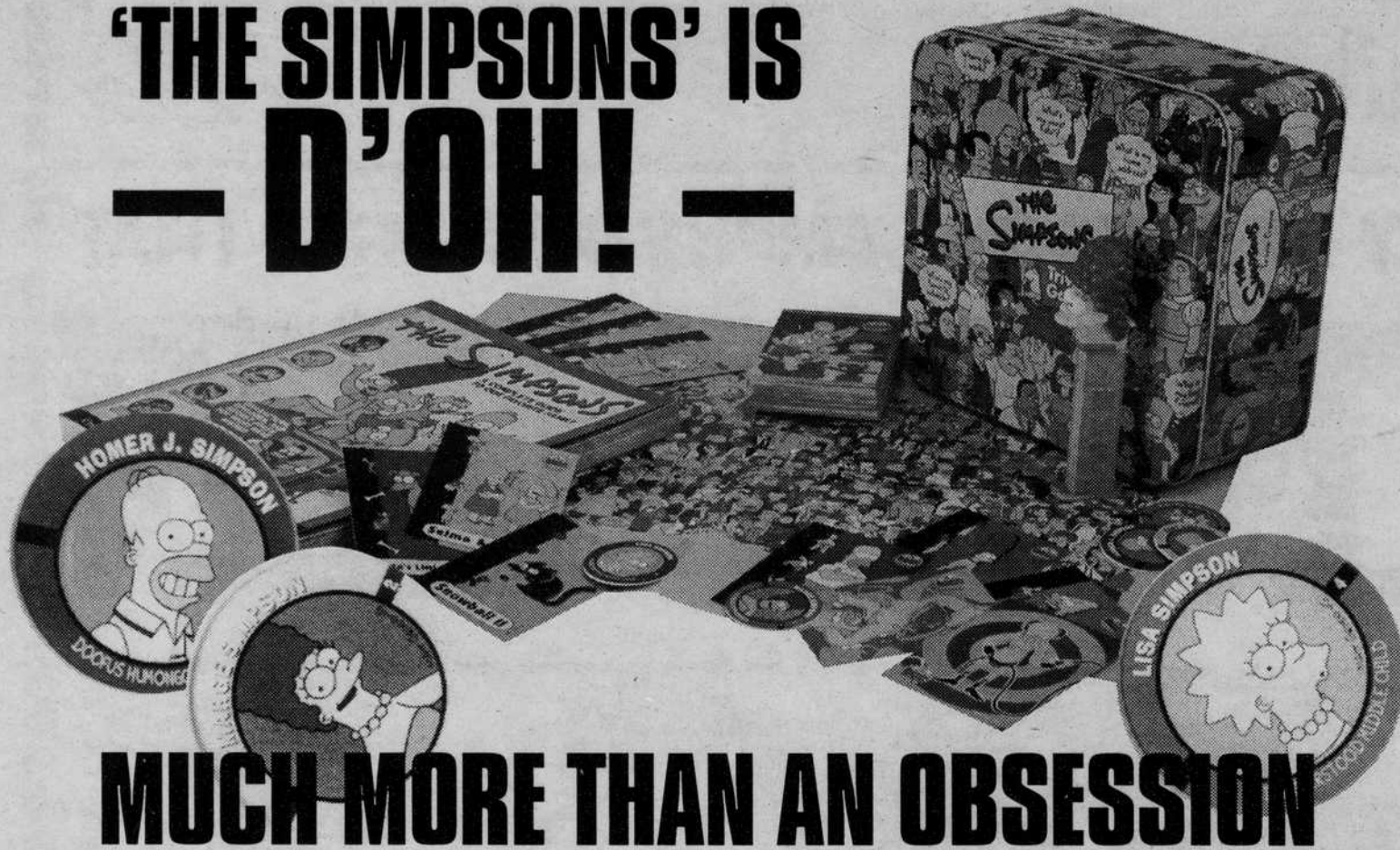


'THE SIMPSONS' IS — D'OH! —



MUCH MORE THAN AN OBSESSION

■ The wildly popular animated series is the subject of college courses and critical study

By Mason West
for the Emerald

If there is a question in anyone's mind about whether "The Simpsons" is an obsession, Knight librarian Juanita Benedicto suggests doing an Internet search with the title and looking at any of the resulting fan sites. One is the Web site www.citizenlunchbox.com/monkey/simpsons.html, which lists oral and visual references to monkeys in "Simpsons" episodes through Season 11.

"It just kind of shows you how obsessed people are about 'The Simpsons' culture," Benedicto said. "These people live, eat and breathe 'Simpsons.'"

While senior Alex Subert hasn't started searching for simians, he said not a day goes by that something doesn't remind him of "The Simpsons." But these affiliations have gotten Subert in hot water. Once, his girlfriend was talking about her problems — which Subert said didn't seem like a big deal — and...

"I made a reference to the episode

when Lisa first meets Bleeding Gums Murphy and says she doesn't have any real problems," he said. "That didn't go over well."

Believe it or not, Subert is still together with the same girl; she even bought him "The Simpsons — The Complete First Season" on DVD.

Subert said he is looking forward to the release of future seasons on DVD, but he already has many of the episodes on tape. Subert's mother forbade him to watch the show shortly after he first heard about it in fourth grade (coincidentally the same grade Bart is eternally stuck in) but Subert's father would tape the episodes behind his mom's back for later viewing — and reviewing, and reviewing.

"Since I've been watching it since I was so young, I didn't get all the jokes. But now that I've gotten more educated, it just gets better," he said. "When there's nothing on TV, I can always pop in a tape."

Carl Bybee, associate professor of journalism, said the show's ability to be enjoyed on multiple levels is one of the main reasons "The Simpsons" is so popular. Though Bybee is a casual "Simpsons" fan at best, he recently used the episode "Homer to the Max" to illustrate the theory of

postmodernism in an essay he wrote with graduate student Ashley Overbeck. As a testament to the show's endurance, Bybee said even after reading the script for "Homer to the Max" 10 times, he would still laugh out loud at the jokes.

Bybee first started thinking of "The Simpsons" as a sophisticated text when he noticed students frequently using episodes as examples in his classes on media criticism.

"In my classes, we have students from all over the world. The only program that I consistently run into that everyone has seen is 'The Simpsons,'" he said.

For her part, Overbeck claims to have seen every episode at least once and most of the syndicated episodes anywhere from three to 10 times each.

"I can rattle off 'Simpsons' quotes at will and find myself saying out loud at least once a week, 'This reminds me of that 'Simpsons' episode where...'" she said.

After using "The Simpsons" as an example in the paper, Overbeck prefers to remain just a fan, but she knows "The Simpsons" is worthy of study, she said.

Sure enough, a course (Satire in

Film and Literature) was offered through the English department at the University during the 2001 summer session that used "The Simpsons," along with other media examples, to illustrate contemporary examples of satire.

Going one step further, Siena Heights University in Adrian, Mich., is currently offering a philosophy course solely on "The Simpsons" called "Animated Philosophy and Religion" using "The Simpsons and Philosophy: The D'oh! of Homer" and "The Gospel According to The Simpsons: The Spiritual Life of the World's Most Animated Family" as texts.

Benedicto found out about this class through an article posted on one of the librarian resource Web sites she frequents, and she subsequently ordered "The D'oh of Homer" to have as part of the library's collection. No, it hasn't arrived yet. But students can find a copy of "The Best of The Simpsons, Vol. 11" on VHS in the Knight Library video collection.

The library isn't the University's only connection to "The Simpsons." The 2001-02 Tours and Information Manual includes the campus legend that The Pioneer statue facing Johnson Hall was the inspiration for the statue of Jebediah Springfield.

The Oregon Blue Book Web site (www.bluebook.state.or.us) lists "Simpsons" creator Matt Groening as a "Notable Oregonian"; the cartoonist was born in Portland, Ore., and lived there until he graduated from high school. In the TV Guide for Oct. 21, 2001, Groening commented on 24 of the show's lesser characters, revealing hidden Oregon inspirations, such as Krusty the Clown's origins in a clown named Rusty Nails who could be found in Portland during Groening's youth.

Trying to pin "The Simpsons" down to a geographical location is a common pursuit among fans on Web sites and message boards. Subert has no doubts that the Simpsons' Springfield is located in Oregon, though not as any one city but a combination of elements from the state. There are many other arguments (a fairly comprehensive collection can be found at www.irsburger.com/funny/location.html) but really, it's just another way for addicts to feed the monkey, so to speak.

Where's the harm in 'vice'?

I have to say, I take issue with this issue. Vice, eh? When I think of vice, I think of police — the vice squad, busting organized crime and cracking down on prostitution. But what is vice?

The word stems from the Latin "vitium," meaning "fault." The definition my dictionary offered is "moral depravity or corruption." Depravity means "the state of being corrupt or bad," and

"corrupt" means "to change from good to bad in morals." And "morals" generally refer to socially sanctioned definitions of good and bad.



Michael J.
Kleckner
Diary of a
Malcontent

I don't know about anyone else, but this is sounding terribly subjective.

Some people's sanctions are different, but my moral compass tells me that harming others is bad.

In that way, some people might say vice is when a CEO sells his stock as fast as Pee-Wee Herman memorabilia moves on eBay, while simultaneously freezing his employees' 401k plans so they can't sell theirs.

One could argue that vice is when a president and attorney general use the deaths of thousands of Americans killed by terrorists to advance a stale conservative agenda.

But in many places, the label "vice" is still being attached to sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll. Gosh, that's so 1985, in a Nancy-Reagan- "Just-Say-No" kind of way.

We should ask, who is being hurt?

If I smoke a bowl, snort a line or pop a pill instead of marinating my liver in fermented hops or rotting my teeth with simple sugars, it isn't vice — it's recreation, unless I let it destroy my life.

When I willingly spend eight hours throwing away \$500 in a loud, neon-covered casino in Nevada, it isn't vice — it's entertainment, especially if I get a lot of free drinks.

And were I to log on to the Internet and spend \$29.95 per month to view a live, digitized feed of three 19-year-old men engaged in all sorts of consensual activities in the confines of their home, that would be little more than pathetic — and certainly not vice.

The things standardly labeled as "vice" today are nothing more than throwbacks to biblical prescription on human behavior. Godly disapproval is fine for some people, but I'm much more concerned with the damage done to others. In a secular society, we should be engaged in prevention, protection and harm reduction.

Where are the unions for sex workers, the needle-exchange programs for drug users and the warning labels saying how deadly alcohol use is? The government should get to it.

And in the meantime, we should focus on eliminating the real vice: the temptation to tell everyone else how to live.

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Atrium Café

Willamette Hall | Atrium
Monday-Friday | 8am-4pm

Daily Grind Café

Knight Library | Lower Level
Monday-Thursday | 8am-10pm
Friday—8am-6pm
Saturday—closed
Sunday—noon-10pm

Hearth Café

Lawrence Hall | 2nd Floor
Monday-Friday | 8am-4pm

Buzz Coffehouse

EMU | Ground Floor

Monday-Thursday | 8:30am-midnight
Friday—8:30am-1am
Saturday—11am-1am
Sunday—11am-midnight

Greatful Bread

EMU | Fishbowl | Main Floor
Monday-Friday | 7am-4pm

campus coffee break



FIT & FUN

Spring Break

This issue will focus on everything from fitness to travel to Spring Break fun! Fit & Fun will be the last issue of Winter term and on the stands all week.

Don't forget to pick up
the Oregon Daily Emerald
Monday,
March 18th

Oregon Daily Emerald

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