

Verbal Equinox

Weber State University Writing Center Journal

Fall 1998

Who's Writing Now?

Publishing Professors Share Writing Experiences

The Weber State University English Department is privileged to have on its staff individuals who are not only fine instructors, but also very accomplished writers. Recently, several professors have published both creative and scholarly works. *Verbal Equinox* has interviewed some of these authors, who were very kind to share personal experiences with publishing their writing.

Dr. Donna Cheney is the author of the book of poetry *Signifying Something*. The book is a collection of poetry written over the course of the last five years. The majority of the poems, according to Cheney, are "memoir" poems dealing with personal experience; however, a number of them are "adapted persona" poems. Dr. Cheney says she gave her editor, Christina Millard, free rein over her entire collection of poems, allowing her to select those which she felt were best and most appropriate.

For Dr. Cheney, having a book published is both exciting and frightening, especially since it involves her poetry. She feels that having her poems available and read by others is like being exposed in some way, but she seems to be taking it all in stride. When asked for suggestions she would give to aspiring poets, Cheney offered that one should always have an "instant pencil and paper" to write down "delicious" words or ideas. "Poems are ephemeral," said Cheney, "and must be written down immediately." Cheney advises writers to read a variety of poets and attend poetry and fiction readings whenever possible to

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Sylvia Speaks...Again

Fall 1998 brought many new things to Weber State and the Writing Center. We made the long anticipated switch from quarters to semesters. The jury is still out concerning how students like the semester system; time will tell. (Add those to your cliché collection, Ryan!)

The Writing Center had its "official" grand opening in our new location; the new desk, tables and chairs finally came. Although we moved with trepidation from the Social Science Building to the Student Service Center last year, we love our new surroundings. Our proximity to the Testing Center gives us great visibility. We have space, we have a white board *and* a bulletin board, we have windows, we have ventilation, we have matching furniture; in short, we now tutor in style! In keeping with our goal to become an online writing center as well as a walk-in center, we updated our web page and, in conjunction with WSU Online, became a presence on the new Writer's Resource Hub (WRH) with the Word of the Day and online paper submission pages. See *SYLVIA* page 4

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spark ideas and aid in developing one's own voice.

Dr. Diane Krantz's fascination with Julian of Norwich, a medieval visionary, began with a paper for a linguistics class which was supposed to deal with a "crux" in medieval literature. Her professor gave students a list of authors to choose from and the only one she recognized was Julian of Norwich. As Krantz read Norwich's "Book of Showings," she began to notice its extensive use of repetition, and its use of what she calls an "enclosing text", or one in which the beginning of the text refers to the end, and the end refers to and deals with the beginning. Krantz eventually wrote her dissertation on this element of *enclosure* in Julian's writings, relating it to the enclosure the woman experienced as a recluse, and to the enclosure reflected in Julian's text in the idea of being "enclosed in Jesus, and Jesus enclosed in us." Dr. Krantz felt that the ideas explored in her Dissertation were still waiting to be dealt with completely--that the project needed some closure. This "closure" would culminate in the publication of her book *The Life and Text of Julian of Norwich: The Poetics of Enclosure*.

Krantz's original dissertation was over 300 pages long; the finished project is 150 pages, including bibliography and text notes. According to Dr. Krantz, "A good way to write is to take things out." *The Life and Text of Julian of Norwich* is Dr. Krantz's first book, although a spin-off article written by Krantz, which deals with some ideas introduced in the book, will be published in a book on Jungian archetypes. Dr. Krantz teaches us that writing can be a lengthy and arduous process (her actual project spanned six years), but nonetheless rewarding in both process and product.

"...writing is a process that redefines thinking and learning and brings order to chaos."

Reading Matters: Narrative in the New Media Ecology is a collection of essays, edited by Joseph Tabbi and **Dr. Michael Wutz** Of Weber State University and including twelve original essays written by them. The book focuses on how literature has evolved as technology has advanced and explains "the convergence of the twentieth century narrative and technology."

Dr. Wutz said that the most difficult thing about

putting this book together was trying to adapt to the changes it underwent during the writing process. He and Tabbi began with a certain idea in mind, but they found they had to change a few things as the work evolved. Wutz counseled aspiring authors not to be slaves to their original ideas and to be open to change. "Let the work itself guide the writing process. Stay close to your original plan, but don't be afraid to use serendipity."

When asked what he felt was the most exciting aspect of writing this book, Dr. Wutz said that one of the biggest thrills was to actually see the finished product. He mentioned that seeing ideas turned into actual solid matter, down on paper, is one thing that makes the whole process worth the trouble. According to Dr. Wutz, writing "is a process that redefines thinking and learning and brings order to chaos."

Other advice Dr. Wutz would give to writers is to stick to the project and to practice plenty of patience. He said that writing is a difficult, time-consuming process which requires a lot of persistence. He also advises writers to use the technological tools and resources available to them to make the process a little easier.

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The Lighter Writer

A writer died and St. Peter offered her the option of going to hell or heaven. To help decide, she asked for a tour of each destination.

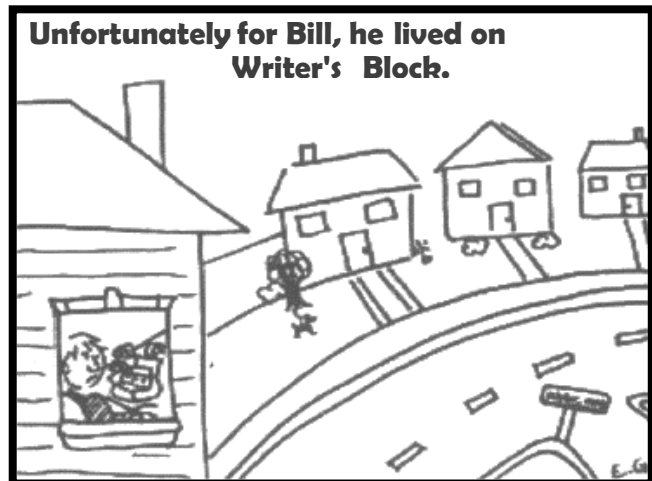
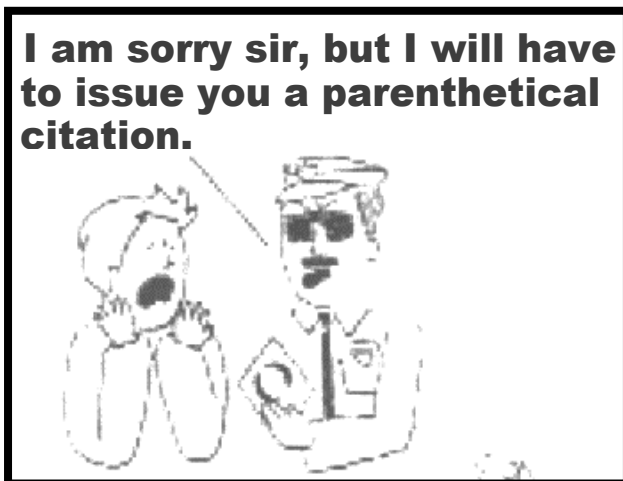
St. Peter agreed and decided to take her to hell first. As she descended into the fiery pits, the writer saw row upon row of writers chained to their desks in a steaming sweatshop. As they worked, they were repeatedly whipped with thorny lashes by demons. "Oh my," the writer said, "let me see heaven."

A few moments later, as they ascended into heaven, the writer saw rows of writers, chained to their desks in a steaming sweatshop. As they worked, they too, were whipped with thorny lashes by demons.

"Hey," the writer said, "this is just as bad as hell!"

"Oh, no it's not," St. Peter replied. "Here, your work gets published."

How do Russian writers commit suicide? Give up? They jump off of their books!



Writing is not necessarily something to be ashamed of, but do it in private and wash your hands afterward.

--Robert Heinlein--

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"Don't give up," is the sage advice given to writers by Dr. Judy Elsley. Elsley is the author of several published works, the most recent of which is a book of seven personal essays entitled *Getting Personal: A Woman in the West*.

In discussing her work, Dr. Elsley says that one of the most discouraging aspects of the publishing process is submitting a manuscript to countless publishers and having none accept it, or being accepted only by a small, unknown company. "The trick is to find the 'right niche' for your work," says Elsley, "Not all publishers look for the same qualities or types of writing." Dr. Elsley writes from the heart on issues that she cares about and then does research to figure out which publisher may accept it. She says she sends out about twice as many manuscripts as ever get accepted.

Of course, before getting published a writer must produce a piece of work that is worthy of publication. Dr. Elsley said that her number one obstacle is actually getting past what she calls her "crisis of confidence". Every writer has self-doubt--something that Dr. Elsley says writers--even published writers--never get over. A writer starts at square one with every new project,

and must get over his or her own "crisis of confidence."

When asked the advice she would give to writers, Dr. Elsley said that the most useful advice she has heard came from a class given by Edward Abbey, who said, "Write a lot, read a lot, live a lot." In Elsley's opinion, there is no replacement for actually spending time writing. "Writing is hard work," said Elsley, "There is no point waiting for the muse--she probably won't visit."

Perhaps

the young tongues
of small babes
are loosed only to wail
because
significant we,
who know all great things,
blind to our inadequacy,
are unable to grasp
the scope
or truth
or infinity

of all they remember.

--Robyn Young--



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The online paper submission page was created to support WSU's online classes, especially English 1010 and 2010. This online tutoring technique was more successful than last year's attempt at real-time tutoring via a chat room. The tutors started with little guidance in this endeavor and did so well that we drafted guidelines for future online submissions from their initial responses. We managed to maintain our goal of helping writers write rather than becoming an editing or proofreading service.

As we explore new ways to serve writers, we will also continue tutoring in traditional ways: face-to-face, teaching skills to and building confidence in the students who venture bravely into the Writing Center.

This very special issue of
VerbalEquinox
has been brought to you by

Krista Beus *Editor*
Abel Keogh *Assistant Editor*
Ryan Decaria *Consultant*
Sylvia Pack *Advisor*

Staff: Janel Latham, Elisalyn Gardener, Suzi Workman, Emily Peterson Whitby, and Robyn Young.

Special thanks to Elisalyn Gardener for her artwork and sense of humor and to Sylvia Pack for her patience and advice that made me a better editor and makes all of us at the WSU Writing Center better tutors and writers.

The Contest

The WSU Writing Center's annual writing contest yielded evidence of quite a few fine writers on campus. Choosing the winners in each category was quite a challenge, but here they are in all of their literary splendor:

Poetry	
1 st place	Craig Ibarguen
2 nd place	Jewell Loveless
3 rd place	Stephanie Hatch
Short Story	
1 st place	Mark Sparkman
2 nd place	Angela Aldrich
3 rd place	Michelle Murray
Essay	
1 st place	Craig Ibarguen
2 nd place	Susan L. Klinker
3 rd place	Leo T. Dirr

Fitting

Maybe loneliness is the key-- the grinded ridges of metal, crafted with sparks of friction; it	tumblers linked with the door, with the time to realize
glides	our
slowly slipping into	tools
design	survive us, join us in hope
clasping the shape	we cannot see
the moment	the form of the key.
of tension, springing	--Craig Ibarguen

Hear

The stairway is dark
but I pause at
the light

switch

And listen
what will this moment
prove the slight seconds
we never

notice

the injuries
suffered from

routine

I hear the furnace hum
the instance before its
strange roar
the house cracks and yawns
with heat
a train sings
voices blur into

tones

of shadows line the walls
narrow stairs and distant calls

a barking dog
a lover's whisper
a faint song's
melody

of life in the passing seconds,

--Craig Ibarguen--

Still the Snow Came Swirling

By
Mark Sparkman
First place Fiction

Out in the bay, the ice ruled. The tall ships were canted at odd angles in the frozen harbor, the sails and rigging and long masts rimmed with frost and crusted snow. The sky was an inverted bowl of gray, unbroken by line or light. And still the snow came swirling.

Judd Mercy, the long-boned seamen, looked out across the frozen water through the mist. It seemed as though he and his wooden ship had been trapped here in the snowy New England bay for many lifetimes. Glancing up at the sky, he brushed his dark hair back, looking for some break, some glimmering of light would tell him that the snow would fail at last. But the clouds were heavy and wet and endless. He shrugged at his luck and spat. The spittle crackled and froze before it struck the deep snow underfoot.

Turning, he waded strongly through the new fall toward the little town's only inn. He crossed the road and stood before the bleak building. It was squat, and gray with weather and age. Smoke rose drearily from a simple stone chimney in the center of the slanted, snow-covered roof. Yellow light gleamed through greased-

paper windows, the cloying smell of newly-butchered beef wafted from the rear of the inn, finding Mercy at the front door. The fenced-in yard behind the structure served as both corral and slaughter yard. The fences were high, to keep out those who would pilfer the precious meat (the harsh winter had meant hunger for some), and to keep the roasts and hock still on the hoof from straying.

Mercy was quiet, thoughtful as he entered the large common room. It was smoky and crowded, smelling of stale beer and musty wine. The faces were glum, the atmosphere as heavy as the snow on the rooftop. Mercy settled himself with some grace near the fire, despite his heavy clothes and peacoat, at his usual table. Its wooden top was scarred and stained from long, rough use. The sailor ran his own rough hand over it. It felt good, solid, permanent. Calloused. Conversations drifted and flowed around the room. The stories were as old and as stagnant as the air. He lit his clay pipe and stretched out his long legs.

Past her prime, but still pretty, the barmaid came over to smile and bring a heavy mug of ale. Mercy thanked her; he could not pay, not until the locked harbor thawed and fishing and trading began anew. He watched her as she made an illiterate scrawl by his signature on her precious slip of paper.

The talk in the tavern was darker than ever tonight. Tales circulated about unending winters, as though Persephone had eaten entire that damnable pomegranate, instead of a few kernels. There was the winter of '75, so hard whole villages perished and ships were crushed in the creaking ice. The rotund bartender, older than most, claimed to have seen worse than that in '50 and '54.

One old mariner, his face and hands furrowed like a new-plowed field, caught Mercy's attention. He was in his cups, ranting beneath his breath. His head bent down over his spilled ail.

"Ye gotta know, ye just gotta. She wants 'un and there be now that nor sun 'til She gets him. Sucked cold, and no sun nor warm! Oh, Lord, protect us from Her..." his gravel voice trailed off into incoherence.

The old sailor looked nearly out of his mind with fright. Mercy set down his pipe and approached the old man's table.

"What is in you, that you speak so oddly, mate? What do you mean, 'She wants one?' Who is she? And what does she want?"

The gray head started at Mercy's voice. "Oh," said the tattered man, looking up and squinting. "It's you. What's that ye say? Was I speakin'?"

"Yes. Yes, you were. What did you mean?"

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SPARKMAN*from page 6*

"I said nothin' and I mean nothin' an' if. . ." the old sailor grumbled. "An if tee knows what's good for-un. . ."

He stopped, a fierce, frightened look on his face.

"I don't know nothin'." The old man jerked himself up, the panic in his yellowed, rheumy eyes glowing ever more ferociously.

"I got to be goin', do ye hear?" He almost howled. Nearby heads turned, conversations ceased.

Grunting, he lurched up and staggered toward the back doorway. Mercy was not surprised; the man probably had to relieve his stomach of the putrid beer. Who could tell with one so old? He returned to his fire and his rough table, perturbed but unshaken.

The evening passed without further drama. Talk waned, then died. Saying good night to the barmaid and her master, Mercy shut the heavy front door behind him and walked into the snow clad night.

Suddenly he, remembered. He thrust the door open again. "Barkeep! Barkeep! What happened to the old man who went out into the cattleyard? It was some hours ago." An alarmed look came over the face of the fat little tavern owner.

"Quick," he cried. "Out the back!" The tow men, barmaid

trailing, hurried to the oaken door and shot the bolt clear. Mercy heaved it open. There, clearly outlined in the snow, lay a dark, motionless figure.

As Mercy trudged home, he thought that there had been little trouble for all that had been the death of a man. The constable and his bully-boys had hauled the frozen carcass away on a plank. That was all. Mercy looked up again at the sky.

The weather was breaking at last.

Plovdiv: A Study

I. Gypsy Love
In Sofia, a gypsy scrapes the top of her scabbed head with knotted fingers.
Her breasts, gnawed to stumps by the last six children, hang wrapped in dusty rags. She and her husband drink cheap Bulgarian wine and watch their bloody toed children play around a horse and cart.

II. Elephant Children
Near Alexander Nevski, children kick a ragged ball amid the piss and shattered mortar of an unused Turkish bath. Bags of pewter colored glue hang like elephant trunks from their smeared faces. The game is only disturbed by the lost German tourist who abruptly turns away after realizing his mistake.

--Abel Keogh--

Victoria Day in Voronezh

The kiosks lining the steel-paved streets flushed into muted gardens, the pale-cut blooms spilling from the hands of babushkas, their toothless mouths gaping like old wounds as they called to passers by.

The girls wore bright bows like poppies and mothers tucked secrets into their tightly-wrapped scarves murmuring straight-lipped bushes to exuberant children as the men marched past.

I saw their rallies where words flew like crisp pages from an old book where the harsh red of their flag cut deeply into the lowering sky.

I heard the throaty cries of the dark-coated men as they clasped their wrists mid-street
pobyedi!! pobyedi!!
....victory.

I watched the smooth-skulled night bloom suddenly into flame -the fireworks spilling- like scattered blossoms- then subside into dusky silence lie a nation still at war with itself/

-Emily Peterson Whitby-

The test of literature is, I suppose, whether we ourselves live more intensely for the reading of it. "
-Elizabeth Drew-

A True Story Faithfully Told

By Gary Boyle

This happened a long time ago in the city of Santa Monica. I was working as a cook at a restaurant called *The Heritage*. The place was about a block from the beach, but I could not see the sand and waves because of all the high rise shoebox condos the yuppies had built. Because the restaurant was big and located in the entertainment capital of the world, occasionally Hollywood types would use the space as a location. On one such occasion Leonard Nimoy was going to make a television movie for HBO and wanted to blow up the kitchen. When he walked in I was amazed at how tall he was. I walked up to him and said, "Live long and prosper dude," and gave the appropriate Vulcan hand sign.

He stared back at me and with no hesitation returned the hand sign and said, "You too man." I was on a cloud for about a week. I went home that night and called my dad and told him all about it. My dad said, "No way. Wow, that really is what living in L.A. is all about." And you know something, he was right.

Anyhow, Leonard is going to blow up the kitchen, but for the banquet scene he wants a big lobster as a center piece. So the day before filming begins a crate arrives about the size of a coffin, and John and I get out some nail-claws and pry the lid open. Inside, packed in ice, is the biggest lobster I have ever seen. The beast is about three feet long. Wooden spikes are embedded around the creature's claws which are also bound with heavy twine. The lobster was stunned, probably from the airplane flight from Maine and the ice pack. I'll never know for sure because I don't speak lobsterese. It took five of us to lift the creature from the crate and place it on a wooden table usually used for cutting steaks and cleaning fish.

"All right guys," John said as he grabbed a large metal spoon and a roll of string. "Hold him down while I tie the tail straight."

While this was going on two other guys were boiling water. They had the biggest pot on the hottest burner in the kitchen; this burner had three rings of flame concentrated on one spot, if that makes sense, it is one of those have to see it to get it things. They would boil water in smaller pots and add that to the big pot which was about half way full. John was getting ready to tie the tail when the lobster realized its predicament. Maybe it saw the knives; maybe it saw the boiling pot; maybe it just thought five guys holding it down was not a good thing. The first thing to go was the tail. The lobster whipped that puppy, and John hit the ground; the metal spoon twisted into a U shape, and the three guys at that end scattered.

All of a sudden this easy job that had brought me to meet Mr. Spock turned slightly dangerous.

"Gary, you and Jose hold down the claws," John commanded. Jose and I looked at each other across with an air of uncertainty. Jose was a large man tipping the scales

around 300 pounds, I was a skinny white kid barely 140. We each took a claw and pushed down with our hands. Two guys leaned across the table to hold down the body while John fetched four more spoons which he layered to act like a steel rod, and grabbed a ball of twine and a roll of duct tape; the three other guys got off the floor and held the tail down. By now the lobster was up to snuff and wide eyed. It looked around with those black pearl eyes, and I swear I could hear it hiss. It bucked its back and lifted the two guys in the middle off the floor; the guys at the tail end struggled to hold it still while John tried to tie the spoons in place. Then the lobster looked up. It looked at Jose, this huge man who was by now leaning down with his whole body on the claw, and then it looked at me. For an instant I could see it contemplate. The lobster calmed for a moment, then looked me straight in the eyes. We stared at each other across an abyss of hate and the beast made its move. Claws bound and spiked began to open, and a part of me, a small part, was impressed. I mean here it was fighting for life and not even mutilation and shackles could prevent its pursuit of freedom. Maybe it could smell the salt of the ocean air or hear the waves lap upon the beach. At the time I did not care. All I knew was the beast was trying to cut my face off with claws bigger than my hands. The lobster began to work the twine off, opened its claw, and snapped at my nose.

"All right John," I said. "Tie this bastard down and let's kill the son of a bitch!" Just then the chef walked up with a wooden mallet and wacked the lobster in the head. This had no immediate effect other than to piss it off.

"Uhh, chef," I said. "I think you are making it angry." The chef leaped up and, POW. The lobster was stunned. John quickly tied up the tail.

"To the pot!" John yelled. The two guys who had the cake job of boiling water, removed the lid to the pot and I could see the water inside at a raging boil.

"Head first!" John said, but we were already in motion and the tail went in first, so the lobster was still alive when the head went in. The beast raised its claw and I looked it square in the eyes and said, "Time to die." The two guys at the pot slammed the lid closed and clamped it shut. As I stepped back I could hear a scream and a claw against the pot lid from within. Jose and I looked at each other with the calm eyes of seasoned executioners. We walked outside together for a smoke, and for the first time I could hear the ocean just beyond the lines of condos as the waves lapped upon the beach, and it felt good.

The next day Leonard showed up. Our kitchen crew got the day off with pay so I never saw him again, but the day after that the lobster we had killed was still there--its shell hollowed out and its meat in pate display. I took a saltine cracker and took a bite.