

= The Principal and the Pauper =

" The Principal and the Pauper " is the second episode of The Simpsons ' ninth season . It first aired on the Fox network in the United States on September 28 , 1997 . In the episode , Seymour Skinner begins to celebrate his twentieth anniversary as principal of Springfield Elementary School , when a man arrives claiming that Skinner has assumed his identity . Principal Skinner admits that his real name is Armin Tamzarian , and that he had thought the true Seymour Skinner , a friend from the army , had died in the Vietnam War . Armin leaves Springfield , but is later persuaded to return as principal .

" The Principal and the Pauper " was written by Ken Keeler and directed by Steven Dean Moore . It guest starred Martin Sheen as the real Seymour Skinner . Although it aired during the show 's ninth season , it was a holdover from season eight . The episode is one of the most controversial episodes of The Simpsons . Many fans and critics reacted extremely negatively to the revelation that Principal Skinner , a recurring character since the first season , was an impostor . The episode has been criticized by series creator Matt Groening , and by Harry Shearer , who provides the voice of Principal Skinner . Despite this , Ken Keeler considers the episode the best work he has ever done for television . Bill Oakley and Josh Weinstein have also defended the episode .

= = Plot = =

On the eve of his twentieth anniversary as school principal , Seymour Skinner is lured by his mother to Springfield Elementary School for a surprise party . The celebration goes well until a strange man arrives , claiming to be the real Seymour Skinner . Principal Skinner admits that he is an impostor , and that his real name is Armin Tamzarian . Armin then tells the story of the events that led him to steal Seymour Skinner 's identity .

Armin was once a troubled young man and finds himself in the Army . There , he met and befriended the real Sergeant Seymour Skinner , who became his mentor and helped him find meaning in his troubled life . Seymour told Armin that his dream was to become an elementary school principal after the war . Later , Seymour was declared missing and presumed dead . Armin took the news of the apparent death to Seymour 's mother , Agnes . Upon meeting him , however , Agnes mistook him for her son , and Armin could not bear to deliver the message . He instead allowed Agnes to call him Seymour , and took over Seymour 's life . Meanwhile , the real Seymour Skinner spent five years in a POW camp , then worked in a Chinese sweatshop for two decades until it was shut down by the United Nations .

After these revelations , the people of Springfield begin to distrust Armin . Armin decides that there is no longer any place for him in Springfield . The real Skinner is then offered the chance to realize his dream and take over as school principal . He takes the job , but the real Skinner finds himself isolated by the townspeople who realize they prefer Armin over him . Armin , however , has already left Springfield and gone to Capital City to resume his old persona as a no @-@ good street thug .

Marge heads to Capital City with Edna Krabappel , Agnes and the rest of the Simpson family . After Agnes orders Armin to return home , Homer persuades Mayor Quimby and all the other citizens to allow Armin to resume his assumed identity as Principal Skinner . The real Skinner is unhappy about this , and refuses to give up his job and his dignity just because the people of Springfield prefer Armin to him . In response , the townspeople banish the real Skinner from town by tying him to a chair on a flatcar of a freight train . Judge Snyder declares that Armin will again be referred to as Seymour Skinner , that he will return to his job as school principal , and that no one shall mention the name " Armin Tamzarian " again .

= = Production = =

" The Principal and the Pauper " was the last episode of The Simpsons written by Ken Keeler , who also pitched the original idea for the episode . Many fans believe the episode is based on the story of Martin Guerre or the 1993 film Sommersby . According to animation director Steve Moore , one of

the working titles for the episode was " Skinnersby ". However , Keeler has said he was inspired by the Tichborne Case of nineteenth @-@ century England . The episode 's official title is a reference to the book *The Prince and the Pauper* by Mark Twain .

Producers Bill Oakley and Josh Weinstein were excited about the episode because Principal Skinner was one of their favorite characters . The pair had already written the season five episode " Sweet Seymour Skinner 's Baadasssss Song " , which was an in @-@ depth study of the character . Oakley said he and Weinstein " spent a month immersed in the mind of Seymour Skinner " to prepare that episode , and from that point forward , took every opportunity to " tinker with [Skinner 's] personality and his backstory and his homelife " .

Describing the real Seymour Skinner , Keeler remarked , " It would have been easy to make him a really horrible , nasty , dislikeable guy , but we didn 't do that . We made him just not quite right , not quite Skinner , and a little bit off . " Bill Oakley said the idea behind the character was that he " just lacked pizzazz " . The producers selected Martin Sheen to voice the character because they admired his performance in *Apocalypse Now* and felt his voice would be appropriate for a Vietnam veteran .

Keeler borrowed the name Armin Tamzarian from a claims adjuster who had assisted him after a car accident when he moved to Los Angeles . However , the real Tamzarian (now a California Superior Court Judge) was unaware his name was being used until after the episode aired . Keeler said he later received a " curtly phrased " letter from Tamzarian , who wanted to know why his name appeared in the episode . Keeler feared he would face legal troubles , but afterwards , Tamzarian explained that he was simply curious and did not intend to scare anyone .

= = Reception = =

" The Principal and the Pauper " finished 41st in the United States in the ratings for the week of September 22 ? 28 , 1997 , with a Nielsen rating of 9 @.@ 2 . The episode was the second highest rated show on the Fox network that week , following *King of the Hill* . The Fox network 's ratings average for the week was 6 @.@ 4 .

The revelation that Principal Skinner was an impostor and the self @-@ referential *deus ex machina* ending were negatively received by many fans and critics . Skinner had been a recurring character since the first season and , after years of development , his backstory had suddenly been changed . Bill Oakley considers " The Principal and the Pauper " the most controversial episode from his tenure as executive producer .

In his 2004 book *Planet Simpson* , Chris Turner describes " The Principal and the Pauper " as the " broadcast that marked [the] abrupt plunge " from *The Simpsons* ' " Golden Age " , which he says began in the middle of the show 's third season . He calls the episode " [one of] the weakest episodes in Simpsons history " , and adds , " A blatant , continuity @-@ scrambling plot twist of this sort might 've been forgivable if the result had been as funny or sharply satirical as the classics of the Golden Age , but alas it 's emphatically not . " Turner notes that the episode " still sports a couple of virtuoso gags " , but says that such moments are limited .

In July 2007 , in an article in *The Guardian* , Ian Jones argues that the " show became stupid " in 1997 , pointing to " The Principal and the Pauper " as the bellwether . " Come again ? A major character in a long @-@ running series gets unmasked as a fraud ? It was cheap , idle storytelling " , he remarks .

In a February 2006 article in *The Star @-@ Ledger* , Alan Sepinwall and Matt Zoller Seitz cite the episode when asserting that the quality of *The Simpsons* " gets much spottier " in season nine . Alan Sepinwall observes in another *Star @-@ Ledger* article , " [The episode] was so implausible that even the characters were disavowing it by the end of the episode . " Jon Hein , who coined the term " jumping the shark " to refer to negative changes in television series , writes in *Jump the Shark : TV Edition* , " We finally spotted a fin at the start of the ninth season when Principal Skinner 's true identity was revealed as Armin Tamzarian . " James Greene of *Nerve.com* put the episode fifth on his list " Ten Times The Simpsons Jumped the Shark " , calling it a " nonsensical meta @-@ comedy " and arguing that it " seemed to betray the reality of the show itself " .

In contrast , Warren Martyn and Adrian Wood , the authors of *I Can 't Believe It 's a Bigger and Better Updated Unofficial Simpsons Guide* , praised the episode , calling it " one of the series ' all @-@ time best episodes , mainly because it shows us a human side , not just of Principal Skinner , but of his hectorish [sic] Mom as well . " They add that " Martin Sheen steals the show [...] in a brief but important slice of Simpsons history . " Total Film 's Nathan Ditum named Martin Sheen 's performance in the episode the 20th best guest appearance on *The Simpsons* .

Ken Keeler , Bill Oakley , and Josh Weinstein all defend the episode in its DVD commentary . Keeler asserts , " I am very , very proud of the job I did on this episode . This is the best episode of television I feel I ever wrote . " He describes the episode as a commentary on " people who like things just the way they are " , and remarks , " It never seems to have occurred to anyone that this episode is about the people who hate it . " However , Keeler says that some of the dialogue was changed from his original draft , making this point less obvious . Oakley and Weinstein explain that they wanted to push the boundaries of the series while working as show @-@ runners , and advise viewers to treat " *The Principal and the Pauper* " as an " experiment " . They surmise that the negative reception was partly due to the fact that it was not immediately apparent to viewers that this was such an episode (as opposed to , for example , " *The Simpsons Spin @-@ Off Showcase* ") . They also describe the ending of the episode as an attempt to reset the continuity and allow fans to consider the episode as non @-@ canonical , divorced from the larger series .

Other figures associated with *The Simpsons* have publicly criticized the episode . In an April 2001 interview , Harry Shearer , the voice of Principal Skinner , recalled that after reading the script , he told the writers , " That 's so wrong . You 're taking something that an audience has built eight years or nine years of investment in and just tossed it in the trash can for no good reason , for a story we 've done before with other characters . It 's so arbitrary and gratuitous , and it 's disrespectful to the audience . "

In December 2006 , in an interview , Shearer added , " Now , [the writers] refuse to talk about it . They realize it was a horrible mistake . They never mention it . It 's like they 're punishing [the audience] for paying attention . " In the introduction to the ninth season DVD boxset , series creator Matt Groening describes " *The Principal and the Pauper* " as " one of [his] least favorite episodes " . He also called the episode " a mistake " in an interview with *Rolling Stone* .

Later episodes of *The Simpsons* contain references to " *The Principal and the Pauper* " . A clip from the episode was used in season eleven 's " *Behind the Laughter* " as an example of the show 's increasingly " gimmicky and nonsensical plots " . In the season fifteen episode " I , (Annoyed Grunt) -Bot " , Lisa addresses Principal Skinner as " Principal Tamzarian " when Skinner chides her for naming her new cat Snowball II , after a cat that had died earlier in the episode . Additionally , the continuity of the series appears to revert to the original story of Seymour Skinner in the season 21 episode " *Boy Meets Curl* " , as he is clearly shown to kick Agnes Skinner in utero , establishing him as Agnes ' biological son after all .