

Verbal Equinox

Fall 2007

Coordinator's Corner

by Claire Hughes

Writing Center Coordinator

Transition and diversity are the watchwords in the Writing Center this season. While one of our strengths is in offering transition support to students moving forward from Developmental

Writing courses into English 1010 and 2010, we continue offering tutoring for all courses across the curriculum that include any kind of writing.

In fact, the tutors who work here represent that diversity, coming from such majors as physics, psychology, business, sociology, art, history, anthropology, and

Asian studies. This year, we're glad to have welcomed English graduate students to our tutoring staff. The element that unites all of the tutors, from our point of view, is their excellent training by Dr. Scott Rogers in composition theory and practice.

One special way we celebrate the talent we witness within this broad spectrum is through our fall writing contest, and while English majors won in each category, this year's winners come from a variety of academic backgrounds. We're delighted to celebrate interdepartmental collaboration daily in this and in so many ways

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2006 WSU Writing Center contest winners!

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A Note From the Editor

by Samantha Balaich
Verbal Equinox Editor

This issue of *Verbal Equinox* is a mere reflection of the many great things being done at Weber State University. As leaves fall and frost starts to settle on the grass, Weber State students are probing actual databases in Stellar Astrophysics, exploring art from the World War II era, and getting ready to present poems and

to name a few of these great things. The students included here have worked hard to put their ideas and discoveries into words so that they might share their determination and creativity with the surrounding world.

In this issue, we have added a new section and a new feature to each piece. The new section, entitled, "Scholarly Non-Fiction," features research-based articles. In addition, each published piece includes anonymous commentary from a member of the review board from the Fall 2006 Writing Center Contest committee, explaining the strengths and characteristics that made it a winning submission. This commentary is located on the same page as each piece, in wavy boxes, and in italic font.

Due to our page limit for this print publication, we decided to take the second half of these pieces to our online forum. Please access the second half of these pieces online at our website: <http://departments.weber.edu/writingcenter>.

Congratulations to those who have been published within these pages. We hope you enjoy this edition of *Verbal Equinox*!

A Pair of Painter Hands

by Emily Ryujin

The heat came in through the rolled down windows the summer I drove to Eden with my brother Sebastian. It settled around our heads like halos and we excused our blunderings, blaming it on the dry wild grasses.

We were gypsies, my brother and I. It was a choice he made, and it was out of total devotion to him that I followed. In those early times we wandered from place to place, finding fairs and contests for Sebastian. We slept in our run down Jeep Cherokee or at the homes of woman he'd charm and seduce for some warm soup, a warm bed and a shower. He was a painter.

I didn't expect to stay in Eden long, although the name was hopeful enough and I was becoming restless. Half of the time I longed for roots to take hold of my feet and plant me in the ground. I wanted steadiness; some familiar. The rest of the time I looked for birds to teach me how to fly away. It wouldn't have mattered at all if I could have followed Sebastian always, but greatness is fleeting and impossible to cage.

Eden was the most unlikely of places to put on hold our transitory ways, but the people liked my brother and believed in God's service. The countryside was full of lonely families and Sebastian traded portraits and a little excitement for a room with a window. I wanted so much to be an artist like my brother. I'd steal scraps of paper or thrown away drawings and draw the birds and trees. I'd draw how the mountains looked at mid-day or anything else I noticed, tight over his drawings of the wife or the family dog. I didn't want Sebastian to feel obligated to teach me so I tried to keep it from him. One day he found me sitting on some large rocks drawing a sunflower patch.

"God Lu, is this what you run off to do all the time?" He took the drawing out of my hand. I looked down at the charcoals in my hands; I'd stolen them from his back.

My face flushed with shame, "I'm sorry Sebastian."

"What could you be sorry about?" He looked out at the sunflowers, noticing how the sun made the deep shadows on the leaves, how it kissed the petals with

light and warm values. He looked back at the drawing and smiled, "And Mrs. Brown looks much better with a sunflower growing out of her head."

After that he was generous with his supplies. We'd draw each other drawing each other. Mine were not very good though, even after some time. And suddenly I didn't draw or paint anymore. I'd sit for hours staring out the small window that overlooked a grove of willow trees. I was withdrawing into the shadows of those trees; I was living in the crevices, making myself small. He'd continue to draw and paint me when I became that way. Sebastian tried to find the place I went to; looking for it in my eyes, in the way my lips protruded out, in the way my eyebrows shifted.

"Where do you go?" He asked after a long sitting one day.

"Sebastian." And I looked at him, a blurred figure. His dark hair blended with his eyes, his clothes, and his arms that were reaching out toward me. He was just a daze. I was crying; tears, tears, like an unexpected drip. "The question is too big for me and I'm giving it up."

"The question?"

"Yes, why paint? It's too big for me."

Sebastian took me by my shoulders gently and looked into my eyes. We could have been twins, although he was five years older and stronger and more beautiful.

"Maybe it's not big enough. Not only must you ask yourself, why paint? You must also ask yourself why write stories? Why play instruments and sing and dance? Why breathe and wake each day? It is all the same question. Then the answer becomes obvious."

"But it can't be that easy, can it? It would be because we must, to survive?"

"Not just survive Lulu, to live! And there's nothing easy about that."

"If you never picked up a brush again, it would not kill you."

Sebastian said, "But what about my soul? My soul would shrivel up and my insides would turn black and my brain would suffocate," he was smiling, "and that is why I must keep painting."

"Well that is why you are so good then, you're life depends on it," I said solemnly.

"I only need three things in life to be

Ms. Ryujin has woven a complex vision of a life few have lived but many have wished for. Her tale is intricately laced with the vibrant colors of life in a dance as wild as the gypsies she portrays and experienced through the eyes of an artist. The reader is instantly entwined in the life of the young woman, and we discover everything about her through a delightful merger of Ms. Ryujin's words and our imaginations. The imagery is hold and captivating while the characters are real enough to touch. The metaphors breathe life into the piece by evoking the depths of human emotions in each passage. This skillful merging of the elements of art and writing have created a piece that stays with the reader long after the reading.

happy. You, painting, and sex."

I started to laugh.

"What does your soul need Lu?" He asked and he was serious again. I couldn't think of an answer.

Gone. Gone, but I remembered him so clearly now as I walked into the gallery. It was a small enclosure of a room. The walls were white, the lights on the ceiling shone on four large canvases. I stood in front of the painting titled, "The Tree Woman". It was a portrait of a redhead from the shoulders up. Her long hair melted into the branches of a tree, or the branches melted into her hair. Either

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2nd Place

The Commute

by Camden Bennett

"Looks like we've got an accident with injuries at the West 10 exit, folks!"

Fred Foley seemed almost giddy from his vantage point in the News Five chopper. Jeff could see it hovering and swooping ahead while the rotors beat their way into the background noise of Foley's traffic report. It caught morning sunlight while the traffic below lay in shadows in the landscape.

"Come on!" Jeff shouted. He looked at his watch as traffic slowed from a crawl to a stop, then ran a hand through his short, brown hair. His exit was still several miles away. When would these idiots learn to drive?

"It's a nasty one, folks!" Foley continued. "We have a tractor trailer jackknifed in the middle of the southbound lane with two or three cars involved as well!"

"How does a semi jackknife in perfect weather?!" Jeff said, hitting his steering wheel with an open hand. He had a meeting in 25 minutes he couldn't miss. Checking his watch again, he clenched his jaw and drummed his fingers on the center console.

"Crews are on the scene but sit tight because it's going to take a while. Keeping you informed from above, this is Fred Foley, News Five!"

Jeff envied Foley's immunity from the terrestrial problems every commuter faced on the ground. With so many thousands packed onto this ribbon of asphalt at the same time every day, accidents weren't really a surprise, they were simply an annoyance to get rid of as quickly as possible.

Jeff rolled down his window to let in the cool air and noticed cars slipping by to his left. Groups of two, three and four people laughed and smiled in the carpool lane, sipping their coffee, certain of reaching work on time. Apparently the accident left a hole for the privileged to slip through. One guy waved insolently from an open passenger window as he cruised by, eliciting a barrage of fingers from several cars. Someone up ahead stood up and threw a breakfast burrito.

The driver of the next car in line, wearing an uneasy expression, had a mannequin riding shotgun. Jeff had seen him pull this stunt before and opened his mouth to yell in protest but a smug grin settled over his face when he saw the patrol car next in line waiting for a place to pull the offender over.

"Finally got that punk," Jeff said, pleased that this morning gone awry had allowed him at least a small pleasure.

Johnny Cash sang, "I fell in to a burning ring of fire..." on the radio and Jeff joined in to occupy his mind, reaching deep for the low notes. Turning the radio up, he moved his head to the music, then kept beat on the steering wheel with one hand.

Still singing, he glanced up when the lane to his right moved ahead a single car length. He stopped short when he saw her.

Jeff guessed she was in her early-twenties, like himself. Her delicate facial features held his gaze, and her full lips parted slightly as she regarded him with something like disdain. Or maybe amusement. Dark brown hair fell to her shoulders, slightly wavy and contrasting with a flared white collar beneath a black suit top. She seemed so familiar to him, although he knew he'd never met her. It wasn't a physical familiarity, it was something else, something he picked up in her eyes and countenance. He definitely hadn't met her before, but he decided in that instant that he needed to.

Fiction walks a fine line between the imagination and reality. It creates characters that we, as readers, can relate within our own daily lives. These fictitious characters also get stuck in traffic jams while their minds wander off and their cars hold still. We may not go to such an extreme as Jeff, but it is possible.

This story offers the reader a scenario that has a couple of different outcomes. We have a story about love; but Jeff's love walks a fine line between a mutual love and stalking the author has given the reader the choice to decide for him/herself if Jeff's heart is in the right place.

Good fiction presents a situation to the reader and leaves him/her wanting more. "The Commute" is a story that could have been written with more detail, but its current impact on the reader works.

She raised her eyebrows quizzically and Jeff reached for his coffee mug, holding it aloft in an embarrassed toast he hoped would cover the memory of his antics performed a moment before. As he grinned at her, a horn blared behind him. Reflexively, he slipped his foot to the gas and lurched forward, then hit the brakes again.

What was she driving? He hadn't seen anything but her face. Craning his neck, he caught a Toyota emblem on the front grill. A blue Toyota. Looked like a Corolla.

The car behind him honked again, as if the twenty feet they were able to travel mattered. Pulling ahead, he reached into the glove box for a pen and piece of paper.

"BRO," Jeff said, slouching in his chair, hands clasped behind his head. Carl, who shared his cubicle, pulled himself away from his computer and spun his chair.

"What."

"I'm in love," Jeff said.

"With what?" Carl said.

"A girl, what do you think?" Jeff said, sitting up straight.

"Got a name?" Carl said.

Jeff shrugged.

"A number?" Carl said skeptically.

Jeff held up a slip of paper and Carl leaned close.

"That's a license plate number," Carl said, crossing his arms.

"Better than nothing," Jeff said.

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1st Place

Hesitancy

by Mario Chard

And now I question
the ordered chairs and tables
of rooms we live
and breathe in
but pass trembling through
in darkness,

How feet uncovered
long to search like brave hands
but hesitantly stumble
on the shadows
of untouched tables
and unmoved chairs.

I would rather walk
the paths of the
compassless,
those who have learned
the distance and measure
of the light-change
before dawn:
who sleep
in the unordered rooms of fields
without shoes
or the fear of pain
that does not move
from where we set it last-

But still makes us wince
in darkness.

Good poetry has a way of taking everyday objects and making them seem unfamiliar and new to us. This reflective, thoughtful poem establishes a dear image of tidy tables and chairs that, alone, seems like an artful yet ordinary description. However, the juxtaposition of this description against "unordered rooms of fields" creates a contrast that allows the reader to think about both rooms and fields in a new way. We also enjoy the structure of the movement of this poem: from walking uncertainly through rooms of ordered chairs and tables to walking through fields, with a turning point coming at a moment when the speaker decides that he or she would rather "walk the paths of the compassless."

2nd Place

See Also: Insanity

by W. Steven McDonald

Art and women
produce much the same effect.
And it's an equal argument
which is more dangerous.
See also: Lysistrata

Creativity makes one crazy.

But I suppose
ears and other extremities
can be done without
as long as it's good for P.R.
See also: Van Gogh

Think about it.
You wouldn't stick your face
at the business end of a skunk
why a shotgun?
I guess the idea is
you don't have to clean up the latter.
See also: Hemingway

It's a cannibalistic and selfish profession.

But who else have learned
to make money
off the voices in their head?

We enjoy how well this poem demonstrates intelligence about different forms of art (with respective references to a Greek play, a French painter, and an American writer), while still inviting readers into the poem. Though many of us do not catch all of the references upon a first reading, we enjoy the self-deprecating tone of the poem and revisit it after finding out more about the allusions. Poetry that incorporates references to other forms of art often becomes so allusive as to be off-putting, but we like how accessible this poem remains. We also like that, though this poet takes his art seriously, he does not seem to take it "too" seriously.

1st Place

Goodbye, Rosie

by Cheyney Wheelwright

Strangely, it is the obituary notices that have the most impact on me today. No amount of hard news from the front page- police raids, gang stabbings, fires, robbery-could have hit me as hard as this. Rosie's notice is there, nestled among the others, in closer proximity to other personalities than she had been in life for many years.

The words are kind and vague, as most obits are. Her accomplishments and her family fit well with all the others in black and white. I know her name, yet am shocked to find I don't recognize her. Her list of life has been glossed over - yes -but it's her picture I'm struggling with. It's the biggest lie of all -and I'm not sure how they did it. She's smiling.

I lean down close to the paper until I can smell newsprint and measure her picture in pixel dots. They've done a fine job in restoring youth and removing "ravage." I've known Rosie my entire life, yet I don't remember this smile. Hers was always guarded, always ashamed. She never looked straight at anyone unless she was asking for money, then she had a way of looking right through the excuses to the face you kept behind.

Rosie's face looks young and fresh on paper, a quality it didn't have with life. She wasn't old when I first met her, but as my mother explained, Rosie's lived hard. She wore her devastation on her face. I can only guess at what she kept inside.

Alcohol was her killer. You won't find that listed in the obituary here -or the prescription drugs, either. No mention of the divorce, lost jobs, or DUIs. Shame and ostracism were her closest friends in the end, yet someone neglected to write them into her life's accounting. Those terrible things that shaped her have disappeared.

She's beautiful in this picture. I didn't know her before the hard years, so this sudden glimpse of beauty comes as a surprise. I suppose that when a woman knowingly and helplessly picks up a bottle in exchange for her family, her broken heart leaches out into her face. A husband, two children, driving privileges, close friends-succumbing one by one in a game of loss.

Portions of her life I know: The heartache of the day my mother had to fire Rosie from her job as a driver at the Senior Citizens Center after another DUI. Rosie begged, but there was nothing to be done. She and my mother cried together in the small office behind the kitchen while the phones rang unanswered.

Ten years, and as many jobs later, Rosie was hired as the custodian for the building where I worked. I had to lean close to hear her whispered words. She wondered if I could tell her where the garbage can in her hand came from; she couldn't remember where she'd picked it up. I tried to help her, but in the end she knew. "I'm sorry." I could tell she'd used those words before.

That would be her last job, her last attempt at failure. She went home to work on her only successful venture- being an alcoholic. A well-intentioned neighbor gave her an old car, and although she had no license she used it to get to the bank and the store. Her tire went flat on a Tuesday, but she drove on the rim until the Friday following, when two other tires went flat on the way home from the bar. The sparks from the rims marked

The piece begins in a stream-of-consciousness style, capturing beautifully the momentary quality of the experience of looking at a familiar face in an obituary. The speaker's attention attaches and detaches, making arbitrary observations, capturing the reflective and apathetic sensations felt in the wake of death. The piece's first person, present tense description also makes the reading experience feel immediate and active. But the real achievement of this piece lies in the vividly captured character of Rosie, and the contrast of Rosie's humanity against an indifferent outside world.

her way home. Another neighbor slipped in after dark and took the car keys. No use killing more than one person if Rosie only intended self destruction.

She began walking the neighborhood. Some took offense when she walked into their homes and helped herself to food and prescription medication. Others left food where she was sure to find it, and hid their alcohol in locked cabinets. Rosie didn't speak anymore unless it was to ask for money, alcohol, or cigarettes. When she encountered locked doors, she simply walked on to the next. Often, she forgot her way home and wandered until something sparked her memory.

That day started out like a hundred others: a drink and a cigarette for breakfast before leaving the house. It was hot outside, but she wore the same sweater she'd worn for the past week. She shuffled up the street, unaware of her surroundings or her pain. Perhaps she wondered where she'd lost her cigarette.

The heat built from the inside out-- the cigarette, forgotten in the pocket of the old sweater, merely smoldered for a few blocks. When Rosie paused a short time later, a young boy thought she seemed to be glowing.

Accustomed to hurt, Rosie didn't cry out or ask for help. She instinctively turned for home. The aching heat shot to flame, eating away the flesh of her arm, neck, and shoulder. Fire consumed portions of her hair and her ear. Just shy of her last safe place, rescuers found her and pushed her to the ground, beating her with their hands to extinguish the flames. She didn't fight them. Perhaps it was good to feel human touch again.

Rosie didn't get out easy. She lived hard, and she died hard. I

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2nd Place

What If They Stray?

by Kathryn Olds

It was 2:00A.M. and something woke me up. It's one of those things where a mom just knows something is not right. I went downstairs to check on my 17 year old daughter. She was gone and the window was wide open. Fear and anger both filled my heart. I looked on the bed and found her cell phone. I opened it and checked her text messages to find out where she might have gone. What I found made my world fall out from beneath my feet.

Her friend had sent her text message about being drunk with her. The rules are no smoking, drinking or drugs as long as you are living in my home. And no breaking the law either. She had been disciplined a year earlier when I had found her smoking pot at a party. We had talked about the dangers of beginning this road and the dead end it led to.

I thought she had made some different choices. She worked as a Certified Nurse Assistant at a Retirement Home, was a senior in High School with just 6 months to go to graduate from High School and receive an Associates Degree from the local University. This would have ensured a scholarship to finish her nursing degree without having to pay any money.

She came home at 3:00A.M. I pulled her aside in my room and we had a long talk. I was informed that she would smoke, drink and do drugs because she was looking for herself and there was nothing I could do to stop her. With tears in my eyes I told her that if she was going to make adult decisions like this, then she needed to leave home and live like an adult. I had three other children that I was responsible for and rules are rules. I told her that if she left, I would always be there to listen to her, to love on her, to hold her when she was hurt, to give advice if she needed it but I would never pay for her mistakes. She chose to leave.

This was probably one of the most heartbreaking moments I've ever experienced as a mother. I love my children fiercely and I want what is best for them. To ask my little girl to leave before she was ready was the most difficult decision to make, and when she left I was depressed for months. But I know I did the right thing for her.

The first night in her apartment, I

received a call from the police. Could I please pick up my daughter as she was with a friend and they were stopped right before they parked in the driveway of her apartment? She was stoned, drunk, cigarettes on her, and breaking curfew. Luckily she was a juvenile and this would not be on her record in 3 months when she turned 18.

The judge pardoned everything except the cigarette charge; she had to go to counseling and take some tobacco use classes. At 18, the day after she received this pardon, she was stopped at the grocery store's parking lot and booked into jail for selling Ecstasy. She was kicked out of high school and she forfeited her ability to get the two year degree at the university. She lost her CNA certification and her job. She had embarked on a very difficult hill that she must climb to succeed in life. I cried- my baby really wanted to do this the hard way and all I could do was keep praying for her and talking to her and letting her know that she was worth gold to me.

Throughout this journey, I never stopped telling her that I loved her. I continually pointed out all the good points in her. We talked deeply about issues and choices and roads that we follow and how to leave them. I saw a little hurt girl who had no self-esteem and who was looking for acceptance in all the wrong places. She knew that I understood what she was going through, that it broke my heart to see this beautiful girl take the hard road, but that I would never let go. Never.

This isn't the end of the story. She is now 19 and still paying for her mistakes. But she is growing. She wants to return to school. She worked towards her General Education Diploma, and now she has goals for the future. My daughter and I have a very beautiful relationship. She is coming over to my house more and more. We have deep talks and she actually thinks I'm the "wisest mom" in the world. I hold her when she cries. I give advice

• • • • • *continued online*

The piece "What if They Stray," captures the profound relationship between a mother and daughter in a touching and meaningful way. It tells a story of failings, reconciliation, growth and hope, while keeping emotional assessments to a minimum, allowing readers to react to the story in their own way. At the same time, it retains a deeply personal voice, evoking feelings with its careful descriptions in an objective but affectionate tone. As the piece moves throughout the difficult experiences of a mother's love, the author adapts the style to reflect the various stages of a parent's first-hand experiences with love and heartbreak.

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1st Place

The Effects of Cheatgrass on the Relative Abundance of a Northern Utah Snake Community

by Lucas K. Hall

Abstract

Cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*), an invasive exotic annual plant, is known to diminish many shrub-dependent organisms; however relatively little research has been done on how it affects snake communities. I conducted a study on Antelope Island State Park, Davis County, Utah, where cheatgrass is abundant and may be negatively impacting snake populations. Four study sites with different cheatgrass cover (37.90-69.23%) were established to measure relative abundance of snakes. I trapped snakes using funnel traps attached to drift fence arrays (one array per site). A total of 35 individuals were

captured between June and September 2005 (221 trap-array days) representing two snake species: the western yellow bellied racer (*Coluber constrictor mormon*) and the Great Basin gopher snake (*Pituophis catenifer deserticola*). Linear regression was used to determine if a relationship existed between the percent of cheatgrass cover and species relative abundances. A negative relationship was found between the relative abundances of both snake species and increasing cheatgrass density. These results suggest that cheatgrass may negatively affect the snake community in shrub-steppe habitat.

Introduction

Cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*), an invasive annual plant introduced from Eurasia, was detected in the western U.S. as early as the 1890's (Mack, 1981; Novak and Mack, 2001). Since its introduction in the Intermountain West, cheatgrass has come to dominate at least 200,000 km² of the shrub-steppe landscape (Mack, 1989). Characteristics of cheatgrass that allow it to out-compete native perennials include abundant seed production, rapid germination (Stewart and Hull, 1949) and its superior competitiveness (Holmgren, 1956; Harris, 1967; Melgoza et al., 1990). Cheatgrass alters plant community structure (Hulbert, 1955; Brooks, 2000), soil nutrient cycling (Walker and Smith, 1997; Evans et al., 2001; Wolfe and Klironomos, 2005), microclimate (D'Antonio and Vitousek, 1992) and fire frequency (Stewart and Hull, 1949; Young and Evans, 1978; Walker and Smith, 1997).

Cheatgrass has diminished many shrub-dependent organisms (Pimentel et al., 2000) such as shrubland birds (Wiens and Rottenberry, 1985; Knick and Rotenberry, 1995, 2000), small mammals (Yensen et al., 1992; Gitzen et al., 2001), and lizards (Newbold, 2005); however, little is known about how it affects snake communities. Cheatgrass cover does reduce the detectability of snakes (Hirth et al., 1969; Mortensen, 2004), but there may be potentially negative implications to the management and preservation of snakes inhabiting cheatgrass areas that have yet to be studied (e.g., locomotive performance and prey carrying capacity may be limited in dense cheatgrass). In northern Utah, cheatgrass is widespread in shrub areas with native grasses and may negatively impact snake communities. My objective was to determine if cheatgrass adversely affects snake abundance.

Materials and Methods

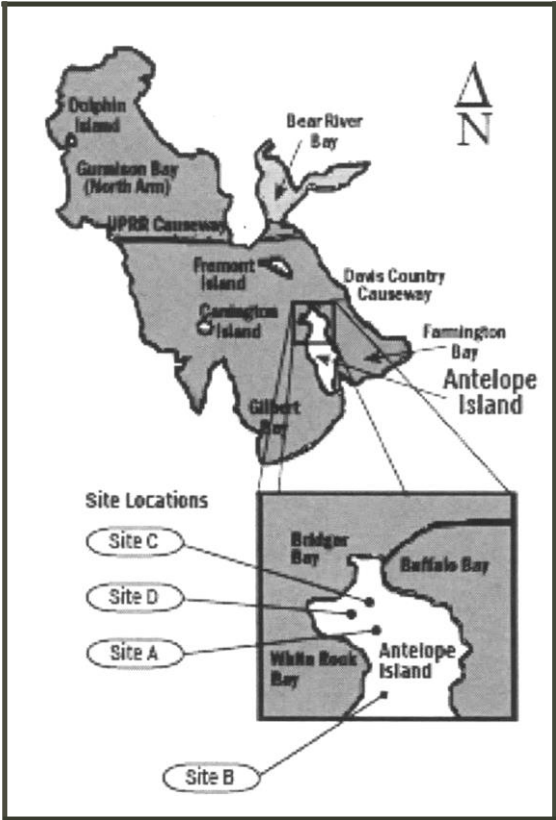
Study Area. -This study was performed on Antelope Island State Park (UTM: Zone 12; 395,961 E; 4,545,924 N; elevation 1310 m; 11, 311 ha) located in Davis County, Utah. Antelope

Island is the largest island in the Great Salt Lake (Figure 1) and is not a true island due to its causeway and a naturally occurring land-bridge during dry years. Cheatgrass is one of the most abundant plants on the island; other common shrub vegetation includes grasses and plants such as bluegrass (*Poa* spp.), buckwheat (*Eriogonum* spp.), wheatgrass (*Agropyron* spp.), rabbitbrush (*Chrysothamnus* spp.), and sagebrush (*Artemisia* spp.) (Marshall, 1940).

Field Procedures - From April to July 2005 four study sites (3 ha each) were selected. Sites were located > 1km of one another; sites C and D were established in Bridger Bay and sites A and B in White Rock Bay (Figure 1). These bays were chosen for their like habitat and variety of cheatgrass densities. Cheatgrass is common throughout the island, and each site included some; however, sites differed in percent of cover.

This piece is a detailed study of one of the environmental issues facing us here in Utah—that cheatgrass overtakes other flora, eliminating habitat for snakes. Mr. Hall includes all of the empirical data associated with examining this environmental issue and uses detailed analysis to inform the public of his findings. The setup of the paper allows even the reader lacking scientific background to follow through the project in the end. Mr. Hall goes into an in-depth discussion but doesn't limit it to simply the snakes. He provides a realistic view of the effects on the entire ecosystem of Antelope Island. He concludes by warning the reader of the loss of biodiversity due to invasive species and maintains scientific integrity by not drawing conclusions that are not supported by the study.

1st Place, cont'd...



Site	Mean%	S.D.
A	37.90	± 15.74
B	39.78	± 19.51
C	54.88	± 20.69
D	69.23	± 18.80

Table 1. Mean (% cheatgrass / m2) and standard deviation for each set of cheatgrass samples (n = 200) from each site.

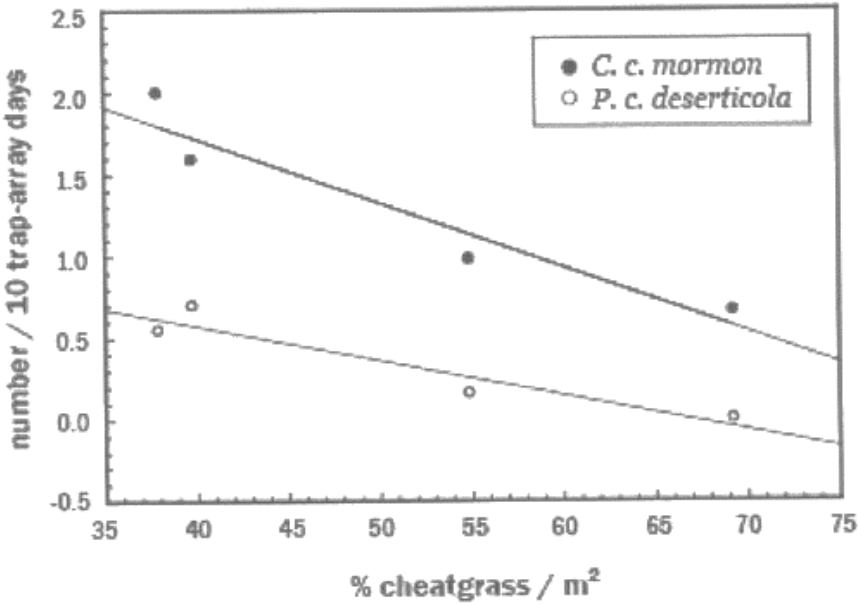


Figure 2. Relative abundances (number trapped per 10 trapping days) of Coluber constrictor mormon ($Y = -0.040X + 3.321$) and Pituophis catenifer deserticola ($Y = -0.021X + 1.437$) as a function of cheatgrass percent cover.

1st Place, cont'd...

Cheatgrass coverage was determined by walking 20 transects from the center of each plot, placing a 1-m² wooden frame on the ground every 10 m and estimating cheatgrass cover within the square to the nearest 5% (Daubenmire, 1959), for a total of 200 samples per site. Samples were then calculated to find the mean cheatgrass percentage/m² for each site.

In the center of each site, a hardware cloth drift fence trap array (0.635 cm² mesh, 40 cm high x 30 m long) was established in an -x pattern. To eliminate gaps between the fence and soil irregularities, fences were buried at least 5 cm. Attached to each fence were 10 double-ended, hardware cloth funnel traps (0.635 cm² mesh, 38 cm high x 1 m long) (Cavitt, 2000) placed 5 m apart. Traps were covered with white corrugated plastic to reduce heat stress of captured animals. Funnel traps were used as the primary method for data collection (Fitch, 1987). Snakes captured by hand within sites were also recorded.

Captured snakes were identified (Collins and Taggart, 2002) and sexed by hemipenial probing (Schaefer, 1934) with the exception of some neonates, in which case hemipenial eversion was performed (Rosen, 1991). Snout-vent lengths (SVL) were measured by contouring a metric vinyl tape along side the individual's snout to its vent. Tail lengths (TL) were also recorded by measuring from the vent to the tail tip. Snakes were weighed to the nearest 0.1 g using a Pesola® spring scale. Captured snakes were individually marked by clipping unique combinations of ventral scales (Spellerberg, 1977). Once marked, snakes were released at the point of capture.

As a result of an abnormally wet and cold spring, sites C and D were first opened in early June. Sites A and B however, were relocated to White Rock Bay to avoid bison (*Bos bison*) grazing areas and were reopened in mid-June and early-July, respectively. Traps were closed from mid-July to early-August to prevent heat stress and trap mortality due to air temperatures exceeding 38° C. Traps were closed in late September after an early frost.

Data Analyses. - Site-specific relative abundances (number of snakes trapped / 10 trap-array days) were calculated for each species. Linear regression was used to determine if a relationship existed between species relative abundance and the percent cover of cheatgrass. SVL measurements were calculated to find the species mean according to site. Linear regression was performed for both species to determine if dense cheatgrass cover affected snake SVL. Chi-square analyses were used to verify if sex ratios (males: females) differed significantly from parity. Statistical tests for regression and nonparametric analyses were conducted using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software, version 13.0. Significance level was set at $\alpha = 0.05$ for all statistical tests.

Results

The cheatgrass cover percentage analysis determined individual percentages for each site. All four study sites were distinct in cheatgrass cover percentage (Table 1). Twenty-eight western yellow-bellied racers (*Coluber constrictor mormon*) and seven Great Basin gopher snakes (*Pituophis catenifer deserticola*) were the only species of snakes observed and trapped during 221 trap-array days. Racers were captured in all four sites, whereas gopher snakes were found in only three sites (A, B and C; Figure 2). The desert-striped whipsnake

(*Masticophis taeniatus taeniatus*) was not observed during the course of this study despite its recorded presence on the island (Mortensen, 2004).

Relative Abundance. - Only one marked snake (C. constrictor; site C) was recaptured. Consequently, no estimates of population size could be derived. Relative abundance of racers was negatively associated with percentage of cheatgrass cover ($F = 22.065$; df model, error = 1, 2; $P = 0.042$; $R^2 = 0.917$; Figure 2). Likewise, gopher snake relative abundance showed a significant negative relationship to increased cheatgrass cover ($F = 18.582$; df model, error = 1, 2; $P = 0.049$; $R^2 = 0.903$; Figure 2).

SVL Analyses. - We found no significant relationship between racer and gopher snake SVL with the percent of cheatgrass ($F = 0$; df model, error = 1, 2; $P = 0.994$; $R^2 = 0$; $F = 4.895$, df model, error = 1, 2; $P = 0.270$; $R^2 = 0.830$).

Sex Ratios. - The sex ratio (males:females) for racers did not significantly differ from parity (11:16; $0.2 = 0.46$, df = 1, $P > 0.05$). There were too few data to statistically compare the sex ratio for gopher snakes (3:4).

Discussion

These findings show that snake abundance is comparatively lower in cheatgrass on Antelope Island, suggesting that increasing cheatgrass density negatively impacts snake communities. However, during a replicate study (one performed 20 y after the original to monitor changes in reptile status in Idaho) Cassel (2003) found that snake abundance was not impacted by exotic annuals, including cheatgrass. Yet, the difference between our results may lie in the method through which we ranked vegetation abundance. Cassel used transect walk-through and point /line intercept surveys to classify all the major cover types of vegetation on a four-point scale. Subsequently, he could not detect a percentage difference among his highest (four, on his scale) cheatgrass rankings. Furthermore, since Cassel's study was a replicate, he was required to utilize previous study sites which exemplified an array of habitat variables; whereas I was able to limit my sites to a similar habitat pattern with the only differences being cheatgrass densities. Thus, he was unable to directly measure cheatgrass effects on snake abundance using similar habitat with the sole variable being cheatgrass percentages.

Gopher snakes exhibited lower relative abundances than racers in all sites, particularly in site D, where gopher snakes were absent. Their absence could be attributed to lower overall vertebrate prey abundance upon which they are dependent (Fitch, 1949; Rodriguez-Robles, 1998). Racers were perhaps more abundant because they can seemingly maneuver more easily in cheatgrass (Hirth et al., 1969) than the slower, more robust gopher snakes (Mosauer, 1935). However, studies measuring garter snake (*Thamnophis elegans*) locomotion in differing push-point densities (representing vegetation stalk thickness by inserting nails into a board), speed was reduced in both experimental populations of garter snakes as push-

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2nd Place

Letters from Birmingham]ail: A Nation's Conscience, A Catalyst for Change

by Janice LeFevre

On January 3, 1964, Time magazine awarded "Man of the Year" to Martin Luther King, Jr. In December of that year, King received the Nobel Peace Prize. What circumstances prompted these prestigious awards? The answer lies in the events of 1963, which Time labeled as the "most decisive year in the Negro's fight for equality" ("Man of the Year" 13). The pivotal event of that year was King's direct action campaign in Birmingham, Alabama, which was begun in April 1963. For out of this campaign emerged what historian S. Jonathan Bass calls "the most important written document of the civil rights protest era"-King's Letter from Birmingham Jail (Bass 1). The Letter from Birmingham Jail (Letter) embodied and eloquently explained the purpose of the civil rights movement and became its premier and foundational document. More importantly, the Letter became the catalyst for unprecedented social changes. Prominent scholars and colleagues of King-Lewis V. Baldwin, Taylor Branch, Wesley T. Mort, S. Jonathan Bass, August Meir, James F. Findlay, Donald T. Phillips, Malinda Snow, Andrew Young, and Alton Hornsby, Jr.-have carefully documented King's life and the civil rights era. Based on their research, I have gleaned information that reveals the immense influence of the Letter from Birmingham Jail; in 1963 and 1964, King's letter pricked America's conscience and galvanized black and white Americans (especially church-going ones), motivating them to work together in the struggle for racial justice and equality (Branch Parting 762; Bass 104-6; Baldwin 125). It inspired clergy to become active leaders in the civil rights movement and convinced the media to promote King's social vision. It influenced the John F. Kennedy administration and led to the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964. In the decades following the sixties, the Letter from Birmingham Jail has continued to be a rallying cry for modern activists-both foreign and domestic. The Letter is also a "widely read modern literary classic" which still shapes American mores (Bass 1).

In 1963, King's greatest challenge was America's political inertia in the civil rights arena. He and his organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), wanted the federal government to pass sweeping civil rights legislation-a "second emancipation" which would obliterate racist segregation laws, guarantee black voting rights, and provide equal employment opportunities for blacks ("Man of the Year" 17; King "Quest" par. 9). To do so, he needed a groundswell of grassroots support to pressure politicians into action. According to Bass, King believed the root of the America's indolence lay in the unwillingness of most clergy to address social problems. In addition, many white Americans, especially those from regions other than the South, saw themselves as living in the "land of the free and the home of the brave," but did not recognize that freedoms were being denied to black citizens. Other whites were simply racist or apathetic to the cause. King also faced the difficulty of uniting a "splintered and divided" black community (Bass 104-106). So, King's challenge was to attract peoples' attention and then educate them about the moral issues embedded in racism. He believed if he could convince conservative and moderate Americans of the justness of his cause, he could meet his goals for achieving racial justice (Meir par. 14). In addition to most American's languid approach to the civil rights cause, King faced the ridicule of the black and white press who "sneered" at King's direct action methods, calling them radical or ineffective (Branch Parting 792). King desperately needed to change their opinions so they could be used as tools to promote racial justice.

According to Phillips and Baldwin, King's goal was "to 'awaken the moral conscience of America,'" challenge her to live up to her ideals, and "produce federal legislation" that would meet his political goals of equal treatment under the law for blacks (Phillips 173; Baldwin 68). To do this, King needed to "unlock the shared feelings and understandings" of blacks

Janice LeFevre does an excellent job of effectively developing a well-written essay on the influence of Martin Luther King Jr.'s Letter from Birmingham Jail. She not only explains how King's letter shaped American history but also explains why it was so important in the history and lives of the American people. LeFevre beautifully incorporates quotes from well-qualified individuals that support her own statements throughout the paper. She explains King's actions and informs her audience of how the letter persuaded the public's mind, including the minds of the president, church leaders, and religious communities. She concludes her essay by summing up the significance of King's letter, explaining how the letter affects individuals today, and giving the reader a sense of finality.

and whites (Branch Parting 792).

Understanding what happened in Birmingham in April and May 1963 is imperative to understanding why King's Letter from Birmingham Jail was later embraced so ardently by the American public. Taylor Branch, a national authority on the civil rights movement, asserts that the events of the "Birmingham movement... transformed King's letter from a silent cry of desperate hope to a famous pronouncement of moral triumph" (Branch Parting 744). In 1963, Birmingham was arguably the most racially divided city in America. In addition, the hotheaded Birmingham police chief, Bull Connor, and other city leaders were fervently devoted to segregation laws and practices. King targeted Birmingham in

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April 1963 as an ideal spot for his non-violent direct action campaign, because he believed Connor would be too impetuous to restrain his racist anger and would react violently to King's campaign. King's hope was to prick American's consciences by exposing the decades-long violence and inequities of segregation and racism to the American public. He planned to do this by disobeying segregation laws, thereby provoking Birmingham police and government leaders to "act out in front of the media (King "Letter" par. 24; Young 185-193). He hoped that by bringing the putrid puss of racism out into the open, it could be entitled to respect as a fellow human being with all basic rights, privileges, and responsibilities which belong to humanity" (2). As moderates, these men believed that it was their duty to fight extremism wherever it was found, so they condemned Wallace and chastised King.

In their letter to King, these eight clergymen echoed the concerns and criticism of many black and white Americans: they labeled King as an outsider, called his direct action campaign untimely, and questioned his tactics of breaking laws (against assembly and for segregation) to make his case. They believed that negotiation, rather than confrontation, would be a better avenue for change. (The complete text of their letter can be found in Snow par. 16-22.)

On April 16, King began writing a letter from his jail cell in response to this criticism. King's Letter from Birmingham Jail read like a Pauline epistle, Negro sermon, and press release rolled into one (Snow par. 4; Matt 412; Bass 227). Its purpose was to call the clergy and the American public to repentance and motivate them to active participation in social reform. In his letter, King claimed that as a Christian leader and an American he was not an outsider; he had the right to defend America's Judea-Christian values and liberties (King "Letter" par. 2-4). He skillfully interwove Christian and democratic themes to convince his readers of the moral and constitutional legitimacy of his civil rights cause and his direct action campaign. He set forth compelling evidence that the Negro people had been denied their God-given rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Exhibiting the heinous consequences of racism combined with allusion to God's word on the matter, King showed the

urgency of quick and direct action to end segregation laws and practices-justifying his "moral obligation to disobey unjust laws (par. 7-31).

King devoted nearly half his letter to "aiming at a tender spot in political and religious culture....religious respectability" (Branch Parting 741; King, "Letter" par. 23-44). He classified the white Christian moderate as "the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom and equality (King "Letter" par. 23). King pulled no punches in his analysis of moderate church leaders who did not participate in social reform. He said, "all too many [white ministers, priests and rabbis] have been more cautious than courageous and have remained silent behind the anesthetizing security of stained-glass windows (par. 35). King wanted white ministers to do more than just "admonish their worshipers to comply with...desegregation...because it is the law, ...[he] longed to hear white ministers declare: 'Follow this decree because integration is morally right and because the Negro is your brother' (par. 37). King reminded the clergy that the early Christian church was powerful because it "was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was a thermostat that transformed the mores of society.... By their effort and example they brought an end to ancient [social] evils (par. 40). King also equated sins of commission with sins of omission: "We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people" (par. 26). For these sins, "the judgment of God is upon the church as never before (par. 42). Interwoven with his strong admonishment of languid Christians, King offered a message of hope, redemption and resolution-the "more excellent way of love and nonviolent protest (par. 28).

King, the master of the moment, recognized the opportunity the eight clergy had provided for him to promote his views. He immediately began writing his rebuttal in the margins of the newspaper. When he ran out of room, he used toilet paper and paper slipped in by his associates. The letter was smuggled out in pieces, then deciphered and typed by King's SCLC subordinates (Branch Parting 742-744). It soon became apparent to the SCLC that King's message

came from a perfect setting-a persecuted prophet writing an epistle from jail, just as the Apostle Paul had done (Bass 115; Snow par. 4). They decided to exploit this opportunity. After King was released from jail (and before the Birmingham campaign was completed), he and his associates edited, polished and released the twenty-page letter to the media and other groups within the first two weeks of May (Bass 120, 134). However, since the themes in King's letter were already familiar to the press, they saw no new news in it, and the letter was largely ignored (Branch Parting 48; Bass 134).

Meanwhile, the violence in Birmingham was making headlines all over the United States and the world. People were hungry to understand the events they had witnessed in Birmingham and they wanted to hear King's side of the story. Suddenly, there was a mainstream demand for his writing and the media complied. Most historians agree that Quakers were the first to publish the Letter from Birmingham Jail, which they distributed in 50,000 pamphlets. As demand increased, they reprinted it in their June issue of Friends (Branch Parting 803-4; Bass 141-2). Other Christian journals quickly followed-notably the "widely read Protestant ecumenical weekly the Christian Century, which published the letter in its entirety on June 12 (Findlay 69; Bass 142). By the end of the summer, the media, which had previously been condemnatory of King, was solidly behind him; newspapers and secular magazines throughout the nation featured the Letter-often as their cover story (Branch Parting 803-4; Colaiaco par. 14). With the violent images of racial injustice still in American's minds, King's letter rang like a clarion call of truth, repentance, and hope to millions of readers. King had finally reached his audience! The impact was almost instantaneous.

The Letter from Birmingham Jail, which had been launched by public interest in King's Birmingham marches, suddenly gave King a new image as a

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