

WRITING UCONN

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essays
poetry*

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Our objective remains the publication of the best student writing done at UConn, and we once again invite undergraduates to submit work for consideration. Regrettably we cannot print all the good writing we get. We wish we could. But we promise to give each submission a thoughtful review.

We hope that through the pleasure WRITING UCONN gives, all students will come to make good writing a real part of their lives.



CONTENTS

Dave Crow / GOODBYE, MR. BUBBLEGUM a personal essay	1
Pamela Gagnon / TWO POEMS	5
Nicole Chaison / THREE POEMS	7
Melissa Jordan / HESITATION CUTS a short story	10
Steven Guglielmi / TWO POEMS	13
Anne Graziano / TWO POEMS	15
J. Nardizzi / INSIDE ORWELL an essay	17
Joseph Stinson / TWO POEMS	21
Lynne M. Vail / THREE POEMS	24
Chieko Katsu / BAMBOO STILTS a personal essay	27
Christine Jopek / A LETTER SHE WANTED TO WRITE a poem	29
Timothy Loftus / IS IT STILL IN YOUR HOROSCOPE? an essay	34
Ellen Olsen / POEM	37
Terrence Roethlein / PALE IRONY a poem	38
Christine Jopek / JANUARY 22 a poem	39
Chieko Katsu / TO AN ANT a poem	41
Steven McCluskey / "Othello: A Cartoon Parody	43

GOODBYE, MR. BUBBLEGUM

A Personal Essay by Dave Crow

There is a look in the eyes of a beaten person. It is a look that cannot be described, only witnessed. That look is on the face that haunts my dreams late at night as I drift between sleep and consciousness.

It is a slim face with a pair of thin lips and a round chin quivering with restrained emotion, tear-streaked cheeks matted with soft brown hair, and a subtle nose that separates a pair of sky blue eyes. It is the eyes that cause me to roll uneasily in bed. The whites are bloodshot, the pupils are constricted, and the blue is magnified by the tears flowing over the puffed lids. I remember that look better than anything else I have ever seen in my life. It is a look of complete and utter defeat. It seems to indicate that all the hope in the world has dried up and left the person with nothing but the ashes of a once happy life.

My uncle, who fought in Viet Nam, said that he had seen the same look in the eyes of many people, mostly refugees and captured soldiers. He too confessed to being haunted by it.

The first time I ever saw it was when my brother and I were sent to the Jackson farm to build a fence. Mr. Jackson has just sold half of his land, twenty acres, to the cattle ranchers in order to hold onto the other half of his land. Although hard put financially and otherwise, Mr. Jackson was determined to fulfill a local obligation; he was bound not only by law, but by honor, to build half of the fence between his farm and the ranchers'.

My father called us into the living room. He was sitting there alone with a solemn look on his face.

"Boys," he said, "You're to go to the Jacksons and build half a fence. The ranchers just bought their southern twenty acres and Mr. Jackson is obliged to put up his part. You are to build half a fence, no more, no less. Understand?"

"Let the Ranchers do it," I said carelessly. "They've go--"

My father's blue eyes went steel, hacking my words off at mid-sentence.

"Do it boy. You're old enough to understand. Now don't come home until you've built that fence, not before. You hear? Now get to it!"

My brother and I sulked out the door and collected our fencing tools, two sledge hammers, an ace, a bow saw, two claw hammers, a roll of barbed wire, and a fifty pound box of steeple nails.

After loading the truck, I went back inside to get the lunch that had been packed for us, and hazarded a glance into the living room. Only then did I notice the red and black spines that bristled from his face. My father shaved every day before breakfast without fail, yet he had several days' growth on his face now. Then I remembered seeing my grandfather's face in exactly the same condition. They forgot to shave only when they and the rest of the men in town were protesting. Now I understood. I would build a fence today, probably the best I had ever built, and learn the true meaning behind the whiskers.

Mr. Jackson awaited us on his front porch swing. His wrinkled face was white, his jaw muscles worked, and his eyes were like that of a lost child. His baggy overalls seemed to swallow his torso and his large straw cowboy hat dropped over those stricken eyes. He greeted us with a limp handshake, and in a quiet, distant voice directed us toward where we were to start building our half of the fence. Howell county law states that each party on either side of a fence is responsible for up-keep of half of it. This includes building a fence, so we would work west from the center, and the ranchers would work east.

"Your father told you?" he asked in a strained voice, rolling his brown eyes up to meet mine. I am convinced that a great chunk of my innocence was lost at that instant, for I learned that sometimes there is no more hope and we are forced to "go gently into that good night."

"Yes sir," I replied.

"You'll do a good job?"

I nodded.

"Get to it then. Remember to stop by the house and get a piece of pie from Lydia when you leave."

With that he averted the gaze that had nailed me to the boards of the front porch and I fled to the safety of the truck.

As we rode through the field, I looked at my brother, the other half of our fence crew. He was two years less than my sixteen years, and even though I knew he understood, I said, "It's his dignity we're saving."

He only nodded. We did not speak again until our task was complete.

It took the ranchers and their modern fencing equipment until noon to finish their half of the fence. Because of our slower, more traditional methods, our half was finished by lantern light. The thick light oozed from the lantern to cast thin wavering shadows. On into the night we worked, not meeting each other's eyes and taking quick glances around to make sure no one witnessed the deed.

At nine o'clock we rumbled by the Jackson house. I had stopped the truck to go in and dutifully eat a piece of pie, when I saw Mr. Jackson sitting on his back porch. He was looking at the fence that now, lubricated by the moonlight, sawed his land in half. I realized that from his position on the porch, he must have seen the whole, terrible act. Awash with guilt and shame, we climbed back into the truck after deciding that we just could not face him.

On the way home I developed an excruciating itch on my ear and a peculiar burning in my eyes, and as I reached up to scratch my ear, my hand brushed the whiskers that were beginning to break through my face.

Mr. Jackson's eyes had the same look that is on the face in my dreams. That look calls up a feeling inside of me much like the one that makes young children afraid to hang an arm over the side of their bed: a fear of being dragged under and never being heard from again.

That face seemed so harmless when I last saw it. I was seventeen now, with three days of whiskers on my own face, just like all the other men at the Crawford's foreclosure auction. Their spikey faces a mute protest to the proceedings, they milled around the farm equipment and the livestock. The only clean-shaven face was that of the auctioneer who was now rattling off bids on the Ford tractor.

The Crawford family huddled next to their flatbed truck. We were all moving down the line of family members, shaking hands and offering our sympathies.

Marsha, the oldest, was first in line. She was just thirteen. I held her hands and looked into her eyes. That moment will go with me to my grave.

She forced a smile.

"You look so old," she said pointing to my grizzly face.

I could only grumble my apology and move on down the line. Last of the children was the youngest. The one who would come running out to meet "Mr. Bubblegum" when I was sent to the Crawford farm to help out. She knew I never did farm work without bubblegum and that the right combination of pouting and smiling would earn her a piece.

Her big blue eyes stared into mine questioningly. She did not understand. The future to her was the next piece of gum that bulged from my shirt pocket. I tousled her hair, hugged Mrs. Crawford, and squared off with Mr. Crawford. He was so small, so helpless to stop the crashing fall of his farm. It looked as though the next gust of wind would blow him away. I shook his hand and stepped aside.

After all the goodbyes had been said, I lifted the children into the truck. The youngest one reached out and touched my nose.

"Got any bub bub, Mr. Bubblegum?" she asked.

I handed her my last piece and held the small hand that reached for it.

"Goodbye sweet girl, don't swallow it now. Linda, I'll see you again. Rich, Tom, look after your sisters. Marsha..."

Those eyes froze the words in my throat, so I forced them out.

"Marry a man who'll take you far away from here. You'll never stay young and pretty here."

She smiled, more easily this time. Then the truck rolled down the road and was swallowed up by the dust that trailed behind the tail-lights. Her eyes held mine captive until I could no longer see them. Those are the eyes that won't let me sleep.

Sometimes, late at night, I start awake and listen for my name to be called, but I never hear it. Those two eyes just stare back at me from the darkness.

Then I remember another pair of eyes, innocent, oblivious to the void she was falling into. And then I hope, no, I pray, that to this day, she still does not understand.

Dave Crow is a second semester History major. He wrote this essay in English 105.

POEMS BY PAMELA GAGNON

Sidewalk Departure

Head down, collar
up, fists pocketed, you are
tunneling
through the light--eyes
tethered to your dimmer goal, feet
more important than clouds . . .
A lifted foot,
a pause,
and

Suddenly you recoil
saved by your miner's eyes
from the brink of anonymous
bird-flattened
head, faceless eye, rigid beak
ajar,
single-winged, bone-angular,
feathers splayed
and displayed
in analysis of flight . . .

There you are,
arrested by no phoenix, no
triumphal ascent--
just bird-bone intaglio some coinage
of earth. Grounded and
defined by mud,
bird-voiced silence
soars and falls among the crowd.
But only you
look up.

Pamela Gagnon was Co-second Prize Winner in the 1988 Wallace Stevens Competition. Her first poem was written in English 246, the second for herself.

What Only Closets Know

I loved him like a cripple loves
a pair of rusted collar skates,
stashed in calculated rooms that--
pledged to self-sufficiency--
fortified and
mortified the flesh.

No one was allowed to see
the limping heart
that stiffened at the sight of him
and turned, with studied
nonchalance, to leave
the passion zone.

Always afraid
I might lean from the crutch and fall,
the smart heart abandoned all
but secret polishings
and midnight spinnings of
the wheels

Harmless if hidden, my upright
heart could say. . . .
What good are roller skates
scented with sachet?

POEMS BY M. NICOLE CHAISON

Stolen Aquarium

I showed you
my perfect, round-pink
poems, rooted
to the bottom of my notebooks.

I opened pages of them
to you. You looked
at their fresh shapes
through my fragile glass.
You sifted them gently
through your hands like fine sand.
I thought it was harmless
as you smiled, open-lipped,
mouthing my sea-green vowels.

I have sunk
and lie exposed
like empty, pock-marked coral.
Thief.
All my smooth, fat words
have shrunk from my pages,

and reopened
like neon anemones
on yours.

Nicole Chaison wrote these poems in an Independent Study course.
She is a graduating English major.

Disease

She has that thick, platinum hair--
the kind that makes other women
talk trash
when her back is turned
and all the hair spreads out
like a fortune.
Her body is full

of disease.
The intestines are gone,
eaten away by thousands
of ulcers, the size of
pin-pricks, and she sees
blood each morning
as she empties herself
of her waste.

There is such luxury
in the morphine. Rich and sweet,
her beautiful head floats away
from her neck,

from the bag
attached to her side,
full of shit.

Yankee Winter

We cover
and recover our beds,
our bodies,
our heads with wool
and patiently smooth out the creases.
Last night I made tracks
out to the barn.
Today they are filled with mud.

There is something wrong
with Mother.
Her fists and fingertips
which used to flex and touch all surfaces
lie dully
on her writing desk.
She will not write,
the snow will not melt.
It is only January.
Mother does not bow to her pain,
she covers her face with pressed powder,
pauses to look out at the blowing drifts.

Twelve days after Christmas
Mother takes down the tree.
I watch this deliberate, curious ritual.
She handles each glass ornament,
and it is so slow
and sad. She paces
from box to tree,
tree to box
like her dead father,
with flared nostrils and pointed chin.
She has taught us to believe
in strong ghosts
and there is no pain here, only
the tick of a grandfather clock
and the dead sound of falling snow.

HESITATION CUTS

A Short Story by Melissa Jordan

When they get back from the A&P, Cate's mother retreats to the study and reads the condolence cards. Cate carries the groceries into the kitchen and puts them away. Sitting at the table, she reaches for the salt and pepper shakers and begins playing them against one another. The salt shaker is a figurine of a young Pilgrim girl. Cate tips her, pouring first salt, then pepper (Pilgrim boy, carrying a turkey under his armpit) until it forms a small mound. She spreads it carefully over the laminated placemat.

Hearing her mother, Cate stands, scraping the grains into her hands, pocketing them just as her mother enters the kitchen.

"Look, hon--there's a note from Mrs. Littlefield. Remember? Joseph's teacher in high school."

Outside, kids are riding their bikes. When Cate was that age she'd been smaller than anyone on their block. They'd called her Birdbones but Cate didn't care. She'd hugged her smallness, as if a secret, to herself.

"...always sent me such nice letters about how smart and creative he was. Remember when Daddy died, she sent that casserole?"

But Cate is no longer little, having gained fifteen pounds since the funeral. At night she lies in bed, her entire being seemingly centered on her hips. They ache, those twin joints thrusting painfully outward.

"She says she was in Cincinnati last month, so she didn't..."

Cate leans her head against the window. The children have gone inside. She turns around and asks after Mrs. Littlefield.

Their mother and her neighbors, circa 1960: With Joseph and Cate under them, making small villages out of the crabgrass, they lay in their lounges, sporting Glamour Girl sunglasses and dreaming, that surreal summer, of Betty Grable. But when they rose, the lounges had stamped, clear as destiny, their woven pattern into each woman's cellulite.

The winter before his death Joseph worked as staff photographer for the Sunday supplement. The magazine operated in a residential neighborhood; the building itself was a gutted two-story with peeling walls. Thursdays, Cate picked him up at 5:30 and took him home for dinner at their mother's.

Early in February Cate met up with Leo, the suburban editor, on his way out. "Jesus, Cate, do you know what's going on with your brother?" he asked, drawing her into the copy room. "I mean, he's just not doing his work anymore. I sent him to do this spread of

that new playground. Do you know what he comes back with.? Snotty noses. I've got hundreds of prints here of close-ups of these kids with snot running down their faces. I mean, come on."

She found Joseph sitting cross-legged on the floor of the bathroom upstairs, snapping pictures. The lights were off, and a nearby Coke machine cast an eerie violet light on his subject: the glass bottles lined up on the toilet tank.

"What'cha doing?" said Cate, crouching on the floor next to him.

"A photo essay: **An Experiment of Light in the Modern World.** You need a haircut." Smoothing her bangs from her forehead, he imitated their mother: "Catherine was always the pretty one."

"That would've been fine, if it didn't always come after, Joseph is the smart one."

"Dad thought you were smart."

"Yeah."

In the car, Cate told him about Leo. "He's worried about you."

"What about you? Think I'm a **weirdo**? Think I'm losing it?" She glanced over at him--slumped in the passenger seat like a kid called to the principal's office.

"I guess I just don't understand what you're doing."

"I'll show you after dinner."

Returning from the darkroom, Joseph handed Cate the proofs he was working on: "What I'm really doing," he said. In the photographs, ghostly pale wrists floated, suspended by nothing. In some Cate could make out thin blue lines near the curve of the palms. But in others, like gruesome underlines, were heavy, stitched-up slashes. "God," she breathed. What are these?"

Joseph rubbed his own palms together, grinning. "Nice, huh. The police call them hesitation cuts." He pointed to the fainter gashes. "People don't always just kill themselves right away. They test the waters; nick their wrists a little bit to see what it feels like. I talked to this lady at a sanitarium and she said she was just sitting in the bathtub one day with her husband's razor and she started cutting her wrists. but very gently. then she got out and dried herself off and...All day she kept looking at her wrist, fascinated."

Spots began to dance before Cate's eyes. She breathed in. "So you go to these mental institutions and take pictures of people's wrists?"

"That's where I got those. The other ones," he said, turning to the stitched wrists, "I got at the morgue." He tossed the

photographs onto the coffee table and kneeled in front of Cate. "But you know what the most interesting thing about my pictures is?" He pulled himself up, gripping her calves.

"Ow Joseph--"

He stared her down. "What's really interesting Cate--in those pictures--the ones who made it and the ones who couldn't go through with it," her brother's blank, smeared face. "You can't tell the fucking difference."

At the funeral Cate and her mother both wore the dresses they had when her father died. It was a "young people's" ceremony; music from **Jesus Christ Superstar** was played, and Joseph's friends were asked to come forward and share their memories.

The general feeling was that it had been a success.

Only when she approached the coffin and saw her brother's shirtsleeves riding so obviously low over his folded hands, did the stillborn objection of that last night with Joseph emerge. He said there was nothing that separated the photographs of the suicides and the hesitators; yet (she now remembered) only the victims were sewn. Ironic: they stitched the dead and left the living to bleed.

A photograph of Joseph and Cate, ages nine and seven, taken at the beach. They are bare-legged and wear sweatshirts over their bathing suits. The sky was clouded--it is either late in the day or a storm is gathering, perhaps both. Joseph, a few yards ahead, walks toward the waves. Cate is following, head bowed, her eyes seemingly on Joseph's back. Both are outlined by the edginess of the coastal rocks and by the darkening sky.

November: Cate is little again, her body no longer protected from the cut of the wind, the insistent rub of snow against her boot tops.

Thursdays are different now; she goes with her mother to their neighbor's house for dinner.

"Look at her, she eats like a bird," Mrs. Galitzky suddenly says to her mother. "You've gotten so tiny, Catherine."

Her mother eyes Cate reflectively. "Five more pounds and you'll disappear, young lady."

Cate smiles at them and thinks of Joseph, and of herself, and their individual, tentative hesitation cuts. She pushes her plate away.

Melissa Jordan is a sixth term English major. This story won first place in the 1987 Jennie Hackman Memorial Prize Competition.

POEMS BY STEVEN GUGLIELMI

The Dead Bee

I found a dead bee
when I rolled up the shade.
The sun was hot
too hot; there he lay
full of sun--

You must have felt
like a lit match head,
bumbling between
hot glass and plastic
bending, buzzing
full stinger dripping
crisping through to the core--

He was crisp.
(I moved him with my thumb)
A little corpse, curled up and dry.
And I thought that with some water
or a drop of saliva
he would tremble, arch, then fly.

Taking the Q Bus To The Atheneum

Finding a seat
it's every person for himself

the only one left
is next to a large lady
tracing the window
with a dirty finger
her wire hair close enough
to scratch my cheek

her odor warm
a drop of fresh blood
from a cut on her knee
runs down her leg
absorbed by her olive green stocking

I move to the edge of the seat

she is laughing and talking
to no one

the faces around me
smiling and shaking--
doll heads in a wheelbarrow.

Steven Guglielmi wrote these poems in English 246 and 299. His poetry won co-honorable mention in the 1988 Wallace Steven Competition. Steven is a 4th term English major.

POEMS BY ANNE GRAZIANO

Daedulus' surfing son, with spoils

The silty film that spots the pane
And the little wriggles of light-headed
Self-doubt, are:
are, the things of things which make
the day unearth and confound in dirt.

I remember sitting in the sky,
with a pina colada in hand,
The earth far below the upholstered chair,
Feeling like a goddess of light and dark
and sophistication.

And in a rickety machine
We flew next to the sun,
And managed only to singe
the ends of eyelashes and armhairs.

Then this head of mine became beclouded
and twisted in labyrinthine emotions,
of hate,
and other unlikely things,

I grasped the grassy meal and gravel,
which was also stuck in my knee,
after I feel on my face.

Luminiferous ether was the something that held everything,
Now it's nothing,
So us atoms float.

de to a day spent on wood and concrete

We sat here
And the brine juice
And the thin, plastic feel
Of your lips
Roused my soul to a plateau of feeling,

of the ingenious imperfection
of our little, rolling lives.

My tattered wool
Incensed the milky softness
Of your cheek
And those caffeine nerves
Ate up the complacency
That no one has.

I'd abandon my earthly form,
Roam as a transparent image
A conduit of the inching desire,
That is a flame, a pregnant wind,
A little word
I'd break up my vision of diligence
And worth and home,
Throw up my world
To fall like cards or leaves or
bricks,
Crush to extract
The little piney liquid that is me,
And pour it into your ear,
So you could feel me.

Anne Graziano is a graduating Senior in English. She won co-honorable mention in the 1988 Wallace Steven Competition.

Inside Orwell

An Essay by J. Nardizzi

Everything about which he felt sincerely and did not deceive himself, everything that constituted the core of his life, was going on concealed from others...every man led his real, most interesting life under cover of secrecy...

"The Lady with the Pet Dog"
Anton Chekhov

Is any comment more appropriate for George Orwell than this? That Orwell was a decent man is an observation often made by his biographers, but after reading the commentaries another fact can be asserted: George Orwell was a very secret man. Biographers differ in their accounts of his life. For example, Peter Stansky and William Abrahams maintain in The Unknown Orwell that Orwell's difficulty with women is reflected by the fact that, while Orwell desired certain Burmese women, he was never able to make his feelings known. Against this assertion we have Bernard Crick, who, in George Orwell: A Life, writes that Orwell did become involved with some Burmese women. The facts given by Orwell himself often jumble and clash with each other. For example, in George Orwell: A Critical Heritage, Jeffrey Meyers notes that Orwell wrote in a letter that "relations between the English and the Burmese were not particularly bad" (378). But why, Meyers asks, does Orwell write Burmese Days, a book depicting the seething tension caused by British rule? Did Orwell exaggerate the conditions in Burma just as he exaggerated the hardship of his early schooling days? An honest, decent man he undoubtedly was, but in his transformation from Eric Blair to George Orwell, did he shed some memories forever? Was George Orwell able to reach back and draw away the true memories of Eric Blair? While the biographies answer many questions, they also entangle even further the myth of George Orwell.

The most damaging evidence against Orwell's veracity as a writer shows us two views of St. Cyprians School: Orwell's memory of it and Blair's actual experience. "Such, Such Were The Joys" has been criticized for its biased account of the prep school environment; even Cyril Connolly, a virulent critic of public schools, admits that Orwell's account is warped and exaggerated (Miriam Gross, The World of George Orwell, 175.) As Stansky notes, doubt exists as to whether the bed-wetting incident actually happened to Orwell. Mrs. Vaughn Wilkes, whom Orwell depicts as a female Nazi figure in his story, was not held in such distaste by the other boys. Stansky writes that many of the boys felt great affection for this woman, who acted as a mother figure at the school (37). In fact, Mrs. Wilkes took Eric and some others to a beach for a picnic, a privilege accorded to few. Orwell never mentions this excursion. Stansky notes that Orwell had great affection for his mother, an affection he was not able to express. Evidently, this inability for expression was characteristic of Orwell, because Mrs. Wilkes says of young Blair, "There was no

warmth in him" (38). Thus the hardness of life at school was probably intensified by the rigid personality of Orwell. The errors in his account could be attributed to faulty memory, at least in part, but Orwell's frantic lambasting of the school hurts his credibility as a writer.

Another aspect of the hidden Orwell manifests itself in the guilt he felt over his involvement in Burma. As Stansky notes, Orwell never fully explained his reasons for traveling to Burma to become, of all things, an imperial policeman (151). Why a young man, already repulsed by the oppressive social system at the schools, would decide to become part of the instrumentality of the imperial government has never been understood. Malcolm Muggeridge writes in "The Knight of the Woeful Countenance" that Orwell had in him a "streak of violence," a surprising addition to Orwell's character as we know it (Gross, 171). Maung Htin Aung confirms this trait in "George Orwell in Burma." He relates a story about how the policeman Blair, after being knocked down accidentally on a crowded bus by a Burmese student, raised his cane and crashed it down across the young man's back (Gross, 24). Imagine this incident occurring on a London bus. Orwell is accidentally floored by an English student. Would he have smashed his cane down on the man in this case? No, because he is in England. Apparently, young Blair took advantage of his superior position in Burma, and this misuse of authority disgusted the older Orwell. The images of people punched in anger "haunted me intolerably...with an immense guilt" wrote Orwell in The Road to Wigan Pier (148). And yet, in the next sentence he justifies his actions -- "Orientals can be very provoking" (149). Once again, there is a strange contradiction: a man at once ashamed and defensive of his actions. Aung also points out Orwell's confused attitudes toward Burma. Burmese Days, he says, brings out Orwell's view of the ugliness of Burma and the "meanness" of the people (Gross, 21). This hatred fits oddly in a book by an author supposedly sympathetic to the Burmese plight. Burmese Days was Orwell's attempt to expiate his guilt over his role in Burma, but even after writing the story, his attitude to the country that shaped him so much is bewildering. The importance of the years 1922 to 1927, the period Orwell spent in Burma, cannot be underestimated. The Burmese years sowed the seeds of the philosophy that he exhibited in later works. Along with his philosophy was a sense of guilt whose imprint, as Jeffrey Meyers points out, Orwell carried with him for his entire life. (A Critical Heritage, 380). The Burmese years shaped and fashioned Orwell out of Blair, forming a clear, concise shape out of formless mass. Much that was Blair was discarded like old scrap metal. To understand Orwell, the discarded Blair must be studied. And it was during the years in Burma that young Blair went on trial and was tested. Studying Orwell's early adulthood, about which so many contradictions arise, means studying the central period of the man's growth. Despite the insights gleaned by biographers, he remains a highly enigmatic figure.

How is Orwell remembered today? A great novelist he is not. As William Steinhoff observes, Orwell is indebted to such earlier writers as Jack London and Eugene Zamyatin, whose images of the future Orwell incorporated into 1984 (George Orwell and the Origins

of 1984). As a stylist, however, he is unique. Undoubtedly, he wrote some of the cleanest, most athletic prose in the English language. Muggeridge wrote that "as an essayist he was incomparable" (Meyers, 360). But behind the crystalline exterior of his writing, how much of the interior Orwell is revealed? This man of contradictions, known as one of the most honest, decent men that ever lived, nonetheless inspired Kingsley Amis to say "dishonesty and hysteria...mar some of his best work" ("Orwell's Reputation" by David Pyrcie-Jones in Gross, 148). This man, who spent time among the tramps and the unemployed to see their lives, nonetheless has detractors who claim Orwell's attitude to the proles is one of "stale revolutionary romanticism" (Orwell, Raymond Williams, 78). This man, who studied miners first-hand to gain knowledge about the workers, is dismissed by Muggeridge, who says Orwell's accounts of the working class were "culled more from popular newspapers and magazines" than from reality (Meyers, 362). Orwell seems to inspire endless debate. One view of Orwell sees the saturnine, lonely writer of 1984, a novel of overpowering pessimism. Orwell seemed incapable of writing about a genuinely admirable character. Instead, all his characters are morbid, acted on and trodden down by events, and many critics see this as a reflection of his gloomy personality. Opposing this, we have the view of Orwell as the eccentric joker. Reading the accounts of Orwell, one gets the impression that there may have been a willful perversity on Orwell's part to mislead people about the events of his life. His sense of humor is often ignored and Stephen Spender's comment about Orwell being "Chaplinesque" seems perfect: Orwell looks slightly ridiculous in his old clothes, but he probably got the last laugh. The pictures of him in his last days are striking. Here he is, suffering from tuberculosis, puffing on a cigarette with the same stubbornness that a 350 pound man with 10 heart attacks to his credit devours another steak. Orwell probably took pleasure in exasperating people with his stubbornness.

Who is the real person behind the overpowering pessimism of 1984? Is it the eccentric who can proclaim, as Muggeridge says, such absurd things as "All tobaccoists are Fascists!"? Or is it the weary man doomed to write only stories of "flight and failure" as Raymond Williams says (39)? Orwell remains a mystery. Stansky says that Orwell gave everyone a "different share of the truth" (xix). This may be Orwell's joke on us: our world of People magazine, credit card ratings bureaus and Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous T.V. show cannot decipher the events of a life that occurred over 30 years ago. He would have been satisfied that, in a time where privacy has little value, people still attempt to put together the puzzle that is George Orwell.

J. Nardicci is an eighth semester major in English and wrote this paper for English 264.

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POEMS BY JOSEPH STINSON

the pink room
(a new york aids nursery)

life is pink

caged pink

choking pink

dying pink

life is touches

by fingers

hiding in

pink latex gloves

life is being fed

by shaking pink hands

life is this prison

behind pink plastic bars

life is crying

pink tears

no one dares wipe away

life is pink

caged pink

choking pink

sunset pink

pink close to the night.

the media days
on Oprah and Phil

A girl who thought
her home life was bad
ran away to the city
and was picked up by a hawk
and when she saw how bad
life in the city was
and ran home
she had AIDS.
That's sad
you're thinking
and you think
that you would cry
if you weren't reading this
and really heard
the voice of the girl
and you considered
that the story could happen.
I heard her voice
yesterday on Oprah
and between trips out of hearing range,
I heard it all.
And I thought myself
jaded beyond belief
because I couldn't cry
even though I wanted to.
It's a good thing

because Phil had on
rapists
and the parents of the victims
they had killed.
In the back of my mind
I curse myself
and thank God
that I'm jaded.

Joseph Stinson was Co-First Prize winner in the 1988 Wallace Stevens Competition. He is a Business administration major and finishing his freshman year. He wrote these poems in English 146.

Going Back to Glasgow-

On the night train
to a Scotland Macbeth had not dreamed of,
to a coldly industrial Glasgow
came the dream disturbing and pulsing at its center,
like a missile poised for launch.
In Grandfather's heatless and empty flat,
came visions of war--
of corpses holding bouquets of red poppies,
harbingers of the pyre.
The dream, obligatory as religion,
reappeared in April daylight at Saint Paul's,
as tourist girls laughed
during the service,
as the voices of choir boys,
like white Sevillian doves,
rose in flight to the dome.
I had felt this would come--
like a night train,
on this bright day
when the dream lent your ghost
to my conscience,
letting me mourn
when I was finally near enough,
with your Catholic ashes
giving me absolution.

-Untitled-

You've rolled out of the past
like a chauffeur-driven Packard
making a brief stop on the road
to New York,
following the sleek chrome woman,
leaning into the wind.
They drive on the wrong side of the road
here, and strangely-catalogued books wait
in the hands of whores
on street corners
where we've turned
walking home from underground.
During inebriate spring nights,
I speak to you,
while you lean over a book
or out a window,
occupied but listening
like rooms in transient hotels
in this cold city and in others.
We've told our stories--
like so many other tales
told between swallows of beer
and the hard shifting of gears on Cape Cod roads
late at night,
told in the hot insanity of seeing life
passing us on the inside.

-Depression Wedding-

I am too much like your dead.
I am black and white
like the wedding photograph
and give a smile like hers
I loved you less than she did
'though I'm less than demanding.
I remember the last time,
The sun hitting your brushed-chrome bed,
how I tried to let the light in behind your eyes,
how I mentioned Monet and you whispered
to me briefly,
that you preferred Raphael...
You go back to your aged and practiced fidgeting.
Though I am younger by four wars,
I survived the way she did.
I am too much like your dead.
When she died she killed you,
now I haunt your linoleum grave.

Lynne M. Vail wrote these poems abroad with the London Program. She is in her eighth semester as an English major.

BAMBOO STILTS

A Personal Essay by Chieko Katsu

I was busy wrapping dried lavers around rice balls which were made by my mother. She was now making omelets. I was so buoyant and cheerful. I was also hungry, but I could not eat these rice balls. These were for our lunch. My mother gave me a piece of omelet, guessing that I was hungry. But that piece just made me more hungry. She also knew that, and said, "You may eat just one rice ball." I responded to her smile, and took one. Father washing the car, listening to the car radio turned up to full volume. I took my bag, which contained my important things such as colored pens, a little plastic doll, and a necklace of beads. Then I got into the car and got out of it immediately because of the heat. Soon my mother rushed out of the house, carrying many bags. The trip began.

It was a bright summer morning, promising a sunny day. I was in the middle of my first summer vacation from an elementary school. My parents were on the vacation for the Bon festival, the Buddhist festival of the dead. We were going to visit my grandfather in kyushu, with my cousin's family, and visit our ancestor in a grave. We drove for about one hour and reached the Osaka port. Our companions had already arrived. I was so happy to meet my cousins, Masatoshi and Kumiko his younger sister. I concealed my joy behind a forced cool smile because of shyness. We soon opened up to each other while we were waiting for our parents to go through boarding procedures. We went on board a car ferry.

My cousins and I played cards for a while in the shop and ate the lunches made that morning. I do not remember how long we were in the ship. It rolled badly. I smelled gasoline. There was a long line to the bathroom. I had to be determined to line up when I went to the bathroom. After sleeping for a long time, I was told that we would reach the Kumamoto port soon. Kumiko got seasick. Masatoshi and I ran down the stairs to the parking deck and up the stairs again. We all went on deck. I expected the sunrise but it was noon. My parents must have seen the sunrise. I resented them for not waking me up. The sky was azure, stained with white here and there. I looked down at the deep green sea, but I could see only the surface. I felt the sea breeze and its smell. The ship was shattering and frothing the waves. Marine algae were twisting like laundry in a washing machine. Our grandfather was waiting for us at the port.

Before we left for his house, we went to the grave of our ancestor. It was in a heart of a mountain. There were some tombs, sandy, small, and rarely visited. My aunt and my mother watered the grave, offered sticks of incense, and arranged flowers while Grandfather pulled weeds. The rest of the people were just standing until my aunt said, "Help him!" Aedine mosquitoes seemed to bite only me. As my relations started to worship in squatting positions, I imitated them for a few seconds. Our grave was conspicuous among other ones when we left there. But it must be surrounded by weeds

and sandy now, because we have never been there since that time.

Grandfather's house was located in the countryside called Yamaga. There were woods of bamboo at the back of the house. And in front of the house, there were many small paddies and vegetable plots. Between them, a path stretched on towards a hill. The house was too large for one living alone. There were a main house and two small houses, one for visitors and the other a bathroom. All the buildings were made of wood. Tatami mats, straw mats, were shining and made rooms look clean.

Grandfather made two sets of bamboo stilts for us. One had higher foot-holds than the other. They had grown up straight to the sky, and did not now kink. Their joints were telling a long history of their life. They were different from my stilts. Mine were plastic. The bamboo stilts were strong, heavy and thick. On mine, it was easy to slip when I had sweat in my hands; the bamboo stilts fitted well to my hands. I like the noise they made when I walked on them best of all. Kumiko and I played with the shorter ones by turns. It was so funny the way she went on them, walking with her bottom stuck out and sticking out her tongue. I tried not to stick out my tongue, but I could not stop sticking out my bottom. Masatoshi rode the higher ones well and walked around us. I wanted to try the higher ones. I stepped onto a porch while my cousins were supporting stilts. I dropped the bamboo and put my right leg on the foot-hold. The more I put my weight on my right leg, the more the bamboo stilts vibrated. I toppled to the ground while still gripping them. I could not walk again until it was starting to get dark. Masatoshi gave me detailed advice. He was so kind to make me a good stilt-walker. Kumiko was using the other set by herself and sometimes became tired of playing and went into the house. When we smelled sukiyaki for dinner I could walk well at last.

It was the best dinner I ever had in my life. I did not drink too much, because I could not go to the bathroom, which was in detached house all by itself. We slept well in the scent of camphor which came from bedclothes.

The next morning we tried to walk on the stilts again. Kumiko also tried the higher ones. I could not do it again at first. We had to leave there before noon. She and I were anxious to use the stilts. While our parents watched and waited for us, each of us could walk only once. Controlling ourselves, we started to go back to our house. Grandfather was raising his hand as he stood by the bamboo stilts, leaning against the wall casually.

Chieko Katsu wrote this in summer school in English 146. She was a visiting student from Japan.

POEM BY CHRISTINE JOPEK

A LETTER SHE WANTED TO WRITE

(-1-)

mama,

i think i'm dying.
i've emptied all the dresser and desk drawers
and can't find any pens,
nobody in the reflections of trees
to take care of the cuts in my hands.
i've got a mouthful of birds
it hurts to swallow

it's raining
heavy stones
(without windows or doors: i know it's raining

you saw me tripping at the edge
a bird trying to fly
through glass
reflection translucent and fused, but

could still see the raining in my soul
looked like you wanted to say something
or touch me
but you stagger, mama,
do you think this could be
a chimerical thing?

(-2-)

i'm living from echoes
looking for a voice

(-3-)

Professor X
said there's no need
to write poetry
too many poets already
such-and-such a place receives
three million poems a day
THREE million
who has the time to read them all?

the poor post man with
three million poems on his back
like some Christ
carrying the suffering of the world
mama, someone should let
those poems free.

(-4-)

they think i have some
disease. some carcinoma
eating away,
my mind:
flotsam in black waters
arms outstretched in night
i long for quixotic stars
sinking in the chasm
between images.

the chrysanthemums you sent me, mama,
i forgot to water them.

(-5-)

do you think tears
or fever
can purge
memory?

you held my small hands up
in darkness blanketed mine
with moonshadows and
branches swaying on the walls
arms collapsing
before touching.

i couldn't sleep then either, mama,
called you all night
to catch black penumbras of birds.
you bathed my forehead with cold
moist cloths
quieted my hands
said you would catch them.
mama, mama
why have they all gone?

(-6-)

there is an old woman
weeping poems
onto attic walls

everyone seems nervous;
pretends it's
refrigerator noise.

(-7-)

mama,

i'm dying again
everything had all gotten better.
i could even sing!
the birds flew from my mouth
shook the sky with feathers
filled the moon with light.
my hands didn't even hurt then.

i don't know how things come to this.
in a shiny white room
headaches pound my eyelids open and
i'm starting to swallow trees
branches catch in my throat.

you saw me running through fields
the other day, mama,
searching for an edge
i imagined i'd feel so beautiful
falling over stone pillars
Isis searching the river for my pieces
so hard to keep together, mama,
i still can't find any pens.

(-8-)

last leaves.
i shake the trees:
the last tattered yellow
flags won't let go.

where am i going, mama?
frost-slicked grass
numbs my feet
the milkweed silk clings

to Buddha-bellied pods:
difficult survival.
this is not an awakening.
no one here.

(-9-)

they are staring
i think
at the cuts in my hands

(-10-)

driving by the cemetery today
clutters of birds
swim from trees into
patterns

tombstones smiling:
broken teeth in the mouth of hills:
windows to crawl in:
my thoughts:
black wings pumping
heavily in the rain.

the moonlight
through my window now
holds me in sleep
tears through me
like a piece of glass.
i don't want to die anymore.

is this a turning point
turning me in stillness?
have i won fighting
what i know
will come back.
maybe catch me
off guard.

(-11-)

mama,

i am scared
they may watch me
from all corners
with blue-volt fingers.

tell me they can't touch
my silent prayers
with their blue lightening.

the blue shears of glass
behind the stars
look lonely.

do you think it'd be easier
falling through holes
where there used to be words?

Christine Jopek is a Junior in English and Co-Second Prize winner in the 1988 Wallace Stevens Competition. She wrote this poem in English 246.

IS IT STILL IN YOUR HOROSCOPE?

An Essay by Timothy Loftus

If today is your birthday you probably woke up early this morning. Although Gemini and Pisces individuals figure prominently, you may have nothing to do with either. If you maintain calm today, a member of the opposite sex will have something important to say to you; otherwise, an aura of confusion and tension will scatter forces. You are a sensitive, touchy, cold, yet caring person. Lunar position intensifies if you plan to go clamming in the near future.

Yes, that is an unfair shot, especially coming from a liberal, open-minded college student. So, doing as I was taught to do, I looked deeper into this astrology thing to learn more about it. Exact birth date, time and place in hand, along with \$40 in pocket, I marched to get my horoscope worked out. This, I found out, is a complicated, time-consuming process which requires that you know the right ascension (sort of a celestial longitude) of all the planets and the sun and moon on the exact time and day you were born. With this knowledge, the talented astrologer begins her work. All twelve signs of the zodiac are involved as well as further divisions of your planetary chart. You end up with planets in zodiac signs and houses which then tell you all about yourself.

As character traits emerged from this reading I began to get more excited. I was hearing things that really fit into my life; strong parental influence, a love of good food and cooking, interest in yoga and meditation, involved in higher education and a concern for problems of humanity. The list went on and on. Now I was getting worried -- can this stuff be right? Well, it could, but I wasn't convinced. I learned more.

I realized that astrology had been around for a long time -- thousands of years. I even knew that 12% of all Americans took astrology seriously according to a recent Gallup poll. I wasn't convinced, but began to understand how ancient peoples thought that stars controlled life. The helical rising of a star is that date when a star is first visible at dusk and is the same date every year. This fact might lead one to associate happenings with star risings and even to think that the rising star caused the event. People have been studying these astrological happenings for at least 3000 years. In those ancient times it was not uncommon for people to predict futures by other means as well: by looking at migrating birds or studying the intestines of a freshly sacrificed animal. These forms of predicting the future have long been dismissed and even laughed at -- so how is it that belief in astrology has persisted?

The path which the sun follows through the sky each year is called the ecliptic. Nestled around this path are the fixed positions of the zodiac constellations. Roughly 4000 years ago these positions, of the 12 zodiac signs, were given their current names. The ancient astronomers noticed that the first day the sun appeared in the northern hemisphere (the vernal equinox) was March 21. They

designated this point to be the first point of Aries; and so it stands. Today in your horoscope you'll see that March 21 to April 19 is Aries. A few hundred years after this astrological system was set up, a man named Hipparchus discovered a thing called precession. This is a wobble in the earth's (or any planet) rotation caused by external sources such as the sun. This wobble changes the first point of Aries (and all the other constellations). So, now if you follow the path of the sun from March 21 to April 19 you will find that it is in Pisces for most of the time! 4000 years from now no one knows where the first point of Aries will be, but chances are that it will not be where it is supposed to be.

Two other astronomical facts also add some challenges to astrology. One is that the stars themselves move independently. So, thousands of years from now the constellation patterns will have changed. At that point, astrologers will have to alter their interpretations to fit the new constellations. Also, when humans live on another planet, Mars for example, that planet will no longer be seen moving through the stars. But, a new one will: Earth! Again, astrological rules and character traits will have to be changed and invented to fit this new planet. However, this periodic redefinition of interpretations of astrological happenings will directly affect our understanding of astrology.

Clearly, from a scientific viewpoint, astrology is easily refuted. But, still being a liberal, open-minded college student I believe that science is not always the final frontier. Some things must simply go unexplained. Some things are just not of this realm: An Indian medicine man who accurately diagnoses disease by listening to your pulse (albeit he listens for twenty minutes) and closely examining your urine, runners who participate in thousand mile ultra-endurance events put on by Sri Chinmoy, and yogis who can control their heart-rate are examples. I realized that I had to go deeper still. So, I hashed it out with one who really believes -- a real astrologer.

She was as normal as the next person, but she really believed. I felt that if she couldn't convince me that no one could. We both saw some kind of trend in which astrology is gaining popularity. I learned that a man called the Cosmic Muffin broadcasts a syndicated radio show from the Boston area. I also learned that as broad and general as newspaper astrology is, it still has redeeming qualities. For example, right now Mercury is in retrograde, and that means Scorpio individuals have trouble communicating. All Scorpions everywhere. For a believer, the daily newspaper astrology column would warn everyone. Then I was hit with the real clincher: her main reason for being an astrologer was a need to help others. Astrology was the manifestation of this need! She told me that many astrologers have a background in psychology, telling me that many others have that same deep need to help.

With all this information in my brain and on the pages of my notebook, I was ready to decide: Do I or don't I believe? No. Sure, we are all living in very trying times and predictions of an astrologer could be comforting. It would be nice and easy to sit

back and let the celestial forces take control. But, I can't. I can't believe that my future lies in anyone's hands but my own. I am perfectly content to let my astrologer friend and people like her go on believing and letting them do their own thing in their own world. My astrologer friend is satisfying her need to help others and if all goes well I'll satisfy my need in my own way.

Yes, millions of people turn to the comics page and peruse their horoscope, but do not know that the predictions have to do with the relative positions of the sun, moon, stars, and planets. To these millions the horoscope gives them a plan of attack for the day or some breakfast table conversation. From now on, it will give me a smile and a thought that someone, somewhere is helping someone else.

Timothy Loftus wrote this paper for English 291. He is a graduating English major.

POEM BY MARY ELLEN OLSEN

I ride motorcycles through foggy towns
helmetless,
in his heavy leather jacket,
arms about his chest;
stay up all night
drinking cold beer and smoking.
I wake in warm beds
moist with sweat and smells;
I am esed awake by sunlight
drowsy in the nest of his limbs
and later I fly down the highway
through a kaleidoscope of colors
hair rustled by wind.

Sins string like pearls
in sorry chains
about my neck

Each grain a sin of sand
smoothed in milky
twilight layers

I cower from altar light,
barefoot, arms clutching knees,
curled between cool cement corners.

Mothers and Fathers
shifting on knot hard pews
spit-up Sunday hymns
and pinch curious children
to silence.

I am Judas
a gutter whore
with ragged dress
and bloody feet.
I weep on knees
down the red church isle
cold hands clasped;
scorn the tingle of finger tips at
my neck for the toad-like pressure
of a priest at my shoulder.

I am alive
Body and Blood burn
through Me.

Mary Ellen Olsen is an eighth semester English major. She wrote this poem for herself.

POEM BY TERRENCE ROETHLEIN

PALE IRONY

One summer I lifted the white coffin a young boy
From a chapel to a black station wagon.
Made of many layers of milky metal
Were the unyielding tiers of deadly sterility
Laid down by a pair of neutral Titan hands.
The sculptor, apparently, saw white as a testament
of uncorrupted youth unfairly struck down.
But instead, design screamed out in discontent
At this frantic, storebought attempt
To mask the honesty of death.

He had ridden his bike into a flooded ditch
Where he lay submerged, unconscious.
The muddy margin of water outlined his face,
Like the frame around the portrait
Of some anemic noble.

He was found and laid in a hospital bed
Where he functioned, comatose, for a time.
Nurses wrapped him tightly in a sheet
Knowing they would use it again,
Not for warming his bluish skin
But for covering his sleeping head.

A white coffin was chosen.
Yet when it emerged,
The summer sun shivered
In the shadow of this beacon
Of silver non-light.

Terrence Roethlein is a Junior in Journalism. He is currently
studying in Mexico. He wrote this poem for himself.

POEM BY CHRISTINE JOPEK

JANUARY 22

re-curring themes
stale as cigarette breath

i can't remember

how to spell the same words
and get lost in the same places
following arrows and exit signs
up circular staircases
finding new walls

man, wherever you are
who nailed these nails
you lie
this is not the WAY OUT

these maps leave out turns
and i am tired
of turning and choosing and
refuting concepts
of determinism and original sin

the air is stale and
full of eyes

it's hard to fall asleep at night

the door to the balcony is taped up.
the cracks in the windows
stuffed with crumpled "Guardians"
with articles missing--
"Irish Soldier's Death
Was Not Accidental"
"Demand for End
to Wall Shootings"
"Deadline Given
over Toxic Waste Plants"
"Hostages to Die
if U.S. Hits Lebanon"
"Salvadorean Rebels Turn
Their Guns on Civilians"--

i have them
in my drawer
with pieces of papers
he wanted to throw away
it was not ME with him
IT WAS NOT ME

what they think
(open mouthed and pointing)
doesn't change anything--
does it?

POEM BY CHIEKO KATSU

To an ant

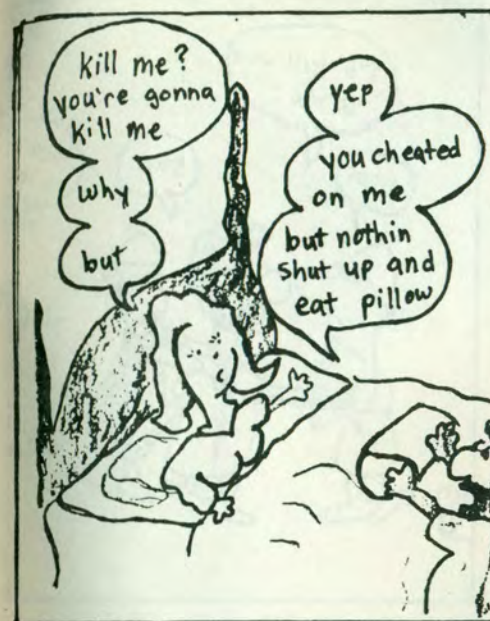
I am sorry.
I did it
not because I tried to kill you
but because I was scared.
You bit me in the left arm suddenly.
I think it must have no offence.
You may have thought honey was spread
on my arms
for they were so glistening with sweat.
Or as the place where you landed
by accident
rocked beneath you violently,
You had to catch hold of it tightly.
I did not notice you until you bit me.
I was just surprised by you.
I sent you flying with my fingers.
My arms sometimes itches even now.
So I worry about you
if I broke your legs
or you have got a straight back.
I am sorry.
Please take good care of yourself.

A PARODY OF OTHELLO



BY
STEVEN MCKLUSKEY







Steven McCluskey created this parody as a project in English 230.
He is a 6th term English major.

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