

Graffiti

The writing is on the wall

All of us have read it; some of us, with trembling hands and ears cocked for intruders, have even authored it.

But what, exactly, is graffiti?

If you're a student of the 1944 edition of the Oxford English dictionary, you probably believe it is "a drawing or writing scratched on a wall or other surfaces, as at Pompeii and Rome."

But with the Oregon Daily Emerald's expense account being what it is, the discussion will be limited to the University.

Graffiti has been around at least as long as the first caveman decorated his domicile with crude drawings of beasts of prey. While the art form has survived thousands of years, it may soon be a thing of the past.

It was one year ago, almost to the day, that Newsweek magazine informed a stunned nation about Graffiti Gobbler, an Australian product designed to all but wipe out the graffiti movement.

By its own admission, Graffiti Gobbler is "the first effective, no mix, inexpensive formula that quickly and easily removes graffiti without harming the original appearance of the surface."

Time magazine says the concoction "could shut down the nation's longest running underground art show." It estimated \$40 of Graffiti Gobbler can undo what previously required \$1,000 worth of sandblasting.

With the introduction of this elixir, and other chemicals already in use at the University that make writing on the walls difficult, 1982 may be the last great year for graffiti.

While that development would undoubtedly be met with glee by janitors the world over, graffiti can, at best, be more than the anatomically detailed work of men wearing raincoats. Rather, it has historically been the testing ground for pithy proverbs that measure and evaluate a society.

To wit: To Do is To Be — Nietzsche; To

Be is To Do — Kant; Do Be Do Be Do — Sinatra.

Filtering that theory down onto a lesser plane, the graffiti at a particular learning institution reflects the character of its pupils.

Take Harvard men's room graffiti for example:

"She offered her honor... He honored her offer... And all night long... It was honor and offer."

Then there is the wisdom that filters out of the University.

"I have seen the future of rock 'n roll and it is Rick Springfield," reads a restroom wall in the library.

Or, "God loves Dick Enright, and I love God," reads an EMU wall.

Not one, but two nuggets of deep and everlasting truisms were mined from one graffiti-pocked desk in Fenton Hall. "Chick is God" reminded one. "Partridge Family Lives" intoned another.

It is often hard for the person writing graffiti to keep his or her educational bent from filtering into their work.

"Just for the sake of demographics, where is everyone from?" asked a probable sociology student. "E=MC squared. Great job Albert, but show your work," scolds a scientifically-inclined mind.

A current University fad is to write in the grout between restroom wall tiles. An informal rule is the slogan must rhyme with great or grout.

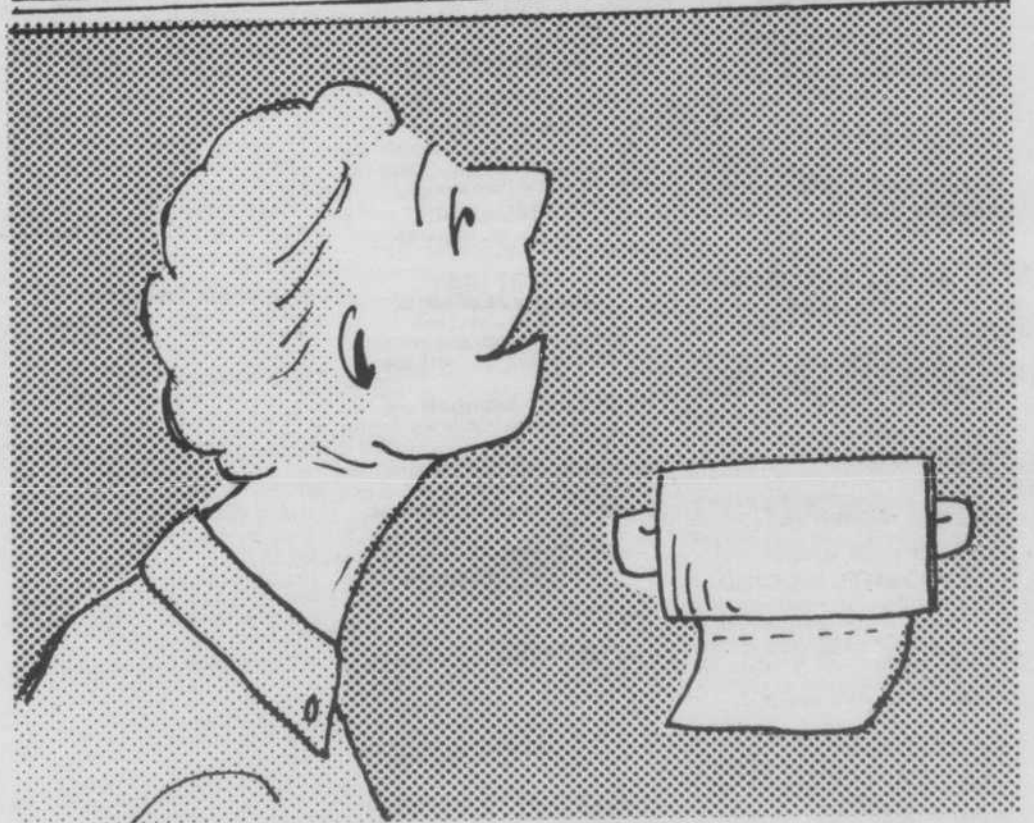
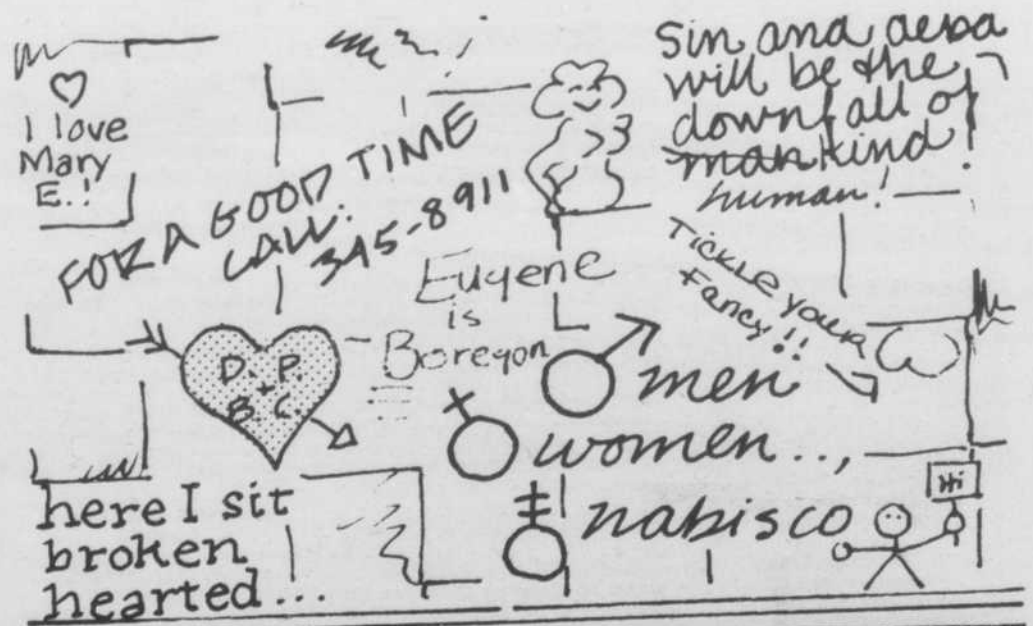
For example:

"Grouty to the max,
Grout balls of fire, the
Groutful Dead, Grout
Scott, That's totally
grouty! Jump and
grout and work it all
out, Potatoes Au

Grouten, The Grout Wall of China, Far
grout and Inside grout."

Of course, as tradition commands, the bulk of graffiti and the University is heavily peppered with words that make George Carlin's list of "Seven words you can't say on TV."

After those seven words, the five most



common used in graffiti here seem to be: blow, suck, your, mother, and horny.

More refined graffiti is being used to help students understand the deeper meanings behind discrete mathematics. A musing on a Honors College wall was apparently profound enough to Professor Micheal Dyer that he fed it to his Math 232 students.

"God is love... Love is blind... Ray Charles is blind... (therefore) Ray Charles is God," it read.

Dusting off several mathematical theorems, Dyer spent five minutes proving, almost beyond the shadow of a doubt and to the relief of many students, that Ray Charles is not God.

Understandably, at least one segment of the University doesn't find graffiti very amusing. They are the people that must clean it off or paint it over.

"That's a hard question to answer," says Custodial Supervisor John Evans, when asked how much graffiti costs the taxpayer. "I'd say here at the University, inside and out, you're talking about \$40,000 or \$50,000 a year. And that's just

the physical plant — that's not counting the student union, the dormitories or the health service."

Evans says the library and the architecture school seem to draw the most graffiti. Allen Hall, where the journalism school is headquartered, is surprisingly among the cleanest of all buildings.

Despite the availability of Graffiti Gobbler, Evans says there is as much graffiti on campus as there was a year ago.

The question of why graffiti continues to thrive at a so-called institution of higher learning was probably best answered by Gusmano Cesaretti, author of *Street Writers*.

"Maybe someday these kids won't have to write any more. They'll be too busy becoming doctors, or scientists, or professional artists.

"But for now, graffiti is their way of saying 'I am,' 'we are'."

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