

# Book mocks serious novels

While many writers strive for perfection, a Truman State student tries to write poorly

BY EMILY WICHMER  
Staff Reporter

The Newbery Award, Caldecott Medal and Pulitzer Prize all are prestigious awards for great literature. However, one Truman State student is challenging the idea of what great literature is.

Sophomore Madeline Perel said she has spent the past few years writing a novel that will be "bad." Perel said the idea came from a book she read called "Irene Iddesleigh" by Amanda McKittrick Ros.

She said she had heard it was purposely one of the worst books ever written, and thought the idea of writing a bad novel was great.

Perel said she thought the fact that the author had intended readers to take the story seriously was genius and something she would like to try as well. She said she decided to write a book that would make fun of the serious, stiff, 19th century Victorian novels she had read in school.

Perel has tentatively titled her book "Silent Moanings in the Dewdrop Night," and she said the title is just the first clue to readers that the book isn't intended to be read as a serious novel.

Perel said she also has taken inspiration from an online article, "How to Write a Bad Novel." There, she said, she learned some "bad" traits she has used in her own novel, such as giving several characters similar names so the reader will be confused.

In addition to giving characters confusing names, Perel said she tried to make her characters speak in a confusing way. She said they misuse adjectives and say awkward, silly phrases in a serious manner.

For example, one character dramatically says, "I have such a strong hunger for the world of the unknown. I just wish I could be spirited away to a land of fantasy!"

Even though she is trying to write a bad novel, Perel said it has been a challenge and a learning experience. She said one of the hardest things about writing it is maintaining the same style.

Perel said at first, the dramatic Victo-

rian style of speaking flowed easily, but as a result it has become harder to keep the same silly tone.

She said the experience has been a fun one, and she enjoys working on the novel when she feels stressed or gets inspiration.

English professor Heather Cianciola, who teaches Victorian literature, said in her experience, Victorian literature occasionally generates a strong negative reaction from readers.

Sensational Victorian romance novels usually feature love triangles and mystery and Cianciola said sometimes are seen as "over the top." Some readers complain that in this sub-genre of Victorian literature, characters are unbelievable — too many coincidences occur and conflicts are resolved too easily, she said.

"What modern readers sometimes perceive as over-the-top language, emotionalism, awkward wording and unbelievable plots is a result of readers' changing expectations about what a novel should be," Cianciola said. "Modern readers often notice at first the qualities of Victorian novels that seem unfamiliar or downright silly, but as they continue to read, they are drawn in by the power and artistry of those novels."

Cianciola said Victorian writers brought new forms of realism, social advocacy and human agency to fiction in a way that, to many readers, is believable and compelling.

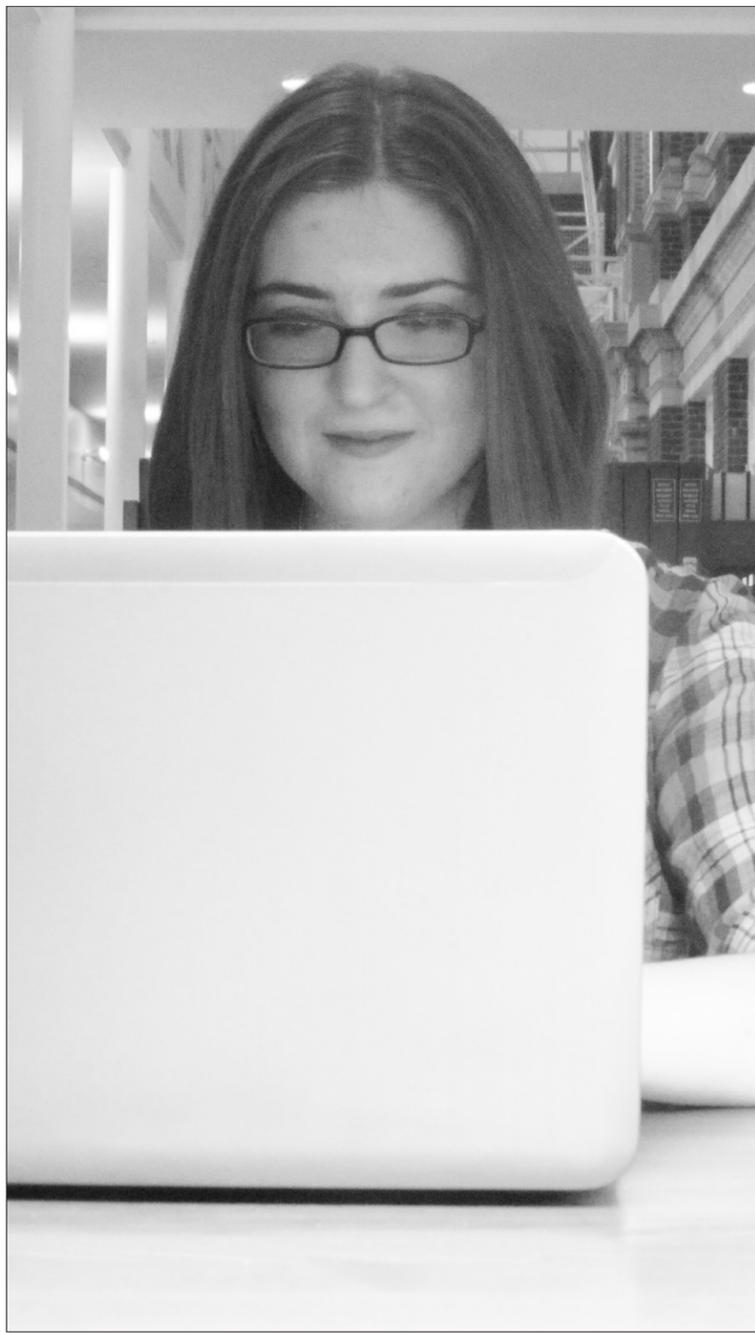
Cianciola said she finds Victorian literature exciting and most enjoys reading 19th century novels as pleasure reading.

However, she said she is interested in reading Perel's novel. She said she loves to see students take on the subject of Victorian literature.

English professor James D'Agostino said while he has instructed several of his students write novels, he never has had students try to write a bad one.

D'Agostino said he thinks Perel's concept is a good one. He said confrontational projects like this can give rise to a great experience.

"When an author writes a story that pokes fun at another novel, they pick up several positive experiences," D'Agostino said. "Even trying to write a bad book is a challenge because in addition to poking fun at the subject, it has to be interesting enough to work and hold the reader's attention. Even if the book is a



Sam Gorden/Index

Sophomore Madeline Perel works on her novel in Pickler Memorial Library. Perel is purposefully writing a novel in a Victorian style that is meant to be of a poor quality writing, which she said has been a challenge.

joke, it has to discover something serious eventually."

Perel said she would love to have her book published once it is completed, but she would prefer to have it marketed as

a serious novel and not a bad one.

"I think it would be great to have someone come up to me and say, 'This book was really fantastic!'" Perel said. "I'd get a kick out of that."

# Statistics professor pumps up jams

Professor Jason Shaw produced a music video adding sass to statistics

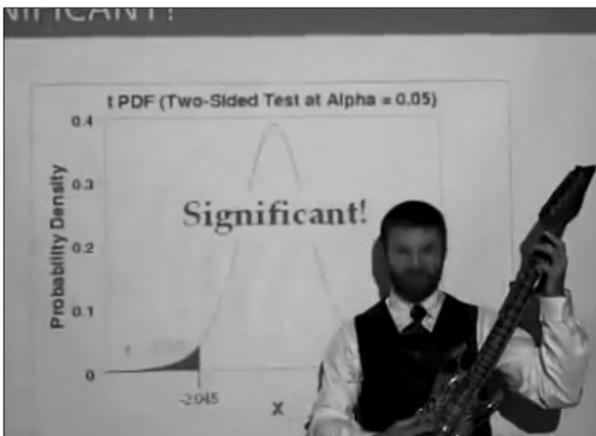
BY SARAH MUIR  
Staff Reporter

At Truman State, basic statistics is a required class for graduation, but statistics professor Jason Shaw has created a music video to prove required doesn't necessarily mean boring.

Shaw's video, titled "Bringin' Back the Stat," is set to the tune of Justin Timberlake's "SexyBack." The video was finished and released on YouTube shortly after Thanksgiving break, Shaw said. It has approximately 5,500 views.

When he started this project he had no specific goal in mind, but he said he knew he wanted to have some fun with statistics.

The lyrics all relate to statistical concepts and references, Shaw said. He said he couldn't remember the exact moment the inspiration for the song and video came to him, but he said he was listening to the song this



Submitted photo

Professor Jason Shaw sings about statistics in his music video, "Bringin' Back the Stat." The video is viewable on YouTube.

past summer and doing something related to statistics, when the line "bringin' back the stat" popped into his head, and thus the process began, he said.

Shaw, who has been teaching statistics at Truman for eight years, said he thought about ev-

erything he would have to do to make the idea of the music video a reality, he said. The lyrics had to be written, the filming had to be done and he had to come up with fun ideas for what to do in the video, Shaw said.

The project was delayed when

the fall semester started, he said. However, Shaw said he kept thinking about it and finally got to work on production during Thanksgiving Break. Working alongside his wife, Truman Academic Advisor Erin Shaw, they got most of the video shot throughout four hours on a Sunday, he said.

However, the video wasn't finished quite yet, he said. After watching what they had shot, Shaw said he realized he wanted student involvement in the video.

Junior Audrey Mecklenburg, a former student in Shaw's STAT 190 class and one of the students who contributed background vocals to the video, said Shaw pitched the idea to the class and invited them to contribute to the project.

Mecklenburg said she expected the video to be educational, but she never expected it to be so clever. When the class saw the final video, Mecklenburg said she couldn't stop laughing.

"I thought it was fun and clever," she said. "The way he incorporated the references was relevant and still educational."

Sophomore Cassandra

Roeslein also became interested in getting involved when Shaw told the class he was working on a video project.

"The video was hilarious," Roeslein said. "I loved it. I showed it to everyone I could. I learn best through music so it was helpful too."

She understood the statistics references in the video from what she learned in class, and she thought it could have been helpful to watch at the beginning of the semester to help with understanding the concepts, she said.

After getting students involved, Shaw said he still wanted one last element — Truman President Troy Paino. Paino agreed to participate in the project, and became even more enthused about it after viewing the video.

Paino started the video by calling Shaw and asking him to take it up a notch in his stats class.

"I thought that bringing Dr. Paino in would make it successful and he really stole the show," Shaw said.

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