

Pluto inspires professor's book

BY MICHELLE MARTIN
Staff Reporter

What's so wrong with the planet Pluto?
Robert Graber, professor emeritus of anthropology, said the puzzle of Pluto's demotion from planet status inspired his newest book, "Plutonic Sonnets," released earlier this month. The collection of Shakespearean sonnets, Graber's first poetic work, explores the quirky but intriguing history of naming planets and elements.

"I started writing poetry a couple years ago," Graber said. "I was in my 30s before I sort of discovered my love for poetry, and then it was predominantly for reading poetry, not for writing it."

Graber, who taught anthropology and sociology at Truman for 25 years before retiring in 2006, received his Ph.D. in anthropology from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee after experimenting in fields like architecture and music, he said.

"Anthropology combines biological and social science," he said. "And it asks big questions. I've always had this intellectual ambition to write [about] big questions."

Before Graber began writing poetry, he already had authored four books between 1995 and 2006, which mostly were anthropological in nature. Graber said the highlights included an anthropological textbook and his bestseller: a small book called "Valuing Useless Knowledge," which makes the case for the value of a stereotypically useless liberal arts education and argues for the worth of a degree for the sake of learning, not just for its practicality.

"The book argues not that knowledge is really useless but that we should value knowledge for its own sake partly because we don't know what might be useful tomorrow or the next century," he said.

Graber's other books include "A Scientific Model of Social and Cultural Evolution" and "Plunging to Leviathan," which explores the political future of the world. Graber was starting a new anthropological work in 2006 when he was inspired to go down a different literary path, he said.

"I was working on a history of anthropological theory," Graber said. "It was going to be a big, serious book ... [but then] I had a dream one night."

Graber's dreams in summer 2006 were set in a tourist ghost town from the old west. In differ-

ent parts of the dream, Graber shot someone and was later shot at by a man who he discovered was himself.

"When I remembered this dream I thought, this was a weird dream," he said. "I'm going to write a sonnet about it."

But after Graber finished the sonnet, he wasn't quite done with it, he said.

"So then I thought, what am I going to do with the sonnet?" he said. "Do I want to give this thing to the world, this bizarre thing? I went on the Internet and found this poetry site, poetbay.com ... and some people said, this is pretty weird but pretty cool."

After Graber began reading and contributing more poetry on poetbay.com, he said he began writing even more sonnets. Graber said he soon discovered an inspiration for "Plutonic Sonnets."

"This all started when Pluto got demoted," he said. "A friend of mine said, 'Well, does plutonium still get to be an element?' ... as if the naming was what made the thing the thing instead of some other criteria."

This concern with the process of naming things like planets intrigued Graber, which led to his writing 164 plutonic sonnets between February 2007 and October 2008, he said.

"It did get me thinking about definitions and how important they are ... what makes a thing a thing, how does science make things change in ordinary life?" Graber said.

The switch from writing serious anthropological books to completing a book of sonnets might seem a bit irregular, but Graber said poetry was a natural exploration after contributing many scholarly works.

"To a great extent it was just fun, more fun than anthropology," he said. "There's a good bit of my own anthropological views and orientation reflected in the sonnets. I don't think of them as entirely unrelated."

Plutonic Sonnets will soon be sold in the bookstore, where Graber will be signing copies on Dec. 16, he said. He said the poetic break was fun, but that he plans on returning to anthropology with his next book about cultural evolution.

"Writing poetry can be a wonderful thing," he said. "And I was never a good soldier [or] a good follower. I would rather set my own agenda."

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Robert Graber
Emeritus Professor of Anthropology

All eyes on Robert Graber

"I've always had this intellectual ambition to write."



Mayank Dhungana/Index

Robert Graber, professor emeritus of anthropology, used the demotion of Pluto as a planet for a means of inspiration for his newest book, "Plutonic Sonnets."

Socialite blog keeps community informed

BY ZOE MARTIN
Assistant Features Editor

Unlike the infamous blogs of the CW's "Gossip Girl" and Juicy Campus — sites that traffic in rumors and anonymity — the Kirksville Socialite is an Internet blog of a different breed.

Created by senior Casey Millburg and launched during this year's Truman Week, the site gathers University and community events and adds a pinch of journalism with political coverage and a dash of fun with an archive of funny YouTube videos. The result, Millburg said, hopefully will get students more involved in campus and Kirksville life.

"It bugs me so much and always has when you have people who complain that there's nothing to do in town," she said. "I can't help but think that would change if they would get out and take advantage of the opportunities."

Millburg said she realized this through personal experience.

"I almost left Truman," she said. "And then I discovered that the more I got out there and did things, I enjoyed it more, and having had that experience, it makes it more of a personal mission to make this place a better environment for the students who have just arrived."

Millburg said she worked on the blog throughout the summer and

even purchased the domain name, KirksvilleSocialite.com, which cost about \$10 per page. Beyond choosing a name, Millburg had particular ideas about her blog's purpose.

"I've never been a big fan of airing your personal emotions, the dirty laundry," she said. "So the approach I took to it was more journalistic, talking about issues and writing about them."

Millburg has a few fellow student contributors, but most of the material is her own, including coverage of last month's congressional debate on campus. She said blogging about news and politics has become a new and potentially better way to disseminate the information.

"With a lot of news sites it's gone so downhill in the past few years," Millburg said. "It's become more of an entertainment media Mecca than it has anything else — a cheap thrill. I think the blogosphere has stepped into the void that was left by that. ... It's such a useful tool for getting an idea out, getting a message out,

getting a perspective out."

Jay Self, assistant professor of communication, agrees that some blogs have a place in today's journalism.

"[Blogs] get us that information very quickly and we react to that more quickly," he said. "You don't have to wait 24 hours — the news cycle is a lot quicker. It's not like investigative reporting, it's just simply getting information out."

But blogs are useless without publicity, which Self said is achieved largely through personal contacts.

"You tell people, 'Hey, I saw this on such-and-such a blog,' and then they go to it, and then they tell somebody else, and they tell somebody else," he said. "So it's word-of-mouth or e-mailing links."

One way Millburg has done this is through her network of friends and acquaintances in organizations at the University. Senior Katie Palazzolo heard about the blog from Millburg. Palazzolo said she visits it several times a week as a quick but detailed source for com-

munity events and supplementary news commentaries.

"It's really nice to know what's happening and more details about what's happening," Palazzolo said. "I also looked at a lot of the election stuff. She did a fun commentary with the debate with [Blaine] Luetkemeyer and [Judy] Baker."

Palazzolo said she also appreciates the off-the-wall news story links and other Web sites in the "Procrastinate!" section. Another page is "The Foodie Room," senior David Mohl's contribution to the site.

"[Millburg] had this idea, and she knows I like to muse about food, and so she asked me if I wanted to write about it," Mohl said.

He said his pieces started as recipes or food-related stories he submitted several times a week, but now his contributions are less regular.

"When I find a recipe I really like or cook something I really like, I'll put that online, or if I have a particular thought on something then I might write it down ... just when the mood strikes," he said.

Mohl said he thinks his foodie section adds something to the overall blog.

"Most of the blog is things happening around town and campus stuff, [but with] mine ... it doesn't really matter what's happening that particular week, you could go back and read the recipes a month,

two months from now," he said. "There's nothing that has any kind of time limit."

Mohl said his contributions to the Kirksville Socialite are as enjoyable for him as he hopes they are for his readers.

"I'm not going to do anything with food in my career, so it's fun to pretend to be a chef for a day," he said. "If everything else you're doing is very heavy-handed and busy statistical work — stuff that's not very fun — it's nice to talk about steak."

With all the extras on the site, Millburg said it averages 250 to 300 views each day but that she wants to increase her readership.

"There are more than 250 or 300 students on campus," she said. "The publicity is something I've been working on for a while. ... Facebook has been my very good friend, ... and then I'll just be talking with people or I'll have other people mention it to other people, and apparently, one of the girls I work with ... says I have a cult following developing of people who are just addicted to checking the site."

Millburg witnessed this herself in the library a few weeks ago.

"I saw three people on my Web page," she said. "And there's something so cool about that. ... Just seeing it in that casual a setting is something that brought a little tear to my eyes."

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Casey Millburg
Senior

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