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LAWS APPLIED TO *SOUTH PARK* AND *THE SIMPSONS*”

Abstract

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This thesis is comprised of original manuscripts of theatre scripts, a novel excerpt, and a critical analysis that examines the use of humor aesthetics, satire, and cultivation theory in *South Park* and *The Simpsons*. The analysis focuses on the intertextuality of certain episodes that demonstrate a constant challenge to the normative standards of American culture which provides a public sphere of critical theory discussion using *South Park* and *The Simpsons* as the primary source. The application of comedic, satirical, and cultivation theories is also applied to the analysis of original manuscripts. The discussion contextualizes itself within the broader question(s) raised by scholars of literary discipline: 1) “Can education come from watching television?” and 2) “Is film a form of literature?”

“RESPECT MY AUTHORITY”:

HUMOR AESTHETICS AND SATIRE LAWS APPLIED TO *SOUTH PARK* AND *THE
SIMPSONS*

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“Respect my Authoritah”: Humor Aesthetics and Satire Laws Applied to *South Park* and *The Simpsons*

In order to reveal and examine certain hegemonic prejudices in American culture, *South Park* and *The Simpsons* employ two tenets of comedy theory in each episode: humor aesthetics/philosophy, and satire (and its laws). This essay will explore how these two comedy tenets are used to promote public engagement through the shows’ message and brand(s) of humor.

The tenets of humor aesthetics/philosophy, and satire (and its laws), when applied, demonstrate the necessity of *South Park* and *The Simpsons* as an existing form of rhetoric of public engagement that can lead the viewership into an ongoing discussion of American culture. Specifically, the public engagement focuses on the prevailing views about the following tropes: race, class, gender, political correctness, and political agendas. The term public engagement encompasses a field of rhetoric dedicated to examining public spheres, communities, agencies, and civic engagement. This idea of public engagement provides a template for the argument of *South Park* and *The Simpsons* being recognized as communities and public spheres of rhetoric regarding certain tropes of American culture.

For example, season 19 of *South Park* dedicates its entirety to the notion of what classifies as PC (political correctness) and examines what being PC actually means. Political Correctness is a relatively new term with origins to Marxist cultural theory dating back to 1914. The most modern ideal behind being politically correct is to use proper terms for defining different groups of people, such as homosexuals, trans-genders, and persons of color. Political Correctness has become somewhat of a cultural epidemic

that hinders certain forms of speech. However, through humor aesthetics/philosophy, and satire, *South Park* mocks and ridicules (versus praises) the modern ideals of political correctness in order to reveal the hidden liberal prejudices and the overall ignorance and short-sightedness of how American culture has attempted to justify the notion of being PC. *South Park* relies heavily on embracing stereotypes or archetypes in the satire and humor of each episode. Being politically correct means that society should avoid reducing or limiting a group of people to roles found in proscribed societal stereotypes. However, the idea of stereotypes, being not politically correct, does not mean that there isn't some form of public engagement to be seen. For instance, when it comes to PC and race, Lindsay Coleman states: "What is significant and potentially inflammatory about *South Park's* deployment of racial stereotypes is that, within the world of *South Park*, shallow stereotypical judgments are invariably true" (Coleman 132).

The Simpsons focuses more on challenging the stereotypical aims of religion and gender. The characters Ned Flanders and Seymour Skinner in *The Simpsons* best represent these challenges. Ned Flanders depicts the simulacrum of the over-religious neighbor. Simulacrum is termed as an image that expresses someone or something in an exaggerated fashion. Flanders is constantly praying and reading from the good book in numerous episodes of the series. His family follows the same principles as he, and this annoys the majority of Springfield citizens.

Seymour Skinner depicts the simulacrum of the homosexual life style. Skinner is clearly homosexual in the traits he establishes with his boss, Mr. Burns, in a variety of episodes, such as when Mr. Burns says: "I love you like a brother, Skinner," and Skinner reply's: "The feeling is more than mutual, sir." In later seasons, there are other instances

of gender equality among the citizens of Springfield. *The Simpsons* has become a public sphere for the LGBTQ and religious communities of public engagement. Matthew A. Henry's essay discusses *The Simpsons* use of satire, and humor aesthetics, in more detail in order to challenge the tropes of gender equality in American Culture stating: "*The Simpsons* continually seeks to expose cultural homophobia, to criticize the institutional apparatuses that maintain it, and to deplore that attendant exclusionary practices based on sexual orientation..." (Henry 134).

South Park and *The Simpsons* are two of the most recognized pop culture media programs in the entire sphere of television history. Unfortunately, the most recognizable factors behind the shows have been registered as animated adult entertainment, which provide nothing of necessity for American society other than the notion "to be entertained". In other words, the majority of viewers recognize the programming as a form of entertainment only to be enjoyed and laughed at. Both programs do contain a level of offensive humor and absurd antics that the majority of viewers tend to dislike; yet, viewers continue to watch the shows seemingly based on the overall content behind each episode. However, while a rather high percentage of viewers find the content of the two programs crude and offensive, the overall viewership continues to rise in popularity. Helen Nixon's article "Adults Watching Children Watch South Park" argues: "Although it was designed as a satirical cartoon for adults, *South Park* has clearly established a strong following with much younger viewers than its original audience of mainly 18- to 39- year-old males. As has been the case with *The Simpsons*, the language and other semiotic codes associated with *South Park* have entered the everyday lives of young people the world over" (Nixon 12). Nixon establishes the importance of the show

throughout the article in regards to television ratings, yet she neglects to examine the actual commentary within the episodes of *South Park*. Nixon places her focus more on the actual census of popularity versus examining the episodes for the content in which a younger viewership appears to latch onto. The question of why has the demographic shifted remains unanswered here.

According to Marcus Schulzke, “the meaning of words and their power to offend is a central theme of *South Park*. The show contests linguistic conventions through humor, which often means repeatedly using bad words or parodying ways of speaking” (Schulzke 24). The article goes on to explain that *South Park* utilizes the art of the offensive and the absurd in the colorful language of the dialogue. This concept of offensive language in *South Park* adds to the satire and humor aesthetics of the programming. While the language may be crude and offensive, Schulzke argues that the public engagement here begins with a discussion behind the language of *South Park*. Schulzke provides an extensive examination on the episodes of *South Park* and the methods in which the offensive and the crude actually enhance the satirical message behind the show, such as he does using the episode “The F Word”: “arguments invoked by the characters in ‘The F Word’ are sophisticated and strikingly similar to scholarly work on language” (24).

Simone Knox states: “Some of the more obvious reasons from the general lack of scholarly writing on *The Simpsons* may include the difficulty in analyzing a comedy that might be classified within either animation or television studies and that the show is a vast entity whose generic and textual identities are far from homogenous” (Knox 73). Knox ventures to claim that by “reading the interplay between text and audience”

involved in *The Simpsons* the viewership will begin to examine the impact of *The Simpsons*, in regards to postmodern critical theory and interpretation techniques. Knox means to provide background behind the public sphere of agency hidden in the text of *The Simpsons*. There is a difficulty in examining comedy and animated television as a text in the English discipline, and Knox provides the reasoning as to why this is. Not only does Knox examine the engagement of the episodes, she also provides the importance of the argument in this thesis.

South Park and *The Simpsons* provide important social commentary on American society. This commentary leads into a form of rhetoric of public engagement dedicated to breaking down certain tropes of American Culture. Topics of race, ethnicity, and gender have all become issues that factions in American society tend to neglect due to the extreme controversy of the public spheres. *South Park* and *The Simpsons* discuss even more controversial topics than this thesis is able to examine. The reason these topics seem unrecognizable in *South Park* and *The Simpsons* is because these shows provide the controversial commentary behind the masks of satire and of humor. Therefore, this thesis will examine specific American culture prejudices depicted in *South Park* and *The Simpsons* and the commentary that comes with it.

Through satire and humor criticism, the reader will begin to recognize that *South Park* and *The Simpsons* contain a form of public engagement which can allow viewers to enter a sphere of controversial discussion without the threat of judgment or ridicule. More importantly, the reader will begin to recognize *South Park's* and *The Simpsons's* constant challenges to certain prejudices of American culture and the methods the shows use to approach that challenge.

Rules of Satire and Application in *South Park* and *The Simpsons*

Satire has existed and been defined ever since the rise of ancient Greece in the early Bronze Age of civilization. From Homer to Aristophanes, the greatest philosophers utilized the ideals of satire throughout their teachings of philosophy and morality in order to spread their message to a wide audience. Dustin Griffin's *Satire: A Critical*

Introduction defines satire as follows:

According to that 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; unlike pure rhetoric, it engages in exaggeration and some sort of fiction. But satire does not forsake the 'real world' entirely. Its victims come from that world, and it is this (together with a darker or sharper tone) that separates satire from pure comedy. Finally, satire usually proceeds by means of clear reference to some moral standards or purposes. (Griffin 1)

Griffin's definition of satire mirrors the exact form of satire used in *South Park* and *The Simpsons*. As Griffin illustrates, satire is essentially a battle of wits that seeks to persuade an audience to pursue some course of action or to simply bring some form of social issue(s) to light. The rather key component to this definition is best surmised by these three factors: 1. Satire is a moral art that "attacks vice or folly" by means of some sort of humor and, 2. Satire is meant to persuade the audience to recognize the "ridiculous"

through exaggerations in a fictional universe and, 3. Satire does not deliberately “forsake” the issues of reality in order to bring to fruition the overall morality/purpose of the satire in question.

According to Dustin Griffin’s definition of satire, the first aspect to examine is whether or not *South Park* and *The Simpsons* “attack vice or folly using wit and/or ridicule”. In other words, do the shows actually demonstrate a source of humor that illustrates humanity’s own faults in society? Both *South Park* and *The Simpsons* employ a form of comedy that challenge prejudices found in American culture.

The character of Homer Simpson in *The Simpsons* represents a simulacrum of the average American, blue-collar male trying to support his family. Homer is depicted as an unintelligent, beer drinking, father and husband with constant five o’ clock shadow and a beer gut. This simulacrum can be seen in other forms of text such as Al Bundy from *Married with Children* and Peter Griffin from *Family Guy*. Homer works at the nuclear power plant, and he has absolutely no idea what he is doing while on the clock; he is extremely under-qualified for the position. More importantly, Mr. Burns, the boss man, simply sits idly in his office all day, while the average worker keeps the entire plant running. By depicting the stereotypical simulacrum of Homer, *The Simpsons* use of rhetorical wit demonstrates the ridicule of the common job market trope in American culture. Homer has held at least one other job prior to working at the nuclear power plant. He was once a fast-food worker. The satire here discusses the current career fields of American culture and the struggles.

Homer’s job is also a dead end, as proven in the episode “And Maggie Makes Three.” This episode includes a scene where, after quitting his job at the plant, Homer

approaches Mr. Burns to beg for his job back, even though he hates it. Mr. Burns gives him his job back, but with a twist: Burns creates a plaque that Homer must stare at every day he is on the clock that reads: “Don’t forget: you’re here forever.” Homer decorates the plaque with photos of his youngest daughter, Maggie, so that the plaque now reads: “Do it for her.” This, again, goes back to Homer being a simulacrum of the blue-collar employee. The wit behind Homer is that he uses his daughter to remind himself of why he keeps working.

South Park delivers a variety of episodes and characters that illustrate the first concept of satire proposed by Griffin. There are so many instances of humanity’s faults in *South Park* that it would take years to fully examine each. However, in regards to this argument and the definition provided by Dustin Griffin, the “attack of vice or folly” in *South Park* can be best expressed by the four main characters of the show: Stan, Kyle, Kenny, and Cartman. These four characters are constantly at the center of whatever distress has befallen their town, from terrorist attacks to a zombie invasion, and the four are the ones who always save the town. The reason that these four characters are the better illustration of the American trope of education is that they are all 4th graders. The ever-continuing pattern behind these episodes is that the children must solve problems without the “help” of the adults. This show depicts the adults as the ones who need to be educated. The wit and ridicule of this satire comes from the notion that the children must act as the adults of the town of South Park. Stan, Kyle, Kenny, and Cartman continually save their parents from making the wrong choices and take responsibility for the adults’ actions. It is Stan who fixes his father’s “addiction” to alcohol. It is Kenny who takes care of his sister with the money he earns from various odd jobs. It is Kyle who questions the

adults' decision of going to war with Canada. It is Cartman who fights against the PC principal. The adults' are depicted as the children who need to be nurtured.

James Rennie states:

Kyle, Stan, Cartman, Kenny, and their classmates learn about the world at large the same way that young people in the real world do—they watch television, they listen to the adults around them, and they discuss matters among themselves with a degree of sophistication parents and teachers rarely recognize. Although public schooling undoubtedly plays an important role in the process of exploration, *South Park* reminds Western society that most contemporary definitions of 'education' exclude the bulk of real childhood learning. (Rennie 196)

Rennie presents an argument that challenges one dominant American cultural notion of what defines the educational system. In regards to whether or not this exemplifies the first notion of satire, Rennie breaks apart the vice/folly of the American education system in that 1. The children of *South Park* learn more from the outside world of reality compared to that of a classroom setting and, 2. Those that define themselves as parents or teachers continue to neglect the wisdom of the children.

This leads into the second concept of satire, which is "to persuade the audience to recognize the 'ridiculous' through exaggerations in a fictional universe". While *The Simpsons* takes place in the town called Springfield, and *South Park* takes place mainly in Colorado, and also include other real world locations, such as New York City and Las Vegas, there is no doubt that the universe in which these characters live is entirely

fictional. *South Park* includes a variety of plot lines in which Kyle, Stan, Kenny, and Cartman visit outer space, fight off a giant “Mecha-Streisand,” and journey into Imagination Land. *The Simpsons*, though slightly more similar to the real world, depict characters with indeterminate race (yellow skin), and involve unrealistic notions, such as the baby, Maggie, being able to use a gun properly; and the son, Bart, falling off the roof of their home without breaking a single bone. In the “ridiculous,” Griffin does not mean to say that cartoons are “ridiculous,” since they are entirely fictional, or that Homer and Aristotle were “ridiculous,” living in their fantasy worlds of philosophy and art.

The “ridiculous” in this sense means to recognize “something or someone is reprehensible” (Griffin 1). In other words, this concept of satire provides an agency of public engagement that deserves to be reproofed or rebuked: “The business of the satirist is to insist on the sharp differences between vice and virtue, between good and bad, between what man *is* and what he *ought* to be” (Griffin 36). The purpose of the satire is to bring to light issues’ that the public sphere may not discuss otherwise, and those issues are what Griffin terms as the “ridiculous”.

The eleventh season of *South Park* includes an episode titled “With Apologies to Jesse Jackson” in which the town of South Park deals with racial intolerance. Randy Marsh, Stan’s father, goes on *Wheel of Fortune* and reaches the final round. The clue he receives is “people that annoy you” with the letters on the board being this: N- -G-G-E-R-S. Therefore, thinking he would win thirty thousand dollars, Randy says: “I would like to solve the puzzle. Niggers!” The audience in the studio, everyone watching at South Park (which is the entire town), and the entire nation become deadly silent. Vanna White turns the last letter to reveal the puzzle: N-A-G-G-E-R-S. “Oh God damn it” is Randy’s

response. Throughout the rest of the episode, Randy is singled out wherever he goes as racist even after apologizing to Jesse Jackson himself by kissing his ass and having a photo taken of that moment.

Randy even creates a college fund to further African American education and gives a speech: “You all don’t know what it’s like. To be constantly reminded of something that happened in your past that you get ridiculed and slandered over and over again.” The entire black audience simply stares at him after this speech, and one man says: “Is this Nigger Guy serious?” No matter where he goes or what he does, Randy is now called “Nigger Guy,” and the scene turns violent. He gets kicked out of a mini-mart, the cashier stating: “We don’t serve the likes of you, Nigger Guy.” Randy almost gets shot down by three redneck, southern folk who see him only as the “Nigger Guy,” and he meets up with the other “Nigger Guys” or those that have used the “N” word on national television, such as Michael Richards from *Seinfeld*. The episode then ends with Randy and the other “Nigger Guys” attempting to remove the word “Nigger Guy” from speech and make it illegal to use against others. Perhaps a member of congress makes the most profound statement of the entire episode: “You mean ‘Nigger Guy’ could affect members of the white community?”

The bill is passed and made into a law: “From now on, no one may utter the word ‘nigger’ unless it is at least seven words away from the word ‘guy’.” The white community cheers, while the black community simply stares at one another and shrugs.

This particular episode was once banned from airing on the network for a certain period due to its extreme use of language. The word “nigger” is uttered more than 150 times in this single episode. This demonstrates the exaggeration of the ridiculous in this

particular episode. By constantly using the word “nigger”, the show attempts to satirize the agency of the ridiculous tropes of racism in American culture. There is a constant offensive nature behind the wit of this episode. While the term “nigger” is over-used, it does not once actually refer to a black man or woman. The term is meant to represent the actions of Randy Marsh, a white male. There is a definitive satire behind this. The simulacrum of the white American is the target of the derogatory term for a person of color. The wit and the ridicule of the use of the term “nigger” illustrates the importance of understanding racism for what it is.

This episode also challenges the idea of “apologies” in the ass kissing scene with Randy and Jesse Jackson. There is a literal ass kissing when Jesse Jackson pulls down his pants and Randy kneels down to kiss it. This exaggeration demonstrates how useless “apologies” can employ the trope of racism. Racism is not a concept that one can apologize for and hope for the best. The episode uses the physical act of ass kissing to illustrate “apologies”. In order to demonstrate the satire of “apologies” further, Randy also makes a public apology, yet his actions were still taken seriously throughout South Park with people referring to him as the “nigger guy”. The standard trope behind proper parenting/teaching was to teach us that if we were to do something wrong, then we had to apologize and the recipient is expected to accept the apology. The satire behind the trope of racism in this episode demonstrates just how ridiculous “apologies” are.

There are also instances where white friends apologize to the victims for the word “nigger,” and they tend to utter the phrase, “I understand what you are going through.” The episode demonstrates this trope of American culture in the backstory at South Park Elementary between Stan and Token (the only black kid in the school). Stan feels that he

understands what Token is feeling, and this upsets Token until the end of the episode when Stan admits: “I get it now. I don’t get it!” “Now you get it, Stan. Thanks dude,” responds Token. The wit of “apologies” is seen here with Stan giving up trying to understand and realizing that not understanding is the answer. Racism is not a trope that someone can apologize for. “With Apologies to Jesse Jackson” provides a rhetoric of public engagement into the American trope of racism, and it discusses the exaggeration of “white fear” of what racism is.

The first season of *The Simpsons* demonstrates a “ridiculous” claim on the average American notion of the “perfect family” in the episode “There’s No Disgrace Like Home.” This episode begins with a family picnic hosted at Mr. Burns’s estate, the biggest estate in all of Springfield. As previously stated, Mr. Burns is also Homer’s boss at the nuclear power plant, and this is why Homer wishes to put on the best impression he can. Therefore, he brings along his entire family in order to get into Mr. Burns’s good graces. His family has a reputation around Springfield as being one of the most dysfunctional families in town. This is proven during the company picnic at the Burns estate when Marge (wife) gets drunk and begins singing 50’s classics to the gods on a tabletop, Bart (son) and Lisa (oldest daughter) cause mayhem by swimming in the fountain, and Maggie (youngest daughter) chases and rides one of the estate hounds. This displeases Homer as he constantly notices another family at the picnic that is well behaved and loving towards one another, unlike his own. Thus, in that family, Homer sees the “perfect” family lifestyle and attempts to mimic that perfection after the picnic is over.

The “ridiculous” factor in this episode is the over-exaggeration of the simulacrum of the “perfect family”. The Simpsons family is by no means perfect. This is the wit behind the exaggeration. Homer compares his family life to that of his co-worker’s so much that he takes his family to therapy. The simulacrum of the American trope of the “perfect family” is satirized during the therapy session. The Simpsons family is sent to electro shock therapy. The concept is that each member of the family can send a shock to the other. The Simpsons shock each other so much that they destroy Springfield’s power grid. There is constant exaggeration regarding the ridicule of the “perfect family” trope. In *The Simpsons, Satire, and American Culture*, Matthew A. Henry writes:

More important, and more relevant to my purpose here, is *The Simpsons*’ overt appropriation of the nuclear-family sitcom and its reinscription of the animated family comedy, which allow the writers of the show to provide a much sharper satire on American culture and a more cogent critique of contemporary (nuclear) family life. Indeed, *The Simpsons* has almost single-handedly ushered in a renaissance in satire on television.

(Henry 5-6)

The third and final concept behind any work of satire, according to Griffin’s definition, is that “satire usually proceeds by means of clear reference to some moral standards or purposes” (Griffin 1). The art of the satire, as opposed to parody or pure comedy, relies heavily on recognizing the “ridiculous” of the real world while also bringing forward a moral standard. This is perhaps the most difficult objective for any

satire, finding the moral purpose in *South Park* or *The Simpsons* can be obscured by humor so vulgar and offensive that the vulgarity draws the main focus.

Jonathan Gray, Jeffrey P. Jones, and Ethan Thompson state:

The initial obstacle blocking many critics of satire from seeing its political potential arises because satire is coded as a subgenre of comedy, and comedy and humor represent for many the opposite of seriousness and rational deliberation. Thus before we discuss and define satire, we find it necessary to clear a path between humor and the political. Admittedly, some simply do not *want* humor to have any substance, preferring to regard it as a zone of escape from real world problems that require pensive stroking of the chin, not laughter. (Gray 8)

Gray, Jones, and Thompson bring about an understanding of the purpose of humor/comedy for most viewers. Comedy is not something to be taken seriously, rationally, or politically. Therefore, defining the moral standard behind the satire of *South Park* and *The Simpsons* becomes a challenge.

South Park: Bigger, Longer, and Uncut contains extreme language, offensive dialogue, and suggestive scenes such as animated sexual encounters between Satan and Saddam Hussein in hell. War between Canada and America continued to rage after the film within the film theatrical release of the Terrence and Phillip movie *Asses of Fire*. The parents became outraged when their children snuck into the film and began imitating the acts of the actors who happened to be Canadian, such as Kenny killing himself by trying to light his flatulence on fire or the constant mimicking of the songs from the

movie, such as “Uncle Fucker,” from the children that went to see the film. There is the moral purpose here of illustrating the trope of media influence in American culture. The morality behind this section of the film is that media has evolved into a rhetoric of public engagement. The children mimic what they see to the point where the adults’ become outraged.

This led to protests and a meeting with the United Nations. Soon, America created propaganda videos for the RSO show, Canadian concentration camps were created where Canadians were sent and tortured, a burning of Canadian literature took place in South Park square, and Ike (Kyle’s adopted Canadian brother) was forced to hide in his attic in order to avoid capture by US soldiers. *South Park* exaggerates the US/Canada struggle, using key elements of World War II satirically. The satire here is that rather than accept responsibility, the parents of South Park decide to blame Canada for their children’s behavior. The wit behind the ridicule becomes evident when the children decide to fix the mistakes of the parents. The moral purpose in the film is to exaggerate personal responsibility and discipline, admitting that you are wrong rather than placing the blame on something else.

Both *South Park* and *The Simpsons* contain a moral standard/purpose in every episode that can be readily recognized but can escape acknowledgment because it is couched in comedy. The moral standard of the satire is different depending on which episode is viewed. *South Park* derives its content from different tropes and current events that occur in American culture. The same can be said for *The Simpsons*. Morality is an idea that contains different meanings for different people.

An episode of *South Park* titled “Chicken Lover” involves the main story line of someone going around South Park having intercourse with chickens. The only person that can stop the culprit is Officer Barbrady, who is the only law enforcement official in town. The problem arises when a note is left at the scene of each crime that gives clues to where the aptly named “Chicken Fucker” will strike next. Each clue left at the scene of the crime is a riddle that can only be solved by reading from the correct book. Officer Barbrady does not know how to read and, therefore, cannot figure out where to go next. So the mayor sends him back to the third grade in order to learn how to read and bring the “Chicken Fucker” to justice.

Kyle, Stan, Kenny, and Cartman assist Barbrady in the task of learning to read, since they are the main characters in the show. The “Booktastic Bus” comes to South Park in order to encourage reading to the children and the citizens of the town. Although Barbrady struggles, he ends up being able to read the clues with his first word being “taxidermist.” Thus, through learning how to read, the “Chicken Lover” is brought to justice, and it is discovered that the criminal was the owner of the “Booktastic Bus”. After being arrested and brought to justice, the “Chicken Lover” makes a profound statement: “Do you see the extremes we have to go to in order to get people to read? Had I not had sex with these chickens, Barbrady would not have learned to read. Don’t you see? I had to have sex with these chickens...it was the only way to promote reading!”

As illustrated in this particular episode, the moral purpose behind the bestiality in the episode is to promote literacy in an exaggerated fashion. If Officer Barbrady had not learned how to read, then the “Chicken Lover” would have sexualized the entire population of chickens in South Park. While the ridiculous humor of the episode resides

in the vulgarity of animal-to-human sex, the moral standard focuses on the public engagement of literacy in American culture. The physical action of having intercourse with chickens provides the satirical exaggeration of the wit behind teaching the law enforcement officer to read. The episode also reveals the extremes one might need to exert to make literacy a priority for Americans.

Alison Halsall states:

Scatology and satirical irreverence operate side-by-side in Parker and Stone's suburban carnival, *South Park*. As a vehicle for resisting official U.S. dogma, Parker and Stone's individual *South Park* episodes and their feature-length animated film, as well as their marionette extravaganza *Team American: World Police*, demonstrate their strategy of using lowbrow humor to undercut and deflate established American cultural icons and ideologies. What is clear about *South Park* is that, despite its two-dimensional style of animation, the form and structure of the film and individual episodes are intensely sophisticated because of their polysemic pliancy, postmodern intertextuality, and self-reflexive irony. Through the comic energy of the carnival, Parker and Stone provide a cathartic (and irreverent) alternative to established American social values (Halsall 35).

Halsall presents an argument where the "carnavalesque" qualities of *South Park* and the satirical nature of the show combine to create stories that provide analysis of American

culture. The analysis then leads into a rhetoric of public engagement, creating agencies of discussion among scholars regarding the challenging nature of *South Park*.

Season 2 of *The Simpsons* includes an episode entitled “Bart Gets an F” that also contains a moral purpose/standard in regards to the education of young ones and the educational system as a whole. Bart delivers a book report over Stevenson’s *Treasure Island* in front of the whole class. It is abundantly clear that Bart did not actually read the story and attempted to deliver his book report by reading the blurb on the back of the cover. Mrs. Krabappel speaks with him after class and says, “Bart, at this point you are failing the class. I’m afraid that you will have to repeat the fourth grade next year. Heaven help me.” After having a parent-teacher conference with the school counselor and Mrs. Krabappel, Bart promises that he will try harder and pass the final test.

The day of the exam arrives and Bart was up all night studying. He tries his best and, in the end, he still receives an “F” (59%) on the exam. His disappointment shows as he cries in front of Mrs. Krabappel, who shows no sympathy from this expected failure. Then, Bart compares his sorrow to that of George Washington surrendering Fort Necessity to the French in 1754, and Mrs. Krabappel is impressed by this knowledge. “I feel as bad as George Washington when he had to surrender Fort Necessity in 1754! I tried my hardest...I swear!” Upon this new knowledge, Mrs. Krabappel realizes that perhaps Bart really did try his hardest this time and rewards him with an extra point for the information bringing his grade up to a 60% (D-); thus, Bart passes the exam and the fourth grade (although he never actually leaves the fourth grade throughout the series).

The moral standard evoked by this episode is to demonstrate the importance of growth and proficiency in the American education system. There has been wide

controversy behind proper teaching methods and how to accurately measure the value of educational instructors/programs. This ongoing discussion in education contains the debate of how to define growth and proficiency in the student body. Proficiency represents the mastery of knowledge and growth represents the knowledge gained by the student body. Proficiency is depicted as an entire student body scoring X amount on the final exam. Growth is depicted as an individual student increasing their final score from X to Y. Bart clearly studied until his head hurt from thinking too much, yet he still failed the exam. However, Bart clearly knew the information as his comparison to George Washington proved to Mrs. Krabappel. This demonstrates the importance of student growth in American culture. The fact that Bart actually knew the information was the reason that Mrs. Krabappel decided to give him the extra point that allowed him to pass the exam and the fourth grade. While Bart did not demonstrate proficiency towards the subject matter, it is evident that his personal knowledge did increase. The moral purpose in this *Simpsons* episode is to demonstrate the concept of an educational system refocusing towards growth and proficiency versus scoring high points on an exam.

Scholar Matthew A. Henry points out how *The Simpsons* problematizes the trope of a television shows' existing moral lesson, and "Bart gets an F" exemplifies this duality: "*The Simpsons* is assuredly a sitcom that, like many of its 1990s peers, has self-consciously questioned the idea of a 'moral lesson' and has often uses this as a basis for both parody and satire" (42).

As the reader will notice, through the definition of satire proposed by Dustin Griffin, *South Park* and *The Simpsons* are clearly defined as satirical episodes. The first point is that every episode attacks the tropes of American culture, such as the simulacrum

of Homer, the exaggeration of children serving as adults, or the educational system. The second point is that satire demonstrates the ridiculous to the audience in a fictional world. Both programs accomplish this through bringing real world topics, such as racism in *South Park's* "With Apologies to Jesse Jackson" and the importance of proficiency/growth in the American educational system in *The Simpsons'* "Bart Get's an F."

While the concepts of satire do show the merits of the commentary behind *South Park* and *The Simpsons*, another theory must be taken into account. The philosophy behind the comedy of the episodes is also an important issue to discuss.

It's Funny Because It's True: Humor Aesthetics/Philosophy in *South Park* and *The Simpsons*

When it comes to the concepts of humor and comedy, there is a continuing trope in regards to basic aesthetic principles: it's funny because it's true. This creates a bigger question that needs further exploration in connection to the humor and comedy of *South Park* and *The Simpsons*. The question is simple yet complex: why is the truth funny? What exactly is it about humor and comedy that make the punch line "funny because it's true"? How can the aesthetics and philosophy of humor create a sphere in which exaggerated tropes appear "funny" and comedic? In what ways do the aesthetics behind humor correlate to the art of satire? These questions will be answered in the following section of the thesis. More importantly, this section will continue to reveal the comedic theories and underpinnings that help make these two shows successful in social commentary.

John Morreall's work defines the essence of humor clearly by establishing humor as virtues of intellect and morals:

Aristotle distinguished two kinds of virtue, intellectual and moral. With humor, we will see, these are closely related since the way we perceive and think has a lot to do with the way we act and treat other people. The basic value of amusement is that it allows us to transcend narrowly focused, emotional responses to situations, so that we think and act more rationally. (Morreall 112)

Morreall establishes humor as a means of amusement that creates a defining space for assessment of situations and the opportunity to act on a more rational basis. The key concepts in this particular definition of humor as virtue are "intellectual and moral." Much like the theory of satire, humor is an existing form of intellect and morality that provides a vital and crucial source of social commentary, as humor is a social interaction. Morreall also writes, "In Sidney's *Defense of Poesie*, the first work of literary criticism in English, he writes that, 'Comedy is an imitation of the common errors of our life, which he [the dramatist] representeth in the most ridiculous and scornful sort that may be, so as it is impossible that any beholder can be content to be such a one.' " (Morreall 8). The method in which humor "imitates common errors of life" is explained in the notion of "it's funny because it's true". When a stand-up comedian performs for an audience, the comedic routine always involves aspects of the comedian's personal history that appear to exist as "worse-case scenarios". Christopher Titus's *Love is Evol*, for example, examines Titus's life story regarding his recent divorce, traumatizing childhood

memories, and sexual scenarios gone terribly wrong. Every issue Titus examines with humor is classified as a “common error of life” that most can relate with.

This idea of humor being both about virtues of intellect and morals is exemplified in both *South Park* and *The Simpsons* and perhaps leads to the intense popularity behind both shows. While the humor present in both programs contains the more vulgar side of comedy, each episode might lead the viewer(s) to further thought such as: “Huh...I never thought of it that way before”. Morreall states, “In responding to life’s problems, what comedy recommends is not emotions but thinking—and rethinking” (82). Now exactly how can humor, which is a concept of social amusement, contain both virtues of intellect and morality, which causes the audience to “think and rethink”? Each virtue, John Morreall claims, contains different levels of intellect and morality that when combined lead to successful comedy.

In regards to intellectual virtue, Morreall claims there are three different levels to consider: “open-mindedness,” “divergent or creative thinking,” and “critical thinking”. Open-mindedness is crucial to the perception of humor because “openness to new experiences also makes people more adaptable to change and more accepting of what we now call diversity” (Morreall 112). As stated previously, the viewership of *South Park* and *The Simpsons* must be willing to consider these shows as more than adult animated cartoons and keep a constant open-mindedness in order to realize the potential and critique found in these television episodes.

The episode “All About Mormons” from season seven of *South Park* discusses different ideas on the Mormon religion. Stan is quick to judge Gary Harrison’s Mormon faith, calling his religion traditions “dumb, dumb, dumb, dumb, dumb,” reducing the

matter assuredly and satirically from the episodes onset. The story is told from the Book of Mormon and is depicted as ridiculous in Stan's eyes. Stan later on attempts to talk sense in to the Mormon family by insulting their religion as "silly nonsense with no actual proof behind it." However, the idea of open-mindedness comes into play at the end of the episode, when Gary tells Stan off for his narrow mindedness towards his religion:

Look, maybe us Mormons do believe in crazy stories that make absolutely no sense. And maybe Joseph Smith did make it all up. But I have a great life and great family and I have the Book of Mormon to thank for that. The truth is I don't care if Joseph Smith made it all up because what the church teaches now is loving your family, being nice, and helping people. And even though people in this town might think that's stupid, I still choose to believe in it. All I ever did was try to be your friend, Stan. But you are so high and mighty that you couldn't look past religion and just be my friend back. You got a lot of growing up to do, buddy. Suck my balls. (South Park)

The episode spotlights the "lesson" that open-mindedness can prove essential in a heterogeneous world. While this episode focuses on religion, other *South Park* episodes focus on the usefulness of acceptance and tolerance when approaching issues of race, ethnicity, gender and politics—broadening the scope. Returning to the topic of religious acceptance and belief, scholar David Kyle Johnson says the notion of "belief" has a sense of convection; it gives and receives. According to Johnson: "But you can't *rationaly* apply these criticisms to other religions and then refuse to apply them to your own. After

all, there are living eyewitnesses and YouTube videos of Sai Baba's miracles, yet it still makes sense to deny their reality" (60).

The second virtue behind the intellectual side of humor is "divergent or creative thinking". Morreall states, "Humor promotes divergent thinking in two ways. First, it blocks negative emotions such as fear, anger, and sadness, which suppress creativity by steering through into familiar channels. Secondly, humor is a way of appreciating cognitive shifts: when we are in a humorous frame of mind, we are automatically on the lookout for unusual ideas and new ways of putting ideas together" (113). The basic idea behind this level of intellectual virtue is simply that humor promotes creativity and reflecting. This can be seen in any episode of *South Park* and *The Simpsons* in that 1) each episode contains some form of comedy that creatively engages and entertains and 2) the characters of both series' demonstrate a meta-fictional self-awareness that they are a television show and that people are watching them.

This idea of meta-fictional self-awareness illustrates a high range of creative thinking invested in the audience. Meta-fiction is defined as a style of writing in which the characters are aware that they are characters. The satire of *Gulliver's Travels* (Jonathan Swift) and *Don Quixote* (Miguel De Cervantes) exaggerate this particular style of writing. *The Simpsons Movie* opens with the Simpson family watching the newest film by Itchy & Scratchy (Tom and Jerry-like figures). After watching the introduction to the film, Homer addresses the real world audience in the movie theatre: "Boring!" "Dad, we can't see the movie." "I can't believe we're paying to see something we get on TV for free. If you ask me everybody in this theatre is a giant sucker. Especially you!" After the last line, Homer points at the screen towards the audience.

South Park's "Cartoon Wars Parts 1 and 2" depicts Eric Cartman attempting to cancel the show *Family Guy*. Throughout the episode, Cartman's friends keep referencing the jokes in *Family Guy*, and this makes Cartman lash out verbally. "Family Guy's jokes make no fucking sense to the plot of the episode. I am nothing like Family guy! My jokes are always relevant to the plot of the episode and add to the story instead of being completely random bullshit," he says. These explanations of Cartman's humor are a break to the audience watching *South Park* in that there is a clear differentiation between *Family Guy* and *South Park*, and Cartman attempts to communicate with the viewers why *South Park* is more popular than *Family Guy*. The meta-fictional awareness of Cartman knowing he is a character in a show promotes divergent thinking to occur. Cartman personifies divergent thinking in this episode by openly recognizing his role as the comic relief character of *South Park*. He engages in a conversation with the viewer, discussing why his comedy style is nothing like *Family Guy*. By acknowledging the audience and comparing himself to another show, Cartman illustrates the wit and humor of a meta-fictional character.

The final intellectual level of humor is how to promote "critical thinking".

According to Morreall:

A third intellectual virtue fostered by humor is critical thinking. In looking for incongruity in society, we look for discrepancies between what people should do, what they say they do, and what they actually do. From the days of the ancient Greeks, comedy has focused on self-deception, pretense, and hypocrisy. Indeed, Plato said that the essence of the comic is thinking of oneself as better than one actually is. In looking for the comic,

then, we look beneath appearances and do not accept what people say at face value. (Morreall 113)

It is this particular virtue that can allow the audience of *South Park* and *The Simpsons* to begin visualizing the program as more than an animated adult entertainment program. This idea behind critical thinking allows the audience to place themselves in the show. If the viewer were a character, which character would they be? Critical thinking leads to comprehensive public engagement on certain tropes of American culture. *South Park* has time and again proven the merits of racial tolerance, gender equality, freedom of speech, religious freedom, and political agendas within its humor. The latest season, for example, depicts the most recent presidential campaign between Clinton and Trump or, as the episode depicts, between a turd sandwich (Clinton) and a giant douche (Trump). Being able to critically approach this season allows the audience to engage in current agencies in American culture. Who would make the better president, the giant douche or the turd sandwich? The exaggeration of the candidates provides the template for critical examination behind the humor of the metaphor.

The Simpsons also demonstrate intellectual virtues of critical thinking by means of the same issues as *South Park*, yet with a different form of humor: “An exploration of race and ethnicity on *The Simpsons* is both timely and important, as it helps to illuminate the contemporary figuration of ‘normative’ American identity in mass media, which has long been coded as white, middle class, suburban, and Protestant (i.e., as traditionally WASP),” claims Matthew A. Henry. Henry provides an illustration of the groundbreaking stance on race in *The Simpsons* and its importance to challenging the

norms of American culture. The characters of the show are not “normal” colors, with few exceptions, but rather of yellow skin. Henry remarks on this choice as a means to break the standard of the mass media “normative” on white, privileged Americans.

Rather than focus on the vulgar and obscene as *South Park*, *The Simpsons* use more real and perhaps homogeneous world-based humor to demonstrate the virtues of intellect. The approach is exemplified in the episode “The Crepes of Wrath,” where Bart is sent to France in the exchange student program, and Adil Hoxha from Albania is sent to take Bart’s place. Adil ends up actually being a spy for Albania’s secret service program and attempts to steal the nuclear power plant’s blueprints so that war can begin. Adil was a sweet, well-behaved boy by all appearances in Springfield, yet his motives were not of the same character. Bart ends up saving the day in France, even though he is usually seen as the troublemaker. This episode depicts a lesson of character judgment and ethnicity, issues that the audience might be shocked to discover through Morreall’s virtues of intellect. This episode also reinforces American stereotypes about foreign malefactors and American heroism.

Along with intellectual virtues, Morreall also concerns his readers with moral virtues behind comedy and the value therein: “Humor, at its best, has moral and religious significance.... because it involves the self-transcendence. It liberates us from the narrow perspective of fight-or-flight emotions and helps us, as the old Candid Camera jingle put it, to see ourselves as other people do” (115). There is a term within this passage that brings attention to this concept of morality in humor: self-transcendence. Self-transcendence is simply “rising above personal concern to appreciate the interests of others” (Morreall 116). This is where the connection between the intellectual and the

moral virtues begins. To appreciate others' interests is to engage in intellectual virtue, as defined earlier. Thus, we have returned to the notion of "it's funny because it's true." In regards to *South Park* and *The Simpsons*, the ideals of humor as an intellectual and moral virtue create an entirely new satire in which the audience can visualize themselves as Homer, Cartman, Lisa, Kenny, Bart, Stan, Ned Flanders, Mr. Garrison, or any of the many characters within these two shows.

As illustrated in this section, *South Park* and *The Simpsons* contain not only a satire of American society but also a source of humor philosophy/aesthetics that goes above and beyond the average notion of simple entertainment programs. True, we engage in humor for the amusement that it brings. However, it is from this amusement that we begin to engage in social commentary dedicated to the intellectual and the moral virtues of the humor presented: "Beyond all these detailed lessons in living well, comedy teaches a general lesson by taking us through all its twists and turns, mistaken identities, miscommunication, screw ups, and last-minute rescues" (Morreall 144).

You Know I Learned Something Today

As demonstrated through this argument, *South Park* and *The Simpsons* provide so much more than just mere entertainment. Through application of both literary and film theory, both shows have proven that pop culture media needs to be taken seriously, especially in terms of the commentary each episode can offer American society. *South Park* and *The Simpsons* prove to follow the methods of satire theory in that each episode "attacks vice or folly," such as depicting the average blue collar lifestyle or bringing to life the knowledge of the average child in a world where adults don't have all the

answers. Each episode also provides a critical approach to the “ridiculous in a fictional universe,” such as racial tolerance in the white community or the notions of the perfect family ideal in American society. As satire theory follows, each episode also provides a moral purpose/standard for the audience to follow by confronting the viewership with real world issues from racism to literacy.

South Park and *The Simpsons* contain a level of humor philosophy and aesthetics that illustrates both intellectual and moral virtues. *South Park* demonstrates this purpose through a brief sign off from Stan and Kyle, as they share with the audience what they learned through the situation. *The Simpsons*, while not as plain as *South Park*, provides a public sphere of humor dedicated to discussing issues American society faces daily, such as terrorism, gender equality, and religion. As Morreall explains, the virtues behind humor engage the audience in critical thinking, creative thinking, and open-mindedness exercises. Both pop culture shows utilize these concepts by making the audience take a step back and think about why the joke “is funny because it’s true.”

Thus, *South Park* and *The Simpsons* provide a form of rhetoric of public engagement, creating public spheres that discuss certain tropes of American culture. Racism, religion, gender, and politics are tropes that *South Park* and *The Simpsons* discuss. So if one wishes to learn about what is actually happening in our reality, when it comes to challenging tropes of American culture, then all one needs to do is turn on a television and watch *South Park* or *The Simpsons*.

Analysis of Original Work(s):

The aim of the original creative works in this thesis is to demonstrate understanding of satire, humor, and tragedy. Each of the original manuscripts in this thesis contains a constant exaggeration of certain tropes in American culture, such as evolving technology, retail business, and life after death. The more specific aim of the original work, as defined in fundamental satire theory, is to reproof and rebuke societal “follies”. The original manuscript draws inspiration from the brand of satire/humor used in *South Park* and *The Simpsons* and provides linkage between the original manuscript and the thesis critical portion.

“Technologic Zombies,” an original one-minute play, critiques how society has become “zombified” by the latest cell phone or computer. This satirical piece exaggerates how people depend on their phones more than each other. “Technologic Zombies” opens with three friends walking across the stage, having a conversation solely through the text messages. Throughout the play, phones are in view and little eye contact is made between the characters. The satire here is an attack on technology’s over-abundance of technology and our ridiculous reliance on it, including the pain and loss of physical human contact and conversation. The characters speak solely in instant messages, such as “omg” and “wtf,” the absurd language of today’s youth.

The twist occurs later on in the play when one of the friends trips over a large, rectangular object on the ground. He drops his phone and, much like the heavy sleeper, he awakes from his dream state confused and frightened. Without the literal fall, the character is unable to escape the obscuring cloud of technology. In this theatrical exaggeration, only a physical jolt and pain can clear the character from his technological

dream cloud. The character's figurative blindness is cured in this way. Even more symbolic, he trips on a book, the screen's predecessor.

From the start of the play, the audience can clearly see the object on the ground as a book and this simple book begins the satire at work here. The character that tripped begins to examine the object on the ground. "What is that?" The examination of the object is exaggerated through the character sniffing it, "It smells...it smells old", and then using it as a phone, "Hello? Hello?" The humor in this short section focuses more on the audience recognizing the object as what it is: a book. The character is unaware of what the object is and that demonstrates the satirical rebuke of technology overpowering written word. The book serves as both a literal and figurative tool for the satire/humor of the play.

After the examination ends, the character wants to show his friends what he found. He calls out to them, but his friends ignore him, texting. Only a text catches their attention. The friends finally come, only after the fallen character texts, signposting the characters' overreliance on technology. The phone is their only real connection to each other and the world, and only a book can begin to awaken them. The fallen character shoves the book in his friends' faces, attempting to get them to look away from the screen. "Guys look at this thing...it's so old and it doesn't even have a battery...." His efforts prove to have no effect.

The play ends with the two friends, still attached to their phones, walking away from the fallen character. Out of rage, he throws the book, it hits one of the friend's backs, and falls to the ground, open. Though the physical impact occurred, the friend that was hit takes no notice and continues to walk away, texting. This goes back to the

exaggeration of tripping over the book and the detachment of the character from his phone. The one that got hit in the back was not separated from the screen and the phone remained. The author satirizes, as visualization to the audience, how technology has become a part of us, has become our life's blood. The fallen character delivers the most chilling dialogue in the final section. He reads from the book: "It was the best of times. It was the worst of times."

Devil Don't Want Me is an upcoming novel that was inspired by the *South Park* episode "Ginger Kids." The episode is about the notion that redheaded, freckled people do not have souls, otherwise known as "Gingers". By using this episode as a template, *Devil Don't Want Me* examines the question "what if Gingers actually have no souls?" which leads into "what happens when a Ginger dies?"

The excerpt included in this thesis is the prologue and the first 3 chapters of the novel. The prologue begins with the teller of the story, Edward, speaking directly to the audience. "Let me take this time to educate each of you reading this novel. In order to have a story, you must follow 'The Arc' or the basic building blocks of developing the plot of the story." Interacting with the audience as a fictional character demonstrates satire of meta-fiction. Meta-fiction, as mentioned in the critical portion, is recognized as a character in a fictional universe being fully self-aware that they are a character. The satire of the meta-fictional is also part of the humor behind the original work. By interacting with the readers, Edward provides a level of personal relation with the audience and this counts for the humor of the meta-fictional.

The meta-fictional is exaggerated constantly throughout the manuscript. The prologue continues on to describe Edward's level of education and the career field he has

chosen and he does not express happiness or enjoyment. Edward rants about his level of education and how even with his expensive degrees' he still ends up working at Wal-Mart. The satire here is in the form of a simulacrum. The humor of the rant here is that Edward, through meta-fiction, is actually having a conversation with the reader. This conversation allows the reader to understand how the character is similar to them. "This is where life leads us. I have wasted my life, and sold whatever soul I have for hourly wage and poor working environments simply because I have to eat." This follows the critical section of the thesis: "it's funny because it's true."

Devil Don't Want Me contains a level of humor that is heightened through the colorful language and vulgarity of the situation. When Edward talks about his life, death, and career, he does not care who is offended. There are jokes contained in the manuscript that are humorous and satirical through the use of modern language. "If my taste buds could speak, they would sound something like this: 'Dear heavens! Why has our god forsaken us so? We shall not survive this onset of plague.' 'Perhaps this is merely a test of faith...' 'Test of faith?!?! Nay! This is our god saying Fuck you all!'" Notice the use of crude language at the end of the quote and the added humor the phrase "fuck you all" brings to the scene. The usage of crude, offensive dialogue matches that of the novel's inspiration, *South Park*. The modern language of Edward also adds to the satire of the original work. The satire seems more realistic when the character uses modern slang and continues the meta-fictional style of the novel.

The overall satire of *Devil Don't Want Me* is to make the reader be Edward. Edward is a simulacrum of all of us in some way. He keeps the story going like a conversation to a friend and an enemy. He does not attempt to rephrase certain situations,

keeping to his casual way of speaking. “*If I can’t choke it out, then I’ll shake it out!* Yet another brilliant plan to save myself. Seriously, the reactions that choking victims have while choking seems like the body itself wants you to die....” At the end of his death scene, Edward provides the humorous and satirical nature of his tale: “Life...Fuck it!”

The Play is more of a stance on life and the ever-popular question “why do we have to die.” Death is something we all have to deal with and that makes the satire all the more important to an audience. *The Play* follows Tag as he sits on a bench in a park with Willy and a strange hooded figure. The hooded figure represents the maker of *The Play*, as the name P. Wright suggests. Tag is meant to represent the term protagonist, or the main character of the story. The satirical aspect of this manuscript takes place in the meta-fictional humor of the characters. This satire becomes clear in the climax of the manuscript when Tag begins reading from the notebook.

“Willy reaches into his jacket and pulls out a gun. He points it at Tag, and the lights go black. Sound effect...GUN SHOT. I die!?!” The reading of the script behind *The Play* demonstrates the satire of meta-fiction and provides the humor. By being able to read his life, Tag illustrates his self-awareness to the audience. At this point, the playwright returns and has a conversation with Tag about what has happened. The satire here is that Tag gets to have a conversation with his creator about why he has to die. This demonstrates a humor of the notion “life after death” and what our creator may have to tell us. The manuscript brings forth a satire of having a conversation about the meaning of life and the outcome.

The playwright simply responds, “Because that is how I wrote it.” This section provides a reflection of the practices of Christianity. The belief goes that we must have

faith in God and trust his plans for us. The satire here can be best illustrated by Jeremiah 29:11, which states, “ ‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ says the Lord, ‘They are plans for good and not for disaster. To give you a future and a hope.’ ” Tag brings about an important philosophical stance in his conversation with P. Wright: “So if you are the creator, then why don’t you change the script so that I don’t die?” P. Wright responds: “I cannot change the final outcome. This is what the audience wants to see. A tragic comedy...it has been this way before even I existed.” There is a satire of religion at work here. Tag questions why his death cannot be avoided. P. Wright refers to his script’s end as “the final outcome”.

Even though Tag is struggling, P. Wright reassures him that he will live on in the many productions yet to come. “Tonight, you will die at Willy’s hand, this is true, and dying is a bitch to be sure. However, you will remain eternal on the stage...” The manuscript appears to attempt to bring about the notion that life goes on and perhaps there is a life after death. The humor of this section is when Tag addresses the audience: “Can’t there be a different ending, though? I meant that guy is on his phone right now, and that one fell asleep. Clearly, my death annoys them.” The manuscript brings the audience into the scene as though they are characters. The meta-fiction of the satire here is that death affects everyone.

Before exiting the stage, P. Wright leaves Tag with words of encouragement: “Just remember, ‘All the world’s a stage, and we are merely actors.’” The author uses this particular paraphrase of Shakespeare to emphasize the satire of life and death. Treating the world as a stage means that we are all actors, living out a script, made by the playwright. Tag eventually accepts the reasoning as the playwright leaves the stage. The

moral purpose of this final section of satire is to allow the audience to understand that death is something that should be accepted. However, acceptance does not necessarily mean that you have to be happy about it. The final line of *The Play*: “It’s still bullshit that I have to die though....”

Technologic Zombies

By

John Edward Reynolds

Enter Stage Right: Three Men in their 20s walk towards center stage towards a strange, rectangular object illuminated by a soft light. All 3 men keep their focus on their phones, texting one another.

Man 1:

(texting out loud)

LOL! OMG ROFLMOA

Man 2:

(texting out loud)

WTF Bro?

Man 3:

(texting out loud)

Dudes, stop being such noobs....

(trips over rectangular object and drops phone in process)

OW!!! What the hell?

The other two men continue walking away texting each other, never even glimpsing at their friend (ad lib selfies/IMs). Man 3 looks back towards the object that tripped him with a daze, as if he has just awakened from a dream.

Man 3:

(looking towards the object)

What is that?

(stands back up and picks up the object)

sniffs object

It smells...it smells...old.

(puts the object to his ear like making a phone call)

Hello? Hello?

(Looks up towards his friends and notices that they did not even see him trip)

Hey dudes! Come back.... I found something weird.

The other men continue to walk away (continue ad lib). Man 3 continues to attempt to gain their attention. He finds his phone on the ground and picks it up.

Man 3:

(snaps picture of object)

(texting out loud)

OMG! You guys get back here ASAP. I found something LEET!

Man 3 places his phone in his pocket and awaits his friends' return. The other two men, still looking at their phones, turn back in unison and head back towards their friend, center stage.

Man 1 & 2:

(texting out loud)

WTF?

Man 3:

Guys look at this thing...it is so old and it does not even have a battery....

The two men continue texting never letting their eyes leave the screen. They make no response as Man 3 continues to shove the object in their faces.

Guys...guys? Hello? Would you look up for just one second? Guys...GUYS!?!

The other two turn back around and head off stage left (continue ad lib).

Man 3:

What the hell? GUYS!?!

(out of rage he throws the object)

The object bounces off one of the friend's backs and lands on the ground, open and exposed.

Man 3:

(intrigued)

...it opens? What is this thing?

(walks towards the object and picks it up while keeping it open)

(continued)

It has words on the inside....

(reading out loud)

“It was the best of times. It was the worst of times...”

END

DEVIL DON'T WANT ME

A Red-Headed Chronicles Novel

by John Edward Reynolds

Part One: I guess we'll start here

Prologue

Today is the day that I died.

Now I know that some of you reading this book may be thinking to yourselves: "Well, this story sucks already. The dumb ass writer gave away the ending in the first sentence. What a moron! I can't believe I actually paid for a story that lasts only one paragraph." I say one paragraph because I believe that you have read this entire section, so who's the moron really?

Well to these particular Sirs or Madams I wish to express two very important points: First, I want to share with you this simple thing called the library. For those who are low on cash and can't buy the actual book, there is the option of going to this mystical land known as the public library, where everything inside can be borrowed for free! I am aware that this is basically Narnia for some of you out there, but I can assure you that it is indeed a real, freaking place (minus the talking animals).

Second, and perhaps most importantly, I wish to say this: "Fuck off," at which point I then present to you my two little bird friends in a hilarious fashion (i.e. I just gave you a double dose of middle finger syndrome).

I mean, come on people, how can you believe that the death of a character is the end of the story? For Christ's sake...haven't you ever read or seen *Game of Thrones*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, or *Supernatural*? Nobody stays dead in these freaking stories (in fact, it gets to the point where it is annoying really. I mean Sam and Dean Winchester have died at least 10 different times at this point...sheesh).

Let me take this time to educate each of you reading this novel. In order to have a story, you must follow "The arc" or the basic building blocks of developing the plot of

the story. You must have an attention grabber to begin with (and I think I have done this with my own death), then slowly build up to the climax of the story (in other words, keep reading if you want to know), and finally, gradually lead the reader towards the ending conflict of the story. So, I'm sorry if I didn't surmise the entire story in one fucking sentence! But hey... you paid for it, so you might as well finish it, right?

This is where the burdens and struggles of my education have led me. I have a Bachelors in Science for Film Studies and a Masters in Arts for English, and here I am writing an entire novel for you people to enjoy at my expense. I mean this is MY story we're talking about here. My story about MY death. "Why write a novel in the first place if you hate it so much," you may ask? Well.... I HATE WORKING AT FUCKING WAL-MART EVEN MORE! Yes...even with all of my expensive debt in education I work at Wal-mart.

Allow me to educate you further, my fellow readers. This is where life leads us. I have wasted my life, and I have sold whatever soul I have for hourly wage and poor working environments simply because I have to eat. The education that some of us seek does not actually matter (at least for my pitiful, worthless existence). So don't get depressed when the truth finally gets revealed that the meaning of life comes down to this: shit tons of Raman, apartment complexes where the neighbors stink up the joint with their *Joints*, and having to suffer at a dead end job where the customer is always right, no matter how fucking stupid they may be.

There is also the fact that I am a dying species: a red head. My hair has led to so much ridicule and mockery with this lovely notion that "gingers have no souls". I mean I almost lost my job at Wal-mart because a customer once complained that my hair represents the "son of the devil." Normally, this would come as a shock to most people, but when you live in Kansas...it feels about right.

"The customer is always right, you know?" So claim the upper corporate management sons of bitches with their kindergarten teacher voices that say: "I'm going to put you in time out if you misbehave again, young man."

My response to this lovely talk with management is simply this: "Do you really want to piss off the son of the devil? Do you, dumb ass?"

What's even more annoying when you are a red head is that every, single person you just happen to walk by or sit next to feels the need to want to touch your hair.

"Excuse me sir? I don't mean to bother you, but I love your hair. Do you mind if I touch it?"

Really? It's just hair for crying out loud!

"Sure. Why not?"

Careful...you could catch "Gingervitis."

So there's my life in a nut shell for all of you reading this novel. I am an educated, "soulless" red head with nothing better to do than write a novel after my shift at the "Gates of Hell." I mean in the very tiny fine print in the application (the kind of fine print where you need the Hubble telescope to even see it) it reads: "Abandon All Hope Ye Who Enter Here...."

Welcome to Wal-mart. Get your shit and leave me the fuck alone.

Anyway, let me assure you all reading this novel that there are many different ways to end a story beyond killing off the main character. I assure you all that there are far worse endings than death. I mean I would know of all people. I DIED today and, yet, here I am telling my story. Frankly, I would rather be dead at this point. I mean discovering that....

Whoops, I almost gave away the climax. Now that would've have been a very dumb thing for me to do. Let me just assure all of you, once again, that death is only the beginning. In this case, death is literally the beginning of this story...MY story. Now stop making assumptions and read the God damn novel. After all, you paid for it.

Now where were we? Oh yes...

Chapter 1

Today is the day that I died.

The worst part of dying is the method. Some die in the heat of battle from a festering gun shot wound. Others die from an explosive car crash after turning right instead of left. Then there are the "looneys" who drink the fucking Kool-Aid laced with rat poison...

Imagine this scrawny, Steve Urkel type of person wearing a flashy, dust ridden maroon cloak with a paper cup in his hands (on sale now at Wal-mart). He takes a sip of the red, cherry flavored liquid inside the cup and smacks his tongue from the strong, bitterness that travels down his throat.

"Hmmm..." the man says, ticking his tongue over and over again to place the flavor. "This Kool-Aid seems to be missing something." He takes another sip, clicks his tongue and the realization hits him. "Ah, I got it now. Someone used arsenic instead of sug...."

He gags on the last syllable and falls to the grass covered ground with his head landing neatly in a steaming pile of fresh cow pie. All around him, death came to all of those with the paper cups of doom and the maroon cloaks with a sudden thud and a squish from the cow pie.

Ah, Cthulhu will be pleased by this sacrifice.

The honest truth, however, I would gladly be one of those "looneys" at this point. Why? Though they were creepy ass cultists, at least they all died side by side. A sort of group suicide pact that gave their miserable, short lives meaning even if the meaning was to serve as worthless sacrifices to a giant, fucking octopus. Unlike those who walk behind

the robes, I died without meaning. Death came at me like I was some kind of freaking fly whose life was meaningless and the only attention I got was due to my incessant buzzing.

Here is me as the fly: "Notice me, notice me! Look at all my education! The degrees and the knowledge I offer! Notice me, notice me!" I continue to buzz to those around me, and yet they refuse to listen. "Notice me, notice me! I'm the fastest cashier at Wal-mart! See how much time I waste? Notice me, notice me!" I buzz and then...SMACK! My life is ended by the flick of a wrist and a rubber spatula. The irony of it all is that a fly only lives for 24 hours anyway.

As my life has always suffered from being mediocre and as boring as watching paint dry, my method of death is nowhere close to being memorable. I died from choking on a fucking Whopperito. For those that may not be aware of this delightfully shitty menu item, the Whopperito is the Burger King's latest creation. The construct is a whopper inside a tortilla served as a burrito, thus aptly named the Whopperito (clever sons of bitches, right?).

Even worse than the method of my own death was that this visit to Burger King was the one time...the one FREAKING time I tried something new and exciting in my lifetime (like I said, I'm boring as shit), and it kills me...

"Welcome to Burger King. How may I take your order," said the clerk with one of the most fakeass smiles I have ever seen. And I would know fake smiles. I'm a Walmart employee.

"Yeah...hi. Ummm..." I look at the menu to see exactly what I want because you never really know until you know, right? My gaze first travelled towards my usual meal, which is a double cheeseburger combo. As my mouth began to form the words, I came across the delightful photo of the Whopperito.

I should've just gotten my usual, but no. I deserved to die I suppose. However, in my defense, the photo looked freaking fantastic and delicious. Although that should have been my first tip off, as with any fast food establishment, the photo never matches the food (if only...if only).

"I think I would like to try the Whopperito combo today," I said to the clerk, who still kept that fake, creepy smile going. I thought what would happen if his face froze that way. Customers waiting in line behind me would see his toothy grin and his wide blood shot eyes that never seem to blink. He really should do something about that green goop stuck between his two front teeth, I laughed to myself.

"Would you like to upgrade to a medium or large combo today, sir," said the "happy" clerk with a hint of judgment.

Was that a fat joke, you little fucker?

"No thanks. Just the regular combo today."

As he hands me the receipt, and I move away from the line with my empty cup, I cannot help but gander at my surroundings. The floors are more brown than they should be from all of the spilled drinks, the leftover crumbs of whatever garbage the customers decided to load themselves with, and the slight yellowish green spots that resemble the past pukings of those that could not hold in their meals. You may think to yourself: "That sounds absolutely disgusting! Why the hell would you eat there in the first place?"

Well, to those readers with this thought process I have no fucks to give, honestly. I mean I paid the price and died, didn't I? Perhaps you should think about why any of us eat fast food. Frankly, all the floors are the same, no matter where you eat, but the food is freaking affordable, so...

Even worse than the floors and the god awful smell (elephant dung with a slight hint of moldy cheese) are the people. Everyone in this shit hole either eats alone or they bring their horde of munchkins, which I like to call "demons of hell," with all their crying and screaming and manic running fits. Believe me...the children of the corn here are nothing compared to the demons that visit my lane at Walmart.

Warning: The following scenario may seem hilarious to some, but it really isn't funny! Why? This is what retail employees go through every fucking day when on the clock! Remember that:

"Mommy, mommy, mommy..." cries the little boy as his mother loads the groceries onto my conveyor belt.

"What is it, dear?" the mother responds, with those words, but what she really means is this: "Be gone, satan, you little shit!"

"I want gum!" whines the demon.

"No, dear. We can't afford that."

I know what comes next.

Suddenly, a high pitched scream escapes the boy's mouth, the kind of scream when animals howl in pain...

The only good thing about this banshee of a boy is that my line suddenly gets shorter.

Now we come to the loners of Burger King or those-that-have-not-been-laid-for-quite-some-time. The people that eat alone never do so with a smile on their face. They have a look that says, "I have no where else to go, and I'm hungry." At times, I swear I see myself in the booth. Sitting, eating, shitting, repeat. I'm no better than anyone else in this place, and I don't fucking care.

"Whopperito combo", shouts Mr. Smiley behind the counter.

Little did I know that as I approached the counter with hunger and anger that I was actually walking the Green Mile. The mile of death row itself where inmates sentenced to die are offered their last meals (which can be anything they freaking want by the way). Had I known that this shit-filled burrito would be my last meal before I visited the chair, I would've at least ordered the endless shrimp special from Red Lobster.

Yes, I have thought about what meal I would make my last, if I had to. I mean who hasn't, right?

Guard comes up to the cell as I finish my third plate of shrimp and says, "Son, I think you've had enough. It's time to walk the mile...I'm sorry."

I stare back at the guard with a slight grin and a twinkle in my eyes and say, "What part of 'ENDLESS shrimp' did you not fucking understand?" I then continue to gaze at the menu choices and order my next last meal.

I grab my tray and walk the mile to my final resting place, and, you know what, it doesn't even taste that great...

Chapter 2

After about 5 minutes of dodging running children and squeezing through the space in-between seats occupied by some of the most obese people I have ever seen, I finally came to the end of the mile.

I feel as though I am competing in the fast food Olympics, and I am Michael Phelps. I can hear the voices of the announcers playing through my head as I dive in.

"Wow look at him go, Chuck! The way he dodges and balances his tray in order to not waste a single scrap of food. Such eloquence, such grace. He resembles a swan floating in its natural habitat. A thing of beauty indeed," speaks the British commentator, Sir Tight-Britches.

"Yes indeed, Britches. There is definitely something mystical behind Edward's Performance today! Look at the way he sucks in that gut in order to navigate through the endless sea of chairs occupied by the fatties. He's in the home stretch now as he claims his throne," responds Chuck, the average blue collar American.

The table is well hidden and unwanted, since it is located next to the restrooms, which adds another level of stank to my final minutes. When I say stank, I mean a fragrance of a horse stable that has not been cleaned for months combined with burnt Indian food all wrapped inside a used diaper, whose owner suffered from diarrhea. Yet, I do not hold a grudge against the placement of the table, since the food itself is the cause of burning colons everywhere.

Now that I have taken my seat of doom (which is a hard, stiff chunk of freezing metal and severely temperamental to my lower back), I finally begin to dive into my last meal.

Here is where the greatest minds struggle to answer the question: what do I eat first? Most people prefer to start with the fries or onion rings and make the main entree the "best for last." This is a terrible mistake, for if you were wanting to even begin with the "best," then why would you choose to dine at a fucking fast food joint in the first place?

Others may feel that the burger is the best place to start, assuming that the side dish is always fresh, hot, and worth the wait. Allow me to tell you all a secret about the fast food life: "fresh, hot, and ready" is as big a myth as finding a unicorn. However, if you were to claim that you have, indeed, found a unicorn, I have just two questions to ask: "What the fuck are you on?" and "Where can I get some of that chronic shit?"

Naturally, I begin with the fries, since I always have the false hope that the main entree is always worth the wait. Every time I am disappointed, and every time I taste nothing that even resembles meat (it usually ends up tasting like flavorless yogurt). The fries never disappoint, however. I always expect to receive the fries that have been sitting under the heat lamp ever since the breakfast shift. In other words, the fries are luke-warm, mushy, stretchy, and salty.

Today was different though. Upon nearing the bottom of the fry holder, I catch a glimpse of something that hardly ever happens to me. I have only heard legends of such occurrences, and when it does happen, it occurs about once every generation. Today I have found...the magical...the magnificent...Random Onion Ring in the Fries!

At this point, I began to feel the ever slight hope that this day will be a not so horrible day. Naturally...I was dead wrong! Why was I DEAD wrong? Well that should be obvious....

Chapter 3

And now the moment all of my readers' have been waiting for....

This is it....

This is the crunch time...

This is the final battle of Gondor....

This is the Golden Fleece....

The time is now....

I am finally going to die.

I believe that I have held your attention span long enough to finally reveal my own timely demise. I know my readers all have been waiting for the death scene that I have promised at the beginning. After all, today is the day that I died and you all seem to be looking forward to it. I mean I did just go on and on...and on...and on...and on.

I have just let it drag and stretch to its absolute final length. I mean come on...I spent many pages just building it up haven't I? Allow me to....

I'm just fucking with you guys! Although I am a little hurt that each of my readers may be actually wanting to see my death. I don't like to re-live the circumstances but I must do what I must....

Here you go....

Assholes....

As I finish the final fry, I glance over at the shiny coating of the foil wrapped Whopperito. It is a decent sized burrito and I know that it will fill my desires to a point.

However, I can't help but feel a sense of sexual frustration as the Whopperito is about double the size of my own prowess (i.e. I have a tiny cock, and I am NOT proud of it).

Ah...this is why I'm still single! The burrito can satisfy what I cannot....

I sip my coke in celibacy and grab the highly erect, throbbing-from-the-heat, Whoppertio and begin to unwrap the silver coating. The texture is that of a Chipotle burrito, and this is what I attempt to compare it to (however, it is nowhere close to quality). Like a fine wine, I sniff the contents before I sample the flavor. I consider myself a fast food connoisseur of sorts.

Unwraps the foil and sniffs. "This Whopperito dates to a vintage of 5 minutes ago today in the year 2017. A fine year to be sure...(huge swing and a miss)" Takes another sniff of the contents. "There is a slight tinge of left over grease from the stove top with hints of moldy cheese and burnt hamburger parts. A fine delicacy among the poverty stricken I declare."

After the sniffing concludes, I take the first and last bite of what I now know to be undeserving of the Whopper title. The cheese squirts into my mouth with hot, salty intensity, and the meat has a slight crunch of overcooked texture. I cannot finish chewing the morsel as it tastes so bad that my taste buds begin dying off one by one.

If my taste buds could speak, they would sound something like this: "Dear heavens! Why has our god forsaken us so? We shall not survive this onset of plague" "Perhaps this is merely a test of faith..." "Test of faith?!?! Nay! This is our god saying 'Fuck you all!'" Those will forever be the last words of what were once my taste buds.

At this point, I attempt to swallow what is left of my first deep throating experience, and it becomes stuck in my esophagus. I clutch my throat in rapid intensity,

thinking that choking myself more is the only way to save myself. No breath can escape or enter my body. I begin to turn blue. I became so breathless and blue that my tombstone will read: "Here lies Papa Smurf. The smurfiest Smurf that ever smurfed."

As all my attempts of dislodging the shit-filled sandwich of a burrito show no avail, I leapt from my chair onto the floor (also landing on chewed up bubble gum) and begin to convulse violently.

If I can't choke it out, then I'll shake it out! Yet another brilliant plan to save myself. Seriously, the reactions that choking victims have while choking seems like the body itself wants you to die....

My eyes begin to tear up as I continue to choke myself, and shake, shake, shake, trying to get this piece of shit out of my body. I know that my final moments have arrived, and I have no one to blame but myself. In this epiphany, I attempt to reach out for help to those also eating whatever refuse came out of the dumpster that is Burger King. Guess what happens? Normally, someone may drop their sad excuse of a meal and leap into action, right? Well....

EVERYONE KEEPS ON EATING THEIR FUCKING FOOD! They all look at me as if I'm putting on an act with an open guitar case on the street corner.

Strums a minor "A" chord and sings: "I'm choking to death assholes...I reach out and try to save myself...yet no one sees me dying on the floor...What the fuck is wrong with all of you...can't you see I'm dying..." People just walk on by. Although someone does throw their gum wrapper in the guitar case.

Not one single fat ass can drop their food while I'm just on the floor shaking, eyes bulging, tearing, and getting ready to meet my maker. Therefore, with my last moments, I

know what has to be done. Before my last attempted breath, I raise my arm, and, with shaking hand, lower all fingers, except for the one in the middle, and begin to flaunt my bird to everyone that can see. I actually got a response from this. The guy sitting right above me puts down his burger and shows me both of his bird friends. He then proceeds back to his lunch as I stop moving and die.

Life...Fuck it!

The Play

By

John Edward Reynolds

A bench in a park with random
people bustling to and fro.

*A lone bench is seen center stage with P. Wright
(hooded figure) sitting in the middle, writing in
a notebook. We never see the face of P. Wright.
Behind the bench, we see two Random Passersby
walking across the stage in opposite directions.*

Random Passerby 1:

(never stops walking)

Lovely day today, isn't it?

Random Passerby 2:

(never stops walking)

Good day for a walk, I'd say.

P. Wright is unfazed, continuing to sit and write.

*Enter stage right, Tag (man, early 20s, seems
constantly confused or searching for answers) is
seen heading towards the bench with a lunch box in
hand.*

Tag:

(to P. Wright)

Is this seat taken?

*P. Wright is unmoved and continues to sit and
write.*

(continued)

Excuse me, sir, is the seat taken? Or do I need to find another bench? *To Self:*

Although it does seem like this is the only bench in the park.

P. Wright:

(ominously)

The show must go on.

Tag:

(confused)

Ok? That sounded ominous...but again, not like there is anywhere else to sit. *To*

Self: Seriously, how small is this park?

P. Wright gestures for Tag to sit while never actually acknowledging him. P. Wright continues to write and sit. As Tag takes his seat, the same two passersby arrive.

Random Passerby 1:

(never stops walking)

Lovely day today, isn't it?

P. Wright is, again, unfazed. Tag looks towards the passerby as if talking to him.

Tag:

(towards passerby)

I mean it's not the greatest, but...

Random Passerby 2:

(never stops walking)

Good day for a walk, I'd say.

Tag:

(towards passerby)

Really? It seems a little dark to me...

*The two passersby walk off stage, never
acknowledging Tag.*

Tag:

(insulted)

Well, that was just rude!

(towards P. Wright)

Wouldn't you agree, Mr...?

*P. Wright continues to write and never looks
towards Tag.*

P. Wright:

(ominously)

The show must go on.

Tag:

(weirded out)

What show? What are you even talking about?

*P. Wright stops writing and looks straight towards
the audience, motionless.*

P. Wright:

(at audience)

Here comes the twist. The show must go on.

P. Wright winks at the audience and completely ignores Tag.

Tag:

(frightened)

Ok...dude, you are really starting to freak me out here!

(at P. Wright)

What show? There is no show. And what do you mean by twist? It's not like we're in a play or anything. And what did you just wink at? There's nothing in front of us, but trees...

Tag begins shaking his head as if trying to understand the meaning behind P. Wright's words and actions. Enter Stage left, Willy Pierce (man, early 20s, pompous, over-dramatic). Tag looks up to see Willy heading towards the bench.

Willy Pierce:

(towards Tag and P. Wright)

Excuse me, but is this seat taken? I've been walking around for hours, and I need a break.

P. Wright remains motionless, looking towards the audience. Tag looks up at Willy.

Tag:

Sorry, but there doesn't seem to be any room for the three of...

P. Wright begins to stand, placing his notebook on the bench. He begins moving towards the audience.

Tag follows him with his eyes until he leaves the stage. Tag is wide-eyed and frozen in fear.

Tag: (cont'd)

(scared, towards Willy)

Did...did you just...did you see that? He started heading towards the skyline of trees and then poof! He...he just disappeared...

Willy Pierce:

(sits on bench)

I don't know what the hell you're talking about, man. There is no one else here but you, me, and this bench.

Tag:

(at Willy)

What do you mean just you and me? I was just sitting next to this creepy hooded person who kept going on and on about "show must go on" and then he gets up, walks right in front of us, and then vanishes!

Willy Pierce:

Dude...what the hell are you on right now?

Willy shrugs at Tag. As Tag begins to ponder what is going on, the passersby arrive again.

Random Passerby 1:

Lovely day today, isn't it?

Tag:

(towards passerby, confused)

Weren't you just here...?

Random Passerby 2:

Good day for a walk, I'd say.

Tag:

(freaked out)

And you...didn't you both just walk by 2 minutes ago...?

Exit Passersby

*Tag slowly turns toward the audience, confused and
frightened. He places his head in his hands and
notices the notebook.*

Tag:

(towards Willy)

Hey, dude...is that yours?

Willy Pierce:

(raises eyebrow at Tag)

Is what mine?

Tag:

(picks up notebook)

This notebook...right here...in my hands?

Willy Pierce:

(confused)

What notebook? You're holding nothing but air, my strange and drugged out friend.

Tag gazes at the notebook in his hands, clearly visible to the audience. He looks Willy in the eye, then turns back to the audience. He continues to examine the notebook to himself, ignoring Willy.

Tag:

To Self: What the hell is this guy talking about? There is clearly a notebook in my hands. Why can't he see it? Why couldn't he see the creepy hooded dude...

Tag stops mid-thought in awe and epiphany.

Tag: (cont'd)

Wait a second...that creepy guy had a notebook just like this! This has to be his.

Maybe there's something in here that can explain...well, anything at this point.

Tag opens the notebook and begins reading out loud so the audience can hear. Willy continues to sit, taking no notice of Tag.

Tag: (cont'd)

(reading out loud)

The Play. Written by P. Wright. Scene...a bench in the park with random people bustling to and fro.

(intrigued)

Characters...P. Wright, mysterious hooded figure. Tag, constantly confused about everything...

*Tag pauses for a few seconds and stares wide eyed
at the audience.*

Tag: (cont'd)

Hey...that's me! But...how...?

(continues to read out loud)

Random passersby 1 & 2, walk back and forth on stage.

*As he reads the next part, random passersby enter.
Tag never looks away from the notebook while
reading. Willy continues to just sit and keep to
himself.*

Random Passerby 1 & Tag:

Lovely day today, isn't it?

Random Passerby 2 & Tag:

Good day for a walk, I'd say.

*Tag is speechless and motionless with his jaw
hanging open. Willy notices this and gives Tag a
light slap on the back to snap him out of it.*

Willy Pierce:

Dude, are you ok? You have been acting funny ever since I got here. Plus you seem to be seeing things that aren't here so...

*Tag shakes his head and turns toward Willy. He
holds up the notebook.*

Tag:

I don't know why you can't see this notebook, but it exists. And even more so, this book knows everything about us...

Willy Pierce:

(confused)

Ok...wacko...whatever you say...

Tag:

I'll prove it to you.

(reads from notebook)

Character...Willy Pierce, over-dramatic and pompous.

(towards Willy)

Now how could I know that? You haven't even told me your name since you got here...

Willy Pierce:

Well apparently you can read minds or something. Willy is also a very common name. Dude...there is no notebook!

*Tag turns away from Willy in frustration with book
in hand. He opens it to the end and reads aloud.*

Tag:

Stage Direction...Willy reaches into his jacket and pulls out a gun. He points it at Tag, and the lights black. Sound effect...GUN SHOT...

Tag stares at the audience, and Willy begins reaching into his jacket and suddenly stops as if frozen in time.

Tag: (cont'd)

To Self: I die!?! Why...why...why...

P. Wright:

(off-stage)

Because that's how I wrote it...

Enter Stage right, P. Wright with hood still up moving towards the bench. Tag stares at him in shock and disbelief. He looks at Willy and notices he is not moving and frozen in place.

Tag:

How...how is this possible? Who are you...really?

P. Wright:

That's a fair question, I suppose. I am your creator in a sense. Everything that has occurred today on this stage has been written by my hand.

Tag:

Stage? Creator? What are you talking about? We are sitting in a park...on a bench
staring at nothing but skyline. See?

*Tag points towards the audience and looks out at
the faces of the people in attendance.*

Tag: (cont'd)

(shocked and confused)

Where did the trees go? Who...who are these people?

P. Wright:

(gestures at audience)

These are the people that have come to see my play. "The Play" as you have
already read in an earlier line.

Tag:

What? I'm a real person. Not some character in a play! I have thoughts, feelings,
memories....

P. Wright:

(interrupting)

Do you really, though? Tell me, where were you born? What were you doing before
the play started?

Tag:

Well, I was...I was...I mean, I know I was...

*Tag begins to sink into a depressive contemplation
look as he struggles to remember. P. Wright
approaches Tag and places his hand on his*

shoulder. Willy remain frozen in place.

Tag: (cont'd)

I don't know...I actually don't know...

(towards P. Wright)

Why?

P. Wright:

Simple...you don't remember because that is not what is written in the script. Didn't you notice that Willy over there can't see me or the notebook?

Tag:

Well, yeah. I just thought he was being an asshole. I mean apparently he's about to kill me.

P. Wright:

(shakes his head)

No, no, no. He cannot see me or the notebook because it is not in the script. Only you can see me and the notebook because...

Tag:

(interrupting, mocking)

Because it's in the script! Yeah, yeah, yeah. I get it.

(pause)

So if you are the creator, then why don't you change the script so that I don't die? I mean when I die, that's the end for me!

P. Wright:

I cannot change the final outcome. This is what the audience wants to see. A tragic comedy...it has been this way before even I existed. And when you die, that is certainly not the end for you...

Tag:

(confused)

How is it no the end of me? Death is THE ending of all endings...

P. Wright:

My boy it is not the end of you because this is only opening night for you. This is one of many performances of this play. We will always have this conversation and we will always arrive at the same outcome. The audience out in front of you...they root for you because you are the main character. They all come to see you and wait to see what happens. Tonight, you will die at Willy's hand, this is true, and dying is a bitch to be sure. However, you will remain eternal on the stage and in the pages of that notebook and these people will continue to watch the performance.

Tag:

Can't there be a different ending, though? I mean that guy is on his phone and that one fell asleep. Clearly, my death annoys them. *To audience:* Sorry to inconvenience you all!

P. Wright:

Oh tag...you are truly one of my favorite characters.

P. Wright begins to exit stage right. Before he reaches the curtain, he turns back to Tag.

P. Wright: (cont'd)

Just remember..."All the world's a stage, and we are merely actors."

Exit P. Wright. Willy is now moving again and pulls out his gun with the barrel facing Tag.

Tag:

To Self: "All the world's a stage and we are merely actors...." It's still bullshit that I have to die though....

Tag closes his eyes and Willy begins to pull the trigger. The LIGHTS go out, and a GUN SHOT is heard.

END

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“Respect my Authoritah”:

Humor Aesthetics and Satire Laws

Applied to *South Park* and *The Simpsons*

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