

CONTACTING US

NEWSROOM:
(541) 346-5511
E-MAIL:
ode@oregon.uoregon.edu
ONLINE EDITION: www.uoregon.edu/~ode

ADDRESS:
Oregon Daily Emerald
P.O. BOX 3159
Eugene, Oregon 97403

PERSPECTIVES

EDITOR IN CHIEF
Sarah Kickler
EDITORIAL EDITOR
Mike Schmierbach
NIGHT EDITOR
Carl Yeh

The terrible temptation of trash TV

Thumbs



TO MICHAEL MOORE:
Creator of the film "Roger and Me," Moore has a new movie out called "The Big One." In the film, Moore documents his efforts to meet with corporate leaders while on a book tour. Only one CEO agreed to talk — Phil Knight. Apparently, Knight wishes he'd kept his mouth shut; various reports indicate Nike executives are angry about the way the interview was edited and conducted. Nevertheless, Moore has resisted pressure to alter the film and has left in footage of the interview, which portrays Nike and Knight in a less than admirable light.



TO CANADA BORDER CHECKS:
Border officials have increased efforts to stop drugs from being smuggled into the United States. Unfortunately, the checks have tied up commuters for hours while catching, by the admission of officials, a minimal percentage of offenders. Additionally, the drug for which police are searching is marijuana. Yes, that's right, time and money are being squandered to keep "high potency" pot out of the Northwest. Yes, we're talking about the same Northwest where grandmothers keep cookie jars filled with bud brownies. OK, perhaps we exaggerate, but the point is that anti-marijuana efforts on this scale are wasting resources without any chance of being effective.



CHRIS HUTCHINSON/Emerald

It might be silly, sloppy or even sleazy, but the Jerry Springer show can still be a lot of fun to watch

I like to think that I'm fairly discriminating in my entertainment choices. The Spice Girls make me retch, I avoid sitcoms and I refuse to give in to the sickening teenybopper sentimentality of "Titanic." This being the case, "The Jerry Springer Show" should be an affront. It should, but every now and again, around 11 o'clock in the evening, I find myself watching. Earnestly watching.

Sometimes it's a pressing social issue like "Pregnant Bad Girls." Other times, it's something simpler like "I Won't Let You Sell Your Body." Occasionally, they whip out that classic standby, "Guess What ... I'm Really A Man!" Whatever the topic, the

basic elements are always in place: the deleted expletives, the obligatory rumble, and of course, that consummate example of malice tempered with mercy, Jerry's Final Thought.

Oh, I know I shouldn't watch. I should be watching A&E, or better yet, reading a book. But I often find myself hypnotized by the spectacle, the comical tragedy of it all.

And I'm not the only one. Ratings for "The Jerry Springer Show" have risen 183 percent over the past year, and it has become the first talk show to share the top slot with Oprah since her show became No. 1 over 11 years ago.

There is, of course, an almost dizzyingly wonderful irony in seeing Jerry's trailer park shenanigans holding their own against Oprah's grown-up austerity.

The show's popularity is especially intriguing. In terms of the standard formula for TV success, Springer is an anomaly. For one thing, it's syndicated, a term often synonymous with basement-level ratings. Furthermore, despite its

popularity, the show can still only get away with charging about one-third of the advertising rates that Oprah charges, and even then it's shunned by some major advertisers.

And there's also the issue of content. Compared to network fare like Oprah's and Rosie O'Donnell's shows, where general civility punctuated with the occasional bit of choreographed zaniness is the standard, Jerry Springer is about as far from the mainstream as you can get.

This is the secret to the show's success. For every middle-income suburbanite who delights in the latest offering from Oprah's book club, there's a college student just itching to see some elbow-throwing and hair-pulling on Jerry.

This isn't a sign, as some of the more high-brow culture critics have suggested, of the decline of American decency. That's because while it's true that "Jerry Springer" isn't a classy show, America isn't a classy country. Indeed, it never has been and isn't likely to become one any time soon. America is full of people who are, at least some of the time,

Big Mac-chomping, tabloid-reading, pop-culture animals. Springer's popularity serves this notice to the cultural elites who squelch their lower impulses and then presume to look down their noses at those who don't: There's more of us than there are of you.

I personally know dozens of people who watch "The Jerry Springer Show." And I'm not talking about slack-jawed yokels here. These are intelligent people, people who can think critically and engage in reasoned debate. They merely like to indulge in television's version of the middle-school food fight for a few hours a week.

The truth is that there's a lot of crap on TV, and everyone has his or her guilty pleasure. "The Jerry Springer Show" is tacky and sleazy, but it's also great fun. In short, it's the perfect metaphor for America.

Kameron Cole is a columnist for the Emerald. Her columns appear on alternate Wednesdays. Her views do not necessarily represent those of the newspaper.



OPINION
Kameron Cole