

the show with Swift misses because Swift's satirical stance does not line up very well against that of Matt Groening and Company. Rather, I suggest that Pope is a more appropriate model. To make that case, it is important to emphasize that Pope's satirical bent was in conscious opposition to Swift's. Swift told Pope that he aimed to "vex the world rather than divert it" (qtd. in Fox 272), and Pope replied, "You call your satires, libels; I would rather call my satires, epistles" (qtd. in Jack 100). In choosing to write Horatian epistles, Pope reminded his audience that he, too, was of this world, one of us. Likewise, even as *The Simpsons* directs its satire at American culture, it also repeatedly reminds us that it, too, is one of us.

There is some debate as to whether *The Simpsons* does contain the kind of moral center around which Pope constructed his satire. In an article mock-epically titled "Homer's Odyssey," A.O. Scott has made the following claim: "[T]he show — brainy and populist, sophisticated and vulgar, gleeful in its assault on every imaginable piety and subversively affirmative of the bonds of family and community — has remained remarkably vital." Scott's claim that the show is "subversively affirmative" of family bonds is apt. Carl Matheson, however, argues that such bonds are themselves subverted in Springfield. He writes, "The Simpsons' use of heart warming family endings should be seen as an attempt to paper over the paradox of comedy that it exemplifies so well" (124). As Matheson defines it, the comedic paradox consists of our cruel willingness and even desire to derive joy from others' pain. I would argue that those "heart warming" moments, which actually occur more frequently than Matheson acknowledges, are the show's attempts to write "epistles" rather than "libels."

It is worth recalling just a few such moments in the life of *The Simpsons*: Bart enlists the help of Michael Jackson to write and perform a birthday song for Lisa; Homer experiences an epiphany about his marriage when his search for his true soul mate leads him into Marge's arms; Lisa reconciles her issues about Homer by being able to empathize with his point of view in their relationship while being submerged in a deprivation tank; Marge regains her trust of her "special little guy" when Bart