹ the carnival clown “makes fun of everyone, including himself, not in order to put down one side in favor of the other but merrily to unmask order and power, all order and power.”⁹⁰ The *universal* nature of carnival—in other words, the abolishment of hierarchies and the leveling of social classes⁹¹—is intertwined and accompanied by two other characteristics: *ambivalence* and *grotesqueness*.⁹² *Carnival*, in effect, is a form of collective, communal *tricksterism*.

These terms and definitions are vital to our study of *Family Guy*, serving as a reference point for any future mentions of satire. As mentioned, *Family Guy* is heir to multiple traditions,

and thus must be measured within several contexts. How does it fit within the tradition of American satire? How does Test's quadripartite approach inform our understanding of the varied satiric devices *Family Guy* utilizes? How do ideas of the trickster and carnival overlap with *Family Guy*'s medium of animation?

This analysis of the family in *Family Guy*, which includes a great deal of focus on satire, centers on a close textual reading of the episodes of *Family Guy*. Because satire is part of the discussion, I would be remiss not to acknowledge the systems that produce and distribute sitcoms, which severely restrict “the radical social argument [i.e, satire and other subversive messages] in most television comedy.”⁹³ In *The Simpsons, Satire, and American Culture*, Matthew A. Henry describes the formation of the Fox Network, including the men behind it—Rupert Murdoch and Roger Ailes—and their aims. Henry says, “Murdoch is driven less by a particular ideology than a concern for the bottom line, which means his priority is to use his media outlets and his wealth to promote policies that will benefit News Corporation.”⁹⁴ Ailes, responsible for programming on Fox News, “showed how ruthlessly [he] would pursue audiences and broaden conservative ideological dominance by playing on audience fears”—this from the same parent network that airs *The Simpsons* and *Family Guy*.⁹⁵ The apparent liberalism of such programs combined with the outright conservatism of a network like Fox makes for obvious irony, but in reality, it does not matter which network broadcasts *Family Guy* because the bottom line will always be the same.

Thanks to the commodification of cartoons a generation earlier, *The Simpsons* and *Family Guy* criticize the establishment while also making a bundle of money for the establishment through advertising and merchandising. In “Re-Drawing the Bottom Line,” Allen

Larson makes the connection from the Saturday-Morning-Cartoon era to contemporary animated series:

In varying ways, each of these companies actively explored the unique profit potentials afforded by animated feature-film production, animated children's television programming, and the plethora of ancillary products derived from franchised cartoon brands as they were repurposed across the full spectrum of media formats in the 1990s. To this extent, we may have—more than any other factor—the increasingly efficient commodification of children to thank for the subversive pleasures afforded to viewers by shows such as *Beavis and Butthead* or *Family Guy*.⁹⁶

Like any mass-produced media text, *Family Guy* would not exist if it did not positively affect the bottom line, a fact verified by *Family Guy*'s unique life history. It was cancelled not once, but twice, and was brought back for a third run in 2005, only because of successful DVD sales, which to some Fox executives hinted at the making of a billion-dollar franchise.⁹⁷ Stewie, Brian, and the other members of the Griffins soon became ubiquitous endorsers of myriad products. "Hiring rude, crude 'toons instead of warm and fuzzy animated characters 'goes with the times,'" said Ira Mayer, president and publisher at the Licensing Letter, a newsletter in New York owned by EPM Communications.⁹⁸ That the characters' edginess is seen as a selling point rather than a point of resistance highlights the contradiction inherent in mass-produced, mass-marketed satire. In a deal not far-off from the *Flintstones*-Winston Cigarette and *Mr. Magoo*-Stag Beer endorsements of the early 1960s, *Family Guy* got its own beer endorsement in 2007. Said Howard Nelson, Vice President of worldwide promotions at Fox Licensing & Merchandising: "Even though it's animated, we've never looked for partners who are kid-based. We want partners that embrace the show's edgy humor and target the young male audience."⁹⁹ By 2008 the show, much more successful than it was during its initial runs, had pulled in a reported \$1 billion for 20th Century Fox, and the company responded by signing MacFarlane to a \$100 million contract that would keep *Family Guy* and other MacFarlane franchises on Fox

through 2012.¹⁰⁰ With the commercial success of *Family Guy* over the last ten years, one can imagine Rupert Murdoch's viewpoint of the show: *I don't care how Family Guy criticizes me, as long as it keeps bringing in money.*

The inevitable tension between television satire and its mode of production is best summarized by Joanne Ostrow of *The Denver Post* in her article, "HBO Leads the Pack in Bringing Satire Back:" "Selling the commercial networks on a sort of comedy that aims to be not merely entertaining but subversive is a tough job. Putting satire on TV means walking a fine line between exposing the folly of our consumer society while hoping to keep millions of potential consumers in their seats."¹⁰¹

Subsequent Chapters

In *Prime-Time Families*, Ella Taylor claims, "Few contemporary forms of storytelling offer territory as fertile as American television for uncovering widely received ideas about family."¹⁰² Taylor, however, believes that live-action television's "tendency towards naturalism and realism" limit its "potential of creating divergent meanings."¹⁰³ However, the tendency—if not expectation—of animation is *not* to represent reality. Literature already exists that explains how animated television, in general, presents new possibilities for divergent meanings and subversive messages, by creating a space of *carnival* performance.¹⁰⁴ Chapter Two continues this discussion by analyzing the ways in which *Family Guy* formally and structurally comments on the television sitcom, and by extension, the family. The structure of the show, which relies on codes of television, animation, and more, upsets a *meta-narrative*—"a story that makes sense of every other story"¹⁰⁵—of family, in a style all its own. In general terms, this chapter explains *how* animation subverts and/or satirizes and *what* it subverts/satirizes.

Chapters Three and Four contain analyses of the presentation of family in *Family Guy*. Chapter Three, specifically, covers *Family Guy*'s explicit references to other families, real and fictional. Always known for its pop-culture references,¹⁰⁶ *Family Guy* uses direct satire to comment on other familial representations on television. Via cutaways, it shows the non-subversive TV families in uncharacteristic and compromising situations. For example, in Season Two's "Peter, Peter, Caviar Eater," the Griffin family watches an episode of *The Cosby Show* in which Theo Huxtable fails to communicate a serious problem to his father, Cliff. Theo has impregnated his girlfriend, and try as he might to get support from his father is instead met with off-topic anecdotes filled with typical Bill Cosby-isms. The incongruity of Cliff's raconteuring amidst Theo's crisis exposes the falsity of *The Cosby Show*. The problem with these television families, *Family Guy* implies, is their denial of real-life problems. However, not all of these allusions are as characteristically satiric, at least according to Test's quadripartite criteria of satire. Would a mixture of satire-like devices in these cutaway allusions—parody, lampoon, abuse—weaken those allusions that effectively utilize satire?

Building off of the previous question, how do the Griffins' own familial interactions demonstrate an effective use of satire? If the targets of television's past indicate a degree of untruthfulness, does the Griffin family itself expose the opposite—the truth? Chapter Four holds the Griffin family up as a mirror to the fictional families it so deliberately mocks. The dynamic of the targeted television families alongside the Griffin family creates a tension not so apparent in other animated sitcoms on the Fox network, like *The Simpsons* and *Bob's Burgers*. In *The Simpsons*, for example, foils to the Simpson family come from within the show's world. *The Simpsons* need not cut away to *Father Knows Best* to juxtapose Homer, Marge and company with a different kind of family; they already live next to the Flanders, *The Simpsons*' version of a

normal family. *Family Guy*'s treatment of other television families, if not always satiric, is more biting, more virulent, than *The Simpsons* treatment of its own families that stand as proxy for other TV-family types. The difference between *The Simpsons* and *Family Guy* in this regard is that the former almost always uses indirect satire to comment on the family while the latter uses a unique mix of direct and indirect satire. The result is a strange mix of superiority and carnival, for *Family Guy* remains a show that makes fun of everything but also puts itself on a pedestal.¹⁰⁷ The sheer amount of information dealing with family in a series this expansive requires us to limit our focus to two familial categories. In keeping with the main subjects of Chapter Three's cutaways, Chapter Four describes how *parenthood* and *marriage* are indirectly satirized in *Family Guy*.

This analysis of familial representation in *Family Guy*, consisting of the show's subversive form and structure, satirical allusions to actual television families, and satiric workings within the Griffin family, is intended to do justice to a complex text. Everyone can agree it is fast, unpredictable, preposterous, obscene, lyrical and self-reflexive;¹⁰⁸ what many disagree on is whether *Family Guy* is a smart and/or worthwhile show. Varied responses to *Family Guy* confirm its contradicting and pluralistic nature—it is arguably a *writerly text*. Suzanne Williams-Rautiola borrows this term from Roland Barthes in her essay, "Animated Fathers: Representations of Masculinity in *The Simpsons* and *King of the Hill*." In it, she argues that the expansive world of *The Simpsons* makes the show a writerly text, which, quoting Barthes, "[makes] the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text...the writerly text is *ourselves* writing before the infinite play of the world."¹⁰⁹ *Family Guy*—no less an expansive text than *The Simpsons*, although referentially rather than in sheer size of place and number of characters—is a text full of contradictions that invites various, if not antithetical readings.

Responses to *Family Guy* certainly cover the spectrum, whether the viewer takes a protectionist approach against it, rejects it on grounds of simpleness, or praises its sophistication. Before passing judgment on *Family Guy* with any of those opinions, one must perform an effective analysis of it. This study hopes to do just that, by exploring and uncovering how family works in *Family Guy*.

Chapter Two

The Subversive Look and Feel of *Family Guy*

Much of the criticism *Family Guy* receives deals with its often offensive and objectionable content, such as Stewie's rape joke in "The Simpsons Guy." Some may object to the show for reasons more general: Peter's "vulgar antics," Lois's failure as a house wife, Chris's laziness, Stewie's diabolical inclinations, Meg's pitifulness, and Brian's hard living. Evidence from the show justifies those judgments of the Griffin family, but to focus solely on characters' personalities, one ignores other important, more subconscious, aspects of the show that influence how it is perceived. In Diane Alters's study of audience reception of *The Simpsons*, she interviews "Susan," who dislikes the program for various reasons, one of which, already mentioned, was its apparent lack of socially uplifting material. However, "she also voiced a critique that emphasized her strong reaction to the look and feel of the show rather than particulars such as plot or language, which she had criticized earlier, also in general terms."¹

Though not articulated by Susan, the *look* and *feel* of animation holds powerful sway over viewers. Both *look* and *feel* refer to the animated aesthetic; both depend on the pacing of the text and the way in which it is edited; both depend on how well these meet certain audience expectations. If a viewer does not like the look or feel of a text, it follows that said text simply does not meet that person's criteria of an *ideal* text. This chapter consists of a formal analysis of *Family Guy* that explains the look and feel of the show beyond "general terms." Admittedly, to analyze form as its own entity would be incomplete; form and content are not mutually exclusive as much as they are intertwined.² Conversely, a treatment of satire and family in *Family Guy* without adequate coverage of animated form would fail to address all of the factors that

influence its presentation of familial satire. Essentially, this chapter explores the ways in which *Family Guy*'s animated-ness influences its ability to be a subversive, satiric text.

The Anarchic History of Animation

As an introduction to animated form, a connection must be made with its cousin, live-action. Film scholar Kristin Thompson explains in “Implications of the Cel Animation Technique,” that early audiences of live-action and animated film did not see a distinction between the two; both were considered novelties.³ In the pre-feature film era, in fact, “*animated film* meant not just cartoons but any motion picture film.”⁴ Works that we unmistakably categorize as animation today, such as J. Stuart Blackton’s 1906 short, *Humorous Phases of Funny Faces*, were merely considered “trick films,” not unlike special-effects heavy live-action shorts from the same period.⁵ Winsor McCay, Emile Cohl, the Fleischer brothers and others inserted themselves into their “animated” films as if performing a normal version of a vaudevillian lightning-sketch act, albeit with visual trickery made possible by the technology of film. Eventually, though, the novelty of film’s technology wore off; “it had become naturalized through familiarity. An ideology of realism of depicted events had taken over.”⁶ As audiences grew accustomed to and expectant of naturalism, a new technology emerged that set animation on a new course: the cel animation technique. “Cel animation consists of separating portions of a drawing onto different layers to eliminate the necessity for re-drawing the entire composition for each movement phase.”⁷ Cel animation technique industrialized, or *Taylorized*, animation, thus narrowing the perception about what animation could be. No longer an *artist’s* medium, animation adopted a streamlined process in which a division of labor was instituted to take care of individual parts—backgrounds, main character poses, and in-between poses—and to simplify

shapes—bendable, *rubber hose* joints on characters, rather than realistic-looking joints.⁸ The move to a stylized form had effectively occurred.

While cel animation technique *limited* the definition of animation, it did so paradoxically. Cel animation helped “Hollywood [define] the cartoon by its difference from live-action films and it has been a secondary form ever since,”⁹ but what is the difference between live-action and animation? According to Thompson and others, it is each medium’s relationship to nature. As live-action film unofficially claimed a monopoly on naturalism, animation made a bid to represent everything *unnatural*: “Animation could do things live-action could not, and hence it came to be assumed that it *should* do only these things. As a result, cartoons did not opt for the naturalism of imitating live-action films.”¹⁰ Explains Thompson: “Cartoon production was broadly stylized, usually in imitation of comic strips; it used caricature, stretchiness, and flatness in general defiance of the laws of nature.”¹¹ Essentially, animation was strangely limited in that it could *do* anything and *be* anything; anything, that is, but natural.

Consequently, the *look* and *feel* of both animation and live-action—*American* animation and live-action, at least—was set by the 1920s and 1930s. The term most associated with Hollywood’s naturalized standard in live-action is the *Institutional Mode of Representation*—*IMR*, for short—which was coined and developed by film studies scholars in the 1960s. The IMR is a concept of film semiotics, a discipline that looks at “the nature and implications of variations and developments in the *language* of cinema.”¹² The language of film—technologically and ideologically informed—varies from culture to culture, but the ways it worked in Hollywood’s golden age are distilled in the IMR, which emphasizes “conventions of *mise en scene*, framing, and in particular...editing, by means of which coherent narrative space and time are set up and fictional characters are individuated in ways which engage, and are imperceptible to, the

spectator.”¹³ In the IMR narrative structure is characterized by “1) Linearity of cause and effect within an overall trajectory of enigma-resolution; 2) A high degree of narrative closure; 3) A fictional world governed by spatial and temporal verisimilitude; and 4) Centrality of the narrative agency of psychologically-rounded characters.”¹⁴

To understand the IMR as the means by which filmmakers represented—and continue to represent—narrative coherence in a visual text is to see the close relationship between form and content in film. In the IMR, the story is transmitted via continuity editing, and the supposed success of this transmission—i.e., the audience’s ability to decode the story—is dependent on its seamlessness.

True to the perception many have of it, animation has been the *anti*-IMR in many ways.¹⁵ In the article “Towards a post-modern animated discourse: Bakhtin, intertextuality and the cartoon carnival,” Terrance R. Lindvall and J. Matthew Melton explain, “Cartoons...do not need the consistency or internal logic of a realist film.”¹⁶ They explain that cartoons “[unveil] the classical cinematic disguise of being a self-contained, closed structure by becoming open to the experience of the readers,” and “by acknowledging familiar topics, issues and personalities...cartoons begin to establish a common ground for communication with their readers.”¹⁷ One way that animation opens itself up to the reader, thereby creating a different dynamic, is through self-reflexive acknowledgements of its own constructedness. Whereas the IMR focused on editing techniques “imperceptible to the spectator,” animation very obviously exposes its maker’s hand, even if the hand, too, is animated, as it is in Chuck Jones’s *Duck Amuck*.¹⁸

As Thompson argues, animated form was technologically influenced, not to mention a response to the IMR; however, something interesting happened in the world of animation that

shaped its *forms*—plural—for the majority of the 20th century. In the mid-1930s, Walt Disney set out to create *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*, which would become the first full-length American animated feature. It was released in 1937 and became an instant hit, consequently setting new standards for animation, roughly parallel to those established by the IMR in live-action film. Disney became the “stylistic and creative orthodoxy of the medium itself.”¹⁹ *Snow White* became the “industry norm by which the other studios, critics and audiences could evaluate its distinctness and comparability.”²⁰ The factor that made *Snow White* and later Disney features distinct was its emphasis on realism. In fact, Disney was unique in putting his animators through a training program taught by Don Graham, in which they focused on realistic, lifelike form. Disney changed the game of animation aesthetics thusly: “Progress was measured in the ways that the technological conditions of production had facilitated an art comparable to live action, not in ways that the language of animation could be used to effect alternative aesthetic and sociological perspectives.”²¹

The *Classic Disney* style—one could call it animation’s version of the IMR—“has been maintained and naturalized into the contemporary era and has created a style and standard by which other animators and animation studios are often measured.”²² This doesn’t mean that all other animation is simply an imitation, for other studios and artists have viewed Disney’s standardization as a means to differentiate their own work.²³ Just as film is limited by the IMR, animation is too, even more so considering its potential “as a vocabulary which moves more towards a sense of the ‘unregulated.’”²⁴

At issue in the language of animation is the tension between Disney’s ideologically conservative insistence on realism and the desire of others to take advantage of the medium’s transgressive qualities. Of the latter, several groups have openly resisted the *look* and *feel* of

classic Disney. Utilizing a “more urbane, less coherent, cacophonous”²⁵ style, Warner Bros.’ animators Tex Avery, Chuck Jones, Frank Tashlin, and Bob Clampett “reclaimed the freedoms of the cartoonal form that Disney had seemingly jettisoned in favour of the pursuit of classic narrative techniques and outcomes.”²⁶ According to Paul Wells in *Animation and America*, those directors reinvented the cartoon as a model of incongruity and irony, caricaturing popular figures, satirizing institutional conduct and re-exploring graphic and narrative idioms.²⁷ This last point is seconded by Timothy R. White in “From Disney to Warner Bros.: The Critical Shift.” White reiterates that Warner Bros.—including their directors who moved on to other studios, like Tex Avery to MGM—was more daring creatively, frequently including elements of self-reflexivity, disjointed narrative linearity, and dislocated sound and image in their cartoons.²⁸ Citing other critics, White claims the results were texts similar in form to European cinema, which operated under a different set of codes than Hollywood and the IMR.

American animation proved influential in other parts of the world by the mid-1950s, with some groups officially choosing sides as to what they thought animation should be. Zagreb Film of Yugoslavia issued a manifesto that included the following pronouncements:

Animation is an animated film. A protest against the stationary condition. Animation transporting movement of nature directly cannot be creative animation. Animation is a technical process in which the final result must be creative. To animate: to give life and soul to a design, not through the copying but through the transformation of reality.²⁹

One need only see Zagreb’s 1962 Oscar-winning short *Ersatz (The Substitute)* for an example of nature-defying, creative animation.³⁰

Before explaining what film and animation language means to *Family Guy*, one more factor must be addressed: television. Although theatrical cartoon shorts were considered different than live-action features—for all of the aforementioned reasons—they were yet to be considered

strictly for one audience type. In “The Great Saturday Morning Exile,” Jason Mittell explains the perception of cartoons in the late 1950s as “entertainment for mass audiences, but with particular appeal to children.”³¹ By the late 1960s, however, “cartoons were now culturally defined as a genre whose primary audience was children, and not a legitimate entertainment for adults as the primary audience.”³² Several factors influenced the changing perception of animation, one of which happened years earlier. The re-structuring of the studio system as a result of *U.S. v. Paramount* made the financing of theatrical animated shorts untenable. Those shorts that had already been made, though, found new life on television networks that had purchased the rights to studios’ entire catalogs. The recirculation of old shorts was fundamentally different in the new medium. No longer did an animated short such as a Bugs Bunny cartoon precede a full-length live-action feature; instead it was combined with several other Bugs Bunny shorts in an episode of *The Bugs Bunny Show*. Already considered appealing to kids, the animated short became even more appealing in its multiplied state, sans an attached, feature-length film. In addition, increased efforts towards political correctness led to the censoring of controversial material, further altering the presentation of cartoons in a kid-friendly manner.

Television altered not just the presentation of animation but its production, too. As significant as the cel technique was to animation between the years of 1910 and 1920, the emergence of limited animation techniques were equally important during the 1950s and 1960s. Without a market for theatrical cartoons, many of the big animation studios closed, paving the way for new companies aimed at television. One such company was Hanna-Barbera, formed by William Hanna and Joseph Barbera, previously of MGM. Producing animation specifically for television presented new challenges, among them a drastic reduction in funds, an increased amount of screen time to fill and the much smaller television screen. The solution was limited

animation, which essentially was cel animation technique at its most extreme. Limited animation was characterized by the ubiquity of changeable, reusable parts, and limited movement.

Emphasis shifted from character action to character dialogue. Compared to the smooth, complete look of *full* animation from classic Disney, Warner Bros., and MGM shorts, limited animation looked remarkably crude.

Despite taking a step backwards in the visual department, early television cartoons—specifically from Hanna-Barbera—“were held up as valued advances in animation that were more entertaining for adults and children than the studio shorts we now regard as ‘classic.’”³³ Perception of audience reception at the time suggested a belief in *double coding*—a theory arguing that a text has one “layer of meaning—usually aligned with the simplistic humor in relatively unsophisticated visuals—which appeals to children, and a second ‘layer’—usually aligned with the verbal jokes in the soundtrack—which appeal to adults.”³⁴ In fact, the intergenerational appeal of Hanna-Barbera cartoons allowed some—most notably *The Flintstones*—to occupy coveted prime time slots.³⁵

That perception of animated television did not last long. According to Jason Mittell, “Cartoons disappeared from prime time because of their perceived inability to reach adult audiences. Although certainly the [animation] boom waned because of the typical effects of generic saturation, the industry took the failure to mean that the genre was inappropriate for adults.”³⁶ Prime time animated cartoons, like *Flintstones*, aimed at the “kidult”³⁷ audience were cancelled, but like Bugs Bunny a generation earlier, they eventually found new life—not in a new medium, unfortunately, but in a new time slot aimed directly at children. The perception was thus: “kids will gladly watch recycled and repeated programs [because] kids cannot discern quality of animation.”³⁸ “Establishing Saturday morning cartoons as a cultural category was

filing the entire genre under a ‘kid-only’ label,” says Mittell.³⁹ The production of cartoons during the Saturday-morning era further changed as programming became a matter of “effectively and more profitably [delivering] audiences to advertisers.”⁴⁰ New cartoons that sat next to Warner Bros. and even Hanna-Barbera reruns on Saturday morning basically became half-hour-long commercials for children’s products.

As a means to synthesize the diverse systems of representation just mentioned, along with their implications, a summary will be helpful: for many years, live-action and animation have been considered distinct modes. Live-action gravitated toward naturalism early on; at least in popular American films, which most likely adhere to the IMR, audiences have come to expect a reflection of nature, via continuity editing. Animation’s distinctness, on the other hand, is characterized by its dissimilarity to nature. Its plasticity, its potential to do what it wants and be what it wants, has become expected. However, beginning with *Snow White* and continuing in his other feature-length works, Disney defied those expectations by making animation that conformed to nature. *All* animation post-*Snow White* has been informed by Disney’s style, either by imitation or resistance. The resistance—the *anti*-Disney—perpetuated the anarchic perception of animation.

That animation is the easiest, if not best, medium to display anarchy analogously makes it the best medium to perform the *carnavalesque*, which was characterized earlier by its universality, ambivalence, and grotesqueness. Tueth deftly describes the way in which animation makes the *carnavalesque* more palatable:

The acceptability of the presentation lies in its inclusion of material which might otherwise disturb a viewer but which is easily incorporated into the cartoon format... Violence and destruction are presented in less disturbing forms. The tradition of the resurrection of cartoon characters [who] manage to survive explosions, crashes, long-distance falls, and the crushing effect of heavy objects landing on them or rolling over them is a major expansion of the inherent optimism of most comic plots.⁴¹

Speaking of *The Simpsons* and other animated sitcoms, he says, “they offer their critique in a familiar and ideologically acceptable environment: the traditional sitcom format. It is this mixture of shock and reassurance that distinguishes the new animated television comedy.”⁴² In the same way that Warner Bros. shocks and reassures when Wile. E. Coyote gets smashed by a boulder, *The Simpsons* shocks and reassures when Homer chokes Bart. Such an act in live-action would definitely be grotesque but would hardly be funny. An audience’s innate knowledge of animation’s constructedness makes it much easier to swallow the violence and grotesqueness found in cartoons. As Tueth mentions, animation is able to ignore the real-life consequences that a more naturalistic text is obligated to take into account. Thus, Bart continually escapes Homer’s grip with nary a mark on his neck. In a more extreme example, the *Family Guy* episode “Bigfat” shows Peter Griffin reading a book titled *The Life of JFK*. Alluding to JFK’s mortal wound, Peter’s head spontaneously explodes on the right side, as if he has been shot by a sniper’s rifle. The image of Peter’s head is truly gory, but *Family Guy* is able to sidestep the permanence of the injury—in the next scene Peter’s head is inexplicably back to normal.

Though animation is arguably the best vehicle for carnival representation, the perception of it as a children’s medium complicates matters. This perception—mostly born out of the commodification of cartoons during the Saturday Morning era of television—is the unstated assumption that colors “Susan’s” negative opinion of *The Simpsons* in Alters’s study. One could make the claim that the viewing public, perhaps subconsciously, considers programs like *The Simpsons* and *Family Guy* children’s shows, for the simple fact that the appropriateness of said programs is constantly in the spotlight. The *appropriateness* of content in live-action sitcoms during the last few years has not been questioned nearly as frequently as that of *Family Guy* and another of Seth MacFarlane’s creations, *American Dad*.⁴³ Surely programs of the last ten years

like *Desperate Housewives*—which aired during the same Sunday night time slot as *Family Guy*—have contained offensive material; however, there was never a pretense that those shows were for children. The unique dynamic of animation’s plastic, anarchic and carnival potential and the perceptions and expectations many viewers have of it is thus: it is the best medium for shocking, outrageous content, but it is also the medium most likely considered to be aimed at children. Children, presumably, are more likely to be enticed by *Family Guy* than by a live-action family sitcom such as *Modern Family*. Evidence supports this notion to a certain extent: recent ratings of key demographics show *Family Guy* as the third-most-watched program of a demographic that included 12-34 year-olds during the week of January 17, 2015.⁴⁴

Family Guy’s Anarchic Essence

The previous chapter presented a series of questions that have only been partially answered thus far; one of them was, “in its representation of family, who/what is *Family Guy* subverting?” The response provided in Chapter One and summarized here is *representations of family in the media, propagated by those who hold hegemony*. The question in the current chapter is an extension of the earlier question and answer: *how does Family Guy subvert media representations of family?* The obvious answer is by what the characters say and do—i.e., the *content* of the program. In this sense, the content of *Family Guy* will not be ignored, as it is the major focus of Chapters Three and Four. As has been discussed, content and form can never really be separated, given that form is what shapes the content we view. Form is perhaps the most obviously *playful* feature of a satire, yet viewers struggle to articulate it beyond generalizations.⁴⁵ The purpose of this chapter is to move beyond generalizations so that an audience can better understand the implications of form, which in the case of *Family Guy* is noticeably subversive.

Thus far this study has provided brief descriptions of different types of families on television, including an explanation of them as satiric targets. This chapter has intended, among other things, to highlight the subversive potential of animation by stressing its distinct plasticity in juxtaposition to live-action media. While much mention is made of the IMR earlier, the IMR is associated more with feature-length film than with television. In order to analyze *Family Guy*'s formal subversiveness, one must find television's IMR equivalent. More specifically, one must identify the language and codes that characterize the sitcom—the genre *Family Guy* belongs to as well as the genre it attacks. For the purposes of this study, a concise classification of the sitcom genre will suffice by allowing us to see how *Family Guy* formally identifies as a sitcom, and also how it diverges. In *TV Genres: A Handbook and Reference Guide*, Larry Mintz defines the sitcom as:

a half-hour series focused on episodes involving recurrent characters within the same premise. That is, each week we encounter the same people in essentially the same setting. The episodes are finite; what happens in a given episode is generally closed off, explained, reconciled, solved at the end of the half hour... Sitcoms are generally performed before live audiences, whether broadcast live (in the old days) or filmed or taped, and they usually have an element that might almost be metadrama in the sense that since the laughter is recorded (sometimes even augmented), the audience is aware of watching a play, a performance, a comedy incorporating comic activity.

The most important feature of sitcom structure is the cyclical nature of the normalcy of the premise of undergoing stress or threat of change and becoming restored... This faculty for the 'happy ending' is, of course, one of the staples of comedy, according to most comic theory.⁴⁶

The enigma-resolution dynamic so important to the IMR presentation of narrative finds its parallel in the thirty-minute-long, self-contained sitcom conflict. *Cyclical* is perhaps the best word to describe the sitcom, which presents the same characters with the same types of problems in the same places, over and over and over. Analogous to the IMR's insistence of narrative cohesion via continuity editing is the sitcom's own version of continuity editing. Brett Mills describes the shooting style of the sitcom:

The “classic” form of sitcom shooting is generally seen as the “three-headed monster” developed by the cinematographer Karl Freund for *I Love Lucy* (CBS, 1951-57). Freund used three cameras to capture a scene involving two characters: the first covered a wide, establishing shot while the other two were each mid-shots of each performer. These shots allowed for fast editing between the two performers in any conversation scene, and also meant that the text offered as much weight to reaction shots as it did to those of speech... Firstly, in seeing a character’s astonished reaction to the behaviour of another character, the audience is cued into reading such behavior as abnormal and, therefore, comic. Secondly, while a shot of comic behaviour would get a laugh from an audience, a subsequent shot of a reaction to that behaviour would get another laugh, meaning that a programme could get two laughs from the same joke.⁴⁷

He goes on to explain how the “fast cross-cuts between speedy, short lines of dialogue create what might be called a ‘comic rhythm.’”⁴⁸ The effect of such editing has comic implications and accelerates the narrative.

The remainder of this chapter contains a formal analysis of a *formally* typical *Family Guy* episode—Season Two’s “The King is Dead.” The analysis consists of, first, a description of the episode’s most sitcom-like elements; after all, for a satiric text to be truly subversive, it needs to at least resemble the type of text it intends to undermine. Once deemed a sitcom, at least according to the formalistic and stylistic criteria above, we can look more closely at how *Family Guy*, and this episode in particular, attempts to subvert said criteria.

With regard to editing, the three-headed monster is on full display early on in “The King is Dead.”⁴⁹ After an establishing shot that shows the Griffin home—an example of *Family Guy*’s indebtedness to the IMR—the camera cuts to a wide shot of the Griffin family, sans Peter, sitting on the couch; an eyeline match reveals they are watching television, the subject of which is the local nightly news.⁵⁰ Lois, Meg, Chris, Stewie and Brian find out from anchorwoman Diane Simmons that longtime Quahog theatre director, Robert Kimble has died. While the news story is running, the phone rings and Lois answers it. On the other end of the line is someone from the Quahog theatre. A wide shot shows Lois on the phone, Chris, Meg and Brian on the couch, and

Stewie playing with his blocks on the floor. “They want me to be the new artistic director of the Quahog players,” says Lois. Immediately the camera cuts to a medium two-shot of Chris and Meg. “All right, Mom!” says Chris. Meg follows with a question: “Are you going to do it?” The camera cuts to a medium shot of Lois. “I don’t know. It’s such a responsibility. I need a moment to think.” The shot rests on Lois before cutting to Chris and Meg, and then Brian, before coming back to Lois.

Though this scene may seem mundane, it effectively uses framing and editing choices—shot-reverse-shot—to establish time and space and to set up the episode’s narrative, which, characteristic of the IMR and Mintz’s definition of the sitcom, is enigma-resolution based. The initial conflict involving the passing of Robert Kimble becomes an opportunity for Lois—that is, until Peter wants in on directing. Shortly after Lois accepts the position of theater director, Peter experiences frustration at the toy factory where he works when his invention, Mr. Zucchini Head, fails to impress his boss, Mr. Weed. Feeling creatively stifled, Peter begs Lois to include him in her first venture as new theatre director—a production of *The King and I*. Though she gives him the seeming vanity position of producer, Lois regrets to include Peter at all, as he fights her over creative control of the show. She eventually quits, and as Peter gains absolute control over the production, he adapts *The King and I* into an incoherent science-fiction story. Ironically, the show is well received at its premiere, which further angers Lois. Following the hearty round of applause at the show’s conclusion, Lois erupts with a diatribe against the bastardization of art. She silences the audience, at least until Peter breaks wind for a ridiculously long time. When Peter’s fart comes to its own conclusion, the audience gives another standing ovation, confirming Lois’s accusations against them. The final scene once again begins with an establishing shot of the Griffin home, before cutting into Peter and Lois’s bedroom. Peter

apologizes to Lois in his own way by thanking her for the opportunity to direct a show, which allowed him to be creative; somewhat reluctantly, Lois admits that anyone who can turn *The King and I* into “that” must be creative. Lying in bed, the two make up, signaling the end of the day and the end of the story, marital conflicts resolved, at least until the next episode.

The events in the episode are largely sequential; time and space are represented coherently and linearly in the aforementioned establishing shot of the Griffin home at the beginning of the episode, followed by establishing shots at the Brine Theatre, the Channel 5 News Studio, and back at the Griffin home several times. Thus far nothing seems uniquely cartoonish in our description of “The King is Dead.” A closer look at several scenes in the episode, though, reveals subversiveness to the sitcom form. A continuation of the first scene described—that which involved Lois accepting the position of artistic director—demonstrates an example of spatial and temporal plasticity. Picking up where we left off when Lois contemplates whether to accept the offer over the phone, the camera cuts to the TV, as anchors Tom Tucker and Diane Simmons also stare at Lois, waiting for her to make a decision. Lois says over the phone that she accepts the position, and immediately the anchors report the news over the television. Such an incident—newscasters breaking through *their* fourth wall on a TV show—would not be unheard of in live-action, especially in our postmodern age. That it happens in an animated program is less surprising, though, given its less restrictive perception.

The breaking of temporal and spatial boundaries disrupts the story in an obvious way, as do two non-sequiturs that disrupt the flow of dialogue. At one point Lois is in the middle of telling Peter something important, but she stops herself mid-sentence: “Peter, please don’t wipe your nose on the couch,” she says to her inattentive husband. Later in the episode when the tension between husband and wife is at its peak, Peter unflatteringly compares a joke Lois plays

on him to one Jay Leno would do, which provokes the ire of Stewie. In a long take, Stewie defends Leno; when the camera cuts back to Peter and Lois, they continue their conversation as if Stewie had never spoken.⁵¹

If those examples of non-sequiturs are disruptive to the flow of the show, they pale in comparison to one of *Family Guy*'s more distinctive features—the cutaway. “The King is Dead” does not disappoint in its number of cutaways. We see Albert Einstein steal the theory of relativity from a man named Smith while working in his patent office; we see God baking shrinky-dinks in his heavenly oven, at least until Einstein enters the frame and steals those, too; we see Peter imagining his life as a Hollywood producer, talking on his phone then tripping over a fence, which causes him to roll down a hill and crash into the home of a Mexican family; we see one cutaway of an independent film Diane Simmons made in college and another one of a roomful of monkeys writing Shakespeare.

Family Guy cutaways blur time and space, breaking the bounds of the sitcom setting, which in some programs limit the characters and story to one or just a few places. *Family Guy*'s cutaways seem to be presented equally, even though they appear to represent different degrees of consciousness or altogether different phenomena—a collective *or* personal memory, a meandering daydream, a hypothetical scenario, etc. Point of view is certainly disrupted, as the audience has to wonder about the amount of subjectivity in any one cutaway. Figuring out who initiates the cutaway is sometimes tricky when it is not outright obvious. Often, though, Peter and company make it clear who the cutaway belongs to, by saying “...like the time when...” in true simile form. The character compares his or her present experience to whatever we see in the cutaway immediately after.

Is the cutaway—as used in *Family Guy*—uniquely cartoony? None of the cutaways in “The King is Dead” contain anything so unrealistic as to be impossible to film. Special effects advances in recent years have arguably made *anything* filmable, although one could question whether such effects should be considered animation themselves. While each of the cutaways could be filmed easily enough, nearly identical live-action versions would not have the same effect as their animated counterparts. Albert Einstein’s robbery of the theory of relativity after smashing *Smith*’s head with metal bars—complete with exaggerated sound effects—would be more horrific than funny in live-action; the same would be true in the later cutaway in which Einstein does the same to God’s head with an oven door. This and other cutaways from “The King is Dead” prove the point made earlier that animation is the best medium for carnival expression.

The effect of the cutaway on *Family Guy*’s narrative/plot is clear: it disrupts it, often frustrating viewers of the show. A slight decline in cutaways in later seasons has actually been met with positive results.⁵² In his review of the Season Eight episode, “The Splendid Source,” TV critic Jason Hughes wrote, “Reducing the reliance on cutaways seems to be the continuing trend for the series, and I think it’s a good move...it forces smarter writing, and creates better narrative structure.”⁵³ Critic Carter Dotson agrees with Hughes that fewer cutaways equals better episodes; he alludes to the cutaways as “manatee jokes,” a reference to the *South Park* episodes “Cartoon Wars: Part II.”⁵⁴ It is hard to argue with the idea that fewer cutaways make for tighter narratives; however, the fewer cutaways used, the more *Family Guy* adheres to the classic sitcom form and the more it steps away from one of its defining features since the beginning.

An understanding of *Family Guy*’s use of the cutaway makes clear at least one way in which the show undermines the sitcom form, and by extension, viewers’ expectations. Though

not using these words, exactly, are Hughes and Dotson not arguing against the *look* and *feel* of *Family Guy*, at least when it comes to its use of atemporal and tangential cutaways? Not to stray from the focus of this study, any analysis of how the family is presented in *Family Guy* need focus on the cutaways, which greatly affect the way the show treats family. The cutaway gags of *Family Guy* disrupt the interactions between members of the Griffin family, thereby affecting the family's ability to solve problems via effective communication.⁵⁵ Though such disruptions might frustrate viewers, they arguably reflect real life better than a traditional sitcom's treatment of conflict. After all, how many real-life conflicts are resolved in a half hour without any kind of disruptions or distractions? The cutaways also allow for an abundance of references to other TV families, which *Family Guy* satirizes directly; this topic is the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter Three

Other Families in *Family Guy*

On November 4, 2007, *Family Guy* aired a special episode to celebrate its newfound stability in conjunction with the series' upcoming 100th episode, "Stewie Kills Lois." This special—officially titled the "100th Episode Special"—consists of a greatest hits sampling of clips and segments in which Seth MacFarlane interviews people who find the show offensive. MacFarlane also narrates the episode in a very tongue-in-cheek fashion. Responding to a common criticism of the show, he says, "You know, people often ask why there are so many pop culture gags on the show. Well, I'll tell you. *Family Guy* likes to hold a mirror up to society and say, 'Society, you're ugly, and we don't like a lot of what you're doing.'"¹ That he says this somewhat smugly does not change the fact that he gives an almost word-for-word definition of satire, though heavy, at least, in aggression and judgment. Allusions to popular culture abound in *Family Guy*, and they have, really, since the first episode, "Death Has a Shadow," which manages to fit in references to *Casablanca*, *G.I. Joe*, *Pound Puppies*, and *Forrest Gump*, among other popular culture texts.

A special type of reference combines the cutaway—a *Family Guy* staple—with a popular culture reference about family. These gags are unique in their specificity; *Family Guy* names names, leaving no doubt about whom or what they are targeting. However, the line between direct and indirect satire becomes blurred in the cutaways, as the targeted families appear so exaggerated as to seem symbolic. Fitting Test's definition of indirect satire, the families featured in these cutaways surely project "an unattractive and undesirable reality...acting out emotions that are potentially socially disruptive and therefore strongly frowned upon."² The *Family Guy* audience, though, does not watch these families from their source texts; instead, we see them

through the lens of *Family Guy*, which raises the question about whether the show uses direct satire through “a voice or persona who indicates what is wrong with society.”³

A subtle directness is arguably at work in *Family Guy*'s treatment of other families, which appear in two types of cutaways—those established by the Griffins sitting on their couch and those vocally summoned by members of the Griffin family. Regarding the former, we know we are not actually watching the family being referenced, mostly because we see an animated version rather than a live-action version of the family. Of the more than twenty cutaways soon to receive mention, only three of them target other cartoon families—the rest target families from movies, television, and real life. Even when the subject is another animated family, the animation style is usually reminiscent of *Family Guy*, not the original program being referenced.⁴ An establishing shot of the Griffin family watching TV from their couch informs us of the point of view—we are watching these families through the eyes of the Griffins. In some instances, the frame of the Griffins' television borders the screen, producing an unusual effect for the real audience of seeing a cutaway through two borders, one of which is animated.⁵ Though the Griffins fail to explicitly comment on the families featured in the cutaways, they function as the filter through which the audience views the cutaways. Cutaways via vocal conjurings are more direct: for example, when Stewie tells Peter, “You're a worse parent than Britney Spears,”⁶ he initiates a cutaway in which the subject and her vices are very clear, as is Stewie's position of superiority. The establishment of the Griffins as the personae of the show, at least in their relationship to the cutaway families, is a necessary component of Chapter Four, which examines conflicts within *Family Guy*'s use of direct and indirect satire.

With the personae stated, this chapter is less concerned about the Griffins than it is about how *Family Guy* represents other families. The sheer number of cutaways featuring real and

fictional families other than the Griffins may tempt one to conflate all of them into the same group. This analysis resists that temptation and instead places them into meaningful groups—those related to and including satire, mentioned in Chapter One. Categorization of the cutaways will allow us to ascribe value to them individually. Viewers of *Family Guy* already know that the cutaways to be analyzed are a combination—sometimes imbalanced—of humor, sophistication, crassness, meanness, and absurdity. By looking specifically at the quadripartite approach to satire to determine the balance of aggression, play, laughter, and judgment in *Family Guy*'s cutaways, we can effectively categorize our examples into meaningful groups, including parody, satire, and abuse. The first is humorous and mostly harmless; the second is balanced, purposeful, and socially beneficial; the third is overly aggressive and socially detrimental. By categorizing *Family Guy*'s popular culture gags—specifically those related to family—our study challenges MacFarlane's claim of satirical intention.

Cutaway Parodies

Using the definition of *parody* provided earlier—"a playful imitation or humorous reworking of another text for comic effect"⁷—it is easy to see which of the four elements of satire are at work—play and laughter—and what the intended purpose is—comic effect. To differentiate parody from satire, the former is not so much concerned with making a critical comment on a subject as it is with getting a laugh. Whether the audience actually laughs at the parody is another matter, dependent as parody is on contextual knowledge. So much of the humor of satire and its related devices—including parody—relies on an audience's ability to recognize the irony of a situation, which again, depends on the audience's familiarity with the targeted text.⁸

Irony is defined by both its “use of words that mean the opposite of what you really think especially in order to be funny” and its situations, which are “strange or funny because things happen in a way that seems to be the opposite of what you expected.”⁹ *Family Guy* employs irony in its parodies of *Two and a Half Men*, *Ghost/Ghostbusters*, and *Eight Is Enough*, by playing with words in the titles. In the first, the audience does not see an animated representation of the CBS sitcom family starring Charlie Sheen, Jon Cryer, and Angus T. Young, but instead sees two men screaming in horror at another man, also screaming, who is cut in half and bleeding on the floor.¹⁰ The irony in this scene comes from the audience’s assumed familiarity with *Two and a Half Men* and in their seeing something opposite to their expectations. The same is true of the *Ghost/Ghostbusters* parody.¹¹ Peter initiates the cutaway by making reference to a job he had in high school. The camera cuts to the outside of a city block, as the *Ghostbusters* wagon pulls to a curb. Decked out in full ghost-busting attire, Peter runs into a brownstone and kicks down a door to find a man and woman spinning pottery, reminiscent of the iconic scene from the 1990 film *Ghost*. Peter zaps the man—who is ghostly transparent—and says to the shocked woman, “That’ll be \$27.50.” In this case, irony is dependent on one’s familiarity with two texts—*Ghostbusters*, which represents ghosts as evil apparitions, and *Ghost*, which represents them as mostly peaceful figures. Combining the two texts’ worlds is done for comic effect; *Family Guy* is not commenting on the relationship of the couple from *Ghost*, nor is it commenting on the family in its cutaway of *Two and a Half Men*.

Other examples of irony intended for comic effect involve characters acting uncharacteristically. In the cutaway parody of *Little House on the Prairie*,¹² Pa sits at the table and helps his blind daughter Mary read braille—not an atypical interaction in the series by any means. However, when she gets up to go to bed, Pa motions the rest of the family to be quiet,

and he proceeds to play a series of practical jokes on her. First, he pushes a stool in front of her, causing her to fall; second, he puts a broom with a pan hanging on the end in her path, as she walks right into it; finally, he places the ladder that normally leads to her loft in a different place. Instead of climbing up to her loft, she climbs up to a window and falls out of it. The rest of the family, minus Mary, laughs heartily. This cutaway is ironic, certainly, featuring actions that anyone familiar with *Little House on the Prairie* would not expect; to present a virtuous family as malicious does not necessarily make for satire, though, for the cutaway does not point towards a hypocrisy or lie entrenched in the Ingalls family.

The previous example borders on the absurd, as does the cutaway parody featuring Pinocchio and Geppetto.¹³ Stewie initiates this cutaway during a conversation with Brian when both are debating how to take care of Chris and Meg while Peter and Lois are away on a second honeymoon. Stewie tells Brian, “I know how to deal with children, unlike Mr. Geppetto.” One would expect this statement to refer to Geppetto’s failure to keep Pinocchio out of trouble in the 1940 Disney film. The cutaway thwarts those expectations as soon as it begins, with Pinocchio and Geppetto together in a carpenter’s shop. Standing in front of Pinocchio, Geppetto purposely drops his glasses on the floor and bends over. Pinocchio right behind him, Geppetto tries to bait him into telling a lie so that Pinocchio’s nose will grow, and consequently penetrate his anus. The explanation of Geppetto’s inability to “deal with children” is a *play* on the audience’s expectations—one might assume that Geppetto’s weaknesses as a parent refer to his losing Pinocchio. Instead, *Family Guy* paints Geppetto as a pervert. This conception of the wood-carver lacks a reference point, unless MacFarlane, who wrote the episode, read malevolent motivations behind Geppetto’s wish to have a *real boy* in the source material.

Of satire's four elements, the one most absent from the cutaways mentioned thus far is judgment. Play is surely on display, arguably predominating over the other three, as expectations of characters and events are turned upside down, resulting in much irony. Whether they actually elicit laughter is harder to determine, given the subjective nature of humor; in satire and its related devices, "[laughter] is rarely simple, sometimes strained, occasionally strange, capable of cutting both ways."¹⁴ One viewer's funny is another viewer's "outrageously inappropriate," based on the PTC's reaction to the cutaway involving Pinocchio and Geppetto.¹⁵ Despite different reactions to the show's style of humor, nobody can claim *Family Guy* does not attempt humor. Aggression, too, can be connected to a certain extent with these cutaways, given their sometimes mean-spiritedness.¹⁶ There is never a sense of real judgment, though, never a sense that *Family Guy* is pointing a finger at the families and programs in question and saying, *we don't like what you're doing*. This is the moralistic aspect of satire—the judgment—and because these cutaways lack that element, they more appropriately fit under the category of parody.

Two cutaways of *The Brady Bunch* straddle the line between parody and satire, as they both seem created mostly for comic effect, but contain a hint of judgment. One begins as a result of conversation between Stewie and his teddy bear, Rupert.¹⁷ Stewie finds out that Lois and Peter are trying to have another baby, and, already nervous about the effects this would have on the time and attention given to him, he says, "What do you think happened to Bobby when they added Cousin Oliver to *The Brady Bunch*?" A cutaway ensues inside the Brady kitchen. Carol Brady approaches the majority of the family as they eat at the breakfast table. Holding a broken vase, she asks Cousin Oliver if he did it, to which he replies, "No. The floor did." Everyone, including Alice in the kitchen, starts laughing. At the left corner of the frame, the door to the garage opens, and Bobby enters. He attempts to join in on the conversation: "Hey, everybody,

I...” Mike Brady jumps out of his chair and grabs a broom, using it to shoo Bobby. “Bobby! You get back into the garage!” he yells.

In another cutaway, the Griffin family watches an episode of *The Brady Bunch* in which the entire Brady family stands inside the bathroom and stares down at the toilet.¹⁸ Giggling, Cindy says, “Look what I did, everybody. Isn’t it the biggest, most special poop you’ve ever seen?” Mike pauses, and responds, “Well, Cindy, I guess it’s true that big things come in small packages,” prompting the entire family to laugh. Unlike the earlier cutaway parodies, these two rely less on irony than they do on exaggeration. The first exaggerates the Brady family’s treatment of Bobby when Cousin Oliver comes to stay with them. The scene speaks more loudly, though, against the addition of a character—especially a younger character—at the end of a series’ run.¹⁹ In the cutaway featuring Cindy—ever lispy and childish—the judgment is mild, but it suggests, *this show is stupid, and this family is ridiculous*.

Cutaway Satires

As the previous section implies, *Family Guy*’s cutaways sit on a spectrum that contain more or less parts aggression, laughter, play, and judgment. Examples from *The Brady Bunch* bridge the gap between parodic examples that inarguably go for laughs and satiric examples that are more critical. Re-defining satire will be helpful in our analysis of cutaway satires in this section. Dustin Griffin—not to be confused with Peter—says, “a work of satire is designed to attack vice or folly”; Linda Morris describes it as “a work that relies upon humor to expose both human and institutional failures”; paraphrasing satirist Walt Kelly, Stephen Kercher describes it as “one of the most effective vehicles for communicating the ‘truth’ and conveying the ‘real.’”²⁰ “Attacking vice and folly,” “[exposing] human and institutional failures,” and “communicating the truth and conveying the real,” do not fittingly describe the earlier parodic examples, which

lack the overall aggression and judgment implied in these descriptions. Of aggression, laughter, play, and judgment, our analysis of cutaway satires focuses mostly on judgment, the element that distinguishes our current examples most from parody.

To focus on the judgment aspect of these cutaways is to identify the vice or folly under attack, which in these examples deal with familial representation. Something about the families under target—be they fictional or real—reeks of untruthfulness, and as the satire seeks to communicate the truth, it does so by exposing the lie. A cutaway of the sitcom *Eight is Enough* contains echoes of the play-on-words parodies mentioned earlier, but it also makes a critical comment of the family in the show.²¹ The cutaway begins with Peter inviting the rest of the family to sit down for the start of the *Eight is Enough* reunion episode. The camera cuts to the Griffins' TV, the border of which is prominent, at least until a zoom fills our entire screen with an animated version of the Bradford family living room. Family patriarch Tom asks his daughters if they have seen their brother, Nicholas. Mary says he is up in his room, and Susan explains that he is upset because Abby threw away his baseball cards. Tom offers a typical solution to bring up his spirits: "Oh, well, maybe I should make him a sandwich." Susan laughs, dismissing her father's idea: "Oh, Dad, that's your solution to everything." Tom's even nature turns hostile as he rushes towards Susan and begins slapping her in the face, repeatedly. Mary intervenes, pulling Tom's hand away. "Dad! Dad!" she yells. "Eight is enough." Recognizing the pun, all three begin to laugh; the cutaway ends and the next shot shows a stunned Griffin family.

Much like the parodic cutaways, the *Eight is Enough* example contains plenty of irony as Tom Bradford reacts to Susan's statement in a very unexpected manner. The difference between it and the parodies, though, is Susan's statement, which cuts through the falsity of Tom's parental strategies. While the problem in this scene—Nicholas becoming upset over the loss of

his baseball cards—is rather trivial, so too is Tom’s solution. Susan’s implication is that Tom’s solution would be exactly the same were Nicholas’s problems more serious.

That exact scenario—a serious, real-life problem dropped into the center of a false, oblivious family—is at the heart of several cutaways that deliver some of *Family Guy*’s most biting satire of the television family. Unlike the *Eight is Enough* cutaway featuring a typical—albeit unimportant—sitcom “problem,” a cutaway of *The Cosby Show* illustrates the contrast between Cliff Huxtable and his son Theo, as the latter seeks earnest advice.²² Briefly mentioned in Chapter One, this cutaway involves Cliff telling a childhood story about his friend, Chubby Franklin; as he is wont to do, Cliff recounts the story with plenty of sound effects and funny faces. Theo is not having any of it; instead, he appears upset, looking to get something off of his chest. “Dad, you’re not listening. I have a serious problem. I got a girl pregnant. What do I do?” Oblivious, Cliff continues on with his story: “And when we saw Chubby Franklin make his face, we would all make this face.” With audible canned laughter in the background, Cliff contorts his face and shakes it back and forth, until it spins off and falls to the floor. The surreal ending of this cutaway reflects, perhaps, the effect such news would have on Cliff, for despite the series’ perception as a “hip-but-heartwarming portrayal of family tensions and togetherness,”²³ the Huxtables never deal with problems like teenage pregnancy that real families often have to face.

Similarly in a cutaway satire of *Happy Days*, Richie Cunningham struggles to communicate conflicted feelings to his parents.²⁴ As the entire family sits at the table eating breakfast, he tells them, “Mom, Dad, I really like Potsie.” Unable to read the subtext of the statement, Mrs. Cunningham says, “Why not, Dear? Potsie’s a very nice boy.” Richie tries to explain again: “No, Mom. I mean, I *really* like Potsie.” Mr. Cunningham infers what his wife cannot: “We heard you the first time son. You have a homosexual attraction to Potsie.” The

camera cuts to Chris watching TV, as Brian walks into the living room. “You have anything on that remote lower than mute?” he asks Chris.

Richie’s dilemma in this scene lacks a reference point, as he did not display any homosexual inclinations towards Potsie, let alone towards any character, in *Happy Days*. His uncharacteristic feelings certainly lend themselves to the cutaway’s irony. More than a statement about Richie, this cutaway is a two-fold criticism, one of which warns about the danger of nostalgia. Filmed in the 1970s but set in the 1950s, the name *Happy Days* makes a claim about better, happier times in the past. *For whom, though?* this scene implies. To appropriate a segment of *Happy Days*’ theme song, “These days are ours, happy and free” are not lyrics that many women or minorities would sing about the 1950s; they especially do not represent the experience of homosexuals during a time when such an orientation was considered extremely taboo, if not altogether unmentionable. Besides criticizing the actual 1950s, this cutaway questions our ideas of the 1950s regarding the “traditional” family mentioned by Coontz in Chapter One. Be they “stable,” “normal,” or “traditional,” these families are fabrications, whose purpose was to create a home that would fulfill virtually all its members’ needs”²⁵ whether they represented their current era, like the Andersons of *Father Knows Best*, or hearkened back to an earlier time, like the Cunninghams. Marion Cunningham’s inability to understand her son’s problem exposes her falseness, or at least her uselessness, when it comes to dealing with a real issue. Brian’s comment after the cutaway reveals the opinion of *Family Guy* in regard to a show such as *Happy Days* with a mother like Mrs. Cunningham.

A cruder real-life practice dropped into a false, TV-family scenario occurs during a cutaway involving *The Waltons*,²⁶ the family considered exemplary by President Bush in the early 1990s. Customary to the closing of almost every episode, the family wishes each other

good night. The only thing the audience sees is the outside of the house, shrouded in darkness, as the lights inside turn off, one by one. First, Mary Ellen wishes a good night to Jim-Bob, who in turn, wishes a good night back to Mary Ellen and to Pa; Pa wishes a good night to Jim-Bob and Elizabeth; Elizabeth wishes a good night to Pa and Ma; Ma wishes a good night to Elizabeth and, lastly, to John-boy. Not hearing a response from John-boy, Ma says, “Good night,” again, this time with a hint of annoyance in her voice. She says it yet again, and again receives no response. With audible footsteps, she walks to John-boy’s room to find out why he is not answering. At the sound of a creaking door, Ma says John-boy’s name again, but in a shocked and confused manner. “Dammit!” yells John-boy. “Can’t a guy masturbate in this house?”

The cutaway of *The Waltons*—like those mentioned about *The Cosby Show* and *Happy Days*—is an indictment against the illusion of a certain kind of television family. As mentioned earlier, *Family Guy* does not limit itself to a single era or category of family, such as those forwarded by Mills and Tueth.²⁷ The first family—the Huxtables of *The Cosby Show*—belongs to Mills’s category of *stable families* and Tueth’s category of *funny families*, albeit in a more wholesome manner than other television families from the same era, like *Roseanne*; the families in the other examples—the Cunningham family from *Happy Days* and the Walton family from *The Waltons*—are more difficult to site. Both represented a bygone era when they originally aired in the 1970s—*Happy Days* is set in the 1950s, and *The Waltons* is set in the 1930s and 40s, during the Great Depression and World War II. Both differ from the *normal* families like the Andersons and the Nelsons, respectively from *Father Knows Best* and *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, as the Andersons and Nelsons purported to represent contemporaneous families while the Cunninghams and Waltons represented the supposed family values of days past.

Differences aside, what do all of these families have in common? Each of them presents a family relatively free from serious conflict. Entries from the *Encyclopedia of Television* describe three families that sound remarkably similar, despite differences such as time periods, socioeconomic status and race. Of *The Waltons*, the *Encyclopedia* says its detractors complained about it being “too sweet, sappily sentimental, and exploitative of viewers’ emotions”;²⁸ *Happy Days* similarly “presented a saccharine perspective on American youth culture of the 1950s,” with a family that showed “no inkling of the ‘generation gap’ discourse which was beginning to differentiate youth from their parents”²⁹ during the era. Both *The Waltons* and *The Cosby Show* countered other TV programs that presented noticeably flawed families. The former “portrayed a sense of family in sharp contrast to the problem-ridden urban families of the ‘socially relevant’ sitcoms such as *All in the Family*, *Maude* or *Sanford and Son*,”³⁰ the latter “discontinued familiar sitcom formulas filled with disrespectful children and generational conflict.”³¹

The previous satiric examples all deal with the clash between real problems and false settings/characters; another type of *Family Guy* cutaway satirizes the television family by having its characters react realistically, albeit exaggeratedly, to a situation within the show. At least two cutaways of *The Jetsons* have George Jetson reprimanding his family for their actions. In the first, George walks the family dog, Astro, on a treadmill outside of his family’s spaceship home.³² Astro sees a cat and chases it but only succeeds in speeding up the track, which George, unfortunately, gets stuck on. He calls to his wife for help, but to no avail. The next shot cuts to the kitchen where his wife, Jane, and son, Elroy, are reading and eating at the table. A scuffed-up George enters the kitchen, with tattered clothes and a black eye. Both Jane and Elroy look on in shock. He tells Jane, “For 45 minutes I was out there screaming. I know that ‘cause my damn watch is broken!” Jane attempts an apology. “I’m-I’m sorry.” Sarcastically, George begins to

mimic her. “Oh, I’m sorry, I’m sorry...Jane is sorry.” His tone turns serious. “I could have been killed.”

The second cutaway of *The Jetsons* plays with the theme song of the show, seemingly with the actual intro and theme song.³³ The entire family rides in a flying car, as George drops each member off at a different destination: Elroy at the Little Dipper School, Judy at Orbit High School, and Jane at the shopping center, after she takes his entire wallet instead of the single bill he offered initially. *Family Guy* plays with the Jane’s exit, though. Rather than ride smoothly away from the family car, George reaches down and grabs her as she falls down the shoot. “Hey, hey, hey, hey, hey! No, no, no!” he says, pointing to the dollar. “I took this one out for you. You take this *one*.” He motions to his wallet. “I take this. You are *not* taking my whole wallet so you can go shopping.” Jane tries to explain herself. “I was just gonna buy some groceries,” she says. George responds brusquely: “Bull crap.”

Many sitcom episodes are self-contained, meaning they are “closed off, explained, reconciled, solved at the end of the half hour,”³⁴ often never to be referenced again. Animated programs go one step further, with self-contained moments that bear no consequences even in the same episode. The first satiric cutaway of *The Jetsons* comments on these types of moments by making the show decidedly un-carnival. As mentioned in Chapter Two, animation can do anything and be anything, and many cartoons take advantage of the freedoms offered by the medium. When George gets sucked under the treadmill, he would expectedly appear in the next scene unharmed and without a scratch. *Family Guy* twists this expectation by showing realistic consequences of an accident like this. In the second cutaway of *The Jetsons*, George’s reaction to Jane when she takes his entire wallet is more plausible than probable; nevertheless, it addresses a conflict that George otherwise shrugs off in the real theme song intro.

Family Guy again comments on the tendency of sitcoms to avoid real familial conflict in its cutaways of *Everybody Loves Raymond* and *Malcolm in the Middle*.³⁵ The cutaway of *Everybody Loves Raymond* begins with the couple in their living room—Ray lies on the couch while Debra berates him: “Ray, your mother insulted my pizzola again.” After a brief interruption in which Meg Griffin enters the scene, Debra continues, but is cut off by Ray: “I don’t care anymore, Patty.”³⁶ After nine seasons, I just don’t care. Maybe you could try not being a bitch.” Debra breaks the bottle she is holding and points it at Ray to stab him; the cutaway ends before any violence happens. The threat of domestic violence turns visible, however, in the *Malcolm in the Middle* cutaway. Three boys and their father—Malcolm, Reese, Dewey and Hal—sit at the table for breakfast while their mother—Lois—nags. The indifference on their faces suggests this is a familiar sight. Hal stands up and calmly walks to the fridge amidst Lois’s unabated criticism. He rips the door off the freezer and slams her upside the head with it, knocking her out. He turns to the boys and says, “Kids, we’re free. We’re finally free.” Together, the four of them walk outside and off towards the rising sun.

The examples of *The Jetsons*, *Everybody Loves Raymond*, and *Malcolm in the Middle* satirize the respective series and the sitcom family in general, which typically treats family conflicts as trivial. *Family Guy* arguably presents the reality of some in these cutaways, but in doing so swings too far—some might say—in the opposite direction of the targeted programs. The insertion of domestic violence—verbal and physical—into an otherwise trivial scene presents a plausible, although undesirable, scenario: surely if someone got stuck on a treadmill and screamed for help, but to no avail, he or she would be upset. It is hard to argue that these examples either promote or censure the behavior—despite the evident judgment in these cutaways, they also contain a large amount of play, like the parodies. However, undertones of

violence against women complicate the presumable intent and effect of such scenes. As will be discussed in the conclusion of this study, *Family Guy* at times overshadows a general satiric object in its presentation of satire with a vice much more ugly.

Other examples of satiric cutaways present the family as an excuse for commercialism. An attack on 1950s media, the cutaway of *Lassie* presents Timmy's family as a vehicle to dispense subliminal advertisements for cigarettes to the viewing public.³⁷ During a typical exchange in the kitchen in which Timmy's mother asks about *Lassie*, a bald man intermittently appears and utters, "Smoke." The subliminal nature of the bald man's appearances begins to dissipate; by the end of the cutaway, he says very explicitly, "Are you smoking yet." *Family Guy* makes a similar comment in a cutaway of *The Honeymooners*.³⁸ Ralph and Alice stand in the kitchen, Ralph waving his fist. Ralph utters one of his trademark lines: "One of these days, Alice, one of these days..." Suddenly a new, dubbed voice replaces Ralph's Brooklyn accent: "...I'm gonna help stimulate the economy by buying an American car." Another cutaway plays with the Doublemint Gum advertisements from the 1980s.³⁹ However, instead of pairs of Ken-and-Barbie-like twins, we see pairs of male and female *conjoined* twins climbing out of a pool and riding bicycles. This cutaway differs from the previous two in that it references a text—a TV advertisement—that has an obvious commercial purpose. The play in this example involves the inclusion of non-traditional twins—typically not the type of twin one sees in a commercial. The flipside of play in this cutaway is its judgment, which actually alludes to what we do not see—the beautiful twins of the original Doublemint commercials, which, more than representing reality, represent an idyllic unreality. After all, how many adult twins, figuratively inseparable, wear the same clothes still and search for opposite-gendered twins to date?

Family Guy surely targets methods of advertising in the Doublemint cutaway, but all three cutaways taken together—*Lassie*, *The Honeymooners* and Doublemint—point towards a bigger problem, which is the melding and consequent indistinguishability of TV advertising and programming. Media scholar Dallas W. Smythe refers to this phenomenon in his essay “On the Audience Commodity and its Work.” The job of the media, according to Smythe, is to produce audiences to sell to the advertisers. With advertisements as the focus of television and other mass media, the rest of a network’s programming must be filled with material that only serves “to reaffirm the status quo and retard change.”⁴⁰ He calls the programming that is not explicit advertising “free lunch.” Sitcoms fall under the category of free lunch by presenting to viewers families and situations that seem to have the solution to life’s problems. Ironically the free lunch experience creates the problems people did not know they had. Though she never uses the term “free lunch,” historian Barbara J. Berg explains how television advertising and programming was used to re-domesticate American women following their industrial turn during World War II, when many of them were called upon to work in factories while men were fighting in Europe and Asia. Says Berg:

We needed a huge media campaign to get these women back into the home. One of the most effective ways to do this was through television...so the television was part of the re-domestication. We had television shows sponsored by numerous commodities, the gleaming appliances that June Cleaver would use in the kitchen...these commodities were being linked to the good life. Women rushed to their new shopping centers in their brand-new cars and loaded up. They didn’t realize that they were actually doing this in the service of a strong governmental imperative. The notion of the commodity boom was linked to capitalism, which our government was supporting, vis-a-vis the threat of communism.⁴¹

Family Guy affirms the capitalistic intentions of TV programming, including sitcoms, by exaggerating the obviousness of the advertising messages within *Lassie* and *The Honeymooners*: the sitcom family is just an excuse to advertise products.⁴²

Cutaway Abuse/Lampoon

A third type of *Family Guy* cutaway that references the family does so without making an apparent social criticism and in a much more personal matter. These cutaways most appropriately fall under the category of abuse, which Test describes as “direct, spontaneous, verbal attacks against a person;” a subcategory of abuse is lampoon, which is a “specialized version of [abuse/invective] in that it is a satiric attack on an individual.”⁴³ *Family Guy*’s examples of cutaway abuse are much more personal than either the parodic or satiric cutaways mentioned earlier because they target real human beings. In some cases *Family Guy* targets these individuals in such a way as to fuse the celebrities—the actors, anyway—to the characters for whom they are known. In other cases there is no fictional persona to attach the target to. Whether the target is an actor, actress, politician, or cable news phenomenon, he or she is still part of a large media sphere—and by extension, popular culture—which raises a question in regard to Seth MacFarlane’s rationale behind *Family Guy*’s pop-culture gags: whom or what is he calling ugly, and what does he not like about what society is doing? The satirical cutaways of the previous section answer those questions with a resounding emphasis on false representation of the television family. However, the following examples do not deal with fictional television families, nor do they contain the relatively lighthearted humor that epitomizes the parodic cutaways.

A cutaway involving actor John Goodman and his family is a good starting point to highlight the differences between the cutaways already defined and this new category of abuse.⁴⁴ Lois initiates the cutaway while attempting to feed a reluctant Stewie. She says to him, “You know, some people would be very happy to have this food. Like John Goodman’s family.” The camera cuts away to John Goodman, largely reprising his role as Dan Connor of *Roseanne*—at

least in dress—while he sits with his family at the dinner table. His wife and two girls look emaciated, starved. While Goodman stuffs his face uncontrollably, one of his daughters begs for food: “Please, Daddy.” Goodman shoots back, “I told you, when I’m finished, you can have what’s left.” The same daughter counters, “There won’t be any left. There’s never any left.” His wife reaches for a handful of mashed potatoes and Goodman stabs her hand with a fork. She pulls her hand away and sadly says, “Happy Thanksgiving.”

The reference points in this cutaway are somewhat mixed: like the character he plays in *Roseanne*, John Goodman is dressed in blue collar attire, as if he has just come back from a construction site. However, Lois refers to him as John Goodman—not Dan Connor—and as he sits at the table with his anonymous family he acts uncharacteristically mean and greedy. The only aspect that seems to fit John Goodman, the person, is his physical appearance, which arguably forms the basis of the cutaway. If we are to understand this pop culture gag as satire and even use MacFarlane’s rationale, whom or what is the “ugly” target, and what is society doing that is reprehensible? This cutaway fails to answer the second question, and with regard to the first question, the only answer can be John Goodman’s weight, making this scene a personal attack, or lampoon, rather than satire. Perception of abuse and lampoon as more off-putting or harder to stomach than satire and related devices, such as parody, has precedent. Says Test: “In the eighteenth century the lampoon was in such poor repute that critics distinguished between satire and lampoon by characterizing satire as general and reforming, lampoon as personal and malicious.”⁴⁵ The question, then, is if direct verbal aggression—via satire-related devices, such as lampoon—is ever “redeemable [or] is it worth justifying?”⁴⁶

A cutaway lampoon of Donny and Marie Osmond is even more dubious in its attempt to reform than that of John Goodman.⁴⁷ Chris Griffin’s temporary teacher, Mrs. Lockhart, initiates

the cutaway after Chris—who follows the poor advice of Peter—walks into class naked in an attempt to impress her. She admonishes him “[not to] be so impulsive...people have gotten into a lot of trouble that way.” A cutaway immediately follows, in which we see Donny and Marie Osmond lying in bed together. They both have the covers pulled up just below their bare shoulders, implying that neither of them is wearing clothing. They both, however, wear expressions full of shame and regret. “Uh, Marie?” Donny asks. “Yeah, Donny?” she replies. He says emphatically, “Um, we *cannot* tell Mom.” The intended laughter, one could argue, is in the irony of two clean-cut Mormon siblings engaging in activities totally unbecoming of their reputations. Surely *Family Guy* is playing with the public’s perception of the Osmond family and in turn casting a judgment on the Osmonds by implying the motivation for their squeaky-clean façade: *a family this saccharine surely has something to hide*. Unfortunately, the skeletons in the Osmond family closet lend some truth to *Family Guy*’s accusations, but also make the cutaway appear that much more inappropriate: several years before the airing of this cutaway, Marie Osmond revealed that she had been sexually abused repeatedly as a child and teenager—though not by a family member—in her memoir *Behind the Smile*.⁴⁸

Food hoarding and incest are certainly problems worthy of censure; neither of those, however, is the focus of the Goodman or Osmond cutaways. Instead, *Family Guy* uses those vices/evils as a means to attack an individual by insinuating depraved motives. In the case of John Goodman, *Family Guy* attributes his appearance to greed and gluttony; in the case of Donny and Marie Osmond, *Family Guy* projects an ironic, perverse scenario that has little basis in reality. Even when *Family Guy*’s lampoons better reflect their targeted celebrity’s real problems, one must question their purposefulness. For example, pop star Britney Spears has a long, tabloid history of neglect as a parent. Her transgressions include driving with an infant on

her lap, nearly dropping her first son—Sean Preston—several times at home and in public, partying hard and eventually entering rehab while undergoing a custody battle, and committing a hit and run while driving without a license and with her children in the car. The accumulation, and increased recklessness, of these incidents forced a Los Angeles judge to turn custody of her children over to ex-husband Kevin Federline.⁴⁹

Family Guy adds its own take on Britney Spears' lack of parenting skills in a cutaway set up by Stewie.⁵⁰ Peter and his friends are golfing on a hot day. Strapped to Peter is Stewie, who complains about the heat and calls Peter a worse parent than Britney Spears. A cutaway ensues inside her home; she talks trivialities with a friend on the phone, which is wedged between her neck and shoulder. In one of her hands is a cigarette, in the other, a baby. Her southern accent greatly exaggerated, she says, "Oh, I know, I know... Oh, the gift basket was *not* worth the trip, not by a long shot." With one hand she makes an indentation in the soft spot of her baby's head and taps the ashes from her cigarette into the newly formed concavity of her baby's head—a human ashtray. The doorbell rings. "Oh, I gotta get that; I'll talk to you later." She hangs up the phone and drops her baby on the ground before walking into the other room to answer the door.

Family Guy's cutaway of Britney Spears could arguably be a satirical comment of the tabloid culture that obsesses over celebrities' every move. Spears parenting history surely contains a number of regrettable actions, but also some that would not be newsworthy if committed by a non-celebrity; after all, not every parent who accidentally drops a child ends up on the news, and it is that exact action that concludes the cutaway. The argument that this cutaway reflects anything other than Britney Spears' character becomes tenuous, though, when one considers whom is represented most poorly. Had Stewie's declaration signaled a cutaway in which a tabloid TV show like *Entertainment Tonight* or *Access Hollywood* commented on

Britney Spears, the target would have been different.⁵¹ However, presented as it is, *Family Guy*'s treatment of Britney Spears in this cutaway is not much different than that of a tabloid show, the difference being that *Family Guy* is going for laughs rather than feeding our need to dig into the private lives of others as tabloids do.

One instance in which *Family Guy* presumably tries to comment on a news story but instead succeeds in lampooning a non-celebrity occurs during Stewie's play at the Little Clam Pre-School.⁵² While not technically a cutaway, the two-minute-long scene operates as such, as it is completely tangential to the rest of the episode. The Griffin family is in attendance to watch "Terri Schiavo: The Musical," based on the case of Terri Schiavo, a woman who lived in a vegetative state for nearly fifteen years, until a Florida judge ordered her feeding tube to be removed.⁵³ The play features Terri, lying in a hospital bed, as well as her doctors, nurses, and husband, Michael. It begins with the doctor tapping Terri's knee for reflexes in beat to the water drip. Michael enters the stage and says, "Hi, Doctor, it's me, Michael Schiavo. How's my wife doing?" The doctor responds, "She's a vegetable," to which another young doctor says, "I hate vegetables!" very indicative of his age. The audience erupts in laughter. The insensitivity increases as the dialogue breaks into a song that details the workings of the machinery that keeps her alive. Of one machine the doctor sings, "And this dispenses gravy for her mashed-potato brains." The song ends describing Terri Schiavo as "the most expensive plant you'll ever see."

Reaction to this scene was particularly strong among Terri Schiavo's survivors. Her brother, Bobby Schindler, Jr., said:

My family was astonished at the cruelty and bigotry towards our beloved sister, and all disabled people that we witnessed in this show. My first thought was how this attempt at satire must have been enormously difficult and painful for my mother. The depiction of Terri in the *Family Guy* episode on March 21 is not only inaccurate, it seems to take the position that certain people are simply not worthy of receiving medical care because they are viewed as burdens on the health care system.⁵⁴

Pro-life activist Jill Staneck also objected to *Family Guy*'s treatment of Terri Schiavo, claiming "Creator Seth MacFarlane's goal is [to] get buzz by being offensive."⁵⁵ Brian and Chris imply as much, shortly before "Terri Schiavo: The Musical" begins. Brian says to Lois, "Don't you think it's a little soon for a musical about Terri Schiavo?" Chris quickly counters: "Or too late?" They are both correct; the nature of the Schiavo case makes it unsuitable musical material no matter how much time has passed, and the fact that *Family Guy* references Schiavo more than five years after the ordeal makes it meaningless as satire. Brian and Chris's comments are nothing more than a self-reflexive nod at how pleased the show is with itself for pushing the limits of network television decency. The purpose in this case is not satirical but is intended to shock.

Like the Schiavo reference, the last example of abuse to receive mention in this chapter does not come in a cutaway; instead it comes during small talk between two characters. Chris Griffin is on a date with a girl named Ellen, who has Down Syndrome.⁵⁶ When he asks her what her parents do for work, she says, "My dad is an accountant, and my mom is the former governor of Alaska"—this, a thinly veiled reference to former Alaska governor and one-time vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin, who happens to have a child with Down Syndrome. Sarah Palin's daughter Bristol reacted to the episode and the series, saying, "If the writers of a particularly pathetic cartoon show thought they were being clever in mocking my brother and my family yesterday, they failed. All they proved is that they're heartless jerks."⁵⁷ Sarah Palin responded in kind, calling the writers of *Family Guy* "cruel" and "coldhearted" in an interview with Bill O'Reilly.⁵⁸ When the *LA Times* asked Seth MacFarlane for a comment he sent them a statement via his publicist, which read, "From its inception, 'Family Guy' has used biting satire as the foundation of its humor. The show is an "equal-opportunity offender."⁵⁹

The question to ask in regard to the Sarah Palin reference is the same one asked about the cutaways involving John Goodman, the Osmonds and Britney Spears, and the scene featuring “Terri Schiavo: The Musical:” What is the targeted societal ugliness—to paraphrase Seth MacFarlane—and what is it about said target that *Family Guy* does not like? Considering the show’s liberal leanings, it is not surprising for it to take potshots at a figure like Sarah Palin.⁶⁰ To do so via references to her disabled child seems a low blow, though. Above all, the main problem with this scene is that it says nothing about Sarah Palin or her politics; it simply takes a shot at her. Compare this scene involving Sarah Palin to the many instances in which *Family Guy* lampooned former-President George W. Bush: it has mocked his intelligence and integrity, suggesting that he was busy reading a children’s book—*Superfudge*, by Judy Blume—instead of dealing with Hurricane Katrina; it has mocked his history of substance abuse, showing him and his commanding officer about to use cocaine; Lois implies that his mother, Barbara, gave him brain damage by holding him under water when he was a child.⁶¹ Each of these attacks against Bush is highly personal, yet they all are less inappropriate than the attack on Palin because they actually say something about Bush, denigrating though it may be. Referencing Palin as the mother of a child with Down Syndrome does not criticize an action or even a personality trait; it just points out that she has a special-needs child.

In the balance of quadripartite elements, abuse and lampoon favor aggression and judgment. Play is evident in each of the examples mentioned, but the realness of the target makes for uneasy laughter, if any laughter at all. Aggression is an inherent part of abuse/lampoon, as it twists a “general reflection” and “[aims it] against an individual person.”⁶² The cases of abuse described in this section are particularly aggressive because each—to a degree—is an uncalled-for attack. Even if abuse/lampoon were considered an acceptable form of satire, there would

surely be more deserving individuals representative of society's ills, than those mentioned here. Judgment is also apparent in each of our examples, but similar to the problem with aggression, its personal nature says more about the satirist's individual tastes and dislikes rather than making a statement about what is ugly in society.

Conclusion

A summation of *Family Guy*'s presentation of other families—mostly via cutaways—reveals a spectrum that defies clear-cut answers. Can the families in *Family Guy* cutaways be described most accurately as examples of “biting satire?” In some cases, yes. Those listed under the *Cutaway Satire* section all have something in common: they present a false, dated vision of the family—at least from *Family Guy*'s point of view—and *Family Guy* succeeds in bringing those families down from their pedestal by injecting incongruities and exaggerations in their worlds. In these examples, *Family Guy* is acting as the trickster, “[making] a comic game of pomposity, power, and prestige; gods and kings are favorite targets for derision.”⁶³ The gods and kings of our modern setting are the institutions that hold power. By targeting the families that represent institutional ideas, *Family Guy* is effectively targeting the institutions. Some presentations of family are not exactly satire, but neither are they harmful. With an emphasis on play and laughter, *Family Guy*'s cutaway parodies target specific pop-culture families, without intention of offering important social commentary. The last type of cutaway/reference to receive analysis and the last to receive mention in this chapter—abuse and lampoon—does not qualify as satire, for all of the reasons mentioned, but most importantly because it does not contain a reforming quality. As opposed to its satire in which members of the Griffin family attack the high in stature from a lowly position, they assume a position of superiority in their abusive cutaways, kicking those who are already down.

We can make that conclusion about cutaways that fall into the latter category because *Family Guy* does have a baseline for effective satire, at least in how it satirizes the family. To complicate matters, though, *Family Guy* features a different kind of satire much more frequent and pervasive than any of the examples mentioned thus far—that of its own family, the Griffins. How does the show treat the Griffin family as indirect satire? Are they, in any way, just like the other families—real or fictional—they target in their cutaways, and if so, does that negate or support any of the important social commentary the show might make? Those questions and more form the basis of Chapter Four.

Chapter Four

The Griffin Family as Indirect Satire

The Griffin family of 31 Spooner Street is a bad family. Peter, in particular, is a bad parent, having committed the following offenses: giving pornography to his son, Chris, and later attempting to share meth with him; shooting his son Stewie in the head and killing him, albeit in a computer simulation; helping Chris and Meg hide Stewie's traumatic head injury—which he received while under their care—by throwing him underneath Lois's moving car, so that she believes she is responsible. Most notoriously, he terrorizes his daughter Meg. He farts in her face often; he admits in a letter to her that he thought she was a housecat the first four years of her life; he hits her while he is on steroids; he sells her to Goldman's Pharmacy at one point to pay off a debt; he even shoots her.¹

The effect of these interactions, especially those between Peter and Meg, is somewhat confusing. Meg appears to be the target, given that she is often on the receiving end of Peter's actions. As the protagonist, Peter is presumably the character we most likely root for. How, then, does the Griffin family as indirect satire complicate our perceptions and expectations? First, we once again must define indirect satire. As mentioned in Chapter One and elsewhere, the indirect satirist presents an unattractive and undesirable reality through characters that act out “socially disruptive” and “frowned upon emotions,” making them the subject of the satirist's attack. Importantly, these characters are more distinct from the satirist than the persona is.² The implications of these definitions for the Griffin family are thus: the Griffins are whom we are supposed to frown upon when we watch *Family Guy*; the worst perpetrator of the bunch—Peter—should be our constant subject of scorn, considering the high number of socially disruptive actions of which he is guilty. Aside from the difficulty of maintaining disgust towards

the protagonist, another factor that complicates the Griffins as subjects of the indirect satirist is their sometimes-role as personae of the show—the subject of the previous chapter.

That a member of the Griffin family can go from acting as the show's conscience to being its object of censure does not make it unique, for the trickster targets "pomposity, power, and prestige," but "may also become what he attacks."³ Similarly, the carnival clown "makes fun of everyone, including himself, not in order to put down one side in favor of the other but merrily to unmask order and power, all order and power."⁴ Led by Peter, the Griffins are tricksters and carnival clowns; MacFarlane uses the term "equal offenders" to describe the show's practice of making fun of everyone, which should include the Griffin family, too. When should the audience relate to the Griffin family, though? When should the audience despise them? If the concept of the trickster holds true in *Family Guy*, a character like Peter becomes a floating signifier, sometimes representing the viewpoint of writers and other times representing the evil actions one should despise. For example, Peter often functions as the trickster in his interactions with his father-in-law, Carter Pewterschmidt. The show attacks the "pomposity, power, and prestige" represented by Carter through Peter's lowliness—Peter always manages to bring his father-in-law down a few pegs. The flipside to the trickster figure is that he or she does not always remain the writers' proxy. Lest one identify too much with Peter's point of view, *Family Guy* contains plenty of examples of Peter's horribleness. Almost any of his interactions with Meg should be frowned upon and considered socially disruptive. As the next section explains, what should be easily identifiable as indirect satire in the Griffin family is not always so clear.

Poor Behavior as a Means to a Satiric End

Coming full circle in our study, we will return back to the other cartoon family with seniority on *Family Guy*—*The Simpsons*. Our rationale in looking at several examples from *The*

Simpsons is to explain the purpose behind the family's sometimes-horrid behavior and to see if the Griffins function similarly in *Family Guy*. To repeat the words of Dustin Griffin, our goal in this analysis is to identify the "vice and folly" under attack. By doing so, we will discover whether the families are exemplars, targets of the satirist, or something entirely different. To corral our comparison of *The Simpsons* and *Family Guy*, we will limit our analysis to the topic of parenthood, and even more specifically, father-daughter interactions.

Despite the notoriety *The Simpsons* has garnered over the years, one might be surprised at some of Homer Simpson's admirable actions. Concerning Lisa, he works a second job at one point in order to pay for her pony, including its food and stable; a flashback episode reveals that Homer sacrifices money the family had set aside for a new air conditioner to nurture his precocious daughter's talents—he buys her a saxophone; in another instance, he sells his beloved tickets to ride the Duff blimp in order to pay the \$250 fee to enter Lisa into a beauty pageant; he also follows his conscience when Lisa urges him to get rid of their ill-gotten cable TV; for his other daughter, Maggie, Homer quits his dream job at the bowling alley to get back his higher-paying job at Springfield Nuclear Power Plant.⁵

In *Simpsons Confidential*, John Ortved explains Homer's dual nature: "At any given moment, Homer can be sweet or bitter, angry or happy, smart or stupid, driven or apathetic, bemused or intrigued, gay or straight." Ortved continues: "He is both the everyman's fantasy and nightmare—a symbol of what we all strive for and what we should avoid."⁶ To prove Ortved's claim, we must identify some of Homer's baser characteristics and actions as a counterpoint to the good he does. In fact, the good actions of Homer Simpson mentioned earlier could rightly be considered attempts at redemption after he does something reprehensible, or at least unwise. He only buys Lisa a pony to make up for missing her saxophone performance at the school talent

show while he was drinking at Moe's; his decision to get rid of their illegal cable is the end result of making the decision to steal cable in the first place; his decision to go back to the power plant when Maggie is born is the end result of his decision to quit a decent job for one that does not pay enough to support a family.

Season Ten's "Make Room For Lisa" functions as a microcosm of the Homer-Lisa dynamic.⁷ In this episode, Homer's negligent actions—accidentally defacing the Bill of Rights at a Smithsonian exhibit when he handles the document with chocolate-covered fingers—lead to more negligent actions, some of which adversely affect Lisa. Unable to pay the fine for the damage he causes, Homer offers up his house as a transmitting station for the cell phone company that sponsors the Smithsonian exhibit. Not surprisingly, the company destroys Lisa's bedroom by turning it into a control room, which causes her to move into Bart's room. True to *The Simpsons'* form, Homer spends the rest of the episode trying to remove the wedge he has placed between his daughter and himself. He succeeds when he takes her to a new age spa to help cure her recent stomach ailments. While she is inside a sensory-deprivation tank, she realizes Homer does a lot of things he does not want to do—present experience included—simply to spend time with her. Homer and Lisa-centric episodes navigate along a course of conflict-resolution, the conflict being what we should avoid, and the resolution being what we should strive for if, by chance, we make a mistake.

Of course, real human beings will not likely make the same mistake Homer makes in "Make Room For Lisa." The chances that one would forfeit physical property to a cell phone company in place of paying a fine are far-fetched, including the possibility that a little girl could come home from school and find her bedroom converted into a control room. As an example of indirect satire, though, this situation works symbolically. In indirect satire, remember, "the

characters and their actions come to stand for what the satirist is attacking.”⁸ The target of indirect satire—in this case, Homer—“must be diminished in importance, made to look foolish, stupid, or vicious.”⁹ Homer, in particular, is often targeted for an “antisocial or inhuman quality or characteristic,”¹⁰ not just in his interactions with Lisa but with everyone. Without an explicit persona to highlight the target’s flaws, indirect satire must exaggerate the unacceptable characteristics of the target in order for an audience to recognize the attack as satire.

As a satiric target, Homer represents the faults of many a parent through his over-the-top actions. If these faults were presented more realistically, they would lack satiric essence. Consider the events of “Make Room For Lisa:” Homer’s mistakes and the manner in which Lisa loses her bedroom are all a bit fantastic, but they symbolize the experience of many children who grudgingly share a bedroom with another sibling after losing their own room. The daughter who suffers the indignity of moving from her own bedroom into her brother’s now-cramped room would likely resent her parents, as Lisa does. The reality of such a move is not inherently funny, though. Sharing a bedroom with a sibling to make room for another child or to give a family extra storage room, among other reasons, is not funny. *The Simpsons* adds laughter to this scenario by playing with the conditions that cause Lisa to lose her own bedroom. The aggression and judgment in this episode are aimed indirectly at Homer, for he is responsible for all of the injustice Lisa suffers.

Some of Homer’s foolish, stupid and vicious actions reflect reality more closely than those seen in “Make Room For Lisa;” regarding “Lisa’s Pony,” many children can relate to feelings of disappointment when a parent fails to show up to a musical or athletic performance. In most cases, the parent cannot get away from work. To make its example of parental absence symbolic—and consequently more abhorrent—*The Simpsons* could not let Homer miss Lisa’s

talent show just because of work; as the target of indirect satire, Homer has to miss the performance of his own volition, or better, because he has no volition when it comes to alcohol. A parent's absence to such an event could happen for the same reason that Homer was absent for Lisa's performance, but such an example in reality would be less common. For the vast majority of viewers unable to directly relate to a parent like Homer, his actions symbolize a common experience, even when they are more closely rooted in reality. Homer's actions may satirically represent the failures of real parents, but in most cases, his mistakes tie directly into the narrative structure of an episode and have as much to do with redemption as with judgment. Common to all *The Simpsons'* examples mentioned, Homer fails Lisa near the beginning of an episode and spends the remainder of the half hour trying to fix his mistakes. He has a conscience and a heart, and the fact that he often corrects himself is evidence that *The Simpsons* uses its familial satire "with a social purpose."¹¹

By taking a judgment of *The Simpsons* held by some—that they are a bad family, to paraphrase the Bushes—and flipping it into a question—*Why are they a bad family?*—allows us to see complexity and a purpose in the show's presentation of family. If nothing else comes across in this short analysis of *The Simpsons*, one should at least recognize them as a flawed family, not a bad family. Their flaws are imbued with a purposefulness, as they "[reduce] the distance between the folly and vice out there among others and the folly and vice in here in ourselves," effectively allowing us to see ourselves as the objects of satire.¹²

Our analysis of Homer and Lisa's relationship may come across as panegyric of *The Simpsons*, which is not exactly the intent. Instead, it is meant to explain the oft-criticized interactions of family members through a satirical lens. By doing so, we are able to identify the purpose behind a character's poor behavior and thereby validate the text to a certain extent. Our

forthcoming analysis of *Family Guy* is not meant as a direct comparison to *The Simpsons*; such an analysis would mostly reveal the two shows are not the same, which we already know. Our rationale for including *The Simpsons* as a lead off to our analysis of *Family Guy* is to demonstrate that a close reading with an emphasis on indirect satire illuminates one's understanding of a controversial, often misunderstood family.

Peter and Meg

Family Guy's catalog of 240-plus episodes contains substantial interactions between members of the Griffin family; to narrow the scope even to two characters would not allow us to include everything about their relationship in a single chapter. With that stated, the remainder of this chapter will attempt to present the relationship of father and daughter in *Family Guy* in as comprehensive a manner as possible. Of all the relationships within the Griffin family, why study that of Peter and Meg? Their relationship appears most troublesome, as Peter's constant ridicule and mistreatment of her raises questions about its purposefulness. The quality of Peter and Meg's interactions is not constant—in some episodes, communication between the two consists of a single line of dialogue, while some episodes contain a Peter-and-Meg-centric plotline. For the sake of concision, episode titles will be mentioned only in the analyses of Peter-Meg episodes; episode titles of all other references can be found in the notes.

Peter's poor behavior and unwise choices adversely affect Meg in a number of *Family Guy* episodes. Contrary to the perception of Meg as Griffin-family doormat, Peter tries to fix his mistakes in several instances, thus winning back Meg's approval. In "The Story on Page One," Meg begins writing for the school newspaper of James Woods High.¹³ While interviewing Mayor Adam West, she discovers he has wasted \$150,000 of taxpayer money to investigate why water disappears when it has been poured into the ground. Meg believes this story is her big

break, but Peter is not impressed with it. He replaces Meg's story with one he wrote—a fabricated story that claims former *Beverly Hills 90210* actor Luke Perry is gay—but leaves Meg's name on the article so she can take all the glory when the news breaks. Instead, Perry finds out about the article and sues Meg for libel. Peter takes it on himself to fix the problem; his solution is to entrap Perry in a compromising situation and photograph it, in order to validate the claim that he is gay. Peter's plan does not work, but in attempting it, he eventually convinces Perry to agree to an actual interview with Meg to set the record straight. Meg is never made to look the fool in this episode; Peter is the clear target of poor behavior, as he bumbles his way into an eventual successful resolution. As indirect satire, the “general reflection” suggested by this episode is that parents' attempts to help their children are sometimes the cause of problems. Attempts to rectify those problems can dig parents and their children into an even deeper hole.

Peter's poor choices in “8 Simple Rules for Dating My Teenage Daughter,” lead him to the poorer choice of selling Meg to Mort Goldman.¹⁴ In the beginning of the episode, Peter discovers that Goldman's Pharmacy will place his expenditures on a tab. Without consideration of the future, Peter runs his bill up to \$34,000. Mort finally bills Peter, who is unable to meet his debt, unsurprisingly. However, knowing that Mort's son Neil is infatuated with Meg, Peter offers her in place of the money. The Goldmans accept and turn Meg into their slave. Having created the problem, Peter attempts to fix it after Brian points out a clause in the contract of sale that states the deal for Meg is null and void if Neil cheats on her. Peter concocts an interesting strategy to catch Neil cheating—he lures Neil to a fake *X-Men* convention where Lois, dressed as the character Mystique, is to seduce him. The seduction does not take, but the problem still resolves itself when Neil tears up the contract—thus freeing Meg—and says that he only wants to be with her if she wants to be with him. Peter's selfishness is the target here, and similar to the

previous example, this episode suggests that parents are not very good at fixing problems they create for their children.

Peter's selfishness is on display again in "Let's Go To The Hop," when he goes undercover at James Woods High to protect his children from the growing drug problem in Quahog, which involves the licking of psychoactive toads.¹⁵ Acting under the assumed name "Lando Griffin," Peter fast becomes the most popular "kid" in school—popular enough to convince the rest of the student body to stop "doing toad." Peter's transformation into Lando comes out of concern for Meg, but he leaves Meg in the dust when the Winter Snow Ball rolls around. Ever hungry for attention and praise, Meg believes she has an "in" with the new most popular boy in school—her father. She tells other students that Lando is taking her to the dance, but she finds that Lando has other plans; he is going with Connie D'Amico, the most popular girl in school and perpetual tormentor of Meg. At the dance, Lando and Connie are named King and Queen of the Winter Snow Ball. Kneeling down to be crowned, Lando/Peter sees Meg walk into the dance, and detecting her disappointment, he realizes how he has hurt her feelings. He interrupts the coronation: "Hold it. I can't be your king. I have a confession. I've been living a lie. I shouldn't be here with Connie. My first choice was Meg Griffin." Following gasps and an outburst from Connie, a spotlight shines on Meg, and Lando continues: "That's my dream girl, but I'm not good enough for her, and she dumped me." Peter's final act as Lando is an admission of his own selfishness, which has hurt his daughter. He redeems himself through his selfless public action.

The examples mentioned thus far form a similar pattern—out of stupidity, poor choices, and selfishness, father affects daughter and spends the rest of the episode working to restore their relationship. In two of the examples, his plan of redemption falls flat as the situation resolves

itself anyway; in the other, he acknowledges his mistakes and comes up with a perfect solution on the spot. However, if these episodes do not seem representative of the Peter-Meg dynamic, it is because they are not. Two of the three episodes come from the early, pre-cancellation era of *Family Guy*, when “Meg was a beloved member of the family.” Pop culture and gaming website IGN explains the evolution of Meg: “As the show went on and explored who the characters were and where the comedy really lied in their personalities, a whole new view of Meg emerged. Now hated by her family, we are more likely to see Peter shoot his daughter...than run to her aid.”¹⁶

As confirmation of IGN’s generalizations, the following examples demonstrate Peter’s consistent mistreatment of Meg, characterized by rudeness: he announces her first period loudly enough for the entire neighborhood to hear; he commends his neighbor Herbert for calling Meg “Thunder Thighs;” he unwittingly calls Meg and her friends “ugly bitches” when they are in disguise on Halloween; he and the rest of the family, minus Meg, read her diary out loud for fun; experiencing paranormal activity at home, Peter considers the possible danger his family is in, and he reminds Lois, “We agreed that if we could only save two, we’d leave Meg!” After suffering from amnesia, Peter says “D’oh!” when Lois introduces him to Meg—a sure sign of his dislike for his only daughter.¹⁷ He bluntly states that Meg sucks; he says, “Shut up, Meg” so often that the phrase has its own Urban Dictionary definition.¹⁸

Peter’s treatment of Meg is even more negligent and harmful in these examples: armed with a baseball bat when he suspects an intruder is in the home, Peter hits Meg while looking her straight in the eyes; when Peter, Lois and family challenge Carter Pewterschmidt to a boat race, Peter throws Meg out of the boat to lighten their load; Peter forces her to stand next to a sick man at a *Star Trek* convention, and she consequently catches the mumps. Peter does not seem concerned about Meg’s purity: after she gets a makeover, the family forms a musical group, and

their manager suggests they exploit Meg's newfound good looks by turning her into a sex symbol. To this idea, Peter says, "That's the smartest thing I've ever heard anyone say about anything." When Lois invites family friend and one-time lover Jerome to move in with the Griffins after his house is destroyed, Peter becomes paranoid that old sparks will reignite between his wife and their new tenant. His obsessing eventually causes Jerome to leave. They reconcile at the end of the episode, though, and Jerome tells Peter he would never start anything with Lois because it would ruin his and Peter's friendship. However, he has a confession to make—while he was living with the Griffins, he had "lots of nasty-ass sex with Meg." Devoid of emotion, Peter says, "I don't care about that."¹⁹

Peter's harmful remarks and actions towards Meg differ greatly in their offhandedness from the earlier episodes mentioned. Functionally similar to *Family Guy*'s ubiquitous cutaways, the "Shut-up-Meg" moments occur without warning and have little effect on the outcome of an episode's storyline. They lack context within a given episode, only maintaining the larger context of Meg's metanarrative. Actress Mila Kunis has provided the voice of Meg since the second season of *Family Guy*;²⁰ in an attempt to explain Meg's character and justify the treatment of her, she said, "Meg gets picked on a lot. But it's funny. It's like the middle child. She is constantly in the state of being an awkward 14-year-old, when you're kind of going through puberty and what-not. She's just in a perpetual mode of humiliation, and it's fun."²¹ Meg certainly gets picked on a lot, not just from Peter but from almost all of the characters in the *Family Guy* world. That the disdain towards Meg is universal is part of the reason it is problematic. As indirect satire, the target should be he or she who behaves poorly—when Peter brands Meg with a hot iron or starts her beanie on fire, he should represent what the satirist is

attacking. Because everyone seems to find something wrong with Meg, though, she becomes the problem.

Peter appears less of a jerk when others engage in the act of abusing Meg. The rest of the family detests her, and Peter's friends know it: in one instance, Lois holds onto next-door-neighbor Joe, as he is about to fall off a steep ledge. Losing her grip, Lois says, "I can't hold on much longer." Joe responds: "Lois, pretend I'm one of your children." Her grip begins to loosen more, and he says, "Not Meg!" Meg's teacher, Mr. Berler keeps Meg in her place: when he sees her standing by Connie D'Amico's group of friends he says, "Wait a minute. You're not part of the popular clique. You run along and play alone somewhere." Meg even succeeds in disgusting complete strangers: when she and Lois are out shopping, a clothing store clerk inadvertently sees her trying on a tight pair of jeans. Repulsed by the sight, the clerk screams in horror, starts herself on fire and jumps out the window. Shortly after, a cameraman who sees Meg in the corridors of the mall does the same.²²

Meg's essence—her Meg-ness—loses its satiric quality as it becomes increasingly self-referential. Lacking the intertextual component of satire, Meg's character becomes something of an inside joke—one in which her tormentors and the show's frequent viewers are in on. Some might perceive Meg's abuse as satirical if taken holistically—like Kunis says, Meg could be a viewed as an allegory of the middle child.²³ Such a viewpoint requires one to consider the sum of Meg's abuse to be greater than its parts. However, an even better explanation of Meg's treatment is the need for *Family Guy*'s writers to up the ante in terms of degradation towards her.

Others' abrupt interactions with Meg have diminished her role, turning her into a one-note character. Though this presentation of Meg has predominated for much of the series, *Family Guy* manages to sneak in a Meg-centric episode from time-to-time. At least a few of these Meg

episodes could be considered Peter-and-Meg-centric episodes, like those cited earlier in this section. Those episodes arguably reflect a period of *Family Guy* that, after thirteen seasons, does not represent the series as a whole. If “The Story on Page One” and “Let’s Go To The Hop,” at least, feature Peter-Meg storylines when Meg “was a beloved member of the family,” what might a Peter-Meg episode look like after she becomes the whipping post of the show, and specifically the whipping post of Peter? Does it follow a similar plot structure to that mentioned earlier—Peter causes problems for Meg, followed by Peter’s attempt to fix those problems—or is it simply a concentrated series of abuses? Our study of Peter and Meg began with analyses of three episodes, each of which present a satirical take on the relationship between parents and children. Having described the abusive turn in the evolution of Meg, we will bookend this section with an exploration of three more Meg episodes: “Hell Comes to Quahog,” “Road to Rupert,” and “Peter’s Daughter.”

“Hell Comes to Quahog” begins with Peter favoring his friends over his daughter.²⁴ Peter—with Joe, Cleveland and Quagmire—goes to the roller skating rink to pick up Meg. While there, they decide to skate, and they have so much fun they forget their reason for being there. They leave without Meg, forcing her to walk home in the rain. To prevent this from happening again, Peter takes Meg to a car dealership to buy her a car. Just as he does at the roller skating rink, Peter forgets his reason for being at the dealership; by the time they leave, Meg is still carless, but Peter is the owner of a new tank. Meg eventually gets a job at the new Superstore USA—a thinly veiled reference to Walmart—with hopes that she can save money on her own to buy a car. Unfortunately, she cannot escape Peter. As Superstore USA begins to take over Quahog, he loses his job at Pawtucket Brewery, which has now become superfluous. He gets a job at Superstore USA and, in a reversal, is working under Meg, his new superior. Meg’s

superior—named Mr. Penisburg—is unimpressed with Peter’s poor work ethic, and he orders Meg to fire her father. Mr. Penisburg stands beside her to support her dismissal of Peter, but Meg instead changes course and quits her job on the spot, citing her relationship with her father as more important. Meg’s actions have an immediate effect on Peter: “Meg, that was a wonderful thing you just did for me. I can’t believe this is coming out of my mouth, but I love y...” Stewie and Brian, however, interrupt Peter as they drive the family tank into the building and demolish the store. Afterwards, Peter’s near admission is not lost on Meg. The episode closes with the Griffins at home, sitting on the couch. Meg says, “Dad, you were going to say something in the store.” In denial, Peter replies, “No, I don’t think so.” Meg presses: “No, I’m sure of it. You were gonna say you love me. You love me and you know it,” she teases, knowing she has the upper hand at the moment. Chris steals Meg’s momentum by repeating a game he and Peter play earlier in “Hell Comes to Quahog”: he says Meg’s name and blows raspberries. Peter does the same, and the two go back and forth until the credits start rolling.

In its satire of a father-daughter relationship, this episode comes close to the redemptive formula of earlier episodes: father’s poor decisions and neglect adversely affect daughter—Peter forgets to pick Meg up from the skating rink, leaving her to walk home in the rain; father’s attempt to remedy his mistake leads to more foolish behavior—instead of buying Meg a car for practical purposes like he said he would, he buys himself a useless tank; despite father’s continual malfeasance, daughter forgives him—Meg demonstrates her ability to forgive when she quits her job rather than fire Peter. Lest *Family Guy* become too sentimental, “Hell Comes to Quahog” ends as if it does not want us to forget that Meg is still Meg. Though Peter finds resolution and redemption via Meg’s forgiveness, Meg is left hanging.

“Road to Rupert” also contains moments in which Peter and Meg appear to have a positive breakthrough in their relationship, although not until after several instances of poor treatment by Peter.²⁵ At the beginning of the episode, Joe revokes Peter’s driver’s license after he attempts an Evel Knievel-like stunt that results in the damage of several cars on Spooner Street. Meg becomes the unfortunate chauffeur of her father, at least until his license is reinstated. Their first ride does not exactly begin well; the scene begins with a close-up of Peter, sitting in the back seat of a car. He says, “Aw, this sucks. Can you believe I’m stuck with Meg driving me around?” The camera pulls back, revealing Meg as the driver, and—as the only other person in the car—an awkward participant in a conversation about herself. Peter proceeds to act childish, calling Meg “Stinky McPoop-Pants” and begging for apple juice. When he does not get it, he begins kicking the back of Meg’s seat. In order to appease him, she not only has to give him apple juice—she also has to turn on *Spongebob Squarepants* for him to watch in the backseat.

Peter’s behavior changes from childish fit to drunken pranks when Meg drives his friends and him home from The Drunken Clam. First, Meg must endure ribald conversation from the four men. Peter asks Cleveland, Quagmire and Joe, “Who would you rather do? Queen Latifah or Halle Berry if she’s been dead for six hours?” Their attention turns from hypotheticals to harassing Meg. Cleveland shushes the other three so they can watch him give Meg a wet willy. Wanting to one-up Cleveland, Peter pulls out a lighter and ignites Meg’s beanie. She is oblivious until the men ask her teasingly if it is starting to get hot. When she realizes her head is on fire, she becomes hysterical until Quagmire douses her head with the remains in his beer can. Meg slams on the brakes, causing an accident when the car behind rear-ends them. The man who slams into them gets out of his car and approaches Meg’s door, ready to give her a piece of his

mind: “What the hell is your problem, you dumb bimbo?” Unleashing all of her pent-up rage of Peter, she jumps out of the car and pummels the man bloody, earning Peter’s respect and praise for the first time, at least in the episode. “Meg, that was awesome,” he says, as Meg’s victim lay on the ground unconscious.

Meg’s eruption proves to be an icebreaker, as father and daughter begin to bond on their car rides: in a montage, Peter and Meg break mailboxes together with a baseball bat, go to a drive-in movie, and complete the exact dare-devil stunt that got Peter’s license revoked. Reflecting on their newfound friendship, Peter and Meg sit on the porch while drinking lemonade. “You know, Dad, it’s been really great hanging out with you. I know there’s probably a million things you’d rather be doing.” Peter agrees with the first sentiment and denies the second: “Are you kidding Meg? I’ve had more fun with you than I did going to see *Lost in Translation* with Cleveland and Quagmire.” Following an irrelevant cutaway, he continues: “Look, I know sometimes I give you a hard time, you know, calling you names, reading your diary, farting in your cereal when you go to get milk and then laughing: ‘ah, ha-ha ha-ha! She doesn’t know she’s eating my fart.’ But you know Meg, I’m starting to realize I got a really wonderful daughter.” Syrupy, heartwarming music build to a crescendo. “Thanks, Dad.”

In civilian clothes, Joe rolls up to the Griffin house and unwittingly destroys the father-daughter moment. “Peter, good news. Your suspension is up. You can have your license back.” Peter takes the news with surprise and excitement: “You...you mean it? I’m free? No more getting driven around? Aw, sweet!” Joe exits, and the attention is again on Peter and Meg. With a look of resignation, Meg says, “So, I guess you don’t need me anymore. You’ll probably go back to treating me like crap, huh?” Peter nonchalantly confirms her suspicions: “Well, maybe just to keep up appearances in front of the family. You know, peer pressure and all that. But from

now on, Meg, you and me are ‘secret’ best friends.” He kisses her forehead. Lois opens the door and asks, “Who wants a glass of fresh lemonade?” Back to his usual self, Peter says, “Not me! What I want is a fresh glass of better daughter!” He throws lemonade in her face and follows Lois into the house. Out of Lois’s sight, he turns to Meg and winks, acknowledging the inside knowledge each of them have about his purported abuse.

In “Peter’s Daughter,” Peter again acknowledges his poor treatment of Meg.²⁶ At the beginning of the episode, a flash flood makes the Griffin home uninhabitable; this does not stop Peter from ordering Meg into the house to get a case of beer for him. Unfortunately, she nearly drowns, and she falls into a coma as a result. Peter’s realization that he must become a better father coincides with the romance between Meg and a medical intern named Michael, who helps bring her out of her coma. Wanting to play the role of responsible father, Peter spies on Meg and Michael as a means to protect her but fails when he discovers that Meg is pregnant. A shotgun wedding ensues, after Peter goes to Michael’s house with a literal shotgun. As the wedding date approaches, the pretense for the marriage becomes unraveled: Meg has a period, meaning she had made a mistake in reading the pregnancy test. She reveals this information to Michael at the altar, and he runs out of the chapel immediately. Instead of offering consoling words, a hug, or any acknowledgement of what just happened to Meg, Peter introduces a cutaway of country singer Conway Twitty, singing “Hello Darlin’.”

Try as she might, Meg cannot receive the reassurance she so desperately craves. “Road to Rupert” does not end with a sea change in Meg and Peter’s relationship, but instead with a conditional acknowledgement that their relationship has to be how it has always been, or at least how it has mostly been since *Family Guy* was brought back from cancellation in 2005. Despite

his attempts at redemption in “Peter’s Daughter,” Peter cannot help Meg when she needs it most; instead, he closes the episode doing what he does best—introducing an off-topic cutaway.

What conclusions can be gathered about these Peter-Meg episodes? They corroborate Peter’s offhanded treatment of her mentioned earlier, and while they are not just thirty-minute versions of Meg-bashing, neither are they out of place in Peter’s overall treatment of her—the lack of resolution and reassurance given to Meg keeps with the verisimilitude of the larger Meg metanarrative. With a general awareness of Meg’s unpopularity, one can decipher some amount of effective satire in each of these three episodes, which mostly paint Meg as the sympathetic character and Peter as the satirical target. It is hard to argue that Meg is not the voice of reason in “Hell Comes to Quahog” when she tells Peter, “Dad, I’m sorry I have to say this, but you’re a fat ass who’s completely incapable of performing the simplest tasks.” As indirect satire of other television families, these episodes resist the “cyclical nature of the normalcy of the premise of undergoing stress or threat of change and becoming restored.” Peter does not change, obviously, in any of these episodes, but *Family Guy* is open about his un-malleability. In other TV families, the perception of change is an illusion, as father and daughter—for example—engage in the same conflict over and over again, seemingly resolving it at the end of each episode, only to face it again in the following episode. As indirect satire of the institution of family, in general, these episodes comment on the perceived real experience of children who identify as non-favorites of their parents. Like Meg, they can never quite receive the approval they so desperately seek. Although “Hell Comes to Quahog,” “Road to Rupert” and “Peter’s Daughter” are much different than the episodes covered at the beginning of this section—those which originally aired when *Family Guy* was still finding its voice—they are no less satire. They lack redemptive conclusions, but in doing so make a satirical statement.

Comparing the diverse ways in which *Family Guy* deals with Meg, one of its biggest problems is not giving her enough of a voice. Both of the Peter-and-Meg-centric episode types—those of the older variety and those more representative of their current relationship—afford her a bigger role and, consequently, more power. As mentioned, abrupt interactions with Meg, regardless of the character, appear as a direct attack on her, not an indirect attack on her bullies, as judgment is displaced from its rightful targets. Even if her attackers come across poorly, the brevity of the “Shut up, Meg” moments lack depth and tell us very little about her attackers aside from their obvious cruelty.

To conclude our analysis of Peter and Meg, we will turn our attention to Peter to briefly discuss the meaning of his actions and attitudes toward his only daughter. Based on the examples provided, we cannot describe Peter as a flawed man who loves his daughter. He is more accurately a selfish, negligent, often mean-spirited man who would more likely avoid his daughter than spend time with her. This verdict of Peter possibly disqualifies him from achieving the everyman status of Homer Simpson, who arguably fits the “flawed but loving” description above, which makes him a mirror of most men and most fathers. That Peter lacks relatability to a certain extent does not make his vices any less worthy of censure. Selfishness, negligence, and mean-spiritedness typify some families; even if these vices are not representative of the majority of families as a whole, they at least define isolated incidents inevitable in any family.

Summary

Through the course of this study, our intention was to address several questions and issues specific to *Family Guy*, and more generally to the topics of satire, animation and the sitcom, among them: how is family presented in *Family Guy*? Is there a purpose to the way it is presented, and if so, what is it? Is there anything problematic about *Family Guy*'s use of satire,

especially as it targets the family? How do the filters of animation and television affect the perception of a satiric program like *Family Guy*? Is the “biting satire” of the show—words used by MacFarlane and other writers—actually satire, or is it an umbrella term for everything shocking and offensive?

The literature review of Chapter One established a satiric context for this study, while our analysis of animated form and sitcom structure enlightened our understanding of *Family Guy*'s subversive uniqueness. Chapters Three and Four focused more closely on the family—in particular, the way in which *Family Guy* directly comments on other families, both real and fictional, and the way it comments indirectly on the family through its portrayal of the Griffins. Our analyses up to this point have hopefully addressed and provided answers for the questions above; however, in an attempt to underline our main conclusions and address any questions that have received less attention, the remainder of this essay seeks to tie up any loose ends.

The primary goal in this study was to identify purpose in *Family Guy*'s presentation of the family. Lest we become confused about the implications of an apparent purpose in the show, this does not have any bearing on whether children should or should not watch it; if inappropriateness in the show is deemed satiric, it is still probably inappropriate for certain audiences, even with its arguable purposefulness. Even after subjecting *Family Guy* to a quadripartite analysis by checking its balance of aggression, laughter, play and judgment, we still must ask if it satirizes its target in the most effective manner. Of the examples given of Meg and Peter, is there a better way to satirically represent their relationship, characterized by selfishness, negligence, and mean-spiritedness?

Even if an incident in *Family Guy* is best categorized as satire, rather than parody or abuse, the likely aggressiveness of it might make one question whether it is uncalled for or if “it

functions as a means to an end.”²⁷ The shockingly real nature of many satiric moments in *Family Guy* seems to overshadow the vices symbolized. For example, actions representing general maltreatment, such as Peter punching Meg in the face, might be better understood if the symbolic action were either preposterous or extremely exaggerated, rather than plausible. *Family Guy* features plenty of examples that fit that description—one, for example, is found in “Hell Comes to Quahog.” When Peter buys a tank instead of a car for Meg, no viewer would consider the specificity of the incident as the object of satire—in other words, nobody would, or should, interpret the scene as an attack on tank-buying, because the idea of buying a tank at a car lot is implausible and ridiculous. The scene, at the very least, satirizes a father’s general selfishness.

What happens, though, when the symbolic, satiric action is something very plausible and, further, much worse than the vice it is meant to symbolize? Two incidences in *Family Guy* illustrate this point, and both of them signal retribution for all of the awful things Peter has done. In “Lethal Weapons,” Lois begins taking martial arts lessons and quickly earns her black belt. As her skills develop, she becomes more aggressive and assertive, and ultimately she makes a power play in her marriage. First, she grabs Peter’s crotch in plain sight to assert her dominance after she defeats her martial arts instructor in a match. On a power trip that night, she enters her and Peter’s bedroom and rapes him. The incident is implied after Lois tells Peter to take his underpants off; he reluctantly agrees, and as his hands grip the waste band of his boxers, the shot cuts to the next morning. We only see the aftermath, which involves a traumatized Peter eating Stewie’s graham crackers. “Dial Meg For Murder” features a similar scene, but this time Peter is on the receiving end of Meg’s abuse. In this episode, Meg strikes up a relationship with a convict named Luke. He eventually escapes from prison, and holes up in Meg’s room. They are both caught, and Meg is sent to prison for three months for harboring a fugitive. After Meg completes

her prison term, she comes back to Spooner Street hardened and eager to pay back all those who have given her a hard time. Peter receives the brunt of this punishment. First, she beats him up and curb-stomps him on the bottom stair in the house. Later when Peter is taking a shower, she opens the curtain and enters and proceeds to rape him with a loofah. More graphic than the scene from “Lethal Weapons,” the shot stays on the outside of the shower curtain while Peter screams. The debate about rape’s place in comedy is controversial and complex, and it exceeds the scope of this study. Suffice it to say, because rape is considered a type of power play in reality, it does not fit with the other examples of allegorical satire mentioned. Symbolizing a general problem like the power struggle in a marriage or between a parent and sibling with something as hideous and plausible as rape takes attention away from the object of satire and places it on the symbolic action. In the examples mentioned, one would be hard-pressed to argue that *Family Guy* is commenting on rape or sexual assault. While the carnivalesque nature of animation arguably softens the actions—they appear less graphic on screen than they do described in print—they should be held up to scrutiny and measured for their effectiveness and appropriateness.

The examples in this chapter and earlier dealing specifically with the Griffin family as objects of indirect satire leave us without definitive answers. Are the Griffins like other TV families, especially those they parody, satirize and abuse in their ever-present cutaways? They can be at times. Peter and Lois’s dispute in “The King is Dead” is a fairly typical example of a cyclical story depending on conflict-resolution between a husband and wife. However, its chaotic, non-linear structure, exemplified by its use of cutaways—like almost all episodes of *Family Guy*—disrupts the flow of the cycle; a visual representation of an episode’s structure would surely look like a circle with many meandering paths. Plenty of evidence also suggests the Griffins are not like other TV families. The relationship between Peter and Meg—not to mention

Meg and everyone else on the show—is characterized by its lack of cyclicity. Father and daughter butt heads regularly in *Family Guy*, though the reasons are often unclear, aside from Peter’s seemingly innate dislike of her. His refusal to ever fully concede to his daughter is counter to the tradition of other TV families and to sitcom characters in general.

Closing in true cyclical fashion, we return to the *Family Guy* theme song from the beginning. One presumably considers the second half of the song as the answer to the question in the first half. In their actual order, “Where are those good old fashioned values on which we used to rely?” followed by, “Lucky there’s family guy, lucky there’s a man who positively can do all the things that make us laugh and cry.” Can the second half of the song be better understood not as an answer to the question, but as an alternative? After all, *Family Guy* succeeds fabulously at times in pointing out what is wrong with families—maybe the “good old-fashioned values” were not so good after all—but at times it falls flat in its direct attack on other families and its indirect attack of its own. Peter can do all the things that make us laugh and cry because he cannot show us the good values of today, whatever they may be.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

To deem *Family Guy* as a valuable text or not is a difficult—if not impossible—task, considering the challenge one faces in establishing a definition and/or criteria of “value.” Some find value in the propagation of “traditional” moral examples while others find it in the subversion of tradition; some find value in socially uplifting texts while others find it in texts that target the ugly truth. An audience-centric continuation of this study would certainly illuminate some of the questions left unanswered in our text-centric analyses.

Rather than enter a discussion about *Family Guy*’s “value” at this point, we can more easily see how it fits with another term provided earlier—Douglas Kellner’s “emancipatory text.” Breaking apart the definition of “emancipatory text,” does *Family Guy* “subvert ideological stereotypes, and [show] the inadequacy of the rigid conceptions that prevent insight into the complexities and changes of social life?” Does it “reject idealizations and rationalizations that apologize for the suffering in the present social system and, at its best, [suggest] that another way of life is possible?”¹

The not-so-simple answers to each of those questions are *sometimes, most of the time, and almost never*. This study found tension in *Family Guy*’s satiric—albeit stereotypical—presentation of the family. Surely Peter Griffin is meant to represent the worst of human behaviors at times—however, his persistent sexist speech and actions towards Lois and other woman, coupled with his negligent attitude regarding parental matters make him a stereotype of domineering patriarchy. In general, though, *Family Guy* rejects idealizations and rationalizations

of the present social system—in our case, the family—by attacking idealized families of popular culture’s past and present. Perhaps the most important issue to address is whether *Family Guy* suggests that another way of life is possible, as Ortvéd claims about *The Simpsons*: Homer, for example, stands as “a symbol of what we all strive for and what we should avoid.”² Peter clearly epitomizes that which we should avoid but fails to show us a better way.

Family Guy is an emancipatory text inasmuch that it frees us from our expectations of a formulaic, cyclical sitcom, and by extension, the formulaic sitcom family, arguably existent within all of the eras described by Mills and Tueth. However, its treatment of the family in cutaways and via the Griffins does not so much “[suggest] that another way of life is possible” as it points to ways of life that are not possible. *Family Guy*’s attacks on TV and real families past and present undermine original textual intent and public perception of the targeted families partly in an attempt to get laughs but also to comment on something it finds “ugly” about the text. Its own presentation of the Griffin family does little to offer alternative approaches to family life. After all, the Griffins do not come across any more enviable than the families they parody, satirize and lampoon.

By not showing us what to strive for, *Family Guy* betrays its own attempt to present a truly emancipatory vision of the family. Does its unfulfilled potential disqualify it as a “valuable” text? Considering the strengths and weaknesses of *Family Guy*, this study does not seek to persuade or dissuade one from watching the program. The reader who has never seen *Family Guy* will not likely take our analyses and conclusions as ringing endorsements of the show; conversely, the reader familiar with—even appreciative of—*Family Guy* will not likely consider our study a condemnation. As suggested in the introduction, value arguably lies more in the audience’s approach to the text than in the text itself. Viewers who are able to critique the

ideological and institutional forces that shape culture and formulate their own alternative cultural perspectives do so regardless of the text's subversive or emancipatory propensity.³ The question, then, is how can a viewer approach a text like *Family Guy* with an appropriate critical lens? Through our approach to *Family Guy*, we were able to address critical questions about the show's purpose by unpacking encoded characteristics of the show that largely influence an audience's decodings, or interpretations. Factors pertaining to satire, animation and the sitcom greatly affect the presentation of family, as we have found. With some modification, this same approach could be used to analyze different topics found in *Family Guy*, such as race, politics, and religion. It could also be utilized in analyses of other satiric texts, animated or not, as long as definitions and criteria are adapted according to the genres, modes and forms represented. Similar studies of *Family Guy* or related texts would, at the very least, reveal the same indisputable conclusion found here: this "simple" cartoon is surprisingly complex.

Notes

1 Introduction

1. Walter Murphy (Composer), Seth MacFarlane and David Zuckerman (Lyricists), Main Title, *Family Guy*, 20th Century Fox Television, 1999.
2. “8 Simple Rules for Buying My Teenage Daughter,” #4ACX11, Aired July 10, 2005; “Fresh Heir,” #BACX13, Aired March 23, 2014; “Stewie Kills Lois,” #5ACX17, Aired November 4, 2007.
3. “Parents Television Council-Home,” *Parentstv.org*, accessed February 16, 2015, <http://w2.parentstv.org/Main/>. The Parents Television Council describes itself on the homepage of its website as “A non-partisan education organization advocating responsible entertainment.”
4. John Ortved, *Simpsons Confidential: The Uncensored, Totally Unauthorised History of the World's Greatest TV Show by the People That Made It* (London: Ebury, 2009), 1.
5. *Ibid.*, 3.
6. Wendy Hilton-Morrow and David T. McMahan, “*The Flintstones* to *Futurama*: Networks and Prime Time Animation,” in *Prime Time Animation: Television Animation and American Culture*, ed. Carol A. Stabile and Mark Harrison (New York: Routledge, 2003), 77. The authors clarify the assertion that no animated series appeared between *The Flintstones* and *The Simpsons* by noting the appearance of the brief summer replacement series *Where’s Huddles* in 1970.
7. Diane F. Alters, “We Hardly Watch That Rude, Crude Show: Class and Taste in *The Simpsons*,” in *Prime Time Animation: Television Animation and American Culture*, ed. Carol A. Stabile and Mark Harrison (New York: Routledge, 2003), 177.
8. *Ibid.*, 178.
9. Chris Turner, *Planet Simpson* (London: Ebury Press, 2005), 9.
10. Matthew A. Henry, *The Simpsons, Satire, and American Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 22.
11. Alters, “We Hardly Watch,” 165.
12. Douglas Kellner, “TV, Ideology, and Emancipatory Popular Culture,” in *Television: The Critical View*, 4th ed., ed. Horace Newcomb (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 489.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Mary Reeves, “School is Hell: Learning with (and from) *The Simpsons*,” Daspit, Toby, and John A. Weaver. *Popular Culture and Critical Pedagogy: Reading, Constructing, Connecting* (New York: Garland Pub., 1999), 47.
15. *Ibid.*
16. Alters, “We Hardly Watch,” 165. One cannot draw a straight line from *The Simpsons* to these FOX programs. The popularity of *The Simpsons* arguably made their existence possible, but a number of other animated programs—especially those that faced (and continue to face) looser censors on cable TV—such as *Beavis & Butthead*, *Ren & Stimpy*,

-
- and *South Park* have greatly influenced the increased grotesqueness and crudeness of modern FOX animated programs, including *The Simpsons*.
17. Turner, *Planet Simpson*, 9.
 18. *Ibid.*, 8.
 19. Nellie Andreeva, "Full Series Rankings for the 2009-10 Broadcast Season," *deadline.com*, May 27, 2010, <http://deadline.com/2010/05/full-series-rankings-for-the-2009-10-broadcast-season-44277/>; Nellie Andreeva, "Full 2010-11 TV Season Series Rankings," *deadline.com*, May 27, 2011, <http://deadline.com/2011/05/full-2010-11-season-series-rankings-135917/>; Nellie Andreeva, "Full 2011-12 TV Season Series Rankings," *deadline.com*, May 24, 2012, <http://deadline.com/2012/05/full-2011-2012-tv-season-series-rankings-277941/>; Dominic Patten, "Full 2012-13 TV Season Series Rankings," *deadline.com*, May 23, 2013, <http://deadline.com/2013/05/tv-season-series-rankings-2013-full-list-506970/>; "Full 2013-14 TV Season Series Rankings," *deadline.com*, May 22, 2014, <http://deadline.com/2014/05/tv-season-series-rankings-2013-full-list-2-733762/>.
 20. Frazier Moore, "'Family Guy:' So Wrong, But So Very, Very Right," *huffingtonpost.com*, July 9, 2008, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/07/01/family-guy-so-wrong-but-s_n_110141.html.
 21. Ken Tucker, "Long Live 'King,'" *Entertainment Weekly*, April 9, 1999, 52.
 22. "'Simpsons'/'Family Guy' crossover under fire for rape joke," *CBSnews.com*, September 24, 2014, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/simpsons-family-guy-crossover-under-fire-for-rape-joke/>.
 23. "Emily Blunt Wants to Star in Family Guy," *The Nation*, June 12, 2009, <http://nation.com.pk/Entertainment/12-Jun-2009/Emily-Blunt-wants-to-star-in-Family-Guy>; Chris Sheridan, Family Guy season 4 DVD commentary for the episode "The Fat Guy Strangler" (DVD). 20th Century Fox, 2005. In this commentary, Sheridan explains that actor Robert Downey, Jr., approached the staff of Family Guy and asked if he could be involved in an episode, which resulted in Season 4's "The Fat Guy Strangler."
 24. James Poniewozik, "Hyper Animation," *Time Magazine*, October 26, 2009, 61.
 25. "The Simpsons Guy," #BACX22/BACX23, Aired September 28, 2014. A *Family Guy* episode set in *The Simpsons* universe, this episode came under fire for a scene in which Stewie Griffin attempts to impress Bart Simpson by prank-calling Moe's Tavern. Instead of asking a mildly crude question as Bart typically does, Stewie says to Moe, "Your sister is being raped." The shocked look on Bart's face after Stewie makes this statement epitomizes the difference between these programs.
 26. Henry, *The Simpsons, Satire and American Culture*, 42.
 27. Bethany Ogdon, "Why Teach Popular Culture," *College English* 63, no. 4 (2001): 500-515; Richard Beach and David O'Brien, "Teaching Popular Culture Texts in the Classroom," in *Handbook of Research on New Literacies*, ed. Julie Coiro (New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates/Taylor & Francis Group, 2008), 775-804. The quote comes from Beach and O'Brien.
 28. "The Father, The Son, and the Holy Fonz," #4ACX22, Aired December 18, 2005; "Mr. Griffin Goes to Washington," #2ACX11, Aired July 25, 2001; "PTV," #4ACX17, Aired November 6, 2005.
 29. "Top 10 Worst Anti-Family Shows on Television," *Human Events*, August 25, 2000, 12.

-
30. "Program Information: *Family Guy*," www.parentstv.org, accessed February 16, 2015.
<http://w2.parentstv.org/Main/News/Detail.aspx?ProgramID=504>
 31. "PTC Mission," www.parentstv.org, accessed February 16, 2015.
<http://w2.parentstv.org/main/About/mission.aspx>
 32. Ibid.
 33. Dustin H. Griffin, *Satire: A Critical Reintroduction* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 1.
 34. George A. Test, *Satire: Spirit and Art* (Tampa: University of South Florida Press, 1991), 16-17.
 35. Michael V. Tueth, "Back to the Drawing Board: The Family in Animated Television Comedy," in *Prime Time Animation: Television Animation and American Culture*, ed. Carol A. Stable and Mark Harrison (New York: Routledge, 2003), 134.
 36. Test, *Satire: Spirit and Art*, 2.
 37. Paul Wells, *Animation and America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 74.
 38. LaChrystal D. Ricke, "Funny or Harmful?: Derogatory Speech on Fox's *Family Guy*," *Communication Studies* (63, no. 2, April-June 2012), 121.
 39. Ibid., 120.
 40. Nick Marx, "*Family Guy*: Undermining Satire," *How to Watch Television*, ed. Ethan Thompson and Jason Mittell (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 178.
 41. Ibid., 178.
 42. Ibid., 179.
 43. Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-79* (London: Hutchinson, 1980), 174-175.
 44. Test, *Satire: Spirit and Art*, 13.
 45. Ibid.
 46. Linda A. Morris, "American Satire: Beginnings Through Mark Twain," *A Companion to Satire: Ancient and Modern*, ed. Ruben Quintero (Malden, MA: Blackwell, Pub., 2007) 377.
 47. Stephen E. Kercher, *Revel with a Cause: Liberal Satire in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 1-2.
 48. Ibid., 59.
 49. Ibid., 164.
 50. Ibid., 164-165.
 51. Brett Mills, *Television Sitcom* (London: BFI, 2005), 8.
 52. Ibid., 8-9.
 53. Tueth, "Back to the Drawing Board," 135, 138-139.
 54. Ibid., 139.
 55. Ibid., 133.
 56. Brett Mills, *The Sitcom* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 21.
 57. David Marc, *Demographic Vistas: Television in American Culture* (London, Sydney and Wellington: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 56.
 58. Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 11.
 59. Test, *Satire: Spirit and Art*, 5.
 60. Ibid., 15.

-
61. Ibid., 16.
 62. Ibid., 19.
 63. Ibid., 23.
 64. Ibid.
 65. Ibid., 16.
 66. Ibid., 28.
 67. Ibid.
 68. Ibid., 34.
 69. Henry, *The Simpsons, Satire, and American Culture*, 9.
 70. Test, *Satire: Spirit and Art*, 34.
 71. Ibid., 103.
 72. Ibid., 112.
 73. Ibid., 116.
 74. Ibid., 121.
 75. Ibid., 30.
 76. Ibid., 267.
 77. Ibid., 17.
 78. Ibid., 16.
 79. Ibid., 16-17.
 80. Ibid., 18-19.
 81. Ibid., 43.
 82. Ibid., 47.
 83. Ibid., 48.
 84. Ibid.
 85. Ibid., 51-52.
 86. Ibid., 44.
 87. Tueth, "Back to the Drawing Board, 141.
 88. Ellen Bishop, "Bakhtin, Carnival and Comedy: The New Grotesque in Monty Python and the Holy Grail," *Film Criticism* 15, no. 1 (September 1990), 49.
 89. Ibid., 50.
 90. Ibid., 58.
 91. Robert Stam, *Subversive Pleasures* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 86.
 92. Ibid., 49.
 93. Darrell Y. Hamamoto, *Nervous Laughter: Television Situation Comedy and Liberal Democratic Ideology* (New York: Praeger, 1989), 2.
 94. Henry, *The Simpsons, Satire and American Culture*, 24.
 95. Ibid., 25.
 96. Allen Larson, "Re-Drawing the Bottom Line," in *Prime Time Animation: Television Animation and American Culture*, ed. Carol A. Stabile and Mark Harrison (New York: Routledge, 2003), 59-60.
 97. T.L. Stanley, "Billion-dollar Franchise? Fox Eyes 'Family' Value," *Advertising Age* 76, no. 17 (April 25, 2005), 12.
 98. Stuart Elliott, "Crude? So What? These Characters Still Find Work in Ads," *New York Times* (New York, NY), June 18, 2008.

-
99. T.L. Stanley, "All Kidding Aside, Here Comes a Family Guy Beer," *Brandweek* 48, no. 42 (November 19, 2007), 9.
 100. "The 25 Smartest People in TV," *Entertainment Weekly*, December 12, 2008, 40-47.
 101. Joanne Ostrow, "HBO Leads the Pack in Bringing Satire Back," *Denver Post*, June 8, 1997, H01.
 102. Ella Taylor, *Prime Time Families: Television Culture in Postwar America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), 17.
 103. Tueth, "Back to the Drawing Board, 134-135.
 104. *Ibid.*, 139.
 105. Jeremy Wisnewski, "Killing the Griffins: A Murderous Exposition of Postmodernism," in *Family Guy and Philosophy: A Cure for the Petarded*, ed. Jeremy Wisnewski (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2007), 9.
 106. Tucker, "Long Live 'King,'" 52.
 107. Ricke, "Funny or Harmful?" 120.
 108. Ortved, *Simpsons Confidential*, 259; Marx, "Family Guy: Undermining Satire," 178.
 109. Suzanne Williams-Rautiola, "Animated Fathers: Representations of Masculinity in *The Simpsons* and *King of the Hill*," in *Animated 'Worlds'*, ed. Suzanne Buchan and David Surman (Eastleigh, U.K.: J. Libbey Pub., 2006), 98-99.

2 The Subversive Look and Feel of *Family Guy*

1. Alters, "We Hardly Watch," 176.
2. David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction* (New York: McGraw-Hill Companies, 2008), 56. Says Bordwell and Thompson: "Every component *functions as the overall pattern* that engages the viewer."
3. Kristin Thompson, "Implications of the Cel Animation Technique," in *The Cinematic Apparatus*, ed. Teresa De Lauretis and Stephen Heath (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980), 106-107.
4. *Ibid.*, 106.
5. *Ibid.*, 106-107.
6. *Ibid.*, 108.
7. *Ibid.*, 107.
8. *Ibid.*, 107-108.
9. *Ibid.*, 108.
10. *Ibid.*, 110.
11. *Ibid.*
12. Annette Kuhn, "History of Narrative Codes," in *The Cinema Book: A Complete Guide to Understanding Movies*, ed. Pam Cook (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 208.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*, 216.
15. To be clear, any discussion of the IMR thus far in this chapter, be it related to texts that support it or texts that resist it, is in reference to live-action film and animation released *theatrically*, before the advent of television.

-
16. Terrance R. Lindvall and J. Matthew Melton, "Towards a Post-Modern Animated Discourse: Bakhtin, Intertextuality and the Cartoon Carnival," in *A Reader in Animation Studies*, ed. Jayne Pilling (London: J. Libbey, 1997), 210.
 17. *Ibid.*, 209.
 18. In this Chuck Jones *Merrie Melodies* short from 1953, Daffy Duck interacts with his artist, who continually erases and re-draws the background, scenery, and costumes, thus angering Daffy. At the end of the short, the animator is revealed to be Bugs Bunny.
 19. Paul Wells, *Animation and America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 45.
 20. *Ibid.*
 21. *Ibid.*, 46.
 22. *Ibid.*, 49.
 23. *Ibid.*
 24. *Ibid.*, 13.
 25. *Ibid.*, 50.
 26. *Ibid.*
 27. *Ibid.*
 28. Timothy R. White, "From Disney to Warner Bros.: The Critical Shift," in *Reading the Rabbit: Explorations in Warner Bros. Animation*, ed. Kevin S. Sandler (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 45.
 29. Ronald Holloway, *Z Is for Zagreb* (London: Tantivy Press, 1972), 9.
 30. This Oscar-winning animated short (1961) follows the story of a man who inflates almost everything he sees during a trip to the beach.
 31. Jason Mittell, "The Great Saturday Morning Exile," in *Prime Time Animation: Television Animation and American Culture*, ed. Carol A. Stabile and Mark Harrison (New York: Routledge, 2003), 34.
 32. *Ibid.*
 33. *Ibid.*, 43.
 34. Rebecca Farley, "From Fred and Wilma to Ren and Stimpy: What Makes a Cartoon "Prime Time?" in *Prime Time Animation: Television Animation and American Culture*, ed. Carol A. Stabile and Mark Harrison (New York: Routledge, 2003), 151.
 35. Mittell, "The Great Saturday Morning Exile," 42-43.
 36. *Ibid.*, 47.
 37. *Ibid.*, 42.
 38. *Ibid.*, 50.
 39. *Ibid.*
 40. Larson, "Re-Drawing the Bottom Line," 56.
 41. Tueth, "Back to the Drawing Board, 141-142.
 42. *Ibid.*, 141.
 43. "Best and Worst TV Shows of the Week," *parentstv.org*, accessed February 20, 2015, <http://www.parentstv.org/ptc/publications/bw/welcome.asp>. This list includes the Parents Television Council's picks for Best and Worst Shows of the Week over a three-year span.
 44. Lynette Rice, "Ratings Alert: What You're Watching If You're 11, 50, or 34 Years Old (The Results May Surprise You!)," *Entertainment Weekly*, January 17, 2015. <http://www.ew.com/article/2011/03/15/ratings-by-age>. *Family Guy* finished behind two

American Idol specials this week in this demographic. Granted, the weaknesses of the Nielsen ratings system and the size of this demographic—which includes at least sixteen years that cannot be considered childhood—makes conclusions about this data dubious at best.

45. See note 1 above; Susan explains she does not approve of the *look* and *feel* of *The Simpsons*, but she is unable to explain why.
46. Larry Mintz, “Situation Comedy,” in *TV Genres: A Handbook and Reference Guide*, ed. Brian G. Rose (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985), 114-15.
47. Mills, *The Sitcom*, 39.
48. Ibid.
49. “The King Is Dead,” #1ACX15, Aired March 28, 2000.
50. This analysis of “The King Is Dead” utilizes film terminology related to framing and editing, and it also refers to “the camera” when describing transitions. Our use of the word “camera” is meant to simplify the concepts behind our discussion, given that *Family Guy* uses an animated rendition of a multi-camera setup.
51. Debate exists about Stewie’s intelligibility among other characters of *Family Guy*. According to MacFarlane—and supported by their interactions on the show—Brian always hears Stewie, but the rest of the family typically does not. MacFarlane addressed these issues in a 2011 Comic-Con interview, which can be seen here: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/07/24/who-understands-stewie-on-family-guy_n_908040.html.
52. *Slight decline* should not be interpreted as abandonment; besides Season Eight’s “Brian and Stewie,” which distinctly features no cutaways, every episode of *Family Guy* includes at least one cutaway.
53. Jason Hughes, “Sundays With Seth: It’s Just One Madcap Adventure After Another,” *TV Squad*, <http://www.aoltv.com/2010/05/17/sundays-with-seth-its-just-one-madcap-adventure-after-another/>.
54. “Cartoon Wars Part II,” #1004, Aired April 12, 2006. In this Season Ten episode of *South Park*, Eric Cartman meets the writers of *Family Guy*, who turn out to be an aggregation of manatees. These manatees get their ideas for *Family Guy* episodes, and especially the cutaway gags, by pushing idea balls into a random generator. The point is that the cutaways are so tangential as to not be relevant or funny.
55. Though somewhat different than the typical *Family Guy* cutaway, an extreme disruption of family life—or whatever else is going on at a given moment—is the entrance of Ernie the Giant Chicken, who appears randomly in over a dozen episodes to fight Peter. Season Five’s “No Chris Left Behind” features a perfect example: Peter and Lois sit at the table discussing possible solutions to Chris’s repeated failures at school. As Peter debates Chris’s options, he is stopped in his tracks when he sees Ernie looking at him through the window. A fight erupts that lasts five minutes, thus disrupting the flow of their family problem.

3 Other Families in *Family Guy*

1. “100th Episode Special,” November 4, 2007.
2. Test, *Satire: Spirit and Art*, 17 (see chap. 1, n. 77).
3. Ibid.

-
4. An exception is the cutaway of *The Jetsons* in “Meet the Quagmires,” which uncannily resembles the original animation by Hanna-Barbera.
 5. “The Son Also Draws,” #1ACX06, Aired May 9, 1999.
 6. “The Tan Aquatic with Steve Zissou,” #5ACX06, Aired February 18, 2007.
 7. See note 77, Chapter 1. Henry, *The Simpsons, Satire, and American Culture*, 9 (see chap. 1, n. 69).
 8. In *Satire: Spirit and Art*, Test gives examples of satires by H.L. Mencken—the so-called Great Bathub Hoax, published as “A Neglected Anniversary” in the New York Evening Mail on December 28, 1927—and Herbert R. Mayers—a mock biography of Horatio Alger, called *A Biography Without a Hero* published a year later—that were generally received as factual by readers. Following the publication of these texts, some researchers cited them as factual in serious articles and books. Test notes, “the irony that should have been produced was in fact stillborn since no one recognized the models that were being mocked. The only irony was in the eye of the creator.” See Test, *Satire: Spirit and Art*, 182.
 9. *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*. 11th ed. Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 2003, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/>.
 10. “North by North Quahog,” #4ACX01, Aired May 1, 2005.
 11. “The Story on Page One,” #2ACX14, Aired July 18, 2000.
 12. “Fore Father,” #2ACX16, Aired August 1, 2000.
 13. “North by North Quahog,” #4ACX01, Aired May 1, 2005.
 14. Test, *Satire: Spirit and Art*, 26.
 15. Aubree Bowling, “Worst TV Show of the Week: *Family Guy* on Fox,” PTC.com, June 13, 2007, <http://web.archive.org/web/20070613130300/http://www.parentstv.org/PTC/publications/bw/2005/0508worst.asp>.
 16. Most notably in the *Little House on the Prairie* cutaway from “Fore Father.”
 17. “Emission Impossible,” #3ACX01, Aired November 8, 2001.
 18. “PTV,” #4ACX17, Aired November 6, 2005.
 19. “The Worst Examples of Cousin Oliver Syndrome in TV Sitcom History.” *Crustula.com*. October 8, 2012. <http://crustula.com/2012/10/08/the-worst-examples-of-cousin-oliver-syndrome-in-tv-sitcom-history/>.
One blogger goes so far as to call Cousin Oliver the precedent for this sitcom phenomenon: “*Cousin Oliver Syndrome* is the well worn TV sitcom trope of introducing a younger character to the cast of a show in its later years as a desperate attempt to add life to a show that has grown a big long in the tooth.”
 20. Griffin, *Satire: A Critical Reintroduction*, 1; Morris, “American Satire: Beginnings,” 377; Kercher, *Revel with a Cause*, 1-2.
 21. “Brian: Portrait of a Dog,” #1ACX07, Aired May 16, 1999.
 22. “Peter, Peter, Caviar Eater,” #1ACX08, Aired September 23, 1999.
 23. Tueth, “Back to the drawing board: The family in animated television comedy,” 138.
 24. “The Son Also Draws.”
 25. Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*, 11 (see chap. 1, n. 58).
 26. “PTV.”
 27. Mills, *Television Sitcom*, 8; Tueth, “Back to the Drawing Board,” 135, 138-139.
 28. Pamela Wilson, “*The Waltons*,” *Encyclopedia of Television*, accessed March 14, 2015,

-
- <http://www.museum.tv/eotv/waltonsthe.htm>
29. Lisa Anne Lewis, "Happy Days," *Encyclopedia of Television*, accessed March 14, 2015, <http://www.museum.tv/eotv/happydays.htm>
 30. Wilson, "The Waltons," <http://www.museum.tv/eotv/waltonsthe.htm>
 31. Bishetta D. Merrit, "Bill Cosby," *Encyclopedia of Television*, accessed March 14, 2015, <http://www.museum.tv/eotv/cosbybill.htm>
 32. "Brian in Love," #2ACX01, Aired March 7, 2000.
 33. "Meet the Quagmires," #5ACX13, Aired May 20, 2007.
 34. Mintz, "Situation Comedy," 114-15 (see chap. 2, n. 47).
 35. "8 Simple Rules for Buying My Teenage Daughter," #4ACX11, Aired July 10, 2005; "I Take Thee Quagmire," #4ACX11, aired July 10, 2005.
 36. Although the characters portrayed are Ray and Debra Barone of *Everybody Loves Raymond*, Ray calls his wife "Patty"—a reference to the actress who plays Debra, Patricia Heaton.
 37. "Mr. Griffin Goes To Washington," #2ACX11, Aired July 25, 2001.
 38. "PTV."
 39. "Let's Go To The Hop," #2ACX04, Aired June 6, 2000.
 40. Dallas W. Smythe, "On the Audience Commodity and its Work," *Dependency Road: Communications, Capitalism, Consciousness, and Canada* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex Pub., 1981), 38-39.
 41. *Miss Representation*, directed by Jennifer Siebel Newsom and Kimberlee Acquaro (2011; USA: The Oprah Winfrey Network, 2011) TV.
 42. Similar to the way in which Saturday Morning cartoons function as a half-hour-long commercial.
 43. Test, *Satire: Spirit and Art*, 121 (see chap. 1, n. 74).
 44. "Brian Sings and Swings," #4ACX21, Aired January 8, 2006.
 45. Test, *Satire: Spirit and Art*, 122.
 46. *Ibid.*, 123.
 47. "Fast Times at Buddy Cianci Jr. High," #4ACX02, Aired May 8, 2005.
 48. CNN Larry King Live, "Interview with Marie Osmond," *CNN.com*, August 7, 2004, <http://www.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0408/07/lkl.01.html>.
 49. Jennifer Vineyard, "Britney Spears and Parenting: A Timeline of Tumult," *MTV.com*, October 1, 2007, <http://www.mtv.com/news/1570950/britney-spears-and-parenting-a-timeline-of-tumult/>.
 50. "The Tan Aquatic with Steve Zissou," #5ACX06, February 18, 2007.
 51. A clearer example of *Family Guy* satirizing the media appears in "Saving Private Brian." Commenting on the obsession of news media to focus on tragic stories involving young, white girls, a cutaway begins in which an officer standing outside of a crashed school bus announces the death of nine-year-old Becky Gunderson. After reporters at the scene sigh, the officer announces, "No, wait. That's Becki Gutierrez." The reporters this time sigh in relief, and one says, "That's not news."
 52. "Peter-Assment," #7ACX16, Aired March 21, 2010.
 53. Arthur Caplan, "Ten Years After Terri Sciavo, Death Debates Still Divide Us: Bioethicist," *nbcnews.com*, March 31, 2015, <http://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/bioethicist-tk-n333536>. The debate in this case centered on the desires of Terri's husband, Michael, who

-
- wanted her feeding tube removed, and her family, who believed she would have wanted to live.
54. Suzanne Vitadamo, "Five Years Later, Terri Schiavo Mocked on Fox Prime Time," *Christian Newswire*, March 22, 2010, <http://www.christiannewswire.com/news/3538013418.html>.
 55. Jill Staneck, "TV show *Family Guy*: 'Terri Schiavo, the Musical,'" *jillstaneck.com*, March 22, 2010, <http://www.jillstaneck.com/2010/03/tv-show-family-guy-terri-schiavo-the-musical/>.
 56. "Extra Large Medium," #7ACX14, Aired February 14, 2010.
 57. Sarah Palin, "Fox Hollywood—What a Disappointment," *facebook.com*, February 15, 2010, <https://www.facebook.com/notes/sarah-palin/fox-hollywood-what-a-disappointment/305122263434>.
 58. TJ Ortenzi, "Sarah Palin Responds To 'Family Guy' And Repeats Call For Rahm Emanuel To Resign," *huffingtonpost.com*, April 18, 2010, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/02/16/sarah-palin-responds-to-f_n_464939.html.
 59. Maria Elena Fernandez, "Sarah Palin vs. *Family Guy*: Seth MacFarlane Responds (Sort of)," *Los Angeles Times*, February 16, 2010, <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/showtracker/2010/02/sarah-palin-v-family-guy.html>.
 60. Besides the controversial attack of Palin in "Extra Large Medium," *Family Guy* attacks Palin in the episode "Road to Germany." Part of the "Road to..." series of episodes starring Stewie and Brian, the two travel back in time to Germany, and in their adventures they pick up a Nazi uniform that has a McCain-Palin button on it.
 61. "Fat Guy Strangler," #4ACX20, Aired November 27, 2005; "PTV;" "Stewie Loves Lois," #4ACX32, Aired September 10, 2006.
 62. Test, *Satire: Spirit and Art*, 124.
 63. Test, *Satire: Spirit and Art*, 47 (see chap. 1, n. 82).

4 The Griffin Family as Indirect Satire

1. "Running Mates," #1ACX09, Aired April 9, 2000; "April in Quahog," #7ACX18, Aired April 11, 2010; "Lois Kills Stewie," #5ACX18, Aired November 11, 2007; "Brian Griffin's House of Payne," #7ACX13, Aired March 28, 2010; "Bango Was His Name Oh," #4ACX06, Aired May 21, 2006; "Lethal Weapons," #2ACX18, Aired August 22, 2001. "The Father, The Son, and the Holy Fonz," #4ACX22, Aired December 18, 2005; "8 Simple Rules for Buying My Teenage Daughter;" "Peter's Daughter," #5ACX21, Aired November 25, 2007.
2. Test, *Satire: Spirit and Art*, 17 (see chap. 1, n. 77).
3. *Ibid.*, 48 (see chap. 1, n. 83).
4. *Ibid.*, 58 (see chap. 1, n. 90).
5. "Lisa's Pony," #8F06, Aired November 7, 1991; "Lisa's Sax," #3G02, Aired October 19, 1997; "Lisa the Beauty Queen," #9F02, Aired October 15, 1992; "Homer vs. Lisa and the 8th Commandment," #7F13, Aired February 7, 1991; "And Maggie Makes Three," #2F10, Aired January 22, 1995.
6. Ortved, *Simpsons Confidential*, 258.
7. "Make Room For Lisa," #AABF12, Aired February 28, 1999.

-
8. Test 16.
 9. Ibid., 18-19.
 10. Ibid., 16-17.
 11. Kercher, 1-2.
 12. Test, *Satire: Spirit and Art*, 48.
 13. “The Story on Page One.”
 14. “8 Simple Rules For Buying My Teenage Daughter.”
 15. “Let’s Go To The Hop.”
 16. “IGN’s Top 25 *Family Guy* Characters,” *IGN*, May 27, 2009, <http://www.ign.com/articles/2009/05/28/igns-top-25-family-guy-characters?page=5>. In conjunction with characters’ changes, the show has also gotten considerably cruder in comparison to its earlier seasons. Matt Collazo, “Modern Propaganda: How Animated Comedies Can Change Our Opinions,” *TheArtifice.com*, July 10, 2014, <http://the-artifice.com/animated-comedies-change-our-opinions/>.
 17. “Model Misbehavior,” #4ACX13, Aired July 24, 2005; “German Guy,” #8ACX14, Aired February 20, 2011; “Halloween on Spooner Street,” #8ACX06, Aired November 7, 2010; “Stuck Together, Torn Apart,” #3ACX10, Aired January 31, 2002; “Petergeist,” #4ACX29, Aired May 7, 2006; “Big Man On Hippocampus,” #7ACX09, Aired January 3, 2010; “PTV.”
 18. Whitey McRosenski, “Shut up, Meg,” *Urban Dictionary*, updated September 17, 2010, <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Shut+up%2C+Meg>. *Urban Dictionary*’s definition: “Taken from the hit sitcom *Family Guy*, this phrase can be said to anybody who either kills a joke, makes an uncalled for comment, or otherwise just needs to be ridiculed spontaneously.” The last reason reflects the treatment of Meg most accurately.
 19. “Untitled Griffin Family History,” #4ACX30, May 14, 2006; “Model Misbehavior;” “Not All Dogs Go To Heaven,” #6ACX17, Aired March 29, 2009; “Don’t Make Me Over,” #4ACX03, Aired June 5, 2005; “Jerome Is The New Black,” #7ACX08, Aired November 22, 2009.
 20. Actress Lacey Chabert voiced Meg—uncredited—during the first season of *Family Guy*.
 21. Kris De Leon, “Mila Kunis Talks About Working on *Family Guy* and Her Upcoming Movie,” *Buddy TV*, September 3, 2009, <http://www.buddytv.com/articles/family-guy/milas-kunis-talks-about-workin-11435.aspx>.
 22. “Breaking Out Is Hard To Do,” #4ACX12, Aired July 17, 2005; “Let’s Go To The Hop;” “Don’t Make Me Over.”
 23. Even though, technically, Meg is the oldest child in the Griffin family.
 24. “Hell Comes To Quahog,” #4ACX33, Aired September 24, 2006.
 25. “Road To Rupert,” #5ACX04, Aired January 28, 2007.
 26. “Peter’s Daughter,” #5ACX21, Aired November 25, 2007.
 27. Test, *Satire: Spirit and Art*, 114.

5 Conclusion

1. Kellner, “TV,” 489 (see chap. 1, n. 12).
2. Ortved, *Simpsons Confidential*, 258 (see chap. 4, n. 6).

-
3. Ogdon, "Why Teach Popular Culture," 500-515; Beach and O'Brien, "Teaching Popular Culture Texts," 775-804 (see chap. 1, n. 27).

Bibliography

- “The 25 Smartest People in TV.” *Entertainment Weekly*. December 12, 2008. 40-47.
- Alters, Diane F. “We Hardly Watch That Rude, Crude Show: Class and taste in *The Simpsons*.” In *Prime Time Animation: Television Animation and American Culture*, edited by Carol A. Stabile and Mark Harrison, 165-84. New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Andreeva, Nellie. “Full Series Rankings for the 2009-10 Broadcast Season.” *Deadline.com*. May 27, 2010. <http://deadline.com/2010/05/full-series-rankings-for-the-2009-10-broadcast-season-44277/>.
- Andreeva, Nellie. “Full 2010-11 TV Season Series Rankings.” *Deadline.com*. May 27, 2011. <http://deadline.com/2011/05/full-2010-11-season-series-rankers-135917/>.
- Andreeva, Nellie. “Full 2011-12 TV Season Series Rankings.” *Deadline.com*. May 24, 2012. <http://deadline.com/2012/05/full-2011-2012-tv-season-series-rankings-277941/>.
- Beach, Richard and David O’Brien. “Teaching Popular Culture Texts in the Classroom.” In *Handbook of Research on New Literacies*, edited by Julie Coiro, 775-804. New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates/Taylor & Francis Group, 2008.
- “Best and Worst TV Shows of the Week.” *Parentstv.org*. Accessed February 20, 2015. <http://www.parentstv.org/ptc/publications/bw/welcome.asp>.
- Bishop, Ellen. “Bakhtin, Carnival and Comedy: The New Grotesque in Monty Python and the Holy Grail.” *Film Criticism* 15, no. 1 (September 1990): 49.
- Bordwell, David and Kristin Thompson. *Film Art: An Introduction*. New York: McGraw-Hill Companies, 2008.
- Bowling, Aubree. “Worst TV Show of the Week: *Family Guy* on Fox.” *Parentstv.org*. June 13, 2007. <http://web.archive.org/web/20070613130300/http://www.parentstv.org/PTC/publications/bw/2005/0508worst.asp>.
- Caplan, Arthur. “Ten Years After Terri Sciavo, Death Debates Still Divide Us: Bioethicist” *NBCnews.com*. March 31, 2015. <http://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/bioethicist-tk-n333536>.
- Collazo, Matt. “Modern Propaganda: How Animated Comedies Can Change Our Opinions.” *TheArtifice.com*, July 10, 2014. <http://the-artifice.com/animated-comedies-change-our-opinions/>.
- Coontz, Stephanie. *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*. New York: Basic Books, 2000.

De Leon, Kris. "Mila Kunis Talks About Working on *Family Guy* and Her Upcoming Movie." *Buddy TV*. September 3, 2009. <http://www.buddytv.com/articles/family-guy/milas-kunis-talks-about-workin-11435.aspx>.

Elliott, Stuart. "Crude? So what? These characters still find work in ads." *New York Times* (New York, NY), June 18, 2008.

"Emily Blunt wants to star in *Family Guy*." *The Nation*. June 12, 2009. <http://nation.com.pk/Entertainment/12-Jun-2009/Emily-Blunt-wants-to-star-in-Family-Guy>.

Family Guy. Created by Seth MacFarlane. FOX Television Network, 1999-2002, 2005-present.

- . "100th Episode Special." Aired November 4, 2007.
- . "8 Simple Rules for Buying My Teenage Daughter." #4ACX11. Aired July 10, 2005.
- . "April in Quahog." #7ACX18. Aired April 11, 2010.
- . "Bango Was His Name Oh." #4ACX06. Aired May 21, 2006.
- . "Big Man On Hippocampus." #7ACX09. Aired January 3, 2010.
- . "Breaking Out Is Hard To Do." #4ACX12. Aired July 17, 2005.
- . "Brian and Stewie." #7ACX20. Aired May 2, 2010.
- . "Brian Griffin's House of Payne." #7ACX13. Aired March 28, 2010.
- . "Brian in Love." #2ACX01. Aired March 7, 2000.
- . "Brian: Portrait of a Dog." #1ACX07. Aired May 16, 1999.
- . "Brian Sings and Swings." #4ACX21. Aired January 8, 2006.
- . "Call Girl." #AACX12. Aired March 10, 2013.
- . "Dial Meg for Murder." #7ACX12. Aired January 31, 2010.
- . "Don't Make Me Over." #4ACX03. Aired June 5, 2005.
- . "Emission Impossible." #3ACX01. Aired November 8, 2001.
- . "Extra Large Medium." #7ACX14. Aired February 14, 2010.
- . "Fast Times at Buddy Cianci Jr. High." #4ACX02. Aired May 8, 2005.
- . "The Father, The Son, and the Holy FonZ." #4ACX22. Aired December 18, 2005.
- . "Fat Guy Strangler." #4ACX20. Aired November 27, 2005.
- . "Fore Father." #2ACX16. Aired August 1, 2000.
- . "Fresh Heir." #BACX13. Aired March 23, 2014.
- . "German Guy." #8ACX14. Aired February 20, 2011.
- . "Halloween on Spooner Street." #8ACX06. Aired November 7, 2010.
- . "Hell Comes To Quahog." #4ACX33. Aired September 24, 2006.
- . "I Take Thee Quagmire." #4ACX11. Aired July 10, 2005.
- . "Jerome Is The New Black." #7ACX08. Aired November 22, 2009.
- . "The King Is Dead." #1ACX15. Aired March 28, 2000.
- . "Lethal Weapons." #2ACX18. Aired August 22, 2001.
- . "Let's Go To The Hop." #2ACX04. Aired June 6, 2000.
- . "Lois Kills Stewie." #5ACX18. Aired November 11, 2007.
- . "Meet the Quagmires." #5ACX13. Aired May 20, 2007.
- . "Model Misbehavior." #4ACX13. Aired July 24, 2005.
- . "Mr. Griffin Goes to Washington." #2ACX11. Aired July 25, 2001.

- . “No Chris Left Behind.” #5ACX11. Aired May 6, 2007.
- . “North by North Quahog.” #4ACX01. Aired May 1, 2005.
- . “Not All Dogs Go To Heaven.” #6ACX17. Aired March 29, 2009.
- . “Peter-Assment.” #7ACX16. Aired March 21, 2010.
- . “Peter, Peter, Caviar Eater.” #1ACX08. Aired September 23, 1999.
- . “Peter’s Daughter.” #5ACX21. Aired November 25, 2007.
- . “Petergeist.” #4ACX29. Aired May 7, 2006.
- . “PTV.” #4ACX17. Aired November 6, 2005.
- . “Road to Germany.” #6ACX08. Aired October 19, 2008.
- . “Road To Rupert,” #5ACX04, Aired January 28, 2007.
- . “Running Mates.” #1ACX09. Aired April 9, 2000.
- . “Saving Private Brian.” #4ACX34. Aired November 5, 2006.
- . “The Simpsons Guy.” #BACX22/BACX23. Aired September 28, 2014.
- . “The Son Also Draws.” #1ACX06. Aired May 9, 1999.
- . “Stewie Kills Lois.” #5ACX17. Aired November 4, 2007.
- . “Stewie Loves Lois,” #4ACX32, Aired September 10, 2006
- . “The Story on Page One.” #2ACX14. Aired July 18, 2000.
- . “Stuck Together, Torn Apart.” #3ACX10, Aired January 31, 2002.
- . “The Tan Aquatic with Steve Zissou.” #5ACX06. Aired February 18, 2007.
- . “Untitled Griffin Family History.” #4ACX30. May 14, 2006.

Farley, Rebecca. “From Fred and Wilma to Ren and Stimpy: What makes a cartoon “prime time?” In *Prime Time Animation: Television Animation and American Culture*, edited by Carol A. Stabile and Mark Harrison, 147-64. New York: Routledge, 2003.

Fernandez, Maria Elena. “Sarah Palin vs. *Family Guy*: Seth MacFarlane Responds (Sort of).” *Los Angeles Times*. February 16, 2010.
<http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/showtracker/2010/02/sarah-palin-v-family-guy.html>.

“Full 2013-14 TV Season Series Rankings.” *Deadline.com*. May 22, 2014.
<http://deadline.com/2014/05/tv-season-series-rankings-2013-full-list-2-733762/>.

Griffin, Dustin H. *Satire: A Critical Reintroduction*. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1994.

Hall, Stuart. “Encoding/Decoding.” *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-79*. London: Hutchinson, 1980.

Hamamoto, Darrell Y. *Nervous Laughter: Television Situation Comedy and Liberal Democratic Ideology*. New York: Praeger, 1989.

Henry, Matthew A. *The Simpsons, Satire, and American Culture*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

Hilton-Morrow, Wendy and David T. McMahan. “*The Flintstones* to *Futurama*: Networks and prime time animation.” In *Prime Time Animation: Television Animation and American*

- Culture*, edited by Carol A. Stabile and Mark Harrison, 74-88. New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Holloway, Ronald. *Z Is for Zagreb*. London: Tantivy Press, 1972.
- Hughes, Jason. "Sundays With Seth: It's Just One Madcap Adventure After Another." *TV Squad*. May 17, 2010. <http://www.aoltv.com/2010/05/17/sundays-with-seth-its-just-one-madcap-adventure-after-another/>.
- "IGN's Top 25 *Family Guy* Characters." *IGN*. May 27, 2009. <http://www.ign.com/articles/2009/05/28/igns-top-25-family-guy-characters?page=5>.
- Kellner, Douglas. "TV, Ideology, and Emancipatory Popular Culture." In *Television: The Critical View*, 4th ed., edited by Horace Newcomb, 471-503. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.
- Kercher, Stephen E. *Revel with a Cause: Liberal Satire in Postwar America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.
- Kuhn, Annette. "History of Narrative Codes." In *The Cinema Book: A Complete Guide to Understanding Movies*, edited by Pam Cook, 208-20. New York: Pantheon Books, 1985.
- Larry King Live. "Interview with Marie Osmond." *CNN.com*. August 7, 2004. <http://www.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0408/07/lkl.01.html>.
- Larson, Allen. "Re-Drawing the Bottom Line." In *Prime Time Animation: Television Animation and American Culture*, edited by Carol A. Stabile and Mark Harrison, 55-73. New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Lewis, Lisa Anne. "*Happy Days*." *Encyclopedia of Television*. Accessed March 14, 2015. <http://www.museum.tv/eotv/happydays.htm>
- Lindvall, Terrance R. and J. Matthew Melton. "Towards a post-modern animated discourse: Bakhtin, intertextuality and the cartoon carnival." In *A Reader in Animation Studies*, edited by Jayne Pilling, 203-20. London: J. Libbey, 1997.
- Marc, David. *Demographic Vistas: Television in American Culture*. London, Sydney and Wellington: Unwin Hyman, 1989.
- Marx, Nick. "*Family Guy*: Undermining Satire." In *How to Watch Television*, edited by Ethan Thompson and Jason Mittell, 177-85. New York: New York University Press, 2013.
- McRosenski, Whitey. "Shut up, Meg." *Urban Dictionary*. September 17, 2010. <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Shut+up%2C+Meg>.

- Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*. 11th ed. Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 2003.
<http://www.merriam-webster.com/>.
- Merrit, Bishetta D. "Bill Cosby." *Encyclopedia of Television*. Accessed March 14, 2015.
<http://www.museum.tv/eotv/cosbybill.htm>
- Mills, Brett. *The Sitcom*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009.
- Mills, Brett. *Television Sitcom*. London: BFI, 2005.
- Mintz, Larry. "Situation Comedy." In *TV Genres: A Handbook and Reference Guide*, edited by Brian G. Rose, 107-29. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985.
- Miss Representation*. Directed by Jennifer Siebel Newsom and Kimberlee Acquaro. 2011. USA: The Oprah Winfrey Network, 2011. TV.
- Mittell, Jason. "The Great Saturday Morning Exile." In *Prime Time Animation: Television Animation and American Culture*, edited by Carol A. Stabile and Mark Harrison, 33-54. New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Moore, Frazier. "'Family Guy:' So Wrong, But So Very, Very Right." *Huffington Post*. July 9, 2008. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/07/01/family-guy-so-wrong-but-s_n_110141.html.
- Morris, Linda A. "American Satire: Beginnings Through Mark Twain." In *A Companion to Satire: Ancient and Modern*, edited by Ruben Quintero, 377-99. Malden, MA: Blackwell, Pub., 2007.
- Murphy, Walter (Composer), Seth MacFarlane and David Zuckerman (Lyricists). Main Title. *Family Guy*. 20th Century Fox Television, 1999.
- Ogdon, Bethany. "Why Teach Popular Culture." (*College English* 63, no. 4, 2001): 500-515.
- Ortenzi, T.J. "Sarah Palin Responds To "Family Guy" And Repeats Call For Rahm Emanuel To Resign." *Huffington Post*. April 18, 2010.
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/02/16/sarah-palin-responds-to-f_n_464939.html.
- Ortved, John. *Simpsons Confidential: The Uncensored, Totally Unauthorised History of the World's Greatest TV Show by the People That Made It*. London: Ebury, 2009.
- Ostrow, Joanne. "HBO Leads the Pack in Bringing Satire Back." *Denver Post*, June 8, 1997, H01.
- Palin, Sarah. "Fox Hollywood—What a Disappointment." *Facebook.com*. February 15, 2010.
<https://www.facebook.com/notes/sarah-palin/fox-hollywood-what-a-disappointment/305122263434>.

- “Parents Television Council-Home,” *Parentstv.org*, accessed February 16, 2015, <http://w2.parentstv.org/Main/>.
- Patten, Dominic. “Full 2012-13 TV Season Series Rankings.” *Deadline.com*. May 23, 2013. <http://deadline.com/2013/05/tv-season-series-rankings-2013-full-list-506970/>.
- Poniewozik, James. “Hyper Animation.” *Time Magazine*. October 26, 2009, 61.
- “Program Information: *Family Guy*.” *Parentstv.org*. Accessed February 16, 2015. <http://w2.parentstv.org/Main/News/Detail.aspx?ProgramID=504>
- “PTC Mission.” *Parentstv.org*. Accessed February 16, 2015. <http://w2.parentstv.org/main/About/mission.aspx>
- Reeves, Mary. “School is Hell: Learning with (and from) *The Simpsons*.” In *Popular Culture and Critical Pedagogy: Reading, Constructing, Connecting*. Edited by Toby Dasplit and John A. Weaver, 42-60. New York: Garland Pub., 1999.
- Rice, Lynette. “Ratings alert: What you’re watching if you’re 11, 50, or 34 years old (the results may surprise you!).” *Entertainment Weekly*. January 17, 2015. <http://www.ew.com/article/2011/03/15/ratings-by-age>.
- Ricke, LaChrystal D. “Funny or Harmful?: Derogatory Speech on Fox's *Family Guy*.” *Communication Studies* (63, no. 2, April-June 2012): 121.
- Sheridan, Chris. *Family Guy season 4 DVD commentary for the episode "The Fat Guy Strangler."* 20th Century Fox. 2005. DVD.
- “‘Simpsons’/‘Family Guy’ crossover under fire for rape joke.” *CBSnews.com*. September 24, 2014. <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/simpsons-family-guy-crossover-under-fire-for-rape-joke/>.
- The Simpsons*. Created by Matt Groening. Fox Television Network, 1989-present.
- . “And Maggie Makes Three.” #2F10. Aired January 22, 1995.
- . “Homer vs. Lisa and the 8th Commandment.” #7F13. Aired February 7, 1991.
- . “Lisa the Beauty Queen.” #9F02. Aired October 15, 1992.
- . “Lisa’s Pony.” #8F06. Aired November 7, 1991.
- . “Lisa’s Sax.” #3G02. Aired October 19, 1997.
- . “Make Room for Lisa.” #AABF12. Aired February 28, 1999.
- Smythe, Dallas W. “On the Audience Commodity and its Work.” *Dependency Road: Communications, Capitalism, Consciousness, and Canada*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Pub., 1981.
- South Park*. Created by Trey Parker and Matt Stone. Comedy Central, 1997-present.

- . “Cartoon Wars Part II.” #1004. Aired April 12, 2006.
- Stam, Robert. *Subversive Pleasures*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989.
- Staneck, Jill. “TV show *Family Guy*: ‘Terri Schiavo, the Musical.’” *jillstaneck.com*. March 22, 2010. <http://www.jillstaneck.com/2010/03/tv-show-family-guy-terri-schiavo-the-musical/>.
- Stanley, T.L. “All Kidding Aside, Here Comes a Family Guy Beer.” *Brandweek* 48, no. 42 (November 19, 2007): 9.
- . “Billion-dollar franchise? Fox eyes ‘Family’ value.” *Advertising Age* 76, no. 17 (April 25, 2005): 12.
- Taylor, Ella. *Prime Time Families: Television Culture in Postwar America*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989.
- Test, George A. *Satire: Spirit and Art*. Tampa: University of South Florida Press, 1991.
- Thompson, Kristin. “Implications of the Cel Animation Technique.” In *The Cinematic Apparatus*, edited by Teresa De Lauretis and Stephen Heath, 106-20. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1980.
- “Top 10 Worst Anti-Family Shows on Television.” *Human Events*. August 25, 2000, 12.
- Tucker, Ken. “Long Live ‘King.’” *Entertainment Weekly*. April 9, 1999, 52.
- Tueth, Michael V. “Back to the drawing board: The family in animated television comedy” In *Prime Time Animation: Television Animation and American Culture*, edited by Carol A. Stabile and Mark Harrison, 133-46. New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Turner, Chris. *Planet Simpson*. London: Ebury Press, 2005.
- Vineyard, Jennifer. “Britney Spears and Parenting: A Timeline of Tumult.” *MTV.com*. October 1, 2007. <http://www.mtv.com/news/1570950/britney-spears-and-parenting-a-timeline-of-tumult/>.
- Vitadamo, Suzanne. “Five Years Later, Terri Schiavo Mocked on Fox Prime Time.” *Christian Newswire*. March 22, 2010. <http://www.christiannewswire.com/news/3538013418.html>.
- Wells, Paul. *Animation and America*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002.
- White, Timothy R. “From Disney to Warner Bros.: The Critical Shift.” in *Reading the Rabbit: Explorations in Warner Bros. Animation*, edited by Kevin S. Sandler, 38-48. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998.

Williams-Rautiola, Suzanne. "Animated Fathers: Representations of Masculinity in *The Simpsons* and *King of the Hill*." In *Animated 'Worlds'*, edited by Suzanne Buchan and David Surman, 95-112. Eastleigh, U.K.: J. Libbey Pub., 2006.

Wilson, Pamela. "The Waltons." *Encyclopedia of Television*. Accessed March 14, 2015. <http://www.museum.tv/eotv/waltonsthe.htm>

Wisnewski, Jeremy. "Killing the Griffins: A Murderous Exposition of Postmodernism." In *Family Guy and Philosophy: A Cure for the Petarded*, edited by Jeremy Wisnewski, 5-15. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2007.

"The Worst Examples of Cousin Oliver Syndrome in TV Sitcom History." *Crustula.com*. October 8, 2012. <http://crustula.com/2012/10/08/the-worst-examples-of-cousin-oliver-syndrome-in-tv-sitcom-history/>.