

= Waylon Smithers =

Waylon J. Smithers, Jr., usually referred to as Mr. Smithers or simply Smithers, is a recurring fictional character in the American animated sitcom *The Simpsons*, who is voiced by Harry Shearer. Smithers first appeared in the episode "Homer's Odyssey", although his voice could be heard in the series premiere "Simpsons Roasting on an Open Fire". He is the consummate executive and personal assistant of Springfield Nuclear Power Plant's owner Mr. Burns.

Smithers' devotion to Mr. Burns was inspired from how numerous Fox executives and staff members acted towards Barry Diller. The idea for Smithers' ambiguous sexual orientation came from Sam Simon, who proposed that Smithers should be gay, but little attention should be drawn to it. Smithers' first name (Waylon) was derived from that of puppeteer Wayland Flowers.

Smithers was originally animated and intended for storyline purposes by some producers and directors to be African American. This however was ultimately changed in later episodes with conflicting and unknown confirmed reasons as to why. Matt Groening however in an unintended interview with TMZ, confirms that the animation director at that time originally drew Smithers black according to plan, but he was changed to "yellow". When asked by the interviewer why he wasn't kept that way, Groening did not respond other than "it was a mistake".

Smithers is an obedient and sycophantic assistant to Mr. Burns, and the relationship between the two is a frequent running gag on *The Simpsons*. In many ways, Smithers represents the stereotype of a closeted gay man, and numerous overt allusions and double entendres concerning his homosexuality are made, though some of the show's producers instead interpret him as a "Burns @-@ sexual". In the season 27 (2016) episode "The Burns Cage", he came out as gay.

= = Role in The Simpsons = =

Smithers is Mr. Burns' devoted executive assistant. His father, Waylon Smithers, Sr., worked for Burns until he died of radiation poisoning after saving Springfield from a potential nuclear meltdown, when Smithers was a baby. Although he is not openly gay, Smithers frequents Springfield's gay village and goes on a vacation to a male @-@ only resort. It was revealed in a flashback that he was married to a woman once, but the two split up when Mr. Burns came between them. Smithers is shown to have a passionate and deep love for Mr. Burns, and his sexual orientation has been characterized by the writers of the show as "Burns @-@ sexual".

Mr. Burns remained largely ignorant of Smithers' devoted adoration, much to Smithers' frustration. Mr. Burns himself has been involved with several women and in "A Hunka Hunka Burns in Love", Smithers is noticeably disgusted when Mr. Burns starts looking for a female companion. Burns, for his part, views Smithers as somewhat of a lackey, albeit a highly valued one for his competence. He has "rewarded" Smithers' devotion with the future "honor" of being buried alive with him after he dies. Smithers has been shown to be somewhat dependent on his relationship with Burns. In "Homer the Smithers", Mr. Burns orders Smithers to take a vacation and Homer Simpson is hired as a temporary replacement. When Homer loses his temper and punches Mr. Burns in the face, Mr. Burns learns to become self @-@ reliant and this results in Smithers being fired. Smithers decides that he needs to be Mr. Burns' assistant and eventually gets his job back. In the season 27 episode "The Burns Cage", Smithers admits his love to Burns, who reaffirms his contempt for his assistant.

Smithers' official job at the power plant appears to be that of executive assistant, which he says is "actually about 2 @, @ 800 smaller jobs" responsible for monitoring employee attendance, and is often a disciplinarian and has won dozens of employee of the month awards. He has often hinted at wanting to be promoted to the position of executive vice president, but Burns has repeatedly quashed this dream, while whimsically bestowing the vice presidency on a dog. Smithers has the largest collection of Malibu Stacy dolls in Springfield and is the president of the Malibu Stacy fan club.

= = Character = =

= = = Creation = = =

Smithers was partly based on how numerous Fox executives and staff members acted towards Barry Diller . The idea for Smithers ' orientation was pitched by Sam Simon , who proposed that Smithers should be gay , but the writers should never draw too much attention to it and should try to keep it in the back of their heads . Jay Kogen said " Originally he was gay and black ... But we thought it was too much so we just kept him gay . " The script for " Blood Feud " originally featured Smithers saying " Just leave me enough to get home to my wife and kids " , but the line had to be cut for time . Smithers is voiced by Harry Shearer , who is also the voice of Mr. Burns . Shearer is often able to perform dialogue between the two characters in one take . Dan Castellaneta occasionally fills in for Shearer at table reads and voices Smithers . The name Waylon was first used in " I Married Marge " and comes from the puppeteer Wayland Flowers .

Smithers made his first appearance in " Homer 's Odyssey " , which was the third episode of the first season , although he can be heard over a speaker in The Simpsons series premiere " Simpsons Roasting on an Open Fire " . In his first visual appearance in " Homer 's Odyssey " , Smithers was mistakenly animated with the wrong color and was made darker than most characters by Gyorgi Peluci , the color stylist . David Silverman has claimed that Smithers was always intended to be " Mr Burns ' white sycophant " , and the staff thought it " would be a bad idea to have a black subservient character " and so switched him to his intended color for his next episode . Silverman retconned this error by saying that Smithers had a tan from a recent holiday in the Caribbean . The first appearance of a yellow Smithers was " There 's No Disgrace Like Home " , the fourth episode of the first season .

= = = Development = = =

Smithers ' relationship with Mr. Burns has long been a running gag on The Simpsons . Smithers is an obedient and sycophantic assistant to Mr. Burns . There have often been strong hints about Smithers ' true feelings for his boss , with one of the earliest references being in the season one episode " The Telltale Head " . Smithers ' sexual orientation has often come into question , with some fans claiming he is a " Burns @-@ sexual " and only attracted to his boss , while others maintain that he is , without a doubt , gay . During the Bill Oakley / Josh Weinstein era , they still tried to keep his sexuality mysterious and there was debate among the writers about his orientation . Al Jean , who thinks of Smithers as being a " Burns @-@ sexual " , felt that had Mr. Burns been a woman , then Smithers would not be gay . David Silverman , a former supervising director has said , " [Smithers] seems to be focused on one particular human , as opposed to anything beyond that . [Rather than being gay] , he 's sort of ' Burns @-@ sexual . ' " In a 2006 study conducted by the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation , it was determined that nine of the 679 lead and supporting characters on scripted broadcast television were gay or lesbian , but Smithers was not included . A list published in 2008 by the same organization included Smithers ; Patty Bouvier , Marge Simpson 's lesbian sister , was included on both lists .

The debate is referenced in " The Simpsons 138th Episode Spectacular " , when the episode host , Troy McClure is answering viewer questions , and one that is asked is " What is the real deal with Mr. Burns ' assistant Smithers ? You know what I 'm talking about . " A montage of various clips that shows Smithers ' lust for Mr. Burns follows , and in the end , McClure says " as you can see , the real deal with Waylon Smithers is that he 's Mr. Burns ' assistant . He 's in his early forties , is unmarried , and currently resides in Springfield . Thanks for writing ! "

Several of the allusions to Smithers ' sexuality have turned into battles with the censors . For example , in Smithers ' fantasy of a naked Mr. Burns popping out of a birthday cake in " Rosebud " , the censors had not wanted Mr. Burns to be naked . Another example is " Marge Gets a Job " , which has a dream sequence where Smithers is sleeping and Burns flies through a window . The sequence shows Burns flying towards him and Smithers looking happy , but originally it went on for

a few seconds longer . It had to be trimmed down due to scenes that showed " Mr. Burns land [ing] in a particular position on Smithers ' anatomy " . There were also issues with " the lump in his bed " , which the animators said had drawn as his knee , but the censors had misinterpreted .

In the second season , the writers started to enjoy writing about Smithers and Burns ' relationship , and the writers often pitched episodes with them as the focus , but many never came to fruition .

Mostly in the early seasons , Smithers had a catchphrase , which comes from a recurring joke that Mr. Burns never remembers who Homer Simpson is . Smithers and Burns would watch Homer (usually over a security camera feed) and Burns would ask , " Who is that man ? " , to which Smithers would reply , " That 's Homer Simpson , sir , one of your [drones , organ banks , carbon blobs , etc .] from sector 7G . " Burns would invariably respond , " Simpson , eh ? "

In September 2015 , it was confirmed by Jean that Smithers would come out to Mr. Burns in a season 27 episode . The episode , " The Burns Cage " , was broadcast the following April and saw Smithers unsuccessfully try to move on from Burns . A writer for British progressive magazine the New Statesman felt that the episode was a retcon , making a serious story about the character 's homosexuality instead of the previous jokes and innuendo which were arguably homophobic .

= = Reception = =

In 2004 , The Simpsons producers announced that one of their characters was going to come out of the closet . Speculation on who it would be was printed in newspapers throughout the United States and Canada (even claiming Smithers ' " sexual orientation was about the worst @-@ kept secret in Springfield ") as well as in Australia , New Zealand , Ireland , (the Irish Independent called Smithers " too obvious " a choice) , and the United Kingdom . Despite Matt Groening joking that it would be Homer , the Boston Herald calculated the odds of several characters being gay , with Smithers at a million to one . PlanetOut Inc. hosted an online poll in the weeks prior to the episode to determine based on " cartoon gaydar " who was gay on the Simpsons , with 97 % of the respondents choosing Smithers . Jenny Stewart , the entertainment editor at the site said of the poll , " We 've never had such an avalanche of people voting in any of our polls as we did on The Simpsons . " It was Patty Bouvier who came out .

In a 2007 article , Entertainment Weekly named Smithers the 16th @-@ greatest sidekick of all time . They have also described Smithers and Mr. Burns as being " TV 's most functional dysfunctional couple " . Star News Online named " Smithers ' fey way " as one of the four hundred reasons why they loved The Simpsons . In a 2003 article , Entertainment Weekly named the " Who Shot Mr. Burns ? " duo of episodes , in which Smithers was prominently featured , the series ' 25th @-@ best episode . Gay.com ranked Smithers as the sixth @-@ gayest cartoon character .

= = Merchandise = =

Smithers was made into an action figure , and four different versions were included as part of the World of Springfield toy line . The first shows Smithers in his normal attire with a picture of Mr. Burns at his feet and was released in 2000 as part of " wave two " . The second , released in 2002 as part of " wave ten " , is called " resort Smithers " and shows him dressed as he was at the resort in the episode " Homer the Smithers " . In 2003 , a series of figures exclusive to Electronics Boutique was released , and a set of one Mr. Burns figure and two different Smithers toys based on the episode " Rosebud " were included . One , called " Bobo Smithers " shows Smithers dressed as Mr. Burns ' teddy bear Bobo ; and the other , known as " future Smithers " , shows him as a robotic dog . A " future Burns " was included in the set as a companion to " future Smithers " and depicts Burns as a robot as he appeared at the end of the episode .