

Verbal Equinox

Spring 2006

Welcoming changes to come

by Claire Hughes
Writing Center Coordinator

Traditionally, the Writing Center newsletter has represented the writing of its staff, exploring the tutoring experience and working to explain writing to students in friendly, accessible essays. The spring edition has been reserved for publishing the writing of our annual Writing Contest winners. These efforts have consistently been valuable in both aspects and remain worthwhile for the talents they develop among our staff and for the sense of accomplishment tutors have in creating this masterful publication. Each shift in focus over

the years has highlighted our desire to broaden readership and to benefit more members of our campus community.

Continuing the tradition of publishing tutor essays along with winning student contest pieces in the spring edition, we now hope to take a new focus for our fall newsletter, one that will support new students entering the university and will give voice to programs designed to encourage their retention and success. For the past 10 years, the Writing Center has worked under the umbrella of Academic Support Services and Programs (ASSP); the back page of

this edition indexes our sister ASSP programs. We are delighted to dedicate the fall edition of the Writing Center Journal, *Verbal Equinox*, to introducing this support network and to explaining the ways of ASSP to those the programs are designed to serve.

One delightful part of this effort will be to spotlight faculty from across the curriculum, introducing them to the student body in greater depth, and we look forward to identifying candidates for this focus. With this shift, *Verbal Equinox* continues its tradition of change while holding its center of student and faculty support.

Dear Readers,

This year's Writing Center writing contest was a huge success, bringing in over 100 entries! To those of you who entered, thank you for your time, effort, and dedication to getting your work published. To those of you who won, congratulations. You should feel accomplished and proud of the art you have created; this issue is dedicated to you.

This semester, *Verbal Equinox* is comprised of the winning entries from the Fall 2005 Writing Center Contest. These pieces are beautiful and very well-written. However, because of our restriction to a certain number of pages for this publication, we were unable to publish the second half to the fiction and non-fiction pieces. You may access the second half of these pieces online at our website: <http://departments.weber.edu/writingcenter>. With this said, please enjoy this issue of *Verbal Equinox*.

Samantha Balaich
Editor-in-Chief

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See inside for Honorable Mentions in the areas of Fiction and Poetry!

We'd Rather Be Alone When We're Lonely

by Benjamin W Roberts

The boy was born with a tail-five inches of rosy flesh.

The doctor nearly threw out his back hauling the birth abnormality books down from the shelf. Then, rubbing his back, he called his wife and asked her to bring him the camera. The nurses hung their heads over their white uniform as the doctor shuffled down the hall following a path of florescent lights to the humble, disinfected room.

"Ibi" he said closing the door behind him, "Ibi, listen, this is rare but not unheard of."

"What's the matter doctor? Is he sick?" she passed a hand over the child's forehead.

"No, he is the picture of health ... I'm talking now about the ectrodactyly ... I mean the tail. Roughly one out of every sixteen babies is born with some kind of malformation."

"Malformation?"

"Yes... right. It means..."

"I know what it means, but there's nothing malformed about my son's tail."

"Right, as tails go, it looks fine, but surely you can see something like this can have or rather can make all manner of complications maybe cause infection...not to mention the social aspects of..."

"What are you saying?"

"Ibi, it's simple... the tail must be removed. We can do the procedure with his circumcision."

"No."

"But...What would your husband say?"

"Murray would feel the same way."

"Surely, you can see..."

"o, I want him to stay the way God made him...When he's older, if he decides he doesn't like it, he can

have it removed himself. It will be his decision.'

In the doctor's lounge, swishing ice around in his Coke wishing it was bourbon, the doctor smirked that the boy was still scheduled for a circumcision.

"Perhaps," said one doctor utilizing a toothpick on a crumb of a cambazola cheese, "God made the rear end and not the front..."

Another doctor chimed in, "Makes sense. I've always maintained God makes us asses while people make us clicks." The doctors laughed and slapped each other on the back and went on their medical way.

Later that day, as the child slept, Ibi wrote her husband, Murray, but she forgot in the combined warmth of motherhood and morphine to mention their child had a tail. Instead, she wrote how all was well and the boy was very healthy and cute and how proud she was to be a mother and how proud she was to be his wife and how much she loved him. And, she hoped the war was going well.

As a postscript, she added she would name the boy Link, and as her pen traced a heart by her signature, her memory traced a path back to San Francisco when the sun set so orange it was palpable. She had giggled when Murray said, "Ibi, I'm serious. If it's a boy name him Link. If it's a girl, name her Zelda."

"I'm serious..." and he looked so serious in the sharp light of the setting sun she had to nod and snuggle against his arm. Seriousness made her shiver.

Ibi shivered when the nurse wheeled the wheelchair away from the doctor with his camera and his clinical opinions. As her wheelchair stopped beside a faux ficus tree in the

hospital lobby, the seriousness of the nurse helping her stand made Ibi shiver again. Holding Link against her chills, she walked through the sunlight crystallized in the glass of the revolving door to the waiting taxi.

On the way home, Ibi looked out the taxi window at the fence surrounding the Base. The fence stood in a field of landmines and Queen Ann's Lace, and millions of yellow butterflies covered the fence, transforming the chain link and razor wire into a wall of small wings. A tear streaked her cheek as her heart fluttered like an abandoned cocoon in the wind.

As Link grew, so did his tail. By his first birthday, the tail hung out of his diapers. At the age of two, she had to wean him off sucking on his tail. By the age of three, his tail was so long he had to wear pants all the time.

Link wore his underwear backwards as soon as he learned to put them on. He let his tail out through the hole. He didn't understand why he had to wear his pants wrong. His tail felt like it was suffocating in pants especially when he had to sit on it at church.

The war was going good for a while, and then it went bad, but there was a big turn around, and the war was going good again, and one midsummer day Ibi received a letter from Murray saying he had received a leave of absence for Link's fourth birthday. When she told her son the good news, Link thought the Lord was coming because he had only heard the word *father* at Church. So, Ibi had to explain she meant his...

..... continued online

"When we encounter a natural style, we are astonished and delighted; for we expected to see an author, and we find a man."

- Blaise Pascal

Two Edged Choice

by Buck L. Kolz

"What's your name?" I asked the young woman, her doe-like eyes barely visible in the dark ravine.

"Cynthia," she murmured, sniffing. Another cavalryman in my squad had his arm around her tiny frame, and I took her little hand in mine.

"Cynthia, it'll be alright." She nodded apathetically, and I could not blame her. She had seen her father cut down, and her mother was not among those we rescued from the Marauders while the sun still shone on the long grasses of the prairie.

Now two of three moons were down and the last would soon be below the horizon. We needed our horses, carefully hidden several miles to the south-east. Picking out three of the ten men in my squad, one of a dozen under the command of the King's second son, I gave orders to prepare for departure.

"We'll be back before sunrise, okay?" I asked, giving her as close to a smile as I could muster.

She nodded and wiped her nose on the sleeve of her ragged brown tunic.

"This is Eronis. He'll keep you safe." Again she nodded blankly. "What arrangements have you made?" I asked, looking up at the soldier.

"I've got the others positioned to watch, but I think the Marauders are long gone." I felt my face tense up, and he added, "We'll be okay, Captain."

Glancing over at the villagers huddled against the bank, I considered how we could get them back to their village.

"Make sure to rotate the watch. Do two three man watches so that you all get some rest. I think it'll get hairy tomorrow trying to get the people safely home." Or what was left of their homes after the Marauders had looted and burned them. I wondered if they would have the will to rebuild, or if they would limp back to the Kingdom's heartland.

"Yes, sir," he replied, looking annoyed that I would change his plan.

The girl looked uncomfortable in his grasp but that didn't surprise me; we had ridden almost five days, stopping only to change mounts. We were unshaved, stinking brutes looking worse for the blood and grime that came from yesterday's battle, fearsome in our iridescent snake scale armor and low riding helmets, our sword grips well worn and the composite bows that gave us our power ever in our hands. The soldiers of my squad, who were all clansmen, fought because the Marauders were enemies to all, not out of any love for the villagers.

The villagers' wary looks and self segregation once we stopped in the ravine made me wonder if the rescue was as hard on them as the enslavement they briefly suffered.

Once nomadic and wild, my soldiers were the first generation of the clan to grow up under the rule of the King. They had grown up listening to their fathers' talk of the days when they burned out any who dared take a plow to the black soil. Many of them looked at the farmers and villagers that flooded in from the west after the King's victory as invaders that tilled down the wild grasses on which horses and bison thrived in order to grow their wheat and potatoes.

I alone was not directly connected to any prairie clan, my former clan considering me Twice Forsaken: first because of my father, who had decided to try his hand at drinking and farming, and then because of my wife, a girl I met trading bison furs in her village. She had now been missing for several years, whether tired of me or taken by Marauders I did not know. It was hard not to see her face every time I looked at a village woman. Neither clansman nor westerner, I now rode for the Prince, and his army was my clan.

"Be nice," I ordered, knowing my men to sometimes be unnecessarily direct.

Eronis nodded with a twist of his lips, "Yes, Captain."

I followed the ravine for about a mile and a half with the three other men I selected to go with me. It was slow going, as the ravine bottom was soft with silt that swallowed our legs sometimes halfway up the calf as we ran. I had a feeling that the Marauders were still all around us, but I didn't have the Gift of Seeing that would have given the Prince sure knowledge of where they were. So we continued stumbling through the ravine safely out of sight.

The horses were tethered and grazing where they were left, and we watered them before we set off back to our squad. Once mounted, I realized we were running out of night. I decided that we would abandon the ravine and risk the open for the speed it would offer. The men were feeling my anxiety; as weary as they felt, no one objected to the brisk pace I set.

"Alright, men," I called out, "lets get saddled up. It looks like there's too many for us to take, but we can haras s them until the Prince catches..."

..... continued online

"If any man wish to write in a clear style, let him be first clear in his thoughts; and if any would write in a noble style, let him first possess a noble soul."

-Goethe

3rd Place

Sins

by Robert Oliver

Till death do us part. The words dripped with bloody uony. Like a stranger, I hid in the tree shadowed darkness. Even though this was my house, I was unwelcome. Tonight, I was the odd man out.

From my vantage point, I intently watched the bedroom window. For weeks I suspected this, but tonight it was verified. As much as I wanted to, I could no longer deny it. What should have been one silhouette grew to be two, and my imagination filled in the rest.

Looking back I never would have guessed this would happen to me. This was the stuff of books and movies; writers and directors crafted these scenes into fiction. In plotlines there are always warning signs. *Did I ignore them?*

Our wedding was bliss, it seemed like fiction, almost too good to be true. It went smooth like silk, not a single hitch. Apparently, they had all culminated into a goddamned devastation. What once was a relationship was now being murdered by faceless shadows above me. Sadly, one of them was my world.

My hand shook as I reached into my waistband. My fingers touched the cold steel of a semi automatic. Hatred and pain intermingled to create dangerous concoctions, as deadly plans sprouted roots. I wondered how it was going to feel to kill my wife of ten years. *Would that time be wasted?! thought so.*

The shadows above me continued the carnal dances. I waited patiently for the movements in the house to subside, as vomit crawled up my throat. I could almost imagine the bastard of a man buckling on pants and grinning a smug smile.

I listened intently until I heard the back door's characteristic creak.

Straining my eyes, I tried to catch a glimpse of the man fleeing. After several minutes I started to second-guess my eyes. *Maybe I missed him.*

After a deep breath I stepped from the brush, crept to the front, and tried the door. The lock designed to keep danger at bay was in full force. *Too bad I had a key.*

"Honey? I'm home." It surprised me how calm my voice remained.

Footsteps on the stairs and there she was. *The adulterous bitch.* Her hair was disheveled, and her body sported faded pajamas. I could only imagine the excuses forming in her mind.

"I was just reading a book," she inconspicuously checked a wall clock, "you're early aren't you?"

Wa thatpanic Iheard?

"You look terrible. Is something wrong?" She sounded and looked so concerned. "Your face looks flushed." She came down the stairs and gripped my arm. My flesh tingled as if in the presence of some evil thing. I didn't resist as she led me into the dining room and sat me down. I was in control. *Tonight would go my way.*

"What's wrong? How was work? Did something happen?" She disappeared into the kitchen and I heard glasses being pulled from the rack. I didn't even know how to begin telling her how I felt. *How much did she already know?*

"You're awfully quiet in there," she called from the unseen, "you haven't answered me, is something wrong?" Ice clinked into glasses.

I didn't have the energy for conversation. Looking around at the memories on the walls, I just wanted to scream, *Was it worth it?*

Pictures smiled from the walls forming an audience. The happy grins seemed to be mocking me, but

after closer inspection the smiles looked forced.

She quickly reappeared holding two glasses of golden liquid, and she set one before me. The sparkling brown liquor reflected the lights of the room. Beneath the table I gripped the hidden weapon preparing myself. *Should I ask why, or just shoot?*

A baby's cry shattered the silence and destroyed my resolve.

"Addy's up," she said, "I'll go get him."

Footsteps on the stairs, and she was gone.

A cold sweat came over me. Hot memories melted my nerves like ice. I remembered clearly the day Addy was born. He was such a beautiful child. The birth of life. The first sight of our child. As much as I hated her now, I still loved her. *What was I doing?*

I pulled my hand away from the gun and rested it on the rim of the glass before me. We could talk it out and maybe settle something. Maybe even without the courts. I silently toasted to Addy; he deserved a father and a mother, either together or apart.

I tilted the glass and pounded the drink. The alcohol warmed my body and I hoped my spirits would follow suit. I could hear voices on the stairs. She and Addy were talking in baby talk. She really was a good mother.

Suddenly, I felt so hot. *The alcohol maybe?* I fanned my shirt to beat the heat. Footsteps on the stairs, she was coming down.

My mind suddenly flashed and I was looking at the ceiling. *Was I...*

••••• continued online

"Writing is a socially acceptable form of schizophrenia."

-E.L. Doctorow

Honorable Mention

Heartbeat

by Hannah K. New

As she took off her clothes, the image of her naked body reflected in the mirror caught her attention. It startled her. She stood, examining her pale torso and limbs. She wouldn't look at her face. It had been a long time since she last observed herself. She noticed the five extra pounds around her waist and the extra jiggle on her upper arms.

When had that happened? She thought to herself, but she didn't take any more note of it than that. She raised one arm above her head and checked for lumps in her breast. She didn't find any, but then, she didn't expect to.

The bathtub looked familiar and strange at the same time; the same yellow wallpaper, the plastic tile on the floor, the fake ceramic on the walls. Yet it felt larger than before. So empty. *Would everything look different without him?*

She almost turned from the tub as she had yesterday. Leaning over, she grabbed the handicapped bars for balance. The bars weren't needed anymore, but she doubted she would remove them. She turned the hot water on, hotter than she usually kept it.

The phone rang right as she stepped into the water. Standing in the bathtub, the hot water already turning her feet red, she looked at the phone, and then ignored it. She didn't want to talk. It registered in her mind that she should answer it anyway. Unanswered phones, at a time like this, brought people over with casseroles. Someone at the door was harder to keep at a distance than a ringing telephone.

As she sank into the bathtub, her headache flared up. She closed her eyes and leaned against the back. The hot water relaxed her and the headache eased.

I needed this. She thought. *I should have done this yesterday.* But yesterday the thought of taking a bath without him scared her.

He loved to bathe with her. At first, she loved it too. He would lower himself behind her, and she would rest against his chest. She kept her ear on his heartbeat, listening for any changes. Later, baths with him became just another chore, like mowing the lawn, or shoveling the driveway.

She thought of her life in terms of before and after the cancer. She married him young. He was older, but that was part of what attracted her to him. At eighteen, full of life and dreams, he was anxious to fulfill them. And he did, for a while.

She thought for sure she would cry. Yesterday, taking

care of herself seemed beyond her. Going to the bathroom alone frightened her. But when she finally did get a chance to be by herself, she felt nothing but relief.

Today, she wanted no one in the house. Having people around just bothered her. She didn't need anyone today. She should have realized that after years of taking care of him, taking care of herself was surprisingly easy.

She cried when she told his parents; and then cried again when she told her own parents. But she didn't cry today; she didn't know why.

Maybe I am in shock. She thought and closed her eyes. *Maybe I don't love him.*

Her heartbeat raced at the thought and her stomach flipped. Her hands balled into fists.

No, I loved him. I know I did.

I should be crying. Why can I not cry?

When he got sick, she prayed. She bargained with God, told Him of all the sacrifices she would make. She would sell her horse, she would be a devoted wife, she would do anything if only he would get better. Then she prayed for the pain to ease. When those weren't answered, she prayed for God to take him.

It took a long time for God to take him.

The remembrance of those prayers brought guilt. No one should pray for her spouse to die. *I shouldn't feel guilty,* she thought, clenching her fists. *There is no reason to feel guilty.* But there was.

She forced her mind to one sunny afternoon, right after he got sick. She helped him sit on the porch, so he could enjoy the air. They sat quietly for some time. He looked out toward the mountains, while she read a book.

Then he broke the silence. "I want to die," he told her.

She looked up at him, frightened. "No, you don't."

He sighed. "I am sick of this body. I want to be free of it."

"No, you don't." When he only looked at her, she shouted, "You don't! How can you say that, after everything I have done for you?"

"I am too much of a burden on you. Think of the money you will get when I..."

..... continued online

"I shall no longer ask myself if this or that is expedient, but only if it is right. I shall do this, not because I am noble or unselfish, but because life slips away, and because I need for the rest of my journey a star that will not play false to me, a compass that will not lie." -Alan Paton

Honorable Mention

Traveling Me

by Brenna Kay Carrigan

Mm. That smell. Latin America. It smelled the same in Costa Rica. Maybe it's just the scent of foreign travel. It seeps into my nostrils and fills me with a curiosity and ambition unique to the moment, the place. I never feel this at home. I long for it. Crave it. It is the only reason I would want to be a millionaire.

How did I get here again? Oh yeah. My ambition. I picked the wrong time to catch the bus. Our bodies press all together into a human conglomeration of sweat, fatigue, and the acceptance that makes us just deal with it. It's five. Five in the afternoon. The humidity fills my hair, makes my clothes feel like Glad saran wrap, and turns my pores into great waterfalls. I let each drop run down my spine, face without interruption. The drips are infinite and never cease. In the shower they only combine their forces with the running tap water—they never actually wash away. Like the pains of some of these people. I love them. I know I could help them find more. Something more. But my own weaknesses and pain keep me from them.

"*Jesus equem salva, Jesus equem salva.*" The skinny dark complexion had asked me if I wanted to hear a song. I tried not to laugh at his Michael Jackson like version of a song he must have made up. He says he wants to be a gospel singer. Maybe it is a fantasy that keeps him happy as he polishes shoes like mine. His greasy hair and ratty black clothes won't score him an audition. But then again, the brush, brush across the top makes a nice accompaniment for all his vocal inventions.

Quem e Flora? Flora is the lady with whom I live. I can't say that I know her. I'm temporary around

here. She says little. They say she is my "avozinho." She looks like one. She is *small* and fragile, but I'm pretty sure she could whip any man into shape. But to me that title entails a little more intimacy. All I know about her is that she is immaculately clean and gets angry when we're late for dinner. I feel bad sometimes about the way I see her, but they do say that communication is everything. Every morning she takes my shower towel and hangs it on the line to dry. Nothing dries inside. It hardly dries outside.

Perhaps Flora finds happiness in her religion. Every morning I wake up and look at the cross hanging on the wall. I wish I could tell them what I know. That's what I came for. I see the Bible on the table. I look at its wilted brown cover with the thin, worn pages and I know that Flora's fingers have made the book what it is. Each morning the Catholic prayers blast rapid and incomprehensible Portuguese from the radio. Only the repetitive "*Santa Maria*" lets me know what it is I hear.

I find the old woman gets bored of the silence. She turns on the TV and a *novela* screams from the kitchen so loudly that I can no longer study. Her love for soap operas gives me a hunch that she has some spark for the romantic and overly dramatic. A spark for something beyond cooking and cleaning for me—a stranger she lets into her home on good faith that she's strong enough.

Flora talks to her dog the way I imagine her talking to her children; sometimes she quietly whispers as she lovingly takes Spanky his food and at other times she sharply commands, "*Nao, Spanky! Venha!*" This is all I know of Flora besides the fact that she loves cucumbers. This

she told me.

It's raining again. It thunders down and crashes upon the streets, roofs, sidewalks. I swear heaven's dams have burst again. The streets flood in minutes and we walk in random unpredictable maze-like paths to avoid the contaminated water. It's because of the rats they say. It's not the rain that is bad, but the water underneath that shows its face as it mingles with the water of the sky. Despite the mess, I love the rain. Everyone carries *uma sombrinha* and they bump into each other. I like to call it "Clash of the Umbrellas." Thankfully, I'm just a little bit taller than the *gauchos* and my umbrella battles best.

Bam! I flinched on the couch as the child started to cry. You could say he was a terror, but he wasn't old enough to talk. He wore just a diaper and his bare feet crumpled from underneath him. A belt. She had used a belt. For no reason other than her own frustrations. I felt catapulted back to an era that I'd seen only on TV. Did people still do that? I sat horrified, uncomfortable. The girl next to me had been here longer. "You'll get used to it," she said. I'll never get used to it.

We visited Salizete today. She seems an innocent child until you visit her home and learn that she cannot be so. Her husband is an alcoholic. He beats her. Her one tooth smile falls at times. You'd never know if you just passed her in the grocery store aisle. She is simple and always wears her hair straight back in a dark ponytail. Her child is fair and freckle-faced. She is...

• • • • • *continued online*

*"All meaningful and lasting change starts first in your imagination and then works its way out
imagination is more important than knowledge."*

-Albert Einstein

1st Place

Preserves

by Katherine Terry

Around 2:45
the refrigerator
begins to hum
and swallows the
north end of the house
in low vibration.

Trying to sleep on her stomach,
she counts the heat
of her pulse
in her wrist.

At three a.m.,
she rolls across
his side of the bed,
picks up the receiver,
and dials.
No one will answer,
and the blunt ring continues
three, four, five times.
The sixth ring will be
cut short by his recorded voice.

Alone, in the grayscale
bedroom,
with his two week-old
jeans tossed over the
the chair
and a grocery receipt from
the Tuesday before he died
stuck three quarters of the way
through a well-worn novel.
she lies in the curve
his body left in
their mattress.

The phone is wet against her
against her cheek,
and his voice-
left behind-
warm and bottled
on the other line.

2nd Place

The Death of Stars

by James Gabrielsen

A star died tonight
I watched it with my own eyes.
I saw it clearly
Though through an unclear view

I blame myself,
or the perpetual fusion of
hydrogen;
Eventually, even it runs out of
steam

As if a pinpoint could blossom
Reflected through a trillion-
trillion miles
It must have died years ago
(eons),
long before she ever saw it
Before the photons struck the
rod in her eyes
And her brain began the
translation
with Urim
Portending, for any
Watcher-hopeless-
An ending.

3rd Place

Spirit of the Sea

by Elisabeth Anderson

Sailors stand in yellow parkas
shivering on the deck
clutching the icy railing
as they brave the waves and spray.

They listen to the hang
as the deadly harpoon leaves
and feel the heavy thud
that cleaves the hide in two

Cold steel burning flesh
spilling red blood out
deep into the ocean
where life once roamed about.

They all reach out to heaven
the wailing creature in
waiting with blackened ropes
to hinder the freedom down.

They smell the oil and blubber,
many thinking of perfume,
they capture twenty more
and some can't breathe the air.

Welcomed home with cheers
many raise their heads with pride.
But, some do not smell
the joy and taste the victory.

Some scorn the brutal
slaughter of the
Spirit of the Sea.

Honorable Mention

All Saints Day

by Katherine Terry

The pumpkin's wide,
singed jaw
puckers under 5 a.m. frost,
its hollowed eye
fixed past the porch,
on a dog,
ticking in sleep.

The air—
smoked and spiced,
runs up the bone of the
dog's back,
breaks apart his dream,
and passes through
the lowered gate
of the cemetery.

Several coughs
are heard along the plots.
The dead smother their mumblings
and stretch low,
grasp their bone toes,
and tuck themselves back
in the ground
to watch the
round Jonagolds
drop
into their yard.

Honorable Mention

The Last Cry

by Hanna K. New

I kept my finger on the neck
to feel the swallow reflex as poured
milk down the throat; but still,
it drowned in my attempt
at kindness. I felt the muscles go
limp in my hand, like I held
a beanbag instead of a kitten.

I held onto hope, when the legs twitched
in post mortem reflex, but heard the last cry
bubble from the throat the moment before it died.
The mother licked the milk from its jaw line.
I wanted to shout at her for such a loving gesture
when it was dead, but none while it was alive.
She simply brushed against me;
and I, knowing Nature can be as cruel as she is kind,
let my hand slide along her back.

When the second one died a week later—
from a fall perhaps, or some wandering
that took it too near dangerous places—
I thought of those mothers who give up one
child, then hold the other until it is too late
for either, wanting one to remember her
and the other to forget.

Verbal Equinox Staff

Spring 2006

Editor-in-Chief: Samantha Balaich**Assistant Editor: Tyler Whitby****Copy Editors: Lori Lundell &
Gregory Sawyer****Distribution Manager: Mario Chard****Website Manager: Katie Van Ausdal**

1st Place

Eyes and Minds

by Hannah K. New

Grandpa loved to tell a good story. Every family dinner, he'd take over the table talk with a tale from his younger years. Like the time he pissed on his horse while in the cavalry:

There were twenty-five of us, riding abreast in a field of sun-flowers. We were on 11 tactical maneuver, reconnoitering for the imaginary enemy. With the sun-flowers at four or five feet, no one noticed the remnants of a barbed wire fence until my horse rode through it. I can still feel the horse jumping back. The horse had a ten-inch cut across his chest. Since we were out in the field, no one had anything to take care of it. My Lieutenant rode up and told me to, "Piss on it. Urine keeps the wound from getting infected." Well, he's my commanding officer, so I obeyed.

In a family of numerous aunts, uncles, and twenty plus cousins, only Grandpa shared my love for horses. Only Grandpa believed me when I said I'd get a horse, and only Grandpa understood what I felt when that horse started to go blind. I found out the seriousness of my horse's painful eye disease, Uveitis, about the same time Grandpa was diagnosed with Alzheimers.

When a horse has Uveitis, the immune system views the eye as a foreign body and sends white blood cells to kill it. It starts in one eye, and then spreads to the other. No cure exists; the horse will eventually go blind. Sometimes it can be stopped. You can remove the eye, or sew the eyelids shut. But either way, you still end up with vision loss.

Alzheimers starts with memory loss, and then spreads to the thought process, and then on to speech.

Eventually, the patient becomes completely helpless.

My horse, Storm, ran a successful racing career in New Jersey for eight years. By the time I got him, he'd turned into a spoiled pet. The previous owners told me something was wrong with his right eye, but I didn't think anything about it until a few years later. His eyelids swelled up and white spots appeared in his eyes. His corneas took on a cloudy look. When I took him to the vet, they said he probably already lost some sight in his right eye. Then came the news I dreaded, the disease had already tainted both eyes. Sooner or later, he'd go completely blind. I could still ride him, but the days of long trail rides and going over jumps vanished in that moment.

When a horse's sight goes slowly, familiar things become fierce, horse-eating objects. It's better when they lose an eye all at once. They adjust quicker to darkness than to dimness. If he can't see it, he doesn't have to be afraid of it.

Storm became dangerous and unpredictable, spooking at everyday things. Once, when I rode him in the snow, Storm spooked at the reflecting sunlight. He slid to the side so fast it would make a snake envious. Not expecting the sudden shift, I flew off and broke my tailbone. I wanted to kill him. If I had a gun right then, I probably would have.

As I rolled around on the ground trying to figure out how to get back to the barn, something must have told him how much pain I was in. He became contrite, not a trait I see in him very often. He stood at my side while I grabbed the stirrup leather to help me get up. Then he let me hold onto his mane and use him as a crutch as I limped back to the barn.

His blindness can have a good side. When I have trouble getting him to take his medicine, I use his blind side to my advantage. He eats around the aspirin in his grain, and he refuses apple-flavored medicine, so I have to squirt it in his mouth with a syringe. When he sees me carrying that syringe, he runs to the far side of the corral. Then a game of catch-me-if-you-can ensues that can last up to a half-hour. Since his right side went mostly blind I keep the syringe on that side until I have caught him. Once I have a hold of his halter, he considers himself captured and doesn't fight.

Grandpa laughs at my stories, just like I laughed at his. But his stories at dinnertime became less frequent. The thing about Alzheimers is that the patient doesn't realize they have it. And when they find out, they forget about it.

Grandpa came into the kitchen, holding a pill container in his hand. "Why am I taking pills for Alzheimers?" he asked Grandma.

"Dear," she said laying a hand on his arm, "we went to the doctor's. He said you have Alzheimers." Grandpa stood there, staring at her face. "Are you OK?"

"I'm going to lay down for a bit." He went into the bedroom and shut the door. Grandma followed him; sat on the bed next to him. The same bed they have had for sixty years.

"Do you want to talk about it?" She asked him, touching his hand.

"Are all my brothers dead?" He stared at the floor.

"Yes. They've been gone..."

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"Have something to say, and say it as clearly as you can. That is the only secret of style."

-Matthew Arnold

2nd Place

Innocence Is A New Gun

by Rachel Boddy

The lobby to the clinic had no smell. It was no larger than a decent living room with chairs lining the walls facing the desk attendant. I was expecting to hear screams and see women being rolled out of the clinic on stretchers, some covered with a stained white sheet. I was expecting the heavy smell of blood women know so well to cloud the room, intoxicating us as we waited. I felt only cold as I sat next to my quiet mother, who I knew was keeping a strong lead for my sake since she knew exactly what's behind the operation room. I rubbed closer to her in our individual chairs but only felt worse. I looked around the room and saw women sitting alone. I couldn't imagine what it must be like, what they must be thinking as they watched me, nineteen years old, snuggling for salvation next to my mother. How they must have despised me. I forced my eyes down and away from their glares like a coward.

While we waited, my mother told me she too had gone to a similar clinic before my older brother was born, but because of health reasons. She had gone alone and even had to fly just to get to a clinic. Even though she was there with me, I felt betrayed; her eyes spoke of regrets and unknowns and pain of knowing what was behind those doors, and what I was about to do, yet she brought me here.

All of us had to wait there in that tiny suffocating room and contemplate for five hours. Like waiting at the gate to heaven, remembering all of your sins, so you know there's no way they're going to let you through, but you can't move, trapped amongst the desperate crowd clung to the gate.

A nurse brought me into a room with two chairs and a small table and sat down in front of me with her notepad and pen. I clenched down on my jaw and shoved my shaking hands deep between my thighs, hoping for an appearance of certainty and strength like my mother and everyone else was expecting from me.

"You can stop the procedure at any time." Her face was static on a television. "Is there anything you'd like to talk about with me before we start?"

I could have told her that when I first found out I was pregnant, I was the happiest I had ever been. I had spent hours in the baby section looking at what I wanted to buy for him or her. But without a father and without any support from family, staying happy was as possible as dethroning God and taking his place. The first words from a brother I hadn't spoken to for years were, "You better not even *think* about backing out of the abortion, Little

Girl." I wanted to tell her that I needed to keep the one thing that would love me selflessly, that would want me. But then I would end up like my mother; rundown, working three jobs at fifty to just pay the bills, and being miserable and wishing I had done things differently. A forked road protruded from my uterus and I had to decide which way I would be the happiest. Either way it seemed I was clumsily selfish and didn't deserve happiness if I ever found it. So I told the nurse, this stranger, there was nothing I felt like talking about. It was that moment that I discovered what real life love was like, and abortion clinics are its mascot.

The doctor was friendly and as emotionally sensitive as a robot. He was comfortable in the setting, probably been at this clinic since it opened years ago. I don't even remember his name. There was one female nurse with him; she walked and stood by me as I lay on the examining bed.

"They're doing surgery on my knee again," he said to the nurse as if I wasn't there, as if they were sitting in the back room having coffee, as if I was here to get a routine shot at a normal little clinic.

He set up the metal device made for stretching open the vaginal area. He pushed forward on his swivel chair and stuck it in me without saying a word. I jumped slightly at the cold hard jab. Then there was a clanking on metal as he wound the device so that it spread me open. The nurse and doctor continued to talk casually which only made me more anxious. He picked up a syringe with the numbing fluid. I hardly felt the prick of the needle on the inside of my vagina. He droned on about his knee to the nurse as he pushed the fluid through the needle and spun away on his swivel stool to dispose of the needle.

The metal device dug sharply into the inside walls as time dragged on. I stared at the poster of a beautiful waterfall on the ceiling and tried to drift off somewhere else, somewhere wherever that picture was where pain and sacrifice didn't exist. Suddenly I felt a hard pinching on one side of my labia, and my legs jerked with reaction to the unexpected pain. I cried out sharply, bursting into tears. I was sure the metal device had malfunctioned and was tearing off my flesh.

"Do you feel like something's pinching you?" the...

..... continued online

"It is never a mistake to say goodbye."

- Kurt Vonnegut

3rd Place

This American Scholar: Reflecting on Emerson's Essay

by Brenna Kay Carrigan

I am exhausted. I try not to fall asleep in my class because I feel bad. The teacher does a nice job and I really want to learn the material. I remember the day I would have just let myself sleep. Back in a high school science class where I realized that I really didn't care about the anatomy of an earth worm or maybe in a gen. ed. class where my only reason for attendance was to get an easy A for a required credit. Thinking about these things, I realize that my thoughts and attitudes toward my own education have changed since beginning long ago. Then, in my own mind, categorizing school and education together would not have been absolutely necessary. School was school. Most of the time I didn't know what to think about what I learned. Emerson would have said that I fell into line with the other "mere thinker[s]" and may have even been a "parrot of other men's thinking." In fact, I am quite sure of it. I took to heart what almost every teacher said to me without reflecting on my own thoughts and opinions about the subject, or how it affected me. I was a dry sponge who soaked up every kind of water regardless of its nature--sparkling or sewer. So true scholar I was not, though I may yet be.

I came to Weber State in the same frame of mind. I sat in gen. ed. classes taking in only that which led me to an A. I learned lots when I wanted, but mostly I sat through the class, received an excellent grade, and moved on having had little intellectual change within myself. Somewhere along the path, however, I began to change. I realized I could go or not, I could listen or not, I could accept the material or not. I had a choice.

My increasing awareness of my ability to choose increased as I entered the field of English. At last, school had personal satisfaction and held my attention for more than what had to be accomplished in order to receive a *buena nota*. So we explored the realms of feminist theory and deconstruction along with James Joyce, Seamus Heaney, and the illusive subjunctive tense. I still had the power to like or dislike something (proved by Virginia Woolf whose book I hated) though I would never disagree with the teacher. I felt like I was tasting the things that finally brought me intellectual pleasure, but I had yet to wholly receive the intellectual nourishment they brought me.

Reader Response theory finally gave me the opportunity to really explore what all the canons of literature meant to me. We didn't read to figure out what the author meant or what the "real" meaning was; we read to experience, reflect, and appreciate. With this new skill placed into my hands (ironically, not until my junior year), I eagerly read the materials in my Romantic British Literature and Modern American Literature courses discovering how I felt about these materials being introduced into my world. I finally felt like I was receiving an education that informed and enlightened, and I could compete with the world at large because I knew about the Harlem Renaissance, Swift's satire, Wordsworth's poetry, and the Red Scare. I found a new way to live. While walking outside I noticed people, nature, myself in these contexts, and my feelings about them. I grew more thoughtful, more analytical, and more aware. I realized for the first time that I was

beginning to rise through the fruits of true education, and that life held much more than deadlines.

So now we come to Emerson's essay. Emerson asks, "is not the only true scholar the only true master?" I never thought about it before, but essentially only be who can completely control his own thoughts and mind, as well as his own body, can be a true master of himself.

So how do we become true scholars? Emerson says that "the scholar of the first age received into him the world around; brooded thereon; gave it the new arrangement of his own mind, and uttered it again" (*italics added*). We must receive the information and really think about it in our own contexts of life. What does that information mean to us today, tomorrow? What do we do with that knowledge? How do I choose to perceive it? Once we have answered our questions and developed the information in our own minds, we exist in the "right state" which according to Emerson is "Man Thinking." We become inventors, thinkers, deliberators, celebrators, investigators, scholars.

Being thus, we possess a faculty which allows us an awareness of the influences in our life. Emerson says that nature is the "first in time and the first in importance of the influences upon the mind." Truly nature influences us because we came from nature. We along with nature are great creations made through miraculous means and configurations. The scholar sees in nature something that "resembles..."

• • • • • *continued online*

"I also know that the more clearly we write, the more clearly we see and feel and think."

-Joseph M. Williams

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