Mathyssen’s Miracle

The *Onion* is a satirical news source in which they write articles based on real news or problems that occur in the world. However, someone unfamiliar with the *Onion* could mistakenly believe that the articles are to be taken at face value. One article, titled “Man Wakes From Coma With Ability To Understand Health Insurance Policy”, explains how a construction worker named Kal Mathyssen awoke from a coma with the ability to understand his health insurance plan. The article goes on to quote doctors and loved ones to explain their shock and awe over his ability to understand his health insurance plan. Although it is highly possible for a man to wake up and fully understand the complexities of his health insurance policy, the article is actually a satire explaining the absurd intricacy of health insurance in the United States.

The article from the *Onion* employs Ethos and the Star Power Fallacy in order to establish credibility to make the reader believe the article. The *Onion* article quotes a fake doctor named Dr. Peggy Adams who remarked “In 21 years of practicing emergency medicine, I’ve never seen anything like this” referencing Mathyssen’s miraculous ability to understand his health insurance policy (The Onion). The use of having Dr. Adams is so the article can obtain credibility, which can convince a reader that the article is factual because it cites a doctor. Additionally, the point of Dr. Adams stating the length in years of her practicing medicine is to
establish more false reliability in the article, making it more probable for a person to believe the statement made by this fake doctor. Moreover, the article is clearly satire because it flips the common notion of having amnesia following waking from a coma to understanding one's health insurance policy, which is improbable in the real world. There is a clear logical fallacy used here known as the Star Power Fallacy. The Star Power Fallacy is when one uses a typically credible source such as a medical professional to falsely make the reader believe the article/quote (Master List). By having someone typically reputable such as a doctor being cited in this article it has the potential to convince a reader that it is factual. Lastly, it is important to acknowledge subtext in this quote, the doctor’s statement is used in order for the reader to see the ludicrous nature of the situation for a doctor to have never seen a person be able to understand their health insurance policy in her 21 years of practice, meaning that health insurance plans are too complicated for the average person to understand, alluding to a serious problem in the United States. The article is essentially satirizing the unnecessary intricacy of the current healthcare system in the United States, which prevents average American’s from being able to understand it without going into a coma.

The article from the Onion employs Pathos and the Scare Tactic Fallacy in order to invoke fear to make the reader believe the article at face value. The article states that Dr. Adams expects him to make a full recovery and that one day “even gain the ability to understand the paperwork he will need to fill out to file for bankruptcy once he is billed for his hospital stay” (The Onion). Dr. Adam’s statement allows the reader to feel scared for Mathyssen, which can make the reader assume that Mathyssen will actually have to file for bankruptcy for his hospital stay. However, in actuality Mathyssen will not have to file for bankruptcy, but the article is being
sarcastic since hospital bills tend to be exorbitantly expensive. The fallacy used here is called the Scare Tactic, which is using shock factor to get the audience to do or believe something (Master List). The Scare Tactic is used here to scare the reader that even though Mathyssen has just gotten this amazing gift, he is still in trouble because he will go bankrupt from the hospital bill. However, the author is employing sarcasm and these tactics in order to falsely make the reader believe that all hospital bills cause people to go bankrupt. The subtext of the quote shows how expensive hospital bills are. The author actually employs humor in order to distract from the dark reality that basic medical care can cause people to go broke. Due to the fact in actuality people can’t afford to go to hospitals for necessary medical procedures because of how expensive the bill is afterwards, which is a serious problem when people aren’t able to keep themselves healthy. Overall, the *Onion* is able to successfully satirize the United States’s shameful problem considering it is a first-world, industrialized nation that is unable to provide affordable healthcare for its citizens.

The article from the *Onion* employs Logos and the Snow Job Fallacy in order to make the reader believe the article at face value with various insurance jargon. The article has a quote from Mathyssen’s wife explaining that before his coma he had a very rudimentary understanding of his insurance policy; however, after his coma she found him on the phone using words such as “billing codes, out-of-pocket maximums, and I don’t know what else” (The Onion). The use of these different insurance related words allows his wife to believe that he is knowledgeable about insurance. Similarly, these words make the reader believe that he is informed about insurance as well. The fallacy used is called Snow Job Fallacy, which is using information to impress the audience and trick them into believing that someone or something is knowledgeable (Master
List). The article employs this fallacy in order to make the reader believe that he is knowledgeable about all things related to health insurance because he uses a few vocab words related to it. The subtext of the quotes shows that his wife is easily impressed at basic insurance terminology, which is a sad notion considering basic words related to insurance should not be so foreign to adults with health insurance. Additionally, his wife is a stand-in for the average American. This quote makes the reader understand that the average adult lacks education on health insurance. This is an economic problem because people do not understand what their insurance covers and what they owe, which can cause monetary problems. Furthermore, this is a social issue because people are not being educated in schools about health insurance and vocabulary related to it. Generally alluding to a systemic problem in America's lack of health insurance knowledge beginning from when these adults were children in K-12 schools.

So, even though it is realistic for a man to wake up and understand his health insurance policy, the article is satirizing the ridiculous complexity of health insurance plans in the United States. The article mocks the reality of having health insurance in the United States. The piece highlights that common people lack the appropriate education to understand their health insurance policy. Additionally, even if one is able to understand their health insurance policy, the cost of staying at the hospital is enough to drain one's bank account. All in all, shining an important light on the health care issues plaguing America, making this article clearly satire and not factual.
Works Cited
