



BY CHRIS BONING  
Columnist

In addition to being a columnist for this newspaper, I am also the instructor for an experimental communication course called Environmental Rhetoric. A major portion of the course is discussing media, mostly written material, about the environment. Many of the readings I have assigned so far originally were produced before the 1920s, and although I do my best to engage my students, a few topics quickly have fallen flat in class. Of these, most are examples of nature writing.

The type of writing to which I refer is that of Emerson, Thoreau, Muir, Leopold and others like them — those individuals to whom the death of a passenger pigeon, a thousand-mile walk or a life lived

## The Little Green Diary:

# Emerson draws yawns

deliberately was intimately important, and those writers who could expound at length about the beauty of a single wildflower or a forest of redwoods. Those kinds of writers are dying out because that kind of writing doesn't sell.

As one of the students in my class pointed out, nature writing is difficult to get through because it can be boring. Admittedly, I agree to a certain extent. Nature writing, especially from the 19th century, is dull compared to modern tastes, but at the time of its publication the style was wildly popular. Also, although a single paragraph about one small plant might seem like a bit much, that kind of writing is still beautiful in its own way.

I think there are a number of reasons classical nature writing now is considered difficult and boring. First of all, it's well known by now that our attention spans are growing steadily weaker, and those who study contemporary educa-

tion and child development know that to stimulate children, one must provide interactive exercises so as to mimic the interactive nature of computers and video games. If it was becoming evident years ago that Americans were losing their ability to stay still and pay attention in school or at work, much less spend a day sitting and thinking under a tree or by the side of a lake, then I fear what young children will be capable of, or rather incapable of, in just a few decades.

Another reason we no longer appreciate nature writing is that the spaces in which an individual may just be and enjoy his or her surroundings are quickly disappearing. Most Americans are familiar with Thoreau's "Walden," but he also spent time living in Cape Cod and wrote about that as well. Today, Cape Cod is a popular vacation spot for the rich and famous and is sprinkled with privately-owned islands. I question whether Thoreau's work

on Cape Cod would have the same resonance if it were known only as a tourist hot spot then as it is now. Furthermore, there are few new territories to be discovered and explored. Lewis and Clark, for instance, kept journals of their travels to what is now the western U.S. These journals documented the nature of the landscape, which was yet unknown to most Americans. These journals also conveyed the explorers' attitudes about the environment, which I would argue is also an essential component of nature writing.

Finally, as I noted in one of my previous columns, I know many young people who have found work on farms, and although I know that their characters are such that they probably are enjoying agricultural life immensely, as far as I can tell few of them are actively and/or publicly writing about their experiences. Similarly, many individuals are joining environmentally-minded communities, but it seems their

reasons for doing so have to do more with isolation and unplugging from the grid than with documenting their lives for the betterment of themselves and the knowledge of the outside world.

Nature writing is no longer considered important to the general populace, even though it serves a vital purpose to us all. Writing about the land, animals, plants and spiders always will be important because it allows us to express our wonder and awe for the natural environment, a space we are quickly losing because of unfettered destruction. We need nature writing because it permits us to put into words the beauty we feel upon seeing a perfectly formed red rose or a colorful sunset, and because it is a lasting reminder of how things used to be before we forgot how to identify birds by the sound of their call or how to tell time by looking at the sun and shadows on the ground. Is nature writing boring? No — it should be anything but.

# Birthday suit makes a come back at campus

BY MEG BURIK  
Columnist

I often find the societal necessity to wear clothes very bothersome. I hate doing laundry and I suck at matching pants, shirts, scarves and shoes to create the perfect color scheme, adhering to fashion codes and flattering my figure. I'm very content slipping on a pair of jeans and a T-shirt and going about my day in a casual, I'm-not-trying-hard-at-all outfit.

But my favorite outfit is my birthday suit. I never have to take it to the dry cleaner's, and I never have to hang it up in my closet to keep it from wrinkling. Since those crazy hooligan exhibitionists in the Garden of Eden, however, the majority of society has found it necessary to shield their bare selves from onlookers with at least a tasteful set of leaves.

Though I love being au naturel and have made peace with the mirror, I admittedly have mixed emotions about who gets to see me in all my nakedness.

Embracing your naked body, regardless of whether you feel comfortable being naked in front of a large group of strangers or only in front of the shower head, is a personal journey.

Senior theater major Kyle Smith stripped nude in the final scene of the play "Bug" last fall. He said that even

though some people involved with the production originally thought the nudity was gratuitous, it just became part of the overall artistic expression of the show.

"I do respect what playwrights want to see in their shows, and that's what he wanted, and that's what we did," Smith said.

Smith said society creates an unnecessary stigma against being naked, but when nudity comes to the forefront, it's no longer a big deal.

"We just build it up in our heads as this huge, scary, intimidating thing when actually we're all kind of alike," Smith said. "When something is new, people naturally say 'weird' as opposed to 'different.' [On stage nudity] is just one other thing that's on the list."

Junior theatre major Sarah Hitzel differentiated between artistic mediums and the acceptability of nudity.

"There's a difference between being able to sit in front of somebody and share a moment like when you're right there," Hitzel said. "To create a moment on film, you're very much removed from the actors, and the actors are very much removed from the audience."

I agree that to strip in front of an audience, all of them sharing that moment with you at the same time, would connect you with the audience in a daring but impermanent

manner. I assume (having never been naked in front of an audience) this connection is also inherently fleeting. The stage lights go black, you re-robe, and the actor/audience intimacy has passed.

Hitzel said the reason people initially might feel uncomfortable with nudity on stage is the private connotation of nakedness.

"People associate nakedness with intimacy and intimate moments, so when you see someone naked or nude in front of you, you feel like you're walking in on some kind of intimate moment," Hitzel said.

A friend of mine, senior Abbey Lukefahr, expressed a similar viewpoint. She said she wouldn't feel comfortable being nude in front of groups of people.

"I was always taught that [nudity] is something that you should treasure and share only with yourself and somebody that loves you extremely ... and would appreciate that," Lukefahr said.

Lukefahr said there is something beautiful about saving nakedness for special moments.

"When people are nude, it's like being able to see in their soul," Lukefahr said. "It's who you are without any pretenses. You can't have any pretenses if you have no clothes on."

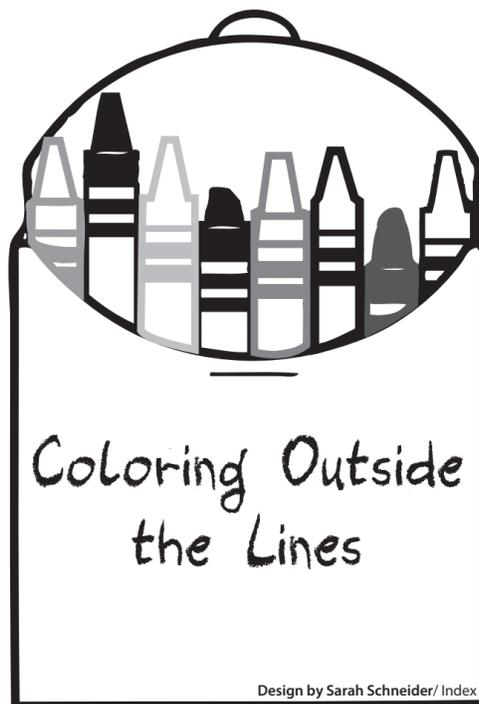
Lukefahr makes a good point — without clothes, there is no buffer between

the body and what's beyond. To some extent, I find being naked a version of expressing my true self. Nothing is left to the imagination when my clothes lie in a pile on the floor beside me.

On the other hand, I feel very lackadaisical about my naked body. It doesn't represent anything about who I am or what I stand for. My naked body won't tell you my favorite band is The Decemberists or that I hate the injustices of our so-called justice system. My naked body won't reveal the childhood moments that molded me into the adult I am or share my deepest secrets. If you were to see me naked, it's not like you would instantly gain some kernel-of-truth insight about who I am — my essential self. All you would see is a woman with a couple of scars from middle school softball and a freckle here or there.

Echoing shades of my lack of concern over nudity, graduate student Rachel Uhlig modeled nude for a drawing class on campus and said she's very comfortable naked.

"The first time, I was walking up the stairs [to the classroom] and I was thinking, 'I can't believe I'm doing this, this is absurd,'" Uhlig said. "I went up on the little platform in the middle [of the room] and dropped the robe and there was no turning back at that point."



Design by Sarah Schneider/ Index

Uhlig said that although she was nervous at first, she realized the art students were as nervous as her, if not more nervous. She overcame the initial anxiety easily and quickly adjusted to baring it all.

"I got a little rush like, 'Ooo, everyone's looking at my naked body,' but it was really quite boring because it was so long and I had to hold these poses for like 30 minutes, maybe an hour sometimes," Uhlig said.

With a smile, Uhlig described her figure as Greco-Roman and said modeling nude empowered her, as people wanted to draw her

nude body.

"I'm a bigger girl — that was a move for bigger girls everywhere. Be loud, be proud," Uhlig said.

I view weight and other surface-level features as negligible, because (at risk of sounding overtly hippie-ish) the body is really just an earthly capsule for the soul. I equally respect people who would donate their entire closet to Goodwill and go naked as I do people who want to save sharing their body for just the right person. Whether you prefer covering your curves is a personal decision (and one that society typically makes for you anyway).

# Happily ever after creates angst

BY ANNE REBAR  
Columnist

I blame Disney for the crushed hopes and dreams of young women everywhere.

They try telling us that one day a wonderful prince will come and take us away to his beautiful castle, and we will live happily ever after with our rosy optimism and humorous sidekicks. When you wish upon a star, your dreams come true! (Eye roll.)

I am pretty sure I wished on hundreds of stars growing up, and none of those wishes came true. Walt Disney is a liar. There, I said it. Hate me.

One of my best friends staunchly believes one day her prince will come. I enjoy her undaunted hopefulness, but there is no perfect guy. No one's perfect. Prince Charming is one of those myths adults tell to little kids to make them feel better, like, "Looks don't matter — it's what's on the inside that counts," and "There's no such thing as a dumb question." False.

Men aren't perfect, and neither are women. It's about finding a person with so many good qualities that you are willing to overlook those annoying imperfections.

I decided to go around and, in a very unscientific and unofficial poll, ask my friends what they thought was most important in a man or woman. The number of these good qualities a potential mate has is directly related to the amount of their obnoxious idiosyncrasies you are able to tolerate. The idea of the "perfect man" is preposterous, but this way you can start

looking for one who's pretty cool and who you can put up with (maybe even for the rest of your life).

Looks was one of the most popular qualities in my unscientific poll. OK, I know you're not actually supposed to say that, and it usually wasn't first on people's lists of desirable qualities, but overall it did appear the most often. My philosophy is, sure, it sounds shallow, but looks are what firsts attract you to the person. When I first meet a guy, I don't know if his personality is perfectly attuned with mine, but I definitely know if his dimples are sexy!

My friend gave me this metaphor for how looks rank when he's looking for a date: "I think of myself as a house with a large fence around it," he said. "My 'heart' resides inside the house and to get to it, a girl's got to make her way through the gate and all the way up to the front door. Looks get you through the gate. The better looking a girl is, the closer to the house it gets her without any other factors coming in to play. Then the other things come in, like intelligence and personality, to eventually propel her through the door and into the 'house' where my heart lies."

I pretty much agree with everything, except for the part about how the better looking someone is, the less the other factors matter. No matter how jaw-droppingly good looking someone is, there is no way they are getting anywhere near my metaphorical "house" if they are as dumb as a box of rocks.

This point brings me to my next quality:



intelligence.

I don't mean that everyone has to be a rocket scientist to be in a good relationship. Actually, this is a piece of advice my father passed down from his father: date someone whose intelligence level is similar to yours. You can't connect with someone who is on a completely different academic plane than your own. Personally, I love having in-depth conversations and debates with the person I'm seeing. If one person has to dumb down his/her vocabulary or explain certain concepts to the other, it impedes the relationship and inhibits the two people getting to know each other on anything but a surface level.

Once, during a discussion on art that I had with an ex-boyfriend, he mentioned he thought the "sixteenth chapel" was the most famous painting in the world. It took me a few seconds to realize he meant the Sistine Chapel. My art history minor and I were horrified. Endless laughing fits ensued. The

relationship has since ended.

There were many other qualities my friends and I came up with, such as a sense of humor and compatible moral viewpoints, but I think those qualities mostly depend on the people and can all be combined into the simple idea of well-matched personalities. I like someone who's confident and doesn't take himself too seriously. Other people look for ambition and an ability to speak one's mind. Everyone has an idea of what personality he or she is most compatible with.

Although no one will have every single "good quality" out there, and, unlike my good friend, I do not retain the hope of a white knight showing up on horseback to carry me off into the sunset, I do think one day I will have the luck of finding someone who has as many of those good qualities as possible. I don't know about happily ever after, but I think we could then go on to live relatively happily for a good long while.