hoi polloi*

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*HOY-po-LOY: noun. 1. The common masses; the man in the street; the average person; the herd. 2. A literary publication of Gainesville College, comprised of nonfiction essays.

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This publication consists of essays written by Gainesville College students. I hope that this slim volume of student writing helps illustrate what is right with Gainesville College. It clearly reflects the fact that the college attracts insightful, talented, and intellectually curious students who take the time and effort to do more than what is required of them in a classroom. Only three of these essays were written as assignments for a writing course. This first Hoi Polloi attests that there is a place on campus for students who want more than a “drive through” education. All except one of these essays went through revisions and have been changed significantly by the authors. These writers did not work for a grade; they worked at the writing because they truly had something to say and they wanted to say it well.

Hoi Polloi is a collection of the best non-fiction essays written at the College over the past year. The three winners of the Gainesville College Writing Contest are included here. The other selections were chosen from a large stack of essays submitted to the Writing Contest and to Hoi Polloi itself. It is never easy to pick the best writing to include in any publication, and choosing the work to include here was no exception. The student editors, Dr. Strickland, and I think you will enjoy reading these essays. We also hope that you will want to read more.

Thomas Sauret
Assistant Professor of English
Searching for Mr. Right has never been easy, but in recent years has it gotten worse? After what may be extensive clinical research, Diane Wall has cataloged the contemporary varieties of male companionship and warns today's young women about what they may expect to find—and as she points out, it's a jungle out there!

Wonderful Male Species

Diane Wall

Are women still searching for Mr. Wonderful? They have a rough road to travel. Even not so wonderful men are hard to come by now. According to The 1986 Statistical Abstract of the United States, in 1984 there were only 23,400,000 single men available for some 39,000,000 single women.

Not only has the quantity of men decreased, but the quality of potential companions has also decreased. The small percentage of available men can be placed into three major species: Homo gropus, Homo borus, and Homo couchus potatus. These species can be classified according to their appearance, topics of discussion, and habitat.

Of the three species, Homo gropus is the most intimidating of all. His appearance seems perfectly normal. He is usually handsome, well-groomed, and well-proportioned. These qualities contribute to this species' undesirable nature. He thinks that he is so perfect that every woman craves the touch of his hands, which always seem to be moving to the wrong places at the wrong times. As far as conversation goes, the only thing he likes to discuss is his next move. If a woman should actually be brave enough to be on a date with a Homo gropus, she need not worry about her attire because she will most likely not be attending a social event. The Homo gropus' habitat is dark and deserted.

While the Homo gropus is considered the most intimi-
dating, the Homo horus is considered the least. His apparel consists of slacks, dress shirt, with tie of course, loafers, and wire-rimmed eyeglasses. Because the Homo horus is very timid and reticent, he is not a proficient conversationalist. When he does speak, he discusses his hobby of coin collecting, stamp collecting, or his most interesting hobby of collecting rocks. This species takes his dates to such exciting places as museums, art galleries, and scenes of various historical events.

**“His favorite exercise consists of squashing the buttons on the television’s remote control box and jogging to the kitchen for more pretzels and beer.”**

The Homo couchus potatus species remains as the most peculiar category. Clad in jeans, tennis shoes, and a football jersey, this species sits enthralled in front of the television set each time a sporting event is aired. He is an athletic breed but he never leaves the couch in the living room. His favorite exercise consists of squashing the buttons on the television’s remote control box and jogging to the kitchen for more pretzels and beer. If a woman is fortunate enough to get this species out of the living room, which is indeed a sign of true love, she can expect to attend a football game, a hockey game, or maybe even a golf match. Of course he will discuss his usual topic, sports and his superlative ability at playing them.

At this time, the American woman has these three wonderful breeds of men to choose from. While surely they must have some desirable qualities, none could be found. Better hurry ladies, the good ones are going fast!

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**The Youth Syndrome**

*Stacey Alexander*

“I don’t intend to grow old gracefully,” the woman on the television screen intones smugly; “I’m fighting it every step of the way.” The woman is attractive, over-confident, and obviously mature—but how mature? How old is she? We don’t know; that’s the whole idea. In recent years, increasing amounts of media attention have been focused on the visible effects of feminine aging. Beauty and fashion magazines are fairly bursting at the seams with articles on how to prevent signs of aging, stop visible aging, and reverse the effects of aging. (Sorry, we just can’t do that one yet.) Cosmetic companies are making big claims backed up by multi-million dollar advertising campaigns, and American women are listening and buying it.

Today’s America is a very youth-oriented society con-
centrated on how people look; scholastic achievements, personal triumphs, and even financial gains (the big #2) are all secondary in importance to physical appearance. Women are particularly conscientious about having the Right Look, partially because the media blitz is aimed directly at their psyches—and their pocketbooks.

Beauty has always been the prime objective targeted by advertisers; after all, every woman wants to be beautiful. The wish to be beautiful can be traced directly to the primal subconscious: to be beautiful is to be desirable to members of the opposite sex. Sexual attraction is one of the main ingredients in the biological recipe of life and is necessary for the continuance of the human race. A woman’s desire to be attractive is ingrained in her subconscious as insurance that the race of man will continue. Advertisers are aware of this fact, and have been successfully playing on this level for years. Recently a new and possibly even more effective angle has been discovered: the wish to live forever, i.e., the fear of dying.

The anti-aging campaigns are the cruelest of any, honing in on the inevitable aging process experienced by everyone that doesn’t die young.

"Because of the biological sex connection, a woman’s loss of her looks means the loss of her youthful sexual attractiveness as well...."

Aging has two key consequences for most women: Losing their looks (fertility), and stepping closer to death. Because of the biological sex connection, a woman’s loss of her looks means the loss of her youthful sexual attractiveness as well, which on a deeper level may mean losing her raison d'être. She is likely to feel worthless and may even descend into depression, meanwhile being encouraged by the media to spend large amounts of cash to “correct” the loss of her youth. If only it was a monetary matter!

One of the prime sources of anti-aging advertising is, of course, the fashion magazine (a bible of sorts for the modern conscientious female). Such magazines are not only filled with ads, but also contain articles on such subjects as how to camouflage age with expensive make-ups and how to actually reduce wrinkling by performing complicated ritualistic treatments. Close examination of the articles may reveal the names of many of the same products featured in the full page ads; it is simply a more subtle form of advertising. In such stories the authors are usually careful to note exactly which high-priced treatments were used for their photo-sessions and, to alleviate any pangs of conscience, the price. Favorite phrases used before product identification include, “One to try...,” and “We like...” “We like...” is especially effective as the reader may feel like “one of the girls” if she likes it, too. Everyone wants to fit in.

"Who can put a price on youth? Right? Right. They can. And They do."

Another major promoter of the Youth Syndrome is the television commercial, which of late has been flooded with sleek young adults that appear lean, perfect, and cool. The commercials are aimed not only at young adults but also at all the not-so-young adults who would like to be young again. These slightly aged grownups are also more likely to have steady incomes, which becomes pertinent information when the grownup goes shopping for the advertised items. Trendy clothes for YOUNG PEOPLE have lofty price tags...but who can put a price on youth? Right? Right. They can. And they do.

Another vehicle for youth advertising, and perhaps one that’s a bit more subtle, is the product labeling itself. After all, product labeling is a form of seduction the consumer can touch, examine, and take home immediately without the
potentially damaging think-it-over, check-it-out period. Since the public introduction of the “miracle” anti-aging drug Retin-A earlier this year, the trend in product labeling has been toward the scientific. Medical-sounding words like “technological,” and “laboratories,” and the now-familiar “non-carcinogenic” have been appearing on smooth white jars decorated with grid formations reminiscent of a medical chart. Also popular and medically impressive are the Capital Initials, usually three in a series, which ultimately stand for a phrase the consumer is already familiar with. For example, in the “Now with scientifically proven SMC,” perhaps given a prominent position on a bottle of lotion, SMC is simply a way of saying “Special Moisturizing Complex.” Most likely the “Special Moisturizing Complex” is a combination of the same oils (mineral, almond, jojoba) found in virtually all other lotion, but is given more “scientific” distinction by the Capital Initials. This technique is by no means limited to product labeling, and in fact is often utilized in magazine ads.

There are also a couple of prefixes that carry scientific clout with the naive beauty consumer, namely “bio,” which means life, and “micro,” meaning small. It’s just another way for advertisers to get a firm grip on the ego’s willful ignorance. Like the Capital Initials, Prefixes are effective when used both in product labeling and magazine advertisements.

Good examples of the usage of many of the techniques described above can be found combined in a recent magazine advertisement for Estee Lauder’s Future Perfect Micro-Targeted Skin Gel (a couple of examples can be found in the name of the product alone). The ad is a glossy two-page spread featuring Paulina Porizkova, recently hailed as “the world’s most beautiful woman.” (The fact that Ms. Porizkova who, in her early twenties, is not even old enough to need help with aging skin and “crows feet,” may be overlooked by many perusers of the ad.) The type, clear and easy-to-read, mentions “Targeted Microsomes,” “advanced technology,” and even “DIA-Digitized Image Analysis,” which, our ad tells us, was “developed for the space program.” Wow! Impressive, huh? At $45 an ounce for the stuff, the folks at Estee Lauder surely hope you’re impressed. Suddenly “Targeted Microsomes” become “Targeted Wal-

“Sterile-looking racks of shining tubes and bottles and skin care “computers” range the countertops, behind which stand perfectly complex-ioned ‘beauty representatives’ suited up in lab coats.”

Department-store cosmetic promotions are perhaps the most financially crippling to the youth-hungry consumer. Glossy foldout flyers are sent via the mail to announce the promotion, allowing the receiver to feel she is being personally invited to an event similar to a social debut. The cosmetic departments of large department stores are usually spacious and richly decorated with sparkling glass counters and accents of marble and chrome. Sterile-looking racks of shining tubes and bottles and skin care “computers” range the countertops, behind which stand perfectly complexioned “beauty representatives” suited up in white lab coats. Money has ceased to be a concern in this environment, clutching her slightly creased promotional invitation. Unlike the immediate impulse associated with product labeling, receivers of the Promotional Flyer have at least a short think-over period. Promoters realize most women must consider decisions of such financial magnitude, if only for the sake of their conscience. But no amount of preparation can override the feeling of seriousness pervasive at most large counters; after all the salesgirl is wearing a lab coat. The woman who is intent on stopping age in its tracks will give considerable weight to a smart-suited representative and an intimidating display of tubes and vials, no matter what the price.

Even a woman who is aware of the game play may not be safe. Over the past two years, I have become somewhat of a “cosmetic junkie,” buying makeup and skin treatments
I realize I don't need and frequently can't use. However, I am a great admirer of skillful advertising. It was soon after I started noticing the angles that were being used to manipulate women into buying these products that I myself started taking an active part in purchasing cosmetics I really couldn't afford; but boy, was the packaging great! I was consciously allowing myself to be taken in, just for the privilege of holding in my hand and owning that small pastel box containing the very essence of beauty, the very stuff that made Paulina what she is today. I am still on a self-imposed rehabilitation program. Occasionally I do fall off the wagon.

There is nothing whatsoever wrong in a woman taking pride in her appearance, or in purchasing the proper products to help her take care of her looks. Beauty rituals and treatments can certainly be beneficial, but perhaps their greatest value is not the most obvious. Beauty rituals can make a woman feel she is being good to her skin, good to herself. As a result she may see more improvement in her looks than anyone else, thereby gaining an inner confidence that is the heart and soul of true beauty. But women need to be careful of the products they buy, tailoring their purchases to the useful basics, and steering clear of high-priced miracles.

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Autumn

Teresa Smith

I cannot think of autumn without remembering my mother. She had a way of making each season memorable, and fall was no exception. Summer was spent tending our large garden; fall was spent canning. I can still see her standing in our kitchen wearing her white robe, the windows in the room steamed up from the heat of the stove. The memory is always accompanied by the sound of the local high school band. We lived only a few blocks from the school, and every fall the Flash of Crimson Band would begin to practice for the new school year. Mother always hummed along as she filled cans with tomatoes or okra.

The streets would soon be dotted with bright yellow school buses carrying dozens of excited children to a new year of school. I could hardly wait to wear my new clothes, even though they were dark and heavy and the heat from the summer was still with us. I wasn't out of place; everyone on the bus seemed to be dressed the same.

Children weren't the only ones to dress for the occasion. Nestled in the drab green of Georgia pines were trees of blazing colors. Yellows, reds, and burnt oranges gave the woods the appearance of being on fire. My mother would round us up for a drive to the mountains to see the leaves with their new colors, giving me the impression that somehow mountain leaves were different than the ones in our yard. Roadside stands peddling apples, cider, jams, and
syrup waited for people just like us to come along. We usually ended up with one of everything, including a giant pumpkin from one of the many farm houses we passed by. The display couldn't be missed. Next to a field of orange would be a homemade sign reading "Punkins for Sail." There were as many ways to spell it as there were pumpkins in the yard, and that was quite a few.

"Nestled in the drab green of Georgia pines were trees of blazing colors. Yellows, reds, and burnt oranges gave the woods the appearance of being on fire."

Our pumpkin had to be huge and perfectly shaped to meet the approval of Mother. She always kept a count of children who came to our house on Halloween night so she could brag to her friends and perhaps attract more trick-or-treaters next year. It was no small matter in her opinion. She used to say "If it was a good year, we can try to make it even better next year; if it was bad, then we'll just have to try harder." Mother was a perfectionist, a quality that I did not appreciate at the time. Fall thus became a time to search our souls and tie up loose ends. The holidays would soon be upon us and they must be a time of gaiety.

When autumn comes around, I still feel the same magic that I did when I was a child. I can only describe it as the feeling of standing on the edge of the universe and looking out beyond, and wondering what is in store, and asking myself if I can meet the challenge once more.

Today fall comes and goes the same as it always has. I cannot say that a season has changed, only that the people and places have not remained the same. The Flash of Crimson still plays with the same enthusiasm that it did in the past. I am just not there to hear it anymore. I am sure that somewhere in my old neighborhood there is a little girl who listens to the music every fall as I once did. I wonder if she will remember it as I do.
dangerous to them psychologically and physically, and second, have far less to do with religious or moral values than many parents and other concerned citizens believe.

While records, tapes, and CDs might not be a religious experience for most people, they are very much a part of a mutated new church. Some of today's youth are members in good standing of this new church, and the lyrics, images, and attitudes reflected by musicians (priests) are their new Bible. The only Satan behind this new church is the apparent callous attitudes of the artists and executives pocketing millions annually from the sale of these tracts. Many make the mistake of thinking that the traditional Christian Satan is behind the production of these records and videos, planning to lead our youth straight down the path to Hell. No matter what label is affixed to this new church by over-zealous media watchdogs, it is the same movement that it has been for at least three decades: simple teenage rebellion. An offshoot from this rebellion is the second head of the demon: the saturation of culture with strong graphic material that can be harmful to young people, especially those with self esteem or emotional problems. The upset and shock over the increasing occurrence of Satanist-related material in popular culture is well founded if a bit misguided. The only Hell our youth are being led to by this material is a cultural one.

"We can see people like Goldie Hawn being heartily congratulated for doing such a fine job of raising her bastard children."

We in America are not the same people we were thirty years ago when the specific marketing of celebrities began to take place almost accidentally. We have watched the same formulized television and seen the same political figures hypocritically manipulate the democratic process until we have become a nation of cynics. Young people, growing bored with the images, force promoters to keep the acts that are to entertain us new and different, and in the case of the youth targeted music industry, the acts have to be not only new and different; they have to upset the youth’s parents as well. Unfortunately for the poor, struggling, barely-making-it music industry, it takes one hell of a lot more to upset the former-flower-children parents of today's head-banging “devil worshippers” than it did to send the simple God-fearing rural citizens of middle America into screaming fits.

Like many social changes, however, the change from the naive, good-old-days music of Buddy Holly and Bill Haley and the Comets to the ear-searing sounds of Ozzy Osbourne and Motley Crue has been a slow wheel turning. The changes in societal attitudes about heroes of popular culture and the ways these heroes are presented to the general public have been a major contribution to the effect that pop stars have on our lives today. During the 1940's, for example, actress Ingrid Bergman was practically deported and was unemployable in American films after having the illegitimate child of director Roberto Rossellini. This indiscretion almost cost Bergman what had become a very successful career in the motion picture industry, but when we turn the television these days to Entertainment Tonight, we can see people like Goldie Hawn being heartily congratulated for doing such a fine job of raising her bastard children and being such a big success in Hollywood simultaneously. Our attitudes on the acceptable behavior of people in the public eye are now in very sharp contrast to what they were just a few short decades ago. Through the course of the last thirty years or so, some people have learned to ride on the cutting edge of public approval/disapproval with amazingly lucrative results.

Those who remember firsthand, and even those of us who have seen after the fact the ghostlike images of early television appearances of Elvis Presley have to agree that he was one of the most charismatic entertainers of all time. In a very roundabout way, Elvis was unknowingly the first spark of nationwide rebellious behavior to burn in the hearts and loins of American teenagers. With Elvis as newly-appointed demigod, rock and roll was here to stay, thanks to the early efforts of promoters and others in the music industry to appease American parents who were convinced rock music would surely drive their children insane. This appeasement came in the form of taking rock and roll away
from the black musicians who fused several different styles of music together to form rock’s roots and placing it in far more mediocre hands (with notable exceptions, of course).

Apparently, the broadminded men who ran the music industry in those days understood all too clearly that we were living in a country that wasn’t “civilly right.” Black musicians who had given birth to the art form were given the boot by music industry personnel who must have thought that the mix of a heady new primal form of music and the eternally mistrusted blacks was a dangerous one. Fortunately, some black entertainers overcame the prejudice in the white-dominated music industry and made a name for themselves. Unfortunately, many of them weren’t so lucky. Many were cheated out of publishing and other rights to their music; music that was bastardized and homogenized for public consumption by decent citizens and soon dominated the popular music charts.

American parents could tolerate rock and roll as long as it was safe for their chaste sons and daughters to listen to without the danger of their young minds being polluted. Not surprisingly, this is the same era that held Senate investigations as to whether or not comic books were a contributing factor in the supposedly mind-boggling rise in juvenile delinquency. The most amazing part is that the senators decided that comic books were harmful to children and ordered the comics industry to clean up its act on its own, or be helped along by national legislation. In short, Mad Magazine meets McCarthyism.

So the Elvis Presley phenomenon was off to the races with Elvis being promoted as a “loving teddy bear,” but the youth of America, male and female, knew there was much more to Presley’s appeal than cuddliness. The youngsters saw Elvis as symbolic for two reasons, one being that he was like an older brother or friend because of the way he tried to bridge the all new gap opening between generations because of rock music. The other reason was that Elvis represented a kind of unattainable goal; girls wanted to be the one and only girl who could break Elvis’ heart (just like in his songs), and boys wanted to be as charismatic and rebellious and as much of a heartbreaker as Elvis was. By tapping the repressed sexual energy of adolescence, whether purposefully or not, Elvis had been responsible for sparking a flame in both the hearts and loins of American youth, a flame that would soon spread to many other parts of their young lives with a little fanning from across the Atlantic.

During the early sixties, the torch that kept this flame of rebellion burning was passed to four young lads from Liverpool, England, none other than the Beatles. In the beginning of their careers, the Beatles received the same careful grooming for image that Elvis Presley was subject to, and apparently, the grooming worked because the only complaint that American parents could lodge against their children’s love of the Fab Four was concerning the quality (or lack of it) of their music. After the death of the Beatles’ manager Brian Epstein, their self-management meant that much more of their true personalities were available for study by young people and scrutiny by parents of these young people.

"Lennon made the casual remark that the Beatles were more popular...than Jesus Christ."

One aspect of the Beatles’ lives that became public was one that shocked and appalled many people: the Fab Four had tried the illicit drug marijuana. This announcement came at a time in history when virtually no one knew even what marijuana was, and of course people were upset, but nowhere near as upset as they would be when John Lennon made a brash and startling statement about the Beatles’ popularity. Lennon made the casual remark that the Beatles were more popular at that time than Jesus Christ. Of course the Bible Belt of America almost ripped out its buckle from the speed at which it began burning Beatles records, and Lennon was practically forced to make a retraction to the statement.

To say that the Beatles made a mistake in letting so much of their private lives and thoughts become public domain knowledge is a gross understatement. However, the Beatles seemed to have no qualms whatsoever about sharing
their views on drug use, spiritualism, politics, or just about anything else. The Beatles' openness was like a breath of cool fresh air to the youth of America, but to concerned parents it was comparable to the door to Hell being left open. The new openness put in plain sight by the Beatles in their short eight year reign under the magnifying glass of popularity was hungrily consumed by American teens and young adults who may have been forced to grow up a bit too fast after seeing our country floundering and cutting itself on the sharp glass of the civil rights movement and the tragic death of their country's young idealistic president. This premature growth led to questioning of values that had never been questioned before. The Beatles didn't necessarily lead the way for this sudden social consciousness; they were merely spokesmen for ideas and ideals whose time had come for the children, but not for their parents.

By the end of their mutual association, the Beatles managed to escape the prepackaged syndrome of being groomed and marketed for a specific target audience by virtue of their universal messages, but many in the music industry had learned a valuable lesson in marketing from Brian Epstein. Some had learned to take what was to many people a genuine concern for world society as a whole and turn it into a gigantic marketing concept. The very idealistic but unrealistic idea of the commune was milked into the famous rock festival at Woodstock. It seems that Woodstock was the ultimate celebration of saying one thing and doing another; the ideas of getting back to nature and shedding off the trappings of our modern society were being celebrated naturally by literally hundreds of people consuming the chemical engineer's wonder, LSD, and listening to guitars distorted by electronics and amplified by thousands of watts of artificially produced electricity. The music industry had found the ultimate answer for young adults trying to rebel against the stiff-shirted, three-martini lunch their parents enjoyed by providing them one of their own in a disguise the youngsters knew their parents would despise.

The distorted chords of Woodstock continued to echo through the early seventies, finally feedbacking into a genre of music known as heavy metal. Where the rock music of the late sixties reflected a sense of hope for a better world, heavy metal seemed to dwell on the ugliness inherent in any large industrialized society, and wallow in hypocrisy. The music industry jumped on this opportunity for young people to shock their parents, because it simply wasn't enough any more for some to be concerned and curious about people and ideas outside their spectrum of immediate exposure. It seems that quite a great deal of bitterness over the uselessness of youthful idealism made the shocking nature of heavy metal music as popular as it is today. The tightly competitive lifestyles of American parents were projected onto the young people who did not want to take part in a value system and a world that they felt to be hypocritical, and those who did take part in it found that it can be a very dehumanizing process to live through. This rebellion against the "damned if you do, damned if you don't" society is the basis for the evolution of ideas of rebellion that are not entirely different from the ones already laid down; the evolution simply made them more intense for parents who weren't quite as shocked anymore as their children thought they ought to be.

"The sexual energy introduced by Elvis became sadomasochism and androgyny and bisexuality...."

The sexual energy introduced by Elvis became sadomasochism and androgyny and bisexuality and the very real, but never-talked-about-outside-of-Army-training-films threat of venereal disease. The drug use explored by the Beatles would soon become one of our nation's biggest collective problems and largest sources of illegal income. Drug use and sexual permissiveness would soon tag team for the bubonic plague of the 21st century, AIDS. The floodgates that would make Noah's look tiny were thrown open in the early eighties.

The parents of America thought they had seen it all, but the offhand remark by John Lennon on the state of modern Christianity was only the tip of the iceberg. The music industry saw the only chink in the armor of American parents that hadn't been gouged until the bloody would...
beneath could bleed no more: religion. Soon heavy metal was filled with mention of human sacrifice and murder and even sacrificial suicide. The music that came from the stereos of the sons and daughters of America's upstanding citizens was aimed by demographic experts at the very core of the American family. The battle cry from young people who saw fit to make their parents squirm now had the perfect ammunition, and the music industry was more than happy to supply even more.

The path from early rock to heavy metal has been long and twisted and has led to the cynical manipulation of young people at the hands of promoters. The use of religious rebellion to sell records seems to be one of the more lucrative schemes that the music industry has ever come up with. There might be, in some people's minds, a question as to the ethics behind the use of sacred symbolism to sell anything. The fact that some young people are winding up killed and maimed as a result of their own amplification of values sold to them in media is very shocking, but that doesn't seem to be as important an issue as parents making sure that their children know that advertisers and sellers will stop at almost nothing to get their products into American homes. Instead of rioting in the streets with religiosity flaming in their eyes, American parents should take steps to insure that their children aren't so culturally retarded that they can be fooled by every advertisement coming down the pike. The ultimate responsibility lies only in the hands of the consumer.

“From ghoulies and ghosties and long-leggedy beasties and things that go bump in the night, good Lord deliver us!” So goes an old petition from a Scottish book of prayer, at any rate. But in his essay, Steven Yurk ponders the odd fact that movie audiences today don't particularly want to be delivered from these or from other deliciously scary experiences. Horror movies come in various types (though today mostly in one color—Type O Red), and Mr. Yurk considers and accounts for most of them in this entertaining look at popular movie images of horror, both in times past and today. “Horror Movies: A Perspective” was the third-place winner in the 1989 Gainesville College informal essay competition.

Horror Movies: A Perspective
Steven Yurk

Fear is a part of human nature, and contradictory though it seems, people often like to be scared. One of the most common methods for getting a thrill today is the horror show. Times have certainly changed from the black-and-white thrillers of the 1940's; directors are adding whole new shades of bloody reds and slimy greens. It is true that gore and violence are the most common elements of horror movies, but there are some horror films that are more concerned with the interior of a plot than with the insides of a person. It is important to remember that just as there are different kinds of fear, there are different kinds of horror movies that use different tactics to frighten us.

The most common kind of horror film is the slasher movie. No matter what the name, these movies all have
basically the same story: a psychopathic killer stalks his victims and slaughters them in a variety of creative ways. Generally there is no motive for the killings, and there is no predetermined pattern—the killer usually surprises his victims by appearing from out of nowhere. The killer is usually invincible, so no matter what the heroes and heroines do to him, he always manages to come back in a sequel. It is simply amazing: most slasher movie stars can get burned, shocked, dismembered, shot, verbally berated, and basically be exposed to every kind of torture known to man, and still come back for more. These people are not mere villains—they are sadomasochists. A perfect example is Jason Voorhees, the machete-wielding star of the Friday the 13th collaboration. Donning a hockey mask to hide his grossly distorted face, Jason takes it upon himself to reduce drastically the teenage population. The original Friday the 13th is particularly stirring due to the special effects of Tom Savini, who is responsible for the chilling guillotine-style execution at the end of the movie. John Carpenter's Halloween focuses on the private vendetta that maniac Michael Myers has against his sister. Unlike Jason, Michael met a definite demise in Halloween II (but not before being mortally wounded many times). Wes Craven's Nightmare on Elm Street involves the capers of the master of nightmares—Freddy Kruger. One of the most successful slashers of all time, Freddy has a special method for dispatching his teenage victims: a set of razor-sharp blades attached to his fingertips.

As I mentioned before, slasher movies are most likely to spawn sequels, and this is certainly true for the previous three examples: Halloween and Nightmare on Elm Street both have three parts, and Friday the 13th has the worst cast of "sequelitis," boasting seven parts. The prospect of being pursued by a lunatic who intends to kill everyone in his way, but who cannot himself be killed, is frightening, and it is this theme which creates the entire foundation for the slasher movie.

The psychological thriller could be regarded as a subdivision of the slasher group, but these films are centered more on affecting the mind and senses rather than with splattering blood all over the screen. Unlike the slasher movie, the killer is not invulnerable, and there is usually a motive for any bloodshed that occurs. Typical elements are spooky music, mysterious characters, and things that "jump out" at the viewer. Alfred Hitchcock's Psycho is a good example. The unusual relationship Norman Bates shares with his "mother" is repulsive, yet intriguing—it is a perfect scenario to demonstrate how mental illness can affect an otherwise benevolent human being. In The Hitcher, a very persistent hitchhiker (excellently portrayed by Rutger Hauer) relentlessly pursues a young motorist across a desert, leaving a trail of corpses in his wake. Creepshow is made from a collection of short stories by Stephen King and uses a new concept in presenting the tales: the plot revolves around a comic book that takes gory short stories and transforms them into reality. The very popular Fatal Attraction could also fall into this category, although it is as much a romance as it is a horror story. Glenn Close is superb as a woman who has an affair with a married man and, in her zeal to keep the relationship going, is willing to commit murder. Fatal Attraction may be a situation carried to extremes, but the warning behind the film is one that is justifiable in the 1980's. We are living in an era in which extramarital affairs and murders are taken far too lightly, and it is time that we regarded these issues seriously.

"Most slasher movie stars can get burned, shocked, dismembered, shot, verbally berated...and still come back for more."

The psychological thriller, in turn, can be broken down into the mystery category. Like the psychological thriller, the mystery film also has a motive for murders, but the overall tone of the movie is different: the action tends to run at a slower pace, and the murders are never excessively gory. Murder mysteries are unsettling because the viewer is never sure who the killer is until the end of the show. Anyone could be the culprit. Alfred Hitchcock was a veteran in this field,
able to take the greatest stars of his time and put them in bizarre situations. In Vertigo, for instance, Jimmy Stewart is the hero who has great difficulty in dealing with high places. He finds that he must overcome his fear of heights to help solve a murder (and to keep himself from being murdered as well). The Man Who Knew Too Much is a story of international intrigue. During a vacation in India, Doris Day and Jimmy Stewart find themselves wrapped up in a murder plot and try to outwit their assailants without endangering themselves. Finally, Rear Window is the story of a voyeur who witnesses a murder and is forced to enlist the aid of his beautiful fiancée (Grace Kelly) to bring the killer to justice. A wonderful challenge for the intellectual, the mystery film was especially popular in Hitchcock's era. Modern mysteries, however, are noticeably few and far between.

"The Bombs are low-budget films with horrible plots that are either parodies of serious science-fiction horror movies or showcases for Play-Doh creations dreamed up by fool-hardy producers."

Science-fiction horror films prove that even people living in the twenty-first century have their own personal fears, as seen in such classics as Alien and Aliens. Both movies involve loathsome extraterrestrial parasites that survive by implanting themselves in human hosts. Sigourney Weaver is excellent in her role of a space marine who uses an arsenal of futuristic weaponry in her efforts to end the alien threat permanently. There is a 1950's version as well as a modern remake of The Fly. Both versions revolve around a scientist who, via an accident in the lab, is transformed into a giant insect. The modern version is filled with disgusting special effects that will test the endurance of the strongest stomach. Unfriendly aliens and laboratory experiments that go awry are the most common plots in the science-fiction film division.

The science-fiction horror movies are primarily responsible for the worst category of horror films in existence: the Bombs. The Bombs are low-budget films with horrible plots that are either parodies of serious science-fiction horror movies or showcases for Play-Doh creations dreamed up by fool-hardy producers. The special effects, if any, are pathetically fake, and the acting is of the lowest quality. Probably the best-known Bomb is Attack of the Killer Tomatoes, a laughable film in which humans are devoured by plastic vegetables. There is plenty of action, very little plot, and virtually no taste—but lots of catsup. The Green Slime is an outer space farce concerning a colony of astronauts that are trapped on a space station by green, one-eyed, multi-tentacled aliens. The laser guns used by the humans are obviously covered with aluminum foil. Plan Nine from Outer Space is a trite adventure that tries (and fails) to combine the supernatural with science-fiction technology: it is a tale of intergalactic vampires. Bombs are made primarily for one purpose: laughter. Any viewer attempting to take a Bomb seriously will quickly go insane.

Horror-comedies are unique in that, while invariably disgusting, they manage to draw a chuckle out of audiences with a slightly twisted sense of humor. Joe Dante's Gremlins is a show about a number of cute, furry munchkins who multiply like rabbits, transforming into slimy, reptilian creatures, and wreak havoc on a small New England town. The Evil Dead, Part 2 is about as funny as one can get when dealing with the spirits of the undead. Probably the most hilarious scene in the movie occurs when an unlucky teenager finds that evil spirits have possessed his right hand. The unfortunate adolescent is then dragged around the kitchen of an abandoned cabin while his hand breaks dishes over his head. An American Werewolf in London takes a humorous look at a not-so-funny subject: lycanthropy. Two college students vacationing in England are attacked by a werewolf. One boy is supposedly killed while the other is merely bitten. The injured man soon discovers that he, too, has become a werewolf, and he immediately sets out to find a cure for his "hairy" problem. Horror-comedies take a
potentially scary situation and add a touch of comedy relief. Perhaps this category of films is responsible for the phrase “die laughing.”

No list of horror movies would be complete without monster movies. Most of these creature-features were created from famous works of literature. *Frankenstein*, the story of a creature that is created by combining parts of corpses and then shocked into life by a jolt of lightning, was written by Mary Shelley. Bram Stoker is the author of *Dracula*, the father of all vampires. It is believed that Count Dracula is based on the historical figure of Vlad the Impaler. It has even been suggested that the vampire was created in a nightmare that Stoker experienced after eating too much stuffed crab! H.G. Wells's *The Invisible Man* is the tale of a criminal who uses invisibility to his advantage. Some well-known monsters created by the movie industry are *The Mummy*, *The Blob*, *The Wolf Man*, and *King Kong*. Last but not least, *Godzilla* has been in enough sequels to bury Tokyo in movie reels. Few children have not been exposed to the giant lizard; for decades he has battled other giant monsters and has destroyed cities. A majority of monster films revolve around mutated giants, and it is on this premise that the movies frighten us. Humans are generally scared of anything bigger than they are, especially if that something is hideous in appearance and enjoys destroying buildings.

All in all, horror films are probably the most underrated movies of all. Although most of them are unnecessarily gory, some moviegoers find them hard to resist; in fact, an extremely gruesome film can bring friends closer together (quite literally). In a movie world filled with tasteless comedies, boring adventure films, overly-sentimental romances, and deeply exaggerated dramas, the horror movie can be an important escape route for the movie advocate who is searching for something out of the ordinary.

Paramedics are familiar to us all—or are they? We've seen them portrayed in movies and on television as heroic, larger-than-life figures, sent out onto the urban streets to do battle with death itself. John McKay, himself an advanced emergency medical technician, has a different view. In this provocative and sometimes disturbing essay, Mr. McKay shows us the reality behind the image of the paramedic. He takes the profession out of its mythic realm and lets us see human beings doing a difficult job as best they can—and he reveals the all-too-human frustrations that such men and women feel. Mr. McKay's composition won first place for informal essay in the 1989 Gainesville College writing competition.

**Signal 63: Officer Down, Needs Help!**

*John E. McKay, AEMT*

First you notice the screaming sirens, coming up through the traffic behind you. Then you see the flashing lights and the pulsating strobes blanketing everything in a wash of blinking red and white. Finally in a blur of white paint and chrome, an ambulance rushes by your door, weaving through traffic, a momentary glimpse of the battle to save a life.

Who are these people driving that ambulance? What makes them do that job, just knowing the horrors that they must experience every day? And exactly what is it that they see every day?

The people in the ambulance are paramedics and Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs), ordinary people...
(for the most part) doing an extraordinary job. Their profession suffers not only from the rigors of the job itself, but also from an extreme mental strain brought on by working amid so much pain, suffering, and death, and by a gross misunderstanding by the general public of the job and the people in it.

Ever since the television show *Emergency!* premiered in December, 1971, the paramedic's world has been shown on the tube and in the movies as full of excitement and glamour. Just the very thought of the handsome, debonair Johnny Gage leaping up from his coffee and racing through the streets of Los Angeles to save a life in his cool methodical way brings a pounding to the heart and a tear to the eye. Even Lou Ferrigno lowering himself hand over hand down the side of a skyscraper in the obscenely ludicrous *Trauma Center* brings a skin-tingling piquancy to the portrayal of paramedics: the Incredible Hulk as a paramedic? Would you really want to be treated by a green-skinned, bad-tempered mutant?

"Like any other governmental attempt to influence real life, these regulations don't always work out."

When paramedics are not the main focus of the show, they are reduced to hauling off the body after the main character, usually a detective, has pronounced the latest murder victim dead. Where this detective has gotten his medical training is left to conjecture. What is implied here is that paramedics are simply modern versions of the old "meat-wagon" or funeral home hearse/ambulance drivers.

What a paramedic actually is according to state law is simple. First, one must take 220 hours of formal school training and pass a state certification test to earn an Emergency Medical Technician certificate. Then by taking an additional 550 hours of formal classroom training, passing an Advanced Cardiac Life Support course, and passing a state board examination, one can work as an Advanced Emergency Medical Technician (AEMT). In Georgia the title "paramedic" is not officially recognized, although there is a movement afloat to change each of these titles to a more easily recognized one. An AEMT must take twenty hours per year of continuing education in the form of classroom lessons provided by the state and must pay $50.00 biannually for license renewal. Once on duty, the paramedic works on a unit that is built according to federal regulations to insure that every conceivable emergency can be handled within the capabilities of the ambulance's performance and with the equipment on board.

Like any other governmental attempt to influence real life, these regulations don't always work out. Ambulances almost always meet the federal regulations concerned with their construction but are seldom adequate for the pounding they receive on the streets. Quite often ambulances break down because of overloaded alternators, overheated engines, broken shocks, or worn-out brakes. As most ambulances are simply modified Ford, Dodge, or Chevy vans, the rigors of the job rapidly break down each major component designed for passenger-carrying use and not code-3 responses. The interior of the patient compartment leaves much to be desired, as it is cramped, crowded with the mandatory equipment, and quite unsuited for conducting emergency medical treatment. During an event such as treating a cardiac arrest, so many people are required to perform CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation), start IV (intravenous) lines, give drugs, set up the EKG (electrocardiogram) machine, and so on, that it becomes almost impossible to have enough space to do any of those tasks effectively. What usually results is that the paramedic will take one, maybe even two, people with him to help do the essential tasks like CPR and "bagging" (using a device called an Ambu-Bag to breathe for the patient), while he does his best to cover the rest of the bases. In effect, this causes one to have to resort to the old method of rushing to the hospital as rapidly as possible rather than using the full capabilities of the ambulance and the paramedics.

Fortunately, a few manufacturers produce ambulances that have room enough and are strong enough to do the job. This leaves the problem of paramedics who have the training but are unable to use it effectively in the field. Any
treatment that a paramedic needs to give, such as administering the appropriate drugs to a cardiac (heart) patient, must be approved by the emergency room doctor at the local hospital (referred to as Medical Control). So the paramedic gets as much information about the patient as he can, including all that he found in his examination, calls the doctor on the ambulance radio, and tries to persuade him that the plan he has devised is the one that will most benefit the patient. The doctor will then theoretically make his decision based on sound medical principles and either agree with and approve of the paramedic’s plan or suggest an alternative one.

What actually happens far too often is that the physician will refuse to approve any plan that calls for active intervention by the paramedic or will order a treatment that is exactly the opposite of whatever one the paramedic has suggested. What is happening is that these physicians have a personal problem with the paramedics involved or with paramedics in general. The doctors express these antagonisms in ways that, unfortunately, affect the patient. For example, I once worked a trauma call where the patient had suffered rather severe injuries and several burns. In my radio report to the doctor, I informed him of my findings and requested permission to initiate an IV of Lactated Ringers, the IV fluid of choice for this particular situation. Not only did the ER physician refuse permission; he ordered me to start an IV line of DSW (Dextrose 5% in Water). This order was not only ludicrous in that it did the patient no good; it could even have harmed the patient by worsening the fluid loss that he was experiencing. Fortunately, there was another hospital relatively close, and we were able to get the appropriate orders from them. The entire motivation of the doctor was that he simply did not like paramedics, and he readily admitted as much to anyone who would listen. This doctor is still a practicing ER physician.

Because the pre-hospital treatment field is relatively new, few physicians have grown up with it, and most see it as an usurpation of their authority (“A paramedic telling me what he wants to do!”). Again, fortunately, there are a few physicians who believe strongly in the Emergency Medical System (EMS), and their influence has helped the system survive and grow.

Perhaps the most difficult problem that paramedics face is life on the streets. In large, urban settings like south and west Atlanta, it is far from unusual for paramedics to be assaulted or even injured by the very people whom they are trying to help. Almost every call into the slum and housing-project areas carries with it a real chance for violence directed against the rescuers, and the hostile atmosphere creates a fear that is sometimes overwhelming.

I worked for a time for Grady Hospital Emergency Medical Services, stationed in one of the worst housing projects in the city, East Lake Meadows. One night while responding to an emergency call we started receiving sniper fire as soon as we turned in to the project, rounds that actually shot away our red emergency beacon. We had to pull back out to a safe area and wait for the police to arrive before we could go find the patient. Situations like this were by no means unusual; before I left Grady, a policy was put out requiring a police escort any time we went into the more violent areas.

“My flashlight beam caught a baby’s blanket and a couple of toys that had been thrown to the floor by the force of impact.”

When working in these areas, you quickly learn the do’s and don’t’s of street life: never stand in front of a door when knocking on it (occasionally the occupant would fire a shotgun blast through it as a means of greeting); never turn your back to anyone (for obvious reasons); and never let a crowd get between you and your ambulance (this happened once to me, and it made for a most unpleasant feeling).

Even with all of the agonies of working on the streets, the worst part, the ultimate horror, is what resides carefully within your mind. People often ask me how I managed to do this job without getting sick or going crazy. The heroic answer is that I, along with every other paramedic, was tough enough to take it. The truth is that we did get sick,
some did go crazy, and some turned into alcoholics and drug abusers. Many times I worked horrible accidents, feeling my stomach turning to mush, and as soon as we got to the hospital, ran for the bathroom to vomit up what I had just witnessed. Every paramedic I know can recall with crystal clarity the worst case he ever went on. Some have several that haunt them; most have one or two that they feel guilty about where things went all to hell and someone died.

I have carefully-caged nightmares that visit on occasion, reminding me of the horror. One in particular makes me feel overwhelmingly guilty, though there is no real reason it should. One night while I was working for Grady, we worked an especially nasty multi-vehicle accident out on one of the expressways. My partner and I had extricated a couple, presumably a man and his wife, from a mangled ball of steel that had once been a car. Their injuries were severe and extensive, and it took us and the firemen helping us several minutes to get them out and into our ambulance. After doing all that we could do on the scene, we were ready to take off for the ER, and my partner went up front to drive us. I suddenly remembered that I had left a piece of equipment in the wreck, and, hollering for him to wait a minute, I raced over to the site. While I was looking for the equipment, my flashlight beam caught a baby's blanket and a couple of toys that had been thrown to the floor by the force of impact. I suddenly had a flash of memory back to a high-school Driver's Ed class horror film, where an ambulance worker had made a similar discovery and later found a baby smashed up under a seat. I was horrified. With great trepidation I found a crowbar and forced up what was left of the front seat. There, tangled in springs and broken metal, was the lifeless body of a six-month-old baby.

This is my dream, this is my nightmare, every night for the past six years. This was just one more call that I did, one more call involving death, one more time I found a body that I could do nothing for. I honestly don't know why I feel so guilty for finding that child; I know it wasn't my fault that it died, but by having that flash of memory, I feel responsible for its having been there. This is what being a paramedic really is like: the memories are overwhelming, and the hurt and pain never go away. I wish to God I had never been one.

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*hoi polloi* is typeset in New Century Schoolbook, a serif typeface of dignity and authority.

Cover design by Terry Hulsey using a Macintosh Plus computer and the Aldus Free Hand art program.