



HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

Hugvísindasvið

The Id, the Ego and the Superego of *The Simpsons*

B.A. Essay

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Abstract

The purpose of this essay is to explore three main characters from the popular television series *The Simpsons* in regards to Sigmund Freud's theories in psychoanalytical analysis. This exploration is done because of great interest by the author and the lack of psychoanalytical analysis found connected to *The Simpsons* television show. The main aim is to show that these three characters, Homer Simpson, Marge Simpson and Ned Flanders, represent Freud's three parts of the psyche, the id, the ego and the superego, respectively. Other Freudian terms and ideas are also discussed. Those include: the reality principle, the pleasure principle, anxiety, repression and aggression. For this analysis English translations of Sigmund Freud's original texts and other written sources, including psychology textbooks, and a selection of *The Simpsons* episodes, are used. The character study is split into three chapters, one for each character. The first chapter, which is about Homer Simpson and his controlling id, his oral character, the Oedipus complex and his relationship with his parents, is the longest due to the subchapter on the relationship between him and Marge, the id and the ego. The second chapter is on Marge Simpson, her phobia, anxiety, aggression and repression. In the third and last chapter, Ned Flanders and his superego is studied, mainly through the religious aspect of the character. The outcome of this analysis is that the three characters can be used as a representation on the three parts of the psyche, that is, Homer Simpson has a controlling id, Marge Simpson has a controlling ego and Ned Flanders has a controlling superego. It is hoped that this conclusion might spark interest in others to do their own interpretation on characters found in *The Simpsons* universe, since the deep and rich characters give endless opportunities for various types of psychoanalytic analysis.

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1. Introduction

With 24 seasons and over 500 episodes, *The Simpsons* is, by a wide margin, the longest running scripted series in the history of prime-time television (“About the Show”). It has won hundreds of awards and its cultural significance can best be summed up by the fact that Bart Simpson was the only fictional character in *TIME* magazine’s list of the 100 most influential people of the 20th century and the prestigious magazine also picked the series as the best TV show of all time (Ortved). The main explanation for the popularity of the show is to be found in the masterful characterization of the people who inhabit the town of Springfield—the setting for the series and home of the Simpson family—and the meticulous care the scripts are obviously given. It is easy to disregard it as just a cartoon; however, a great *The Simpsons* episode is nothing less than a multi layered piece of fine literature.

Given the amount of material that has been written about the show from various angles, I was surprised to discover that nobody seems to have analysed it from a Freudian point of view—especially since I feel that two of the main characters are such a perfect representation of the id and the ego. It is perhaps understandable that characters in a long running show like *The Simpsons* do not seem to be prime candidates for a thorough analysis; with different writers and producers over the decades, the characters must go through a lot of changes even though the world that they live in is a world of informed status quo. By *informed* I mean that they remember the things that have happened during the past seasons, even though they have not aged and seem to be perpetually living in the same Groundhog Day. There are exceptions of the status quo: supporting characters have died, had kids and the era and circumstances of backstories have been altered to fit the floating timeline; however, this, in general, does not affect the characters.

In this thesis, I will explore three characters in the series: the mother and father, Homer and Marge Simpson, and their neighbour Ned Flanders. My main statement is that these three represent Freud’s three parts of the psyche, the id, the ego and the superego, respectively. I will also discuss those characters in general in regards to Freudian terms like the reality principle, the pleasure principle, anxiety, repression and aggression. For this, I will use a selection of *The Simpsons* episodes, the English translations of the original texts by Sigmund Freud and other sources, including the psychology textbooks *Psychology* and *The Development of Children*.

2. The Controlling Id of Homer

Since his first (barely recognizable) incarnation in 1987, Homer Simpson has been an almost unstoppable force of instincts seeking instant gratification without thought or reason. His lack of self-control and his controlling id has caused many troubles and adventures for himself and his family. A glimpse of his lack of self-control can be partly seen by the viewing of his résumé—the almost innumerable count of jobs he has held during the last three decades. Although his main profession of a Nuclear Safety Inspector for the Springfield Nuclear Power Plant has been a constant entity in his life since the first season (“Homer’s Odyssey”), his lack of inhibitions has caused him to take on almost anything that slides in his direction. The most drastic examples of jobs Homer has taken on are: union leader, talk show host, hit man, paparazzo, soldier, smuggler, police chief, sideshow freak, opera singer, mayor, critic, fireman, boxer and, of course, an astronaut for NASA.

Homer’s lack of professional commitment is overshadowed by the total dependency he has to his ego, that is, his wife Marge; without her, he crumbles and finds no connection with society. In fact, when left to his own devices, he almost goes through regression or devolution, reverting to a more ancient version of humanity which has ended in him being mistaken for Bigfoot (“The Call of the Simpsons”). This reversion when Homer is without Marge goes hand in hand with Sigmund Freud’s theories about the id and the ego, as will be discussed later. Furthermore, on the gratification and the relationship with the ego, Freud stated:

The power of the id expresses the true purpose of the individual organism’s life. This consists in the satisfaction of its innate needs. No such purpose as that of keeping itself alive or of protecting itself from dangers by means of anxiety can be attributed to the id. That is the business of the ego, which is also concerned with discovering the most favorable and least perilous method of obtaining satisfaction, taking the external world into account. (*An Outline* 19)

This chapter is devoted to the exploration of Homer’s psyche, his controlling id, his oral character, the dependent relationship he has with his wife (the ego) and issues regarding his mother, by looking at a few episodes of *The Simpsons*.

2.1 The Pleasure Principle in “King-Size Homer”

In the seventh episode of the seventh season of *The Simpsons*, Homer strives to obey the pleasure principle to new extremes. In a mandatory five minute session of calisthenics at the Nuclear Power Plant, Homer finds out that one of his co-workers got injured on the job and is now on disability with full pay. Upon hearing the news, Homer immediately decides to get himself injured enough to become disabled so he can work from home. Unable to harm himself, he realizes that hyper obesity can qualify him as disabled. He consults Doctor Nick Riviera, who recommends “a slow steady gorging process combined with assal horizontology” and that Homer focuses “on the neglected food groups such as the whipped group, the congealed group and the chocotastic.” With help from Bart, Homer begins his mission of overeating himself into obesity.

This is obviously not a good idea; however, Homer is regulated by the pleasure principle, which entails that when confronted with pain he finds the easiest way to relieve himself of it (Freud, *Beyond 1*). Freud explained: “The pleasure principle, then, is a tendency operating in the service of a function whose business it is to free the mental apparatus entirely from excitation or to keep the amount of excitation in it constant or to keep it as low as possible” (*Beyond 56*).

For Homer, his job is the excitation and the id strives to have Homer away from the Nuclear Power Plant at all costs. This explains partly why Homer has dipped his toe in so many fields of professions; while the job is new and exciting in itself, it does not cause pain. However, Homer’s attention span only lasts so long and he quickly becomes bored. Being on disability is the perfect choice for Homer’s pleasure principle regulated mental process. Instead of seeking new jobs, which all end in causing pain instead of pleasure, he gets to be at home—which means, in his mind, being able to drink beer and frolic with Marge at will. The ends justify the means, even if it is dangerous for his health and immoral, since becoming disabled on purpose is abusing the system.

Confronted by Lisa about this morality issue and whether he has told Marge about his plans, Homer answers:

I’m not saying it isn’t sleazy, honey, but try to see it my way: all my life I’ve been an obese man trapped inside a fat man’s body. ... No, it would only worry [Marge]. If you want to add to her worries, go ahead. I guess I’m just a little more grateful for all the things she’s done for us.

Unlike the ego, which tries to be moral, and the superego, that can be super-moral, the id is non-moral (Freud, *The ego* 44). For Homer it is not morally wrong to answer his eight year old daughter like that, neither is becoming disabled due to obesity. There is really no right or wrong in the id, no contradictions or conflicts—there is only the instinctual strive for pleasure (Freud, “The Question” 196, 201). Obviously, the ego needs to step in and Lisa is surprised on how long Marge is willing to let this go on. She needs “to mediate between the claims of the id and the objections of the external world” (Freud, “The Question” 201). In this case the claims of the id are being obese and, quite frankly, lazy while the external world objects with ridicule. Unlike the id, the ego goes by the reality principle, which “takes into account the conditions imposed by the real external world” (201) and the difference between the reality principle and the pleasure principle shines through when Marge finally confronts Homer:

MARGE. Let’s quietly and calmly discuss the pros and cons of your controversial plan, shall we?

HOMER. I ...

MARGE. Con! You’re endangering your health.

HOMER. Pro. I’m drought-and famine-resistant.

MARGE. Con! You’re setting a bad example for the children.

HOMER. Pro. I, er, don’t have to go to work.

MARGE. Con! You’re running the air conditioner non-stop. It’s freezing in here.

HOMER. Pro. Uh... uh... I love you?

MARGE. Con. I’m finding myself less attracted to you physically.

The ego’s intervention is too feeble, too late. Utterly disconnected with reality, Homer exclaims that this is everything he ever wanted and now, he finally is a “big fat dynamo.” He now works from home and for Homer that is enough. Of course, his happiness based on a change of scenery lasts only a few hours and although he does not have to face the morning traffic, he does have to succumb to the boredom of sitting in front of a computer all day pressing Y for Yes, N for No and Tab for ordering the soft drink TAB. To be fair, his job as a Nuclear Safety Inspector never seemed to require as much attention while he worked at the plant itself. Now, he has to actively take decisions over and over again on serious matters like venting gas to prevent explosions. Even when confronted with this critical task, he fails to realize the impact of his deeds.

He begins answering every question with “Yes,” casually using a broom so he does not have to leave the couch, and when that becomes too much of a chore, he puts a toy in charge—a drinking bird that bobs its head up and down in perpetual motion. He literally risks a nuclear meltdown, so dire is his need for pleasure. He leaves the confinements of his home/workplace, sporting his new flowery muumuu, cape and his fat guy hat.

While outside, in the real world, he is confronted by the ridicule that was expected. He tries to see a film (“Honk if you’re horny”) but loses his dignity when the cinema’s manager explains that the seats cannot take a man of his girth and offers him a garbage bag full of popcorn if he does not make a scene. Homer hurries home and decides that it is up to him to show the world that the obese are not lazy and irresponsible, only to find that while away, the bird failed and an explosion is imminent. In the end, of course, he redeems himself by saving the day; however, the only reason why he is adamant enough to do so is because an explosion would cause him personal pain. “Everybody’s going to be dead, especially me!”

2.2 The Oral Fixation and Oedipus Complex in “Mother Simpson”

The reasons why Homer is so controlled by his id could lie in his childhood and the best source for information on the developing phase of Homer’s childhood can be found in the season seven episode, “Mother Simpson.” It begins with Homer faking his own death so he does not have to work on a Saturday. Here, like in “King-Size Homer,” the id can go extreme ways in relieving itself from the pain caused by work. While rectifying the situation, Homer finds out that the grave he thought belonged to his dead mother, is in fact Walt Whitman’s, and, as luck would have it, his mother is alive and at the cemetery when he discovers the truth.

When Homer was around three to four years old, he was led to believe by his father that his mother had died when he was at the movies, when in reality she had become a hippie activist, who got herself entangled in some illegal protesting and had to escape the law. While Homer’s father, Abraham Simpson, is shown in flashbacks to have been a very conservative, ill-tempered, unsupportive and distant father figure, it is shown that Homer’s mother, Mona Simpson, was the exact opposite. She is shown as a nurturer with a great and heart-warming relationship with her son, a relationship on a level he would never get with his father.

HOMER. More sugar, more sugar!

MONA: No.

HOMER. Why not?

MONA. Because you're sweet enough. ("Mona Leaves-a")

This is a tender moment between a boy and his mother which goes in hand with Freud's statement that the first object of a boy's love is his mother ("New Introductory" 118). Homer's mother's actions and absence had a lot of influence in the development of his character, which is an oral character, caused by the unsatisfactory resolution of the oral stage. For oral characters (also called oral personalities), the mouth is the greatest source of pleasure and that can lead to over drinking and eating—many blame oral fixation for alcoholism and obesity (Ellis, Abrams and Abrams 112). The oral character also goes hand-in-hand with his id controlled persona:

An example is the adult personality pattern that Freud called the *oral character*, which he believed was grounded in an oral fixation. During the oral stage, Freud argued, the infant feels warm, well fed, and protected, leading an idyllic existence in which all is given and nothing is asked for in return. According to Freud and his student Karl Abraham, fixation at this stage can leave the adult to relate to others as he once did the breast, usually as passive dependence. Thus, the adult "please love me" derives from the infantile "feed me." (Gleitman, Fridlund and Reisberg 617)

When his mother left him, Homer seems to have become fixated in the oral stage, that is, he still seeks pleasure through the mouth, both by drinking (he is an alcoholic, more on that later) and by eating nonstop. Mona even made things worse by leaving young Homer in front of the open refrigerator when she went out to protest. When her politics began to take over her life, she became absent to Homer—long before she left him. Homer knows the impact she had on his persona and confronts her with it: "You left a hole in my heart that could never be filled, so I filled it with food. But I am never full" ("Mona Leaves-a"). Mona's leaving may also have had a drastic on Homer dealing with his Oedipus complex.

Homer's relation with his father is, to put it mildly, not good in any shape, way or form. As stated earlier, Abraham was a distant father figure; however, he raised Homer alone and did, at least, try to be a good father on some occasions. For instance, when

Homer and Marge bought their house on Evergreen Terrace, Abraham sold his own home so he could give them the money they needed. Homer's repayment for this gift was putting his father in a shoddy retirement home ("Lisa's First Words").

One of the key elements of the completion of the Oedipus phase is when the boy, driven by guilt and envy, affiliates himself with the father and differentiates himself from the mother—the father thus stops being a threat or competition (Cole, Cole and Lightfoot 364). This may have never happened in Homer's case. The last moment he shares with his mother as a child is when she is lovingly tucking him in:

MONA. Oh, my little Homey bear. Time for bed.

HOMER. Sing me my bedtime song, Mom.

MONA. Ooey, gooey, rich and chewy inside. Golden flaky, tender caky outside. Wrap the inside in the outside, is it good?

HOMER. Darn tootin'.

MONA. Doing the big Fig Newton! Here's the tricky part. ("Mother Simpson")

The bedtime jingle she is singing is actually a commercial for Fig Newton treats, again showing her nourishing Homer's oral fixation. She obviously knows her son extremely well, not only because of the choice of song but he also falls asleep at the moment she whispers: "Here's the tricky part." Then, probably the day after that, Homer comes home from the movies and his father informs him that his mother has died. Her death is therefore not connected to goodbyes or a sweet moment they shared, but his father. In a sense, his father took his mother away from him, which may have strengthened the Oedipus complex at a time when the complex should have been resolved—probably furthering the animosity between Homer and his father.

2.3 The War of the Ego and the Id

The marriage of Homer and Marge did not have the greatest of beginnings. In the early 1980s, they had been dating for several years. Homer was happy working at a Fun Centre, living with his friend Burney Gumble, while Marge worked as a waitress, sharing a home with her mother and sisters, Patty and Selma. Then, Marge became pregnant with Bart and everything changed. Abraham Simpson urged Homer to get married, since "he will never do any better" and Homer, uncharacteristically, listened to his father and proposed to Marge. Homer and Marge then got married in a small, shady chapel, where "the tenth wedding is on the house." Since both have them are in low

paying jobs, they cannot afford their own home, so they sleep on two different sofas in Marge's mother's home, where every sound they make is scrutinized. Homer, figuring that he will never be able to provide for Marge and the unborn baby, decides to leave them forever ("I Married Marge"). Marge, of course, finds Homer again and they start their life together; however, those early marital problems would echo throughout their marriage.

Freud stated that "[the] ego represents what may be called reason and common sense, in contrast to the id, which contains the passions" (*The ego* 15) and this rings true in regards to Homer and Marge. Take for example the second season episode "The War of the Simpsons." When the show begins, Homer and Marge are hosting a party. Homer's oral character shines through from the very start when he begins eating Marge's hors d'oeuvres before the guests arrive. Marge slaps his hand and says he promised and he replies: "I promised I would not eat? Never! You lie!" As previously stated, oral characters tend not only to overeat but to be alcoholic and when Ned Flanders starts mixing drinks, Homer's alcoholism kicks in. Marge urges him to keep calm, reminding him of previous drunken escapades but he does not recall them and binges on alcohol. His drinking causes him to lose the little control he has—he threatens guests, acts like a fool, ogles Maude Flanders' breasts and ends up passed out on the floor.

It is obvious that Homer and Marge had very different reasons for throwing a party—Marge wanted to be social and repay all the friends that had invited them to their homes while Homer wanted to have as much fun as he could. That is typical for the id and the ego, as Freud stated: "[The] ego pursues different purposes [than the Id] and by other methods" ("The Question" 196). Here, Marge goes by the rules and standards of society and tries to be a good host; Homer goes by the pleasure principle and does whatever comes to mind. After the party, Marge scolds Homer for his actions and she ends up signing them up for a marriage retreat, held by Reverend Lovejoy and his wife; "a psychological counselling for couples whose marriage is hanging by a thread or those just in need for a tune-up" ("The War of the Simpsons"). Homer is not happy about that but changes his tune when he finds out that the retreat will be held at Catfish Lake, so he can go fishing.

Again, the different ends and means for the ego and the id become apparent. Marge wants to spend the time trying to save their marriage and Homer wants to fish. This also shows the principles that the ego and the id go after. The reality is that if they do not try

to salvage their marriage, they will end up getting a divorce. Marge recognizing that and goes by the reality principle; however, Homer goes directly for the pleasure, because, as Freud stated: “The id obeys the inexorable pleasure principle” (*An Outline* 109). But to what extent does Homer’s id obey this unappeasable principle?

If Homer did not understand how much trouble his marriage is in, Marge makes it perfectly clear for him at the retreat. Reverend Lovejoy urges her to list Homer’s faults and she begins by describing him as self-centred and forgetful and then she continues, presumably for eight hours, until her voice is hoarse from exhaustion. Homer uses this new knowledge, processes it and decides the best thing to do is sneak out in the middle of the night to go fishing—even though it means sacrificing his marriage.

Now, I am being pretty hard on Homer here. Perhaps there are some justifications for his actions; maybe he just does not know how to deal with the anxiety brought on by the impending end of his marriage. Freud discussed anxiety and the id in his book *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*:

The one and only endeavor of these instincts is toward satisfaction, which it is hoped to obtain from certain modifications in the organs by the help of objects in the external world. But an immediate and regardless satisfaction of instinct, such as the id demands, would often enough lead to perilous conflicts with the external world and to extinction. The id knows no precautions to ensure survival and no anxiety; or it would perhaps to be more correct to say that, though it can produce the sensory elements of anxiety, it cannot make use of them. (108)

Homer’s instincts demand that he satisfies them by catching a mythical, 500 pound, uncatchable catfish named General Sherman—to impress some “weirdoes at the worm store”—which, of course, causes conflicts with the external world that demands him recognizing and fixing the problems he has with Marge. Although there are no conflicts in the id (Freud, “The Question” 196) this surely must create some conflicts in Homer’s psyche and perhaps creating anxiety that Homer just doesn’t know what to do with or react to. So, the anxiety brought on by the problem, only strengthens the id’s goal to relieve it of the pain (Freud, *Beyond* 1). By going fishing, regardless of possible consequences, Homer is thus relieving himself of the pains that his marriage troubles are bringing him. That is, fuelling the problems in the external world while feeding the pleasure principle in his internal world. In the end, Marge and Homer reconcile.

However, Homer will continue to abide the pleasure principle rather than his marriage woes in future episodes.

Take the season five episode “Secrets of a Successful Marriage,” as an example. In the episode, Homer decides he wants to be a teacher; however, since he does not have any qualifications nor anything to teach, he begins to tell his students about the inner most secrets of his marriage and family—causing high tensions between him and Marge.

The episode begins by showcasing Homer’s oral character on two occasions, the first when Homer chokes on poker chips which he has mistaken for potato chips, and then a glimpse is given into his alcoholism:

HOMER. Oh and how is “education” supposed to make me feel smarter? Besides, every time I learn something new, it pushes some old stuff out of my brain.

Remember when I took that home winemaking course and I forgot how to drive?

MARGE. That’s because you were drunk!

HOMER. And how!

Homer is talking about him becoming smarter because he just found out that his friends and his family regard him as “a little slow.” He is taken aback by this revelation and ends up going to an adult education centre to see if there are any classes he could take. There, he realizes that some of his friends are actually teaching classes, which makes him feel that he also should be a teacher. Again, Homer shows that he is in no way connected to the real world. After lying to the principle that he is a member of a perfect, happy family, he actually gets to teach a class called “Secrets of a Successful Marriage.” Now, Homer knows that he has nothing to teach anybody on how to have a successful marriage; in fact, he is the epitome of how not to act in a union. It is Marge that holds them together and fixes what needs to be fixed; however, for Homer the ends always justify the means and here, the id and his oral character are both pouring fuel on the fire.

Two of the many traits the oral character has are being envious and manipulative (Ryckman 71) so when Homer sees his friend Moe Szyslak, the local barkeeper, helming the class “Funk Dancing for Self Defence,” or his co-worker Lenny Leonard teaching “How to Chew Tobacco,” his envy rises. Now, the pain is not only from being regarded as slow, but also envy. The id needs to diminish this displeasure, so Homer ends up showing his manipulative side. He takes on the class and begins lecturing

desperate, lonely people on the secrets of a successful marriage. Homer is not only manipulating the truth—lying about his qualifications—but also the people themselves that look at the class as perhaps their last hope of future happiness.

How inept is Homer as a teacher of marriage secrets? When his first class starts, he has nothing to say, so he goes by the suggestion of one of the students and asks the students to share their relationship problems with one another. While they talk, he begins to devour an orange and when he is confronted by the student speaking, he justifies his feeding-frenzy by comparing a marriage to a citrus fruit:

HOMER. Well, yes, yes, to the untrained eye, I'm eating an orange, but to the eye that has brains, I'm making a point about marriage! For you see, marriage is a lot like an orange. First, you have the skin...then the sweet, sweet innards.

His students are not sold by his orange escapades and start to leave. Homer mumbles to himself that he had told Marge that this would not work when they were in bed the night before—the libido kicks in and the students are intrigued. Homer is quick to understand the situations and divulges personal information about his marriage and family. This echoes in a way the actions he took in “War of the Simpsons,” where he decided that it was more important to impress those “weirdoes at the worm store” than to save his marriage. Here, he puts the attention he gets from his students ahead of the importance of the privacy of his family. These actions are not simply because of obedience to the pleasure principle, but also a fixture of the oral character, that is, to be accepted of other people, or as previously quoted: “Thus, the adult ‘please love me’ derives from the infantile ‘feed me’” (Gleitman, Fridlund and Reisberg 617).

It does not take long for Marge to find out what is going on. She tries to deal with it the best way she can at first, begging him to stop. However, when Homer brings his students to dinner, so they can observe his family life first hand, she finally throws him out. In a matter of hours he regresses to a childhood state of total despair, not just mentally but physically—he looks like he has been shipwrecked on a desert island for three months, wearing tethered rags and dirty, overgrown, hair and beard. He has no place in this world without Marge and he finally realizes that, and ends up giving, in a bizarre way to win her over, this heartfelt speech (that also can be used as a synopsis for my thesis):

HOMER. Wait a minute...wait, that's it! I know now what I can offer you that no one else can: complete and utter dependence.

MARGE. Homer, that's not a good thing.

HOMER. Are you kidding? It's a wondrous, marvelous thing! Marge, I need you more than anyone else on this entire planet could possibly ever need you! I need you to take care of me, to put up with me, and most of all I need you to love me, 'cause I love you.

MARGE. But how do I know I can trust you?

HOMER. Marge, look at me. We've been separated for a day, and I'm as dirty as a Frenchman. In another few hours I'll be dead! I can't afford to lose your trust again.

Or, as Freud put it: "For there is no natural opposition between ego and id; they belong together, and under healthy conditions cannot in practice be distinguished from each other" ("The Question" 201).

Poor Marge.

3. The Controlling Ego of Marge

Although Homer is (most of the time) the sole provider, the Simpson family household is very much a matriarchy—Marge is in charge of the house, the bills, the family and the marriage. She, like the ego, tries to find pragmatic ways of acquiring pleasure that work in and accord to, the real world (Freud, *An Outline* 19), while Homer just does what the id wants. Incidentally, her normal, day to day life is not one of great excitement and happiness. She tries to make each day special, often in finding new ways of preparing food for her family, which always goes unnoticed (“Separate Vocations”) and sometimes, she goes the Homer route and finds herself employment outside the home. Unlike most of Homer’s jobs, Marge’s tend to be positions of authority, for example a police woman, all-female gym owner and Pretzel Wagon entrepreneur.

In most episodes, Marge is not in the limelight since *The Simpsons* is very much a “Bart and/or Homer” show; however, when she gets the attention she deserves, a very intriguing character is shown. Marge is loved by her family, but, most of the time, she is not respected. The only family member that truly appreciates her always is the toddler Maggie. Homer takes her for granted and Bart and Lisa find her terribly outdated and uncool:

MARGE. Am I cool, kids?

BART and LISA. No.

MARGE. Good. I’m glad. And that’s what makes me cool, not caring, right?

BART and LISA. No.

MARGE. Well, how the hell do you be cool? I feel like we’ve tried everything here. (“Homerpalooza”)

She wants the kids’ respect and complains that it is always “fun dad,” never “fun mom” (“The Food Wife). She also urges the kids to go to a dance with homemade Pepsi—“It’s a little thick, but the price is right” (“Lard of the Dance”)—so she truly just does not know how to be *fun* like Homer. In this part of the essay, I would like to dig a little deeper into the psyche of Marge—utilizing Freud’s theories on the ego, anxiety, repression and aggression.

3.1 Anxiety and Repression in “Fear of Flying”

In the sixth season episode “Fear of Flying,” Marge’s anxiety and repression are put in the limelight. After accidentally impersonating an airline pilot and destroying an airplane, Homer gets a free flight for his family from “Crazy Clown Airlines” to any state in the US (excluding Alaska and Hawaii). When telling Marge and the kids, Lisa and Bart get excited and happy but Marge seems to be not too pleased. “I don’t know Homer,” she explains, “We are right in the middle of the busy housekeeping season... I don’t want to be a wet blanket, but getting on a plane like that seems like a hassle coupled with a burden.” Although his wife is obviously distressed, Homer pleads until she gives in.

On board the airplane, Marge looks quite calm at first but her anxiety sets in quickly as she starts to give excuses for why she should leave the plane: “Oh, I forgot to clean the lint basket in the dryer. If someone broke into the house and did laundry, it could start a fire. ... I think I’ll go get a picture of the plane taking off.”

Homer inquires her about her anxious demeanour and she finally admits to him that she “isn’t a good flyer.” He suggests drugs to calm her nerves but Marge breaks down and has a panic attack and begins to scream: “Let me off!” over and over again while running back and forth the aisle of the plane. The Simpson family heads back home, disappointed. Marge obviously has aerophobia and according to Freud, the ego uses phobias to “escape anxiety through a process of avoidance or by means of an inhibition” and anxiety is thus an emotional signal of the phobia (“Phobia” 119).

At home, Marge explains to her family that she does not want to talk about this episode of hers and Homer agrees with that. “The important thing is for your mother to repress what happened. Push it deep down inside her, so she’ll never annoy us again,” he says. Lisa does not concur and warns that her mother’s feelings will come out in some way. Marge then promptly exclaims that the cat and dog have never been married and have been living in sin. Marge shows other signs of anxiety in the next few days. She starts baking and cooking around the clock and even wakes Homer up when she decides to fix the roof in the middle of the night.

In his work, “New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis,” Freud stated that “the ego alone can produce and feel anxiety” (85) and anxiety breaks out when the ego has to face its weaknesses (78). Marge’s controlling ego is thus producing these anxiety attacks as a response to this new stimulus: the thoughts of airplanes and flying. The

phobia is thus something that the ego created to avoid the anxiety brought on by facing its weakness, a defence mechanism.

As the family realizes that Marge's anxiety is out of control, the decision is made to hire a therapist. Homer is against the notion, fearing that the therapist will turn Marge against him. Marge also denies that there is a problem, and gives a clue that perhaps her repression was something taught, or rather, enforced by her mother:

MARGE. No, no, honey, it's all right. Really, I'm fine, I'm all right. Mother always said, "Don't complain. Be good. Behave. Behave. Be nice. Smile. Be polite. Don't wink..."

Finally Marge agrees that there is a problem and goes to see the therapist who wants to "delve deeply into [her] subconscious" to find the root of her fears which she suspects can be traced to a childhood drama. During their sessions, Marge begins to remember repressed things from her childhood and talks about a dream in which she is the mother in the TV series *Lost in Space*, and ends up deserted on an alien planet. In her dreams she calls out: "Wait! Wait, daddy, please don't leave! Take me with you!" The therapist realizes the importance of the dream and wants to discuss it. Marge is not on that wavelength. She flusters and changes the subject until the therapist insists. "OK," Marge says, "but you're going to make a big deal out of this. He was a pilot" ("Fear of Flying").

The mere mention of this fact about her father causes Marge to remember a repressed memory from when she was a child. Her age is not given but she seems to be about four. She is with her mother in front of a plane. They are saying goodbye to her father. She asks her mother why he has to leave and her mother explains that her father is a pilot, an important man, who flies people all over the world. Marge decides to run after her father into the plane, only to realize that he isn't a pilot. He is a steward, a male flight attendant. In her memory she screams and in reality she cries.

One might come to the conclusion that Marge's anxiety is brought on by her repressed memory. Freud suggests, however, that it is in fact the other way around, the anxiety causes the repression ("New Introductory" 89). It can thus be concluded that finding out that her father was a flight attendant caused enough anxiety to repress the memory deep into the unconscious. Why, though, was this a dramatic moment for her?

Marge was born in October 1964 (“Marge Gamer”), which means that this repressed memory took place around 1968, when flight attendants were almost exclusively female. The gender neutral term itself, “flight attendant,” did not exist until the 1970s; before that, the occupation was a feminine stewardess (“From Stewardess to Flight Attendant”). When Marge saw her father in a female role (he even had a feminine apron on) he was in fact castrated. Freud admits that women have a castration complex; however, it is not literal castration like for men but a figurative castration, as in a fear of loss of love (Freud, “New Introductory” 87). The difference is also in the fact that for boys, the castration complex finally ends the Oedipus complex, however, regarding girls:

The castration complex prepares for the Oedipus complex instead of destroying it; the girl is driven out of her attachment to her mother through the influence of her envy for the penis and she enters the Oedipus situation as though into a haven of refuge. (Freud, “New Introductory” 129)

The trauma was not only seeing her father in a female role, but also the castration destroyed the “haven of refuge,” since the bearer of the penis (which was refused to her by the mother) no longer has it. According to Freud, the business of the ego is to use anxiety to protect itself from danger (*An Outline* 19), danger being “an increase in unpleasure which is expected and foreseen” (16). For Marge, the whole idea of her castrated father was danger and thus her controlling ego took charge. It protected her by using anxiety which in turn repressed the whole incident.

3.2 Aggression in “Homer Alone” and “Screaming Yellow Honkers”

Freud said that “the inclination to aggression is an original, self-subsisting instinctual disposition in man” (“Civilization” 122) and Marge Simpson is a perfect example of that. As previously stated, Marge’s life is not perfect and a lot of tension builds up in her over time and not just because of Homer’s antics. Her being taken for granted and how she has to fix and almost everything regarding the family seems to be a much bigger factor regarding her mental stability. In the third season episode, “Homer Alone,” a little glimpse into Marge’s daily life of being taken for granted and the breakdown of her psyche, is given.

The day starts when Homer and Bart break a vase, which they leave for Marge to clean up. She says that she will not clean it up, however, she adds quickly: “Who am I

kidding?” (“Homer Alone”). Then she begins preparing lunch, sandwiches, which would be an easy task if everybody did not want something special. While she is trying to get everything sorted, Homer, Bart and Lisa all talk at the same time about what they want from her. She yells at them to speak one at a time: they do not. The repressed aggression begins to show and she yells that enough is enough. That is of course not enough for Homer, who sees that she is ready to go out: holding Maggie, the cat in a cage, her purse, a full bag and a list of everything she has to accomplish during the next few hours. He tells her to take his bowling ball for repair. Things go from bad to worse when Bart and Lisa miss their bus to school and Marge has to drive them. After the car ride, in which both of them misbehave, Marge turns to them and yells in a demonic voice: “Get out!” Several other things pile up during the day, and in the end, she stops traffic and roars like a lion on anyone who dares come near. Here, her built up aggression is released because of sheer pressure, her aggression coming to light in a different way has also been shown, like in the season eleven episode “Marge Simpson in: ‘Screaming Yellow Honkers.’”

In that episode, Marge’s aggression is brought on because of empowerment. After Homer accidently buys a SUV designed for female drivers, he decides that Marge gets the SUV while he gets her car. While driving, Marge is timid at first; acting like she did in her old car. However, when she feels the force and the power she has with this huge automobile, she becomes a different person. She realizes she can take shortcuts since the SUV can drive anywhere and that she does not have to abide to the rules of the road. She basically becomes filled with road rage, which can be defined as “a motorist’s uncontrolled anger that is usually provoked by another motorist’s irritating act and is expressed in aggressive or violent behaviour” (“Road rage”). Marge is not shy on expressing her aggression, even when confronted by the chief of police and she ends up in traffic school. There, when she is no longer in power, she becomes her usual self but as soon as she gets back in that SUV, her aggression blooms and she speeds into a prison, finally causing her to lose her license to drive.

Aggression is not just a normal disposition in man according to Freud, but linked especially to the ego. “When the superego begins to be formed, considerable amounts of the aggressive instinct become fixated within the ego and operate there in a self-destructive fashion,” Freud stated, adding, “[the] holding back of aggressiveness is in general unhealthy and leads to illness” (*An Outline* 22). Marge’s psyche shows this self-destructive workings of the aggressive instinct, she holds it in—represses it until she

can control it no more—which proves to be very unhealthy for her, going as far as leading her into a nervous breakdown.

The reality principle the ego abides to, may be helping her in a way when she finds work outside the home. As I mentioned, Marge goes for positions of authority, that is, of power. Marge's aggression seems to come out when she is empowered, so perhaps, she is trying to abide to reality and finding, unconsciously, ways to release her aggression in small portions over a period of time, rather than in an implosion. Or, perhaps, it is her aggressive instinct that drives her to seek power. I dare not conclude.

4. The Controlling Superego of Ned

In the world of pop-culture analysis, there exists the term “Flanderization.” It is used when a certain trait of a character is blown out of proportions and effectively takes over the whole persona. The term is named after Ned Flanders, who when *The Simpsons* started was just the mild mannered neighbour of the Simpsons family who happened to be religious. Over the years he has become the religious fanatic he is today (“Flanderization”). Not only is Flanders the main outlet for Christianity in the world of the Simpsons (even more so than Springfield’s Reverend); he is also a strong religious figure in the real world—the magazine *Christianity Today* went as far as stating that the name Ned Flanders is second in line after “Jesus Christ” for names associated with the word “Christian” (Pinsky). I mention this because Ned’s religious convictions are well in line with his controlling superego (also known as the ego ideal):

It is easy to show that the ego ideal answers to everything that is expected of the higher nature of man. As a substitute for a longing for the father, it contains the germ from which all religions have evolved. The self-judgement which declares that the ego falls short of its ideal produces the religious sense of humility to which the believer appeals in his longing. (Freud, *The Ego* 27)

To be fair, most of Ned’s convictions and actions can be connected to the superego. For example, when Homer reveals that Ned is a senior citizen (he is sixty) it is revealed that Ned’s secret (he looks much younger) is living by the three C’s—“Clean living, chewing thoroughly and a daily dose of vitamin church”—and he resists all the major urges. You name it: Flanders has not done it (“Viva Ned Flanders”). Unlike Homer, who follows every instinct that demands satisfaction, Ned goes in the opposite direction and denies himself any form of gratification; which is, according to Freud, the main function of the superego, the limitation of satisfaction (*An Outline* 19). Ned also goes further and opposes those faculties in others by observation. In one episode he actually controls Springfield’s CCTV for a while and observes everybody (“To Surveil with Love”). He is never afraid of criticising people and their actions in a very passive aggressive way, and he prohibits everything under the sun. “Over 230 channels locked out!” (“Home Sweet Homediddly-Dum-Doodily”). Observation, criticism and prohibition are some of the things that define the superego (Freud, *Moses* 149).

The purpose of this part of the essay is to show that Flanders' character traits (the ones that have gone through Flanderization) are not because of his Christian fanaticism, like one would think, but rather that his religious beliefs are just part of the characterizations brought on by his controlling superego. For this, I will mainly focus on Ned's childhood, as seen in the season eight episode, "Hurricane Neddy."

4.1 Religion and the Superego in "Hurricane Neddy"

Out of all *The Simpsons* episodes that showcase Ned Flanders as a leading character, none is as revealing as "Hurricane Neddy." After a hurricane hits Springfield it seems that the only property left in total destruction is the home of the Flanders family, which is ironic since Ned Flanders is the only person in town who was totally prepared for the natural disaster. He took every step in securing his home and his family but to no avail: the only earthly possessions that survived the storm are the Flanders family tombstones and since Ned considers insurance a form of gambling, the family truly has lost everything. Even his store, The Leftorium, is ransacked by a storm addled crowd.

The Flanders family seeks refuge in the church and Ned cannot hide his confliction. He asks Reverend Lovejoy if God is punishing him and Lovejoy answers: "Short answer *yes* with an *if*, long answer *no* with a *but*." Alone in the dark night, Ned turns to the Bible and suffers a paper cut and deep in Ned's psyche, something just gives in:

Why me, Lord? Where have I gone wrong? I've always been nice to people. I don't drink or dance or swear. I've even kept Kosher just to be on the safe side. I've done everything the Bible says, even the stuff that contradicts the other stuff. What more can I do? I feel like I feel like I'm coming apart here! I wanna yell out, but I just can't dang-darn-diddly-darn-dang-ding-dong-diddly-darned do it! I just... I... I... I...

The day after, Ned comes home and finds his house rebuilt by his neighbours. He turns ecstatic with joy, only to find out that his new house is literally worse than the rubbles of his old one. He promptly has a nervous breakdown and berates everyone he knows. Immediately, Ned's conscience fills him with guilt and he commits himself to a mental hospital. Freud stated that "the superego is the vehicle for the phenomenon we call conscience" ("The Question" 223), and also that the superego can be super-moral (*The Ego* 44) and Ned's response, to God and his friends and neighbours, are against his

strong conscience and his super-morality. First off, he questions the Lord, which Ned Flanders simply does not do, and then, he is ungrateful and aggressive. The rebuilt house does not last long nor is it good in any shape, way or form; however, as the ego (Marge) mentions, they all had good intentions and took the time to try. Screaming at someone who has spent the last day trying to give you a new home, as Ned does, is not the Christian thing to do.

At the mental hospital, a nurse recognizes Ned and calls the psychiatrist Dr. Foster, who treated him as a child. Through flashbacks, it is shown that Ned was a very aggressive young boy with 1960s beatnik parents who did not believe in rules and discipline but wanted to control baby Ned's anger. "You've got to help us Doc! We've tried nothing and we're all out of ideas" ("Hurricane Neddy"). Dr. Foster recommends an experimental therapy, the University of Minnesota Spankological Protocol, which entailed Dr. Foster literally spanking Ned nonstop for eight months. The treatment worked: after eight months of spanking, baby Ned can no longer express anger. "From that point on, any time [Ned] felt angry, [he] could only respond with a string of nonsensical jabbering." Dr. Foster tries to rectify the situation by teaching Ned how to release his anger in a healthy manner. He seeks the help of Homer who tries to anger Ned, which finally works when Ned confesses that he hates the post office and also, his parents.

When Ned was brought to Dr. Foster as a child, his superego began to form. Ned never had real authority figures and so, Dr. Foster, became his substitute father for those eight months. Thus, Dr. Forster became the predecessor of the superego since it is "the successor and representative of the parents (and educators) who superintended the actions of the individual in his first years of life; it perpetuates their functions almost without a change" (Freud, *Moses* 149). Before his therapy, Ned obviously had no rules or order to abide and then came Dr. Forster, who not only disciplined but also took away his freedom and control. He also caused the fixation of Ned's aggression into his subdued ego, where, it operated "in a self-destructive fashion," like Freud noted about the formation of the superego (*An Outline* 22). The superego represents the influence other people have had (Freud, *An Outline* 17) so Dr. Forster gave Ned his first model for a strong, powerful, dominating father figure, who would at some point evolve for Ned into the most grandiose of all father figures, God.

People need authority personified: they need someone to admire and submit to, someone who dominates them and may even ill-treat them. This longing comes from

the need for the strong father during childhood helplessness (Freud, *Moses* 139-140). The childhood helplessness also causes the need for religion, which is “kept alive perpetually by the fear of what the superior power of fate [the father/god] will bring” (Freud, “Civilization” 72). According to Freud, the image and idea of God is simply a glorified, overrated version of the perfect father, created by the believer himself (“New Introductory” 162).

With this information, it can almost be concluded that the superego of Ned Flanders was first modelled after Dr. Forster and then, when the need for the father he never had, became stronger, Dr. Forster was substituted with God, an even more controlling father figure and this perfect deity that was everything that his weak beatnik father was not. While the hatred for his real father grew—adding more and more aggression to the resigned ego—the love for his new adopted father, God, flourished. Thus, inadvertently, the superego became stronger and more controlling.

5. Conclusion

When I began researching for this thesis, I had seen every episode of *The Simpsons* numerous times and I did believe that it would be hard to pinpoint the “normal” characterizations of the characters; however, while watching the whole series in order, I found a remarkable stability. The characters do change, they grow and evolve, mostly during the first two seasons, and character traits become more obvious; however, they are always the same people. Homer always abides to the pleasure principle and never ceases to be dependent on Marge, who in turn always follows the reality principle, with an underlying sense of anxiety and aggression. Ned’s religious beliefs have only become stronger and more obvious with his super-morality blossoming. From the first season onto the one currently airing, Homer has been the id, Marge the ego and Ned the superego.

The Simpsons is in its 24th season: it has been renewed for at least one season more and in all likelihood the show will go on forever. Springfield inhabits hundreds of personas who all have their special features and underlining psychological traits; the show is very much a character driven entity. As such, I have only slightly scanned the tip of the iceberg. The series gives almost unlimited opportunities for psychoanalytic analysis, being Freudian, Jungian or Lacanian: the megalomaniac Mr. Burns and his trusted, and deeply-in-love, Smithers; the corporate shill Krusty the Clown; the Kennedyesque and corrupt Mayor Quimby; and, of course, the underachiever-and-proud-of-it, Bart Simpson and, my personal favourite, the moral compass, Lisa Simpson. The opportunities are endless and I hope someone will grab them.

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