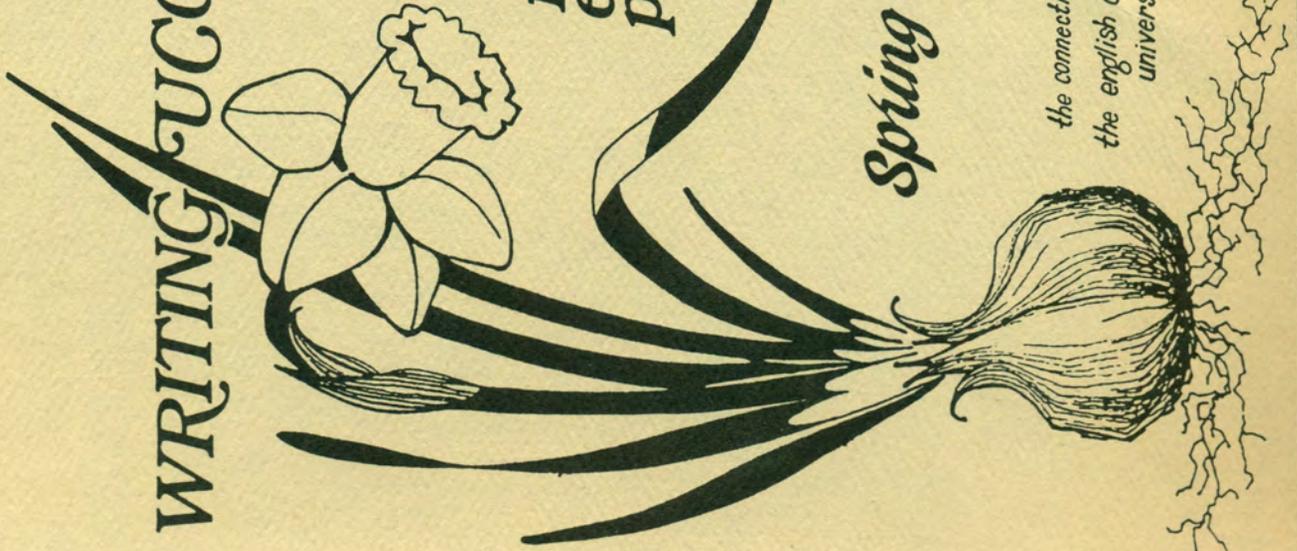


WRITING @ UCONN

fiction
essays
poetry

Spring 1990

the connecticut writing project
and
the english department of the
university of connecticut



P.O.H.

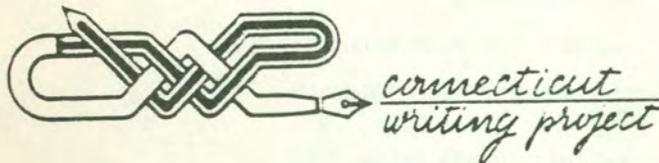
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This eighth issue of WRITING UCONN has been prepared by Matthew N. Proser and Scott Bradfield, who reviewed and selected the pieces to be printed. After selection, Kim Jackson of the Connecticut Writing Project assisted in this issue's production. The cover design is by Pat O'Hara of the UConn Co-op. Adam Knight and Doris Marques typed the manuscript, and the booklet itself was produced at University of Connecticut Publications.

Our objective remains the publication of the best student writing done at UConn, and we once again invite undergraduates to submit work for consideration. In this issue we have also included a piece of graduate writing which seemed especially pertinent to university life. 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.



TWENTY-FOUR HOURS

Matt Finch

Friday Dave invited friends over from Wareham and we went to the beach to check out some early fireworks. Afterwards we made a fire and drank. A town cop was presiding, but he didn't bother us. Dave's girls were all too old for me. At around two the cop left and we climbed into our cars and headed back home.

The next morning I was awakened by Bob with his car outside. I couldn't figure out what he was checking on, but he kept revving it up and down. In between he let it sit in a noisy idle. He did this just about every day. Bob's license was revoked, the car was off the road, and he had nothing better to do. I tried to shut out the noise, but it was no good. I got up and didn't say anything, 'cause things are kind of touchy between me and him.

Dave was asleep in the kitchen with his head on the table. I went over and shook him. He didn't move or say anything but he could have been faking it, so I got a cockroach out of one of the traps. It twitched its brown, revolting self between my fingers. I put it on the back of Dave's neck. He didn't even flinch, so it was no good. I sat down next to him and started in with the beer.

I was feeling okay. Presently Bob came in and handed me my mail from Friday. My father had sent me a check, but the banks were closed so I put it on the refrigerator. There was also a letter from Diane, and it said,

Dear Ray,

I'm so glad I got your postcard! It's so boring at home. My mom got me a job in her office, and it sucks! But at least it's air-conditioned. When are you coming? My parents will be away all weekend and I think it would be great if you came home and we could spend some time together. Debbie's got a new car, but it'll be here the whole time. I think I can get Mike (you remember Mike) to get it started for me . . .

She said she missed me, to call if I was coming home. It was a long, long letter. Toward the end I stopped trying to make sense of it.

I was hungry, I started to eat some toast but it tasted lousy with beer. Dave wouldn't be up for a while, so I went into the front room and banged on the old TV. There was a

talk show on and the guests were talking about their near-death experiences. Being dead, explained one woman, was very, very warm and very, very bright. There was also a gospel show on and they were singing a hymnal. It sounded rich. Bob came in and had a look at it. "Niggers," he said. Just to bug him I started to flick the TV through all the channels. I could see him looking at me out the corner of my eye, but I just stared at the tube. I saw some toothpaste, a badger in his den, a therapeutic chair, a rocket on the pad, insurance for retirees, the Statue of Liberty, G.I.'s in a rice field. All kinds of stuff. When I got it back to the gospel show I killed the set. I went back into the kitchen without looking at him.

"Dave. Hey, Dave."

He sucked in some spit. It was a good sign.

"Dave, man, get up." I pushed his shoulder and he started to slide off the chair.

"How you feelin', Dave? You feel okay there, Davey?"

He sat up, rubbing his head. I pulled open his eyelids and he slapped my hands away. "'Samatter, Dave?"

"Fuuuck you." He stretched and yawned. "Oh. What time is it?"

"Time to take me to look at my car," I said. He got up and brushed past me into the bathroom. The shower started.

Bob was out of the house by this time so I went and put a tape on the stereo. It was a metal tape, and I turned it way up. Dave started singing in the shower. It was pretty horrendous. When he got out of the bathroom, he looked almost normal. I could tell he didn't have a hangover. That was fine.

It was about one-thirty by the time we finally got out to look at the car. We headed over the bridge and were in Hyannis in about twenty minutes. The roads in there were bad. All the Boston accountants were down on safari, and the senator was supposed to be in town. It took us about an hour to find this guy's house, and he had the car sitting in the back yard.

"I understand this engine has been rebuilt," I said.

"No, this isn't the original." His moustache annoyed me. I didn't think I wanted to buy the car from him. "The original one blew up on the Pike. This one's from a '76 Camino."

All three of us got in and drove around the block a couple times. It was a pretty sound, but there were too many replacement parts on it. I made him a low offer.

"I don't think I can take that," he said.

I gave him our number and Dave and I drove off. We crawled through the middle of Hyannis, and it was hotter than Hades. The air above the hood was a bank of flickering heat. We talked about the car for a while, and then Dave said he wanted to check out the Barnstable fair before it closed up. We decided to head over that night.

Bob was still out when we got home, and I started to hit the booze. We weren't supposed to drink when he was around 'cause he was on the wagon. By five of the clock I was pretty loaded, and I went out to examine Bob's crappy Merc. I sat in it and raced the engine for a while. Big deal. Then I got out and sat on the warm hood. I felt okay. The house looked funny with the light like it was. I closed my eyes and summer came around me, and I was everything, and Dave was lighting firecrackers behind the house. I thought about Diane and got slightly aroused. I had to work. But I could blow it off . . . picking up work is like picking apples off a tree.

Presently I could see the bats all coming out from under the eave. I went in and took a shower and Dave made macaroni.

"Bob tell you where he was going?" he asked me.

"Naw. No idea."

"He was supposed to go see Scaiano about work," Dave said with his mouth full. His eyes looked like marbles. I had nothing to say to marble-eyes about this.

"When do you want to leave?" I said after a while.

We left at eight-thirty. I was sobered up a little. The sky was lit up around the fair, and the rides flashed fluorescent blue, yellow, red through the dark trees. We jumped the fence behind a chattering generator and Dave made a beeline for the fake-gold vendors. He held a chain up for me to see.

"Tacky shit," I said. The woman behind the table glared at me. I grinned.

"Don't listen to him," Dave said, and bought the thing. Then we went to check out the games. Dave tagged these two girls and we followed them up and down. They shot little

basketballs for a t-shirt, but they blew it and laughed. Next they did the thing with the BB guns. This time we laughed when they screwed up. They rolled their eyes at us, but we were on to them alright. When we threw baseballs, where they clock your time, they were on the side talking to each other.

"Last ball, son," the old guy said to me. I threw, and it was a seventy-one. He handed me a brand-new baseball.

"Want a baseball?" I said to the one closest.

"Oh, you keep it," she said. I was starting to like the way she looked. I turned to give it to some little kid. When I turned back, they were gone. Dave was standing there with a baseball in his hand.

A little later we saw them in line for food. I slipped up behind them and laid a twenty on the counter. I looked the fat-lady vendor in the eye.

"I'm from Goodwill," I said. I buy food for little-girl teasers."

She stared at me blankly. The little girl I liked laughed. The other one just said, "Oh my God," low. Dave came up and made a joke. I didn't hear what it was.

* * *

After a couple of minutes my girl and I lost Dave and her friend and we got on the ferris wheel. "I haven't been on one of these in so long," she said.

"What's your name?" I asked her.

"Lisa."

"Where you livin'?" The ferris wheel was taking us up backwards into the nighttime. A moth fluttered around her hair.

"I'm staying with my sister in Yarmouth. Um. What's yours?"

"My address?"

She laughed. "No, what's your name?"

"Ray."

"Ohhh."

"What?"

But she wouldn't answer me. I took her hand and lit a cigarette.

"Oh, you're cool," she said.

I had nothing to reply to this. Then she asked me who my girlfriend was. I had nothing to say to that either. I just looked at her. After that we didn't say much. I leaned back and concentrated on her hand. She had one tiny ring on her pinky, and her nails were short. It was a fairly delicate hand, but she could squeeze pretty hard with it. The ferris wheel went around five or six times. Towards the end of the ride we were looking straight at each other.

We got off and couldn't even walk straight. We kept close to each other but there didn't seem to be anywhere definite we wanted to go. Presently we saw Lisa's friend and Dave playing one of the games. We stood out in the middle of the thoroughfare and watched. Dave won a t-shirt that said "Bud" on it. He had two or three others tied around his waist. They came over when they saw us standing there.

"Where ya been, kids?" Dave hollered. His girl took a nip from a plastic flask.

"Around," I said. "Here, there, and everywhere."

"Yeah, I'll bet," said Dave's girl.

"I didn't catch your name," I said to her.

She told me it, but I don't remember what it was. I asked to see her flask. It was about a quarter full of rum.

"I'm hungry," Dave said. We all were. We ordered four big kielbasa grinders and Cokes and laughed when we couldn't finish them. We were a little ways from the noise of the fairground. Across the field I kept thinking I saw horses or deer running past through the trees . . . we all talked about our summers. After a while Lisa and her friend broke away and were talking a little ways off.

"This fair sucks," said Dave.

"Lemme see your chain." He unclasped it and handed it to me. I examined it for a minute.

"Did you guys have fun?" He was a little interested in Lisa.

"Yeah. Did you?"

"She's okay."

The girls came back. The friend whispered something into Dave's ear. He looked at her funny, but a second later his keys were in my hand.

"See you in the morning, pal," he said, and they were gone.

Lisa sat down and started picking at one of the kielbasa.

"I guess this means we get to go home and play cards," I said.

She smiled without looking at me. "Yeah, I guess it does."

We held hands again as we walked to Dave's car. Lisa kept stopping to look back at the lights. On the way home we stopped off at the beach to watch the big fireworks. We talked and kissed a little. The whole air around us was filled with whistles and bangs. We stayed about a half hour, and I drove pretty slow the rest of the way home, and Lisa told me all about what she was doing with her life. Her brother-in-law was supposed to fix her up with a decent waitressing job for the summer. Her voice was cool and welcome after the heat of the day and the noise of the fair. After a while I stopped listening to what she was saying and let the sound of it merge with the noise of the road and the insects in the passing trees. Shiny raccoon eyes flashed a couple of times.

When we finally got home Bob was still out so we stayed down in the front room.

"I don't feel like watching TV," I said.

"Neither do I."

"Would you care for a drink?"

"Um," she said. "I'd like a beer, if you have any." I got her a beer and opened one for myself. I sat down next to her on the couch. "It's funny how you meet people sometimes," I said, and kissed her a hard one on the mouth. After a couple of minutes she got up.

"Where's your bathroom?"

When she came back things started happening pretty fast. Everything was fine. Then I heard the door open and the cat jumped on my back. I swatted her onto the floor.

"God damn," I said. Bob had turned the light on.

The cat sat down and looked at me with a bloody squirrel hanging out of her mouth.

"Gross," said Lisa.

"How's it goin' Ray?" said Bob loudly.

I rubbed my eyes. "I'm alright. This is Lisa."

"Hey, Lisa. Hey, Ray. Boy I feel pretty fuckin' good." He sat down in the easy chair. "Lookit that fuckin' cat."

Bob looked hard at us for a second. "Where's yer shirt, Ray?" he bawled. "What's goin' on in my house?"

"Everything's fine, Bob."

"That's good." He sat there and avoided my eyes.

I looked at Lisa and shook my head.

"Scaiano give you work, Bob?"

He banged the coffee table with his palm. "I'm gonna kill that son-of-a-bitch."

"Guess not," whispered Lisa.

"I tell you, I'm just gonna twist that son-of-a-bitch's head right off." He started telling us about Khe Sahn. Scaiano and Vietnam were somehow connected in Bob's mind.

"Let's go outside," I whispered to Lisa. We went out to the driveway.

"I'm sorry," I said. "I thought he was gone for the night." I was holding her in my arms.

"It's alright," she said.

"No. It sure ain't." I laughed.

After a while she said, "I think I better go."

I didn't say anything. I just held her tighter. She broke away after a minute and went into the house. I leaned on Dave's hood. The metal was still warm under my palms . . . and the sandy driveway was cool under my feet. I thought I could feel ants between my toes. I looked at the yellow front-room window, and saw Lisa standing there with a plastered-on smile. Bob's voice carried dimly through the air.

Lisa came back out. "Are you alright?" she said.

"No."

"Come on," she said. "I have to go."

Halfway to Yarmouth we started talking a little. This time I was telling her things about myself. All of a sudden she'd become interested in my life, my family, my inner self. I didn't mind I guess. I avoided the touchier questions.

I gave her my number outside her sister's house, and she left hers up on the dash. I didn't know that I'd call her. If I decided not to decide, Dave would clean his car out during the week and I could get rid of the problem that way. I thought about this on the way home.

Bob had pulled his car under the bay and he was messing with the distributor. I looked at him standing under the light for a couple of seconds as I walked to the door. Bugs flew all around his head. We didn't speak.

I went up to my room and slipped into a long, slow burn. Bob started up his car and revved it for a minute. I picked up an old magazine off the floor. I mulled over a couple articles. Then I stared at the cracks in the ceiling and fell asleep.

When I woke up I'd only been asleep for about forty-five minutes. I don't know why, but the anger was all let out of me. I felt cool and calm. After a while, I noticed that Bob's car was still running down outside my window. I listened to it. It was steady. It was turning over a thousand times a minute. Kind of amazing. Running, running, running . . . I got up, went down to the kitchen and made myself a sandwich. When I looked out the window, I couldn't see Bob. I couldn't see inside the car. I finished the sandwich and made another. I was so damn hungry. I thought about going out to check the situation, but I was too hungry. Afterwards I went into the front room and turned on the TV. The noise of the engine was persistent. I just kept watching the police show they had on. It was a pretty interesting one.

Matt Finch is a 5th semester English major. This story took first prize in the 1989 Hackman Memorial Competition.

THE VEGETABLE MAN

Michael Neckerman

Ray looked around and sighed. Being in the hospital wasn't all that bad. At least he was away from his crazy friends. The friends that helped put him here. The friends that helped get his body battered to a pulp. Broken in every place imaginable and some that weren't.

The nurse walked in. She was smiling that smile that said, "I just boinked a doctor in the laundry room."

"You're going to have a new roommate!" she said.

Looking at the other side of the room which had been empty since he arrived Ray said, "But I was just getting to know the last one."

"Ooh aren't you funny! Don't worry he's a quiet one."

Ray let his thoughts wander and dozed off.

*

When Ray awoke his roommate was in his room. A doctor was intently looking him over. Ray called over to the doctor,

"What is his name?"

"Curt. Curt El Bategev."

"Does he always smile in his sleep like that?"

"Sleep? Oh he's not sleeping. He's in a coma."

"Coma? Why did he go into a coma?" Ray asked aloud. "And why did he get put in my room?" Ray thought silently.

"Oh it's quite a story, really," replied the doctor, but I've got a major game of golf in an hour so I can't tell it to you. Flag a nurse down and ask her to tell you the story of The Vegetable Man. Better yet - his friend comes to visit once a week - tomorrow in fact. Ask him. Chow." And he was off.

Ray looked over at The Vegetable Man. The Vegetable Man kept smiling.

*

The next morning Ray was awakened by the voice of a young man who was leaning over The Vegetable Man. "Curt? Curt are you in there? I brought the missus some flowers." Ray just stared until the man looked at him. "Oh, hello. My name is Henry Sugarapsa."

"I'm Ray Misterex."

"Nice to meet you Ray. I see you've met Curt."

"The Vegetable Man."

"Yes, that's right."

"Why do they call him that - other than the fact that he's in a coma?" Then it hit him. What if that's the only reason they call him that. Henry will think he's making fun of him. Ray, being the brave, courageous man that he is, quickly feigned sleep.

"Ray? Ray? It's okay. Everybody calls him that. Don't sweat it. It's not because he's a vegetable. Which he is. There's more to it than that."

Ray feigned consciousness. "What do you mean?"

"Look at him. Does he look like a normal comatose patient to you?"

"Well other than that damn smile he always wears - yes."

"That's exactly it. He's having a happy ending."

"How did all this come about?"

"It all started Friday evening when Curt and I were home watching Baywatch. He had just broken up with his girlfriend so he was in a pretty bummin mood. I suggested that we take root in front of the television and drink ourselves to oblivion. He liked the idea so we did it. After, we got hungry so we went snooping in his refrigerator. The only thing we could find was this terrible salad with asparagus in it. I passed out before eating any.

The next morning I awoke to find Curt smiling and reading the paper. He said, "How was your trip?"

"Pardon?"

"Henry, what happened after we ate the salad?"

"I don't know. I didn't have any."

"Henry, after I ate the salad I went on this incredible journey."

"You left the house?"

"No. At least I don't think so. But I was at the beach. It was so beautiful."

"I think it must have been something in the salad."

"There's still some left."

"Let's go to the beach." I laughed.

After we finished the salad the only place I wanted to go was the bathroom to throw up the worst salad I had ever tasted. Then I looked at Curt. He was just staring into space with this ridiculous looking smirk pinned to his face. After a while he came out of it. Just in time, too, because my finger was hitting the first 1 after dialing 9.

"Curt! What happened?"

"I went again. Didn't you?"

"No. Curt we've got to have a doctor check you out. That's not natural."

"It's so beautiful though."

"Curt - it could be deadly. Promise you won't do it again."

"I won't promise but I will see a doctor if you're that worried."

"Great. My friend is a salad addict."

*

The weeks that followed were wild ones. Girl problems still plagued us but we coped. Curt made the appointment like I asked but I also knew he was trying to figure out what sent him on his little trip. One day I got a call. "Asparagus! It was the Asparagus, Henry!"

"Curt, leave that shit alone."

"No way. This is too good."

"Listen Curt, your appointment is in two days. Try not to wig out before then, O.K.?"

"Yeah, O.K."

*

The next day I got good news. Curt called and said he had met this girl. He called her his dream girl. He said her name was Amil. I was really happy for him. I figured this might keep him out of trouble. Still, I was going to meet him at the doctor's office in a day.

*

When I arrived at the doctor's Curt was already there. Once again he was smiling. He was happier than I'd ever seen him. "Why are you smiling like that?" I asked him.

"I'm in love."

"Hey, that's great! You two are really hitting it off, huh?"

"Yup."

"Where did you meet this chick?"

"I told you. She's my dream girl."

"Oh no. You've got to be kidding me."

At that point the doctor called Curt into his office. Curt invited me along. After explaining the situation to the doctor, he took some blood tests and sent us back out in the waiting room.

"Curt, you can't be serious about this girl."

"More serious than I've ever been about anyone."

"She's not a real person."

"Yes, she is. How would you know, anyway? You can't even go."

"That's because there's nowhere to go."

"I've been romancing this girl now for a long time. This place I go to is very real and Amil's everything I want in a woman."

The scary part about this whole situation was that if you actually knew Curt you'd realize just how sane he sounded. He actually believed he was going somewhere. I was beginning to believe it, too. The doctor called us back into his office.

"Well, as far as my colleagues and I can determine, you have an acute allergy to asparagus. I know this sounds funny but you can't eat it any more because your next batch could kill you."

As we were walking out of the office I noticed the smile had been replaced by the look that Curt had before that fateful Friday night. "I'm never going to see Amil again." I tried to console him, but how could I? He had just lost his lover. It was almost like she had died. Then, with a terrible twinkle in his eye, he looked at me and said, "Henry, I've got to go back and say goodbye."

"No! Absolutely not. You heard the doctor!"

"Henry, Please . . . I'll never be happy again if I don't at least kiss her goodbye. You can be in there with me."

"You mean there, there?"

"No, I mean in the room with me if something goes wrong. Come on, Henry, tonight at seven. I promise this will be the last time."

"Well, short of calling the cops and telling them that my friend is about to OD on asparagus, I can't really stop you. Seven then."

*

At seven Curt and I were at his house. On the kitchen table lay the asparagus. "Thanks, Henry. I really appreciate this. No one else would understand."

"I don't understand, Curt."

"Are you ready?"

"Are you ready?"

"Yeah, see you in a little while."

"You'd better come back. If you don't I swear I'll find a way and come in there as her big ex-boyfriend."

"You got it, chief," he said as he started to munch away. The whole process took all of a minute and a half. His eyes

glazed over. He started to smile. He went to the beach. I went to the bathroom. The whole time he was gone I was worried but I watched his life signs carefully and they never changed. About two hours later he came to. "How was it?" I asked.

"We made love under the palm trees during sunset."

"And then you said goodbye?"

"She said she couldn't bear the thought of living without me."

"And then you said goodbye."

"We held hands and walked along the beach with only moonlight illuminating our path."

"And then you said goodbye."

"And then I said goodbye."

"Phew! I'm glad that's over with."

"Yeah, me too. Look, Henry, I really am grateful that you came tonight, but I'd like to be alone with my thoughts now."

"No problem. See you tomorrow, pal?"

"Yeah. Thanks again, Henry. You're a real friend."

*

And so I thought it was all over. He called within an hour of my arriving home. "Henry?"

"What?"

"I'm going to ask Amil to marry me."

"What? Curt don't do a thing until I get there."

"Hey. Relax, Henry. This is what I really want. I just called to tell you because if she says 'yes' you'll be the best man. In absentia, of course."

There he went again, making the whole thing sound so logical.

"What if she says 'No'?" I was trying to stall for time.

"Then I'll be back."

"But what about . . ."

"Henry, stop stalling for time."

"But I'm losing my best friend!"

"You knew we were going to get married someday."

"Yeah, but I was hoping it would at least happen in this universe."

"Just trust me on this one, O.K.? And do me a favor."

"What?"

"Don't call 9-1-1 and tell them that your friend is going to OD on an asparagus."

"I won't."

"Thanks, Henry. Goodbye and God bless."

"Bye, Curt"

It didn't take long for all those 9-1-1 people to arrive where I sent them. If only I had sent them to Curt's house instead of his neighbor's. Needless to say I jumped in my Ford Rambler and arrived before they did. On the kitchen table was a shopping bag full of asparagus remains. Curt was lying on the couch with the smile you see here before you. I guess she said 'Yes.'

*

Henry Sugarapsa shifted positions in his chair. Ray asked him, "So, the doctors are still baffled?"

"Yeah, he's one big medical mystery." He placed the flowers in a vase beside Curt's bed. "That should about do it for me."

Ray decided that it wasn't an appropriate time for his "You are what you eat" joke. He said goodbye to Henry. He looked over at the smiling Curt, slid down in his bed and smiled back.

Michael Neckerman is a 5th semester English major. He wrote this story for English 147.

After A Death
(for Evelyn Wright)

You look for her
in the sheen that skims
a pearl, in light
wincing off a knifeblade.
Inside a rock, you find
a city of stars.

In the attic, floorboards nudge
and settle, though
no wind shoulders the house,
though the cat sleeps,
plump, in your lap.

Moon's halo on a night
before rain. The way fire
makes wood remember and sing
the countless small songs
of each bird that touched
even a moment on the tree.

Bears

"Human sexual activity attracts bears."
--U.S. Department of Agriculture

We turn from each other
and listen: whuffling, snorting,
clanking through the trash.
We should know by now. Tie the garbage
high in the maple. Bury it somewhere
far from the house. Outside,
sure enough. Bears.
Trampling the dahlias.
Shredding the lawn chairs.
The biggest one looks up and sees us.
He blinks. They stop.
At the edge of the yard, a few
hunkered down like furry boulders,
roll to their feet. One by one,
they all rise to hind legs,
swagger up the street to another house,
where the last light has just gone out.

Reply

"I . . . am small, like the wren; and my hair is bold,
like the chestnut bur; and my eyes like the sherry
in the glass that the guest leaves."
--Emily Dickinson, in a letter

You told me about the birds, the day
cardinals settled in a leafless tree
by your window, some the color
of autumn landscape, a few
bright as apples. The next morning
I saw them in my yard,
a windfall on the frost.

It's already snowed
in the town where you live now. You write
of spending winter alone, a week of visitations
by fire: a matchbox exploding into a torch,
a spark on your down quilt, the room angry
with soot and feathers. You beat the flames out
with your hands, never thinking
of yourself as brave.

Once you and I
watched a woman stand in front
of a packed courtroom, recite her crimes,
her dreams, unbutton her dress
to show us the scar above her heart.
On the way home, we walked apart
and could not speak. Beside us
in the field, cornstalks shivered
against each other, thin-boned women.

Rabbits

Halfway up to the tracks,
she looks back. Sudden as mushrooms
in a damp summer, by the dumpster,
by the ratty mattress, across
the asphalt lot, dozens of rabbits
hobble into the streetlight. Keeping close
to the brush, scratching, twitching.
Now wheeling and wheeling in widening circles.
They vanish into the brambles,
a few leaves trembling.

He listens, watching the candle's flame
trapped in her wineglass, its ruby light
wavering over her fingers.
Once they drove in the country,
Moths falling in the headlights like snow,
and she told him how she'd line up
her dolls and animals, drape a towel
on her head so it whirled as she spun
on the sidewalk, tossing a camellia
high in the air, marrying, always,
herself. Outside, the thin beginnings
of rain, mounting slowly
to a ringing shout. He tells her
not to worry, that the rabbits dig their runs
so their burrows won't flood.

His sleep whispers through their room;
she hears the early train clacking,
rocking over those tracks
on to the gulf coast. She imagines
standing below, facing the blast,
the blur of boxcars, kudzu growing
even as she waits, its thickening drifts
of heart-shaped leaves. And the rabbits,
how they must huddle beneath it,
in winter, in daylight.
The tunnels in the earth.

Kathy Rodier is a graduate student in English. She was the third
place winner of the 1990 Wallace Stevens Poetry Competition.

POEMS BY JON ANDERSEN

Move Lightly Now

You've seen me
perhaps have been me once
standing on
the sides of long roads
with a cardboard destination
a frostbitten thumb
pleadingly extended your way.

Or maybe you rushed by
pushed me with your leather briefcase
at the busy station.
I move unworried
my hair pushed up under an old cap
a faded duffel slung over my shoulder.

I wake up sometimes
on the sides of mountains.
A sunrise ledge
overlooking sleepy miles
quite farms and rivers
stretching gracefully
beneath a smiling blue Virginia sky.

I'm on the train
their shadows dancing, hopping
skimming industrial river waters.
the sunlight sprays off
our train's streaking silver sides
inspires a slow hand
greasy, calloused, to
wipe a sweaty brow in the factory yard
below.

Behind him heaped high
by black smoking forklifts
tower filthy rusting barrels.
He turns away. His big back to me.
Workboots scrape a solid grate
across the lot.

Maybe you have seen him too
as you travelled south
and he should see you also
stopped for a moment
(one of many today)
to remember
when he didn't stand in
stained, worn leather

on baking asphalt for
a tyrant time clock
but with fresh, clean youth
moved lightly on America.

Old Woman

Crazy back hills woman
baggy brown baked skin
stooped shuffle down the road
bright dishcloth wrap protects coarse white hair
hung head shades
cloudy black marble eyes.

Gazes off the road
flows with the wind across the fields
fresh orchards dives
into cool stream waters to the mossy bank
where she greets two angels, who
accompany her to the seat of God.

Four by four bounces down the road
slides around the corner
big wheels scream to a stop
horn shatters her thoughts, scatters them
like broken bottle glass gleaming in the afternoon sun.

Hobbles shuffles hobbles
"out of the way, out of the man's way . . ."
"Get out of the goddamn road!"
Hurry hurry to the safe side
the goldenrod, honeysuckle
tall grass.

Gazes off the road
dust cloud follows the truck
past angry machines scraping the earth
men framing, building a monotony
slapped together, thrown against hot blue sky.

Crazy back hills woman
baggy brown baked skin
stooped shuffle down the road
bright dish cloth wrap protects coarse white hair
hung head shades
teary black marble eyes.

Jon Andersen is an English major in his 4th semester. "Move Lightly Now" was written for English 146, and "Old Woman" was written in English 246.

RECKLESS ABANDON

Dan Waters

Timmy wheeled his battered Schwinn around to the front of the house just in time to see the family car, a big green Chevy, roll to the bottom of the driveway. He laughed and waved. His mother looked at him, but she didn't wave. Instead she turned away. Why were all the suitcases in the car? Were they going to Grandma's?

Timmy dumped his bike and ran across the yard as fast as his Pro-Keds would carry him. Tires squealed and blue smoke shot from the car as his dad pressed down on the accelerator. The smoke made Timmy's eyes water.

The car coughed like a rusty throat and Timmy watched as it sped up the street.

"Mommy?" he said, trying to blink away the sting of the fumes.

*

That was three days ago. Timmy's mom and dad still hadn't come home. This was longer than usual. Tim felt really lonely. He thought his parents must have taken Kitty too because she hadn't touched her food bowl in three days. He heard a car drive by and hurriedly drew back the curtains. It wasn't them.

Timmy decided to stop going to school. He went the day after his parents left, hoping that after reading and science and recess were over with he would walk home and see his Mommy and she'd have some cookies for him like the other kids' mommies had for them, but when he came home only the cookies were there. He decided he didn't want any, anyhow.

He watched He-Man and Transformers and lots of other shows and had a jelly sandwich for dinner, just like he had when mommy felt like going out, which she did often. He fell asleep in Daddy's chair and when he woke up the next morning he thought he would wait at home rather than go to school in case his parents came back. Besides, Tom and Jerry and Deputy Dawg were on in the mornings and he could play with his army men when the yucky shows Mommy liked to watch were on. He skipped breakfast and had cookies and Cheez Doodles for lunch.

The phone rang when the ghostbusters were on. Timmy leapt from Daddy's chair to answer it, knowing it was them.

It wasn't. The man had a hollow, nasal voice that reminded Timmy of Darth Vader.

"Hello? Hello?"

"Hi. You want to get your parents?"

"They're gone."

"Where?"

"They left."

"Tell me where they went."

"I don't know."

"You lying to me kid kid?"

"No."

"You better not be."

The man sighed. "Shit. Tell your Dad he better not leave town."

He hung up without saying goodbye. Timmy felt like crying. He knew his Dad would have hated anyone who used such bad words. It made him think of the boys who made fun of his tears when Mommy and Daddy sped away in the car.

"Whatsa matter, kid? Lose your Mommy?" they said and pretended to cry. They were older boys from the other side of the neighborhood.

Timmy stopped crying long enough to hit one of them in the head with a rock and run inside, banging the screen door shut behind him. The boys didn't come in because they thought his Mom was still there.

Timmy was scared that night. He dreamed that the man on the phone was a bad man who was chasing Daddy and that's why he had to leave. In his dreams the man came over to find Timmy's Dad but instead all he found was Timmy so he was very angry and stole Timmy and made him work in a dark coal mine. Timmy found he was able to make the dreams stop by falling asleep watching TV, snuggled safely with his big comforter in Daddy's chair. He was glad he stopped dreaming, because he almost thought he would rather go to school than work in a coal mine.

The next day he got another phone call, but it still wasn't his parents. "Hello. May I speak to your parents

please?" It was a soft female voice and his heart thumped for joy because at first he thought it was his Mommy but then he realized it was only Mrs. Grezelda, the school nurse.

"No."

"Why?"

"They left."

"Is this Timmy?"

"Yes."

"Hi Timmy. This is Mrs. Grezelda. Are you feeling sick? Timmy?"

"Yes. My throat hurts." He wondered if he should pretend to cough. Hastily he added, "Mommy said I could stay home."

"Okay, Timmy. Could you just ask your mother to give me a call at the school when she gets in?"

"Okay."

"Thank you Timmy. I hope you feel better."

"Goodbye."

"Goodbye, Timmy."

Timmy felt even worse now than when the man called. He wished Mrs. Grezelda had been mean to him. For some reason that would have been easier to take.

He felt sick and wished he hadn't eaten the whole bag of Cheez Doodles. He also wished his parents hadn't taken kitty. He bounced a tennis ball against the living room wall for awhile to amuse himself, but he had already broken a lamp and was growing bored. Then he mixed dish-washing liquid, Drano, Muscatel, grape juice and a half pound of salt in a Tupperware bowl, hoping the mixture would be explosive or maybe a super-glue like Wile E. Coyote tried to trick the Road Runner with that afternoon. Instead it just struck the kitchen wall with a loud splat and puddled on the floor.

He stared at it and felt himself turn all hot because he was so mad. He wished someone was home to punish him.

He sobbed softly and tried to remember what his Mommy's voice was like.

*

Timmy woke up in a bad mood this morning. He still felt sick from all the food he had eaten, and he was mad because the only cartoon that was on was Heckle and Jeckle and he hated those stupid birds. He walked aimlessly from room to room, first to the kitchen, then the family room, his room and the bathroom. He avoided his parents' room in case there might be some ghosts in there. He could smell the ghosts as he walked by, they smelled like stale cigarettes and alcohol. Sometimes he thought he heard her cough, or heard him shuffle from the room to the cabinet under the sink. Timmy wondered if there was ever a time when his parents weren't ghosts.

His house seemed small and cramped and he felt like he could walk around from room to room all day without being tired. He ran up and down the narrow hallway, hurdling and kicking the piles of dirty laundry in his path. Then he jumped on his bed for five minutes, hollering and shouting nonsense words. Then the doorbell rang and he was afraid it was the police coming to get him for making too much noise.

He padded fearfully to the front door and opened it.

There was a big man in a grey suit holding a flat black briefcase out on the doorstep. His hair was slicked back with something greasy that made it hug closely to his skull.

"Hello." he said smiling like a Grinch. "May I come in?"

"No."

The Grinch stopped smiling. "Why the hell not?"

"Because my Daddy said not to let strangers in."

The man sighed. "Shit. Get your Daddy. I've got to talk to him."

"No."

Timmy laughed because the Grinch's smooth face was turning red. He wasn't in such a bad mood anymore.

"Why not?"

"Because he's not here."

"Is your Mommy here?"

"No. Are you a policeman?"

The man laughed. "Far from it. Tell your Dad the man from the bank was here, okay? And tell him I've got some papers for him to sign. Thanks."

Timmy watched the man walk down the doorstep and across the lawn to his car. Timmy prayed for a flat tire.

*

It was a week before Timmy would get another visitor. He tried to occupy his time by playing army men or riding his bike around the neighborhood when there weren't any good cartoons on. On Thursday, it must have been Thursday because Creature Double Feature was on, Timmy spotted a wet, red clump of fur on the side of the road a street over from his house. It was kitty. He stepped back and whimpered when he saw the ants running out of his mouth and ears. His cat was dead. At first he was sad and tried to quiet his sniffing in case someone saw him, but then he realized something that made him flush with guilt.

"I'm glad they didn't take you." he whispered softly to the small lump of meat. His sniffles disappeared by the time he was riding down the street, flying by the rows of identical houses on his shaking bicycle.

Sometimes he would put on Daddy's frayed green coat and pretend to drink his beer, but he was afraid that his Dad might come home and see him. Whenever he heard a car he would run to the window, the coat flapping on the carpet behind him. It was never his parents.

Timmy wished he had some friends. There were lots of kids in their development, but most of them were older.

"I can't play with you," a boy his own age had told him, "cause Mommy said not to because your Daddy doesn't work."

Usually Timmy had Kitty to play with, but she usually ended up scratching him. It didn't matter to Timmy that the other boys all had nice toys and he didn't have any; he just wanted someone to play with.

That was why Timmy let Mrs. Grezelda, his second visitor, inside. He was so lonely and she was nice, even if she was old.

Timmy let her in the front door and sat on the couch with her. She felt his forehead and her hand was smooth, just like Mommy's.

"Where are your parents, Timmy?"

"They're not here."

"I can see that, Timmy. Do you know where they are?"

He felt bad about lying to Mrs. Grezelda. "At work."

She looked at his eyes while holding his little hands in hers. "Really, Timmy? The school records say your Mommy doesn't work. Did she find a job?"

He started to say yes, but then he started to cry.

The Nurse hugged him while he sobbed quietly, stroking his hair softly with her hands, trying to smooth the knots that a week and a half of not bathing had formed. She held him like that for a few minutes, until he looked up at her with tear-stained cheeks.

"Am I going to jail now?"

She smiled and dried his cheeks. "Of course not."

He put his head in her lap and before long he was asleep. She lifted him as gently as she could and carried him to her car.

*

"Damn him! Figures I'd get stuck with the brat! Should clean up your own messes, I always say."

Timmy heard the voice and knew it was Grandma but he wanted to finish eating his hot dog. It felt so good to eat hot food again; he was really tired of all those jelly sandwiches and Froot Loops. He even felt better after Mrs. Grezelda had given him a bath, but he wasn't going to tell anyone that.

"They leave their own kid and expect me to take care of it? Uh-huh. No way. He's got some family upstate. I'll let them deal with it."

Timmy couldn't hear what Mrs. Grezelda was saying, but he knew she was trying to calm Grandma down. Grandma had a quick temper, not like Mrs. Grezelda. He wished he could stay longer at Mrs. Grezelda's house with her big dog Rufus. Rufus never got mad like Kitty did when you pulled his tail.

"My daughter is such a dumb little whore, nurse, you would not believe. I told her at least a hundred times the guy was trouble, and believe me, I've been with enough guys

to know . . . There you are, Timmy! Are you okay?" Her brightly painted lips stretched into a smile as she bent down to look at him, looking ridiculous with her blue hair curlers and stretch pants. She smelled sickeningly sweet, like rotting fruit.

"You'll like living with Uncle Rex, Timmy. He's got two boys of his own and a big pool in the backyard and he doesn't drink nearly as much as your Father, wherever he is." Timmy wished she would stop smiling, it made the wrinkles around her mouth split and lengthen until he feared her face was about to crack. He didn't like Uncle Rex, but at least he never slapped him like Grandma sometimes did.

"Well, I'll take him off your hands now, nurse. Thanks for the trouble."

"It was no trouble, really . . ."

"And you can be sure when his rotten parents show I'll give it to them good!" She made a fist, a small knobby thing. Nurse Grezelda nodded, smiling thinly. "Come back and visit, Timmy."

"I will." he said, taking hold of his grandmother's wrinkly hand. Then he turned back and looked at the nurse.

"Nurse?" he asked quietly, ignoring his grandmother's insistent tugging, "Do you think they'll come back?"

She shook her head. "I don't know, Timmy."

He looked away into the street and allowed himself to be pulled towards his grandmother's car. He wondered what cartoons were on.

Dan Waters is a 6th semester English major. This piece was written for English 247.

Simple

Simplicity I hear -
Simplicity I say -
But the plumbing won't plumb
and the fridge hums too loud
Wru Wru Wru
And the faucet still leaks -
They call this simple,
The older the easier -
Well - Bull I scream -
Bull
And I'll grab him by the
horns
I will shake the massive
bulk
And if you listen carefully
you may hear
past the stomach
beyond the loins
beyond the muscle tissue
a full but delicate chime of
the rattling of his bones.

The Sheep

The sheep and cows and horses and geese are all fine.
My sneakers are well worn.
My thighs are the same.
I round the curve with heavier steps as the road descends
Into a pasture where the sheep eat and talk all day.
I don't think they care much for me,
unless I have food to offer.
That is infrequent.
But they look at me and must be thinking,
"Those thighs are all the same,"
because that look they make is much too knowing and indifferent.
The sheep and cows and horses and geese are all fine.
My sneakers are well-worn.

Terri Warren is an 8th semester English major. She wrote these poems for the 1990 Wallace Stevens Poetry Competition.

Overcoming Fictions About Love

I.
The world is about to not-so-spontaneously-combust
right into the vast, yielding, universe.
A lover who becomes invisible
inside an ex-whore.
He does not know her land,
the melancholy of organs,
the history. She counts
blue grapes on the wallpaper.
I am here,
swallowed by a bed,
too comfortable. I turn back
blankets like layers of skin.
I know that a tongue is vicious
tangled in another's mouth
It tries, tries to suck the life
out of the kissed.

II.
In fourteen years
I'd grown breasts
terrifying mounds
rising tenaciously
under my layers of armor.
Would I ever be normal again?

The ocean is a wasteland.
I've always been afraid
of it. On holiday in
Florida, I stood on the shore
and watched a storm come.
It wanted to eat me;
I could tell. That fear
of drowning-- I had become
a woman. The waves
were monsters like the ones
in dreams: intangible.
The waters, black
spread diseases in my mouth.
I was the only life
for centuries.

It is daybreak and I
am counting pennies again.
I put each shiny petal
in my mouth to show respect.
I must pick through
old candy wrappers

and empty milk cartons.
The giant fish will rest
his smiling head
in my lap. I will walk
to shore, then, full
and sleepy eyed.

III.

I watch myself loving
and cannot recognize her.
Arms and legs blooming
arms and legs. I roll
into a wild as easy as water.
He wants to do something strange
like put an apple in my mouth.
I am the me that eats sushi.

I want it to be alright. I want
the blinds to come down. Cures
for the common cold, and patches
for my trousers, then I can
go on into the night and plant

something, wait until it grows.

I Am a Woman Incognito

wrapped in a stranger's beer
stained, wool jacket. Last
night's sweat feels eternal,
still cold in my hair.
I cannot step outside
of myself; there are no windows.
Inch by inch I am absorbed
by my own hanger. As if I
were never beautiful. But, I was.
Like a mare. I could lift
my leg in bars and men turned
away to blush.

Sometimes I pinch myself in anger.
It doesn't hurt enough. My skin
is too round--tough eagle--
forgotten how to be delicate
a belly underneath. I want
to raise my voice like Odetta
and sing, Dear Mother, dear Lord,
fall open, let me become woman
in you. A blue-black taste
clouds my mouth as I lurch
over breakfast. I peer
from behind broken glass,
counting chewed fingernails
from a stranger's lint filled pockets.
I have a fetish for things
that don't matter.

Poem Unearthed by Regression
(for Yusef Hawkins)

I. Mississippi

A swollen state,
once so thoroughly immersed
in blood
swimming in it was easy.

I've heard stories
almost forgotten
of political people with political hair
who marched clutching hope
to their chests. One fine Sunday
afternoon breeze moved the people
like a wave. An angry white Zion
rushed in fresh with epithets like lava.
They shook their bare asses from under Sunday hats.

The specific scent
of burning hair lies
thick over rivers.

II. Yusef Speaks

The worst thing
about death
is missing
the smell of
Mama's morning bacon,
my teeth pressed together
as I come awake,
my stomach grunting-
And also not being there
when everyone raids
their windows
to watch
the brownstone
across the street
turn to burnt cinders-
and the fire hydrants'
relief in July-
And not to have ever
really loved.

The pain was so great.
A glass lung
someone stomped
black smoke into.
I sighed when I drifted
from one white abyss
to another.
The faceless weeds

had cleared
And I could feel
millions of souls
crying themselves
to sleep for me-

III. Going Home

How strange the way our cities wilt.
This planet, terrified by bombs.
Yusef Hawkins dies, smashed
into the hot brooklyn pavement.
I walk down hollowed streets
counting the chalked police
outlines of brothers gone mad.

Understand my fear, then,
of a dead battery at night
a well wooded road
twenty miles out from the city.
The bright lights flash
in my window as I crouch
beneath my seat
blinking at darkness till dawn.

Dawn Martin, an 8th semester English major, was the winner
of the 1990 Wallace Stevens Poetry Competition.

MY BRICK

Muireann O'Callaghan

Farmer Paddy's a fine man. If I were an old woman I would like him. He must be smart not to marry Old Miss Greta because her eggs are too greasy and she lets the dog lick the dishes and then doesn't even wash them in warm water. My mam says that's not good. The other night when Farmer Paddy came to visit us in the village, I was trying to pick some flowers that grew behind the nettles. He didn't want me to sting myself on the nettles, so he grabbed the bunch of them with his bare hands. He yanked them, roots and all, from the earth and said, "There ye go. You'll have some fine rosemary for the kitchen now." Nobody has stronger hands than Farmer Paddy.

Today it is a warm enough Autumn day to wear my red cardigan without a jacket. Besides, picking potatoes on Saturdays in Farmer Paddy's field always gets me sweaty. "Adrian, do ya think Farmer Paddy sleeps with a cap on his head?" "Don't be an eejut," Adrian says. "He doesn't I tell ya." "Well I've never seen it off the top of his head in me life. I even heard the ladies askin the other if he has a bare spot--that was when he was teaching the Irish dancing lessons." Adrian's blue eyes look big and round as they stare at me. Dirty handprints are spread out on his cheeks and blond hair falls messy around his soft face.

"You needn't be worrying about those grown-up things, or you'll only be getting yourself in trouble. My mammy tells me to mind me own business, and I'll tell ya the same now." Adrian plops himself down on the damp ground. He tugs the black rubber wellingtons off his feet, empties the dirt from them, and pulls up the dusty socks that wrinkle around his toes.

With our stomachs full from lunch, we are ready for the field again. "Uum pam pa, uum pam pa, that's how it goes;" My older sister and her friend are practicing singing their part for the school play, Oliver, which won't be shown until Christmas. As I walk past her, Fiona hands me a burlap sack without stopping and I stumble to a spot behind my brother. The men have plowed three rows for us to pick while they're in eating lunch. I try not to think about lunch because then I taste Old Miss Greta's greasy eggs in my mouth. I think the men only picked two rows while we ate, but then I remember we take a shorter break. They have to drink their Guinness, and I even saw one of them put six spoons of sugar in the big glass mug of Guinness. But Farmer Paddy didn't do that.

I feel the underneath of my fingernails become caked with mud. The only reason I'm picking fast is because the sparrows are waiting for the fresh worms that burrow in homes below the potatoes. I figure the sparrows have to have lunch too, but then again, they've been eating all day. I slow down and hum my own tune.

The old men are always louder after lunch. I can't tell if they're happier; they seem to laugh more, but they still stoop over the tilled row and stare at the potatoes with that understanding, best friend look. "Grand spuds." "Fine spuds." "Poker and pints at Smiddy's tonight is it?" "Ah 'tis a grand night at Smiddy's tonight I hear. A turkey, not killed one day ago, will be given to himself with the best hand." They're loud all right.

I hear Farmer Paddy start up the tractor and I wish I could be as excited as the sparrows. Last week Farmer Paddy gave us one of the turkeys he won playing cards at the pub, and he gave Adrian's mother the other one. I heard the doctor's wife chatting to Adrian's mother, who clutched the turkey like a baby next to her breast. "Paddy Hennessey is it? He's a fine respectable man so he is. And never getting married after the woman he loved refused his hand. Fine man he is." Adrian's mother nodded her head. Why would anyone refuse Farmer Paddy's hands? Didn't the lady know how strong they were?

I stand straight up and stretch my back. I watch Farmer Paddy on his tractor plow a straight row in the dirt. He will probably give me and Adrian and our brothers and sisters a ride on the tractor at the end of the day. My mam said he really loved the lady, but she didn't go to our church. If I were the lady's mam and pap I would let her marry him. I bet she would put a chair in every room in his big house so he could sit in more than just the kitchen and his bedroom. She would like him when he didn't get loud like the other men.

I walk over to Fiona and she gives me another sack. I've been picking at a steady speed today; I don't want to hear any of Fiona's hurry-ups. Farmer Paddy raced me around the outside of our house the other day and he never said hurry-up. I can't remember if we had a tie, but he said I was the fastest runner he ever saw. He can run faster than any of the other men.

We have only one row left and Farmer Paddy is picking now too. All the girls love to go to his dancing lessons, and he even got some of the fellas to join in, and the mothers love to watch too. He has deep wrinkles in his forehead and around his eyes. He's not an old man like the others are. He still has all his teeth and he talks to more than just

the other men. The hair that I can see below his brown-checked tweed cap matches his silver overgrown eyebrows. I know he can't be old because everytime he comes to our house he brings me sweets. He brings me the best kind: the toffee ones with the dark chocolate covering.

It's finally over. The men gather the sacks. We all cram into Farmer Paddy's gray, mud-splashed Escort, and he takes us back to the village. I can taste stale crackers in the car air. Farmer Paddy comes into my home to sit by the hot turf fire and have a cup of tea. He sticks his leathery hands right into the flames of the fire, to warm them he says.

Farmer Paddy's a smart man. I know it because of what he wrote in in my autograph book. I asked him to sign it after he had taken his hands from the flames. I brought the small collection of pages to my bed and I found the page with two straight lines and his signature written in slanting, half-script, half-print black ink letters:

In the chimney of your memory
Regard me as a brick.

P. Hennessey

Muireann O'Callaghan, a 6th semester English major, wrote this story for English 146.

THE ART OF OSCAR WILDE

Mark Vanase

He saw himself as a prophet of the 1890's, someone who could bring beauty back into the lives of the Victorian people. Instead of donning a typical black suit, he sported velvet knee breeches and a trademark green carnation (Norton 1659). His name was Oscar Wilde, and with his flamboyant style and paradoxical witticisms, he altered the theories of Ruskin and Pater into something that he called the "New Aestheticism" (Wilde, "Decay" 987). Wilde hoped that this new philosophy would be spread by Wildean Dandies, young men who opposed the gentleman class by emulating Wilde's styles and mannerisms. He felt that life imitated art, and throughout his existence, he tried to make his life a masterpiece so that others would mirror him and spread his wisdom.

Wilde's aesthetic theories were presented in a dialogue called "The Decay of Lying," which was published in 1889 (Complete 1209). The dialogue maintains that the "Art of Lying" in Victorian England is in a "state of decay," and that this deterioration was causing Art to be "curiously commonplace" (Wilde, "Decay" 972). In this essay, it is apparent that when Wilde speaks of "Lying," he is actually referring to the loss of imagination which he felt Victorian artists were suffering from. He writes that "England is the home of lost ideas," and that literature requires "distinction, charm, beauty and imaginative power" (Wilde, "Decay" 974). He further attacks modern artists by saying that "when Art surrenders her imaginative medium she surrenders everything" and creates Realism, which Wilde dubbed "a complete failure" (Wilde, "Decay" 979).

Wilde was concerned with the loss of "Beauty" in paintings, literature and the other arts. He felt that Victorian artists were so concerned with the problems of England that their work was mirroring the new industrial life of their society (Wilde, "Decay" 972). This was a problem for Wilde because he felt that "industry is the root of all ugliness" (Wilde, "Phrases" 1206). By being Realistic, and representing this new age, he believed that these artists failed to realize that "the object of Art is not simple truth but complex Beauty" (Wilde, "Decay" 978).

While Wilde felt that English art could be saved, he concluded that the United States was an example of a nation that could not be saved from artistic vulgarity. He reasoned that American artists had forsaken beauty for "Facts" which "usurp the domain of Fancy" (Wilde, "Decay" 988). He writes that Americans lack imagination because

their whole country reveres George Washington, who was "incapable of telling a lie" (Wilde, "Decay" 980). According to Wilde, the tale of Washington and the cherry tree did the United States "more harm and in a shorter space of time, than any other moral tale in the whole of literature" (Wilde, "Decay" 980).

As the essay progresses, Wilde describes the history of Art's demise, which occurred in three stages. He writes that Art began with "abstract decoration, with purely imaginative and pleasurable work dealing with what is unreal and non-existent" (Wilde, "Decay" 978). Second, Life "became fascinated" with Art and Art took Life "as part of her rough material, recreated and refashioned it in fresh forms." These new "forms" were "absolutely indifferent to fact" (Wilde, "Decay" 978). The last stage, which Wilde dubbed "true decadence," occurred when Life got the "upper hand" and "drove Art into the wilderness" (Wilde, "Decay" 978). Only the liar, the Wildean dandy, could save the Victorians from this decay by rescuing Art with his imagination. Wilde wrote that "Art, breaking from the prison house of Realism" would "run to greet" the Liar and "kiss his false, beautiful lips, knowing that he alone" understands that "Truth is entirely and absolutely a matter of style" (Wilde, "Decay" 981).

Once Wilde's essay establishes the fact that Art is in a state of distress, he discusses the doctrines of his New Aestheticism, which the Wildean dandy would spread in order to return art to beauty. Basically, Wilde believed that Life and external nature mirrored Art and he gives examples to defend his position (Wilde, "Decay" 991). Wilde wrote that "a great Artist invents a type, and Life tries to copy it . . . like an enterprising publisher" (Wilde, "Decay" 982). One example of this phenomenon is Shakespeare's character, Hamlet, who invented "the pessimism that characterizes modern thought" (Wilde, "Decay" 983). Thus, the despair and confusion of the Victorians came straight from Hamlet's emotion and feelings. Today, some great people feel that this theory is valid because humans imitate characters in fiction, actors and musicians (Woodcock 127). Wilde would have cited the Dorothy Hamil and John Travolta haircuts of the 1970's as prime examples of life imitating art.

Wilde also wrote that "external Nature also imitates Art" because "the only effects that Nature shows us are the effects that we have already seen through poetry, or in painting" (Wilde, "Decay" 992). As an example, Wilde writes that sunsets are "quite old fashioned" because "they belong to the time when Turner was the last note in art." Since Turner's art showed incredibly beautiful sunsets, people look at sunsets in a different way. Thus, nature tries to

mirror Turner's paintings because he had created the ideal sunset" (Wilde, "Decay" 987). This idea of nature imitating art could be verified by Idealist philosophers who say that "the world exists only because we see it; it is the sum of our perceptions." Thus, "if our perceptions of nature are increased or changed by a work of art," such as one of Turner's paintings, then nature "insofar as it exists in our minds, has been changed" in order to mirror the painting (Woodcock 128).

While he was developing his new aesthetic theories, Wilde was also perfecting the image of the Wildean dandy, whose "first duty in life is to be as artificial as possible" (Wilde, "Phrases" 1205). Wilde said that "artificial" meant the ability to maintain artificial personalities (Ellman 311). The British dandy created a series of masks for himself through his "complex interplay of gesture and wit" (San Juan 4). The Wildean dandy used these gifts to "charm, to delight" and "give pleasure to people," and he was the exemplary liar who tried to live artistically (San Juan 7). By "imitating the rhythm" of Wilde's proverbs the dandy rebels against the society which has created him and sets himself higher than the others (San Juan 12).

Although other dandies existed, Wildean dandies were created from their social situation. Baudelaire wrote that "dandyism appears above all in periods of transition, when . . . the aristocracy is only just beginning to fall" (Gagnier 81-2). In times such as this, "Certain men who are politically and financially ill at ease, but are rich in native energy" establish "a new kind of aristocracy . . . base . . . on the divine gift which work and money are unable to bestow" (Gagnier 82). Wildean dandies were gifted with gesture and wit that would allow them to spread the new aesthetic theories.

Wilde wrote that "dandyism is the assertion of the absolute modernity of Beauty" (Wilde, "Maxims" 1203). However, "in the eighties" aestheticism "suffered for lack of example" (Ellman 305). In The Picture of Dorian Gray, Wilde "filled the need with . . . irreverent maxims, catch phrases," and "conversational gambits." "The novel announced the age of Dorian," where Wilde and his dandies taught the people "how to shape a sentence and live in style" (Ellman 305).

The three characters in the novel are Dorian Gray, Basil Hallward, and Lord Henry Wotton. Hallward, a great artist, finds that his latest sitter, Dorian Gray, is so beautiful that he gives new meaning to his art. In fact, the young man inspires Hallward to create his best portrait ever (Wilde, Dorian 140). Hallward reluctantly introduces Dorian to Lord Henry Wotton, a Wildean dandy gone bad who is "the

spokesman for an aestheticism gone extreme and insensitive" (Ellman 320). Like Wilde, Wotton admires youth and beauty; he recruits young Dorian and teaches him the maxims of a dandy. The result of Wotton's influence over Dorian is the young man's wish that his portrait would grow old and change rather than he, himself (Wilde, Dorian 169). In a somewhat Faustian sense, Dorian sells his soul to the devil and gets his wish; the picture ages and shows the marks of Dorian's sins.

Dorian falls in love with an actress named Sibyl Vane. He is infatuated with her characters, her masks rather than the real person. When the two fall in love, Sibyl's acting turns sour, for she wants to give her art up for love. Once she does this, however, Dorian tells her "you have killed my love . . . you used to stir my imagination," and "without your art you are nothing" (Wilde Dorian 237). The dissolution of their relationship eventually leads to Sibyl's suicide, which is the beginning of Dorian's demise. Dorian becomes emulated by other dandies who mimic his style and mannerisms, and is in a situation that Wilde wanted to be in himself.

Dorian was everything Wilde wished to be. He was a work of art that others tried to mirror. The figure in the painting continuously grows older and Dorian begins to lose his mind. He commits several unnamed sins that alter the portrait. Eventually, this continuous state of decay leads to Dorian's murder of Hallward. In doing this, Dorian is denying "the creator of his beauty" for the painter is solely responsible for his beauty (San Juan 52).

At the end, Dorian stabs the portrait in order to destroy it. When people enter his home, Dorian was found "with a knife in his heart;" he was "withered, wrinkled, and loathsome of visage" and the painting had returned to normal (Wilde Dorian 391). In Dorian's pact, he traded places with the image of himself on the canvas. Thus, by stabbing the portrait, he kills himself.

According to Wilde, the message in Dorian Gray was that excessive behavior reduces people to incomplete human beings. Hallward worshipped physical beauty too much, Dorian became too hedonistic and Wotton was "only a spectator of life" (Gagnier 56). Wilde was warning people that aestheticism taken to the extremes can be harmful, even to the point of self-destruction. This message, however, was missed by several critics who dismissed it as an immoral novel filled with "dullness and dirt" (Hart-Davis 85).

These middle-class critics were concerned with their absence from the novel more than anything. The novel was a

"typical aesthetic reaction against middle-class materialism" because Wilde "divided the world of Dorian Gray between the upper and lower classes exclusively" (Gagnier 57). Also, by this time, rumors of Wilde's homosexual practices were spreading throughout London. It seems as if these critics were judging the author and not his literature (Gagnier 57). If they had looked more closely at Wilde's previous stories, poems and prose, they would have found that the pieces they had previously praised for "morality" and "literary craft" had the same styles and themes as the novel. "The novel, unlike the stories, removed art from the locales and sentiments of middle class life" and upset the critics about what was not in Dorian Gray rather than what it did contain (Gagnier 88).

These disagreements between the gentleman critics and Wilde allowed Wilde to perfect the image of the dandy and to give it "considerable publicity" (Gagnier 51). Wilde's preface also was used to defend the novel because it "shifted the focus from the work to the spectator" (Gagnier 61). Wilde wrote that no one knows what Dorian Gray's sins are, and that "he who finds them has brought them" (Gagnier 61). His clever defenses in support of the novel gave it publicity which became more positive when Yeats and Pater gave it positive reviews (Hart-Davis 85).

Although nearly everyone was debating the issues of immorality in the novel, they all wanted to know which character Wilde was. He wrote that "Basil Hallward is what I think I am, Lord Henry is what the world thinks of me and Dorian is what I would like to be" (Gagnier 98-9). However, "these narrowings of his personality" seem inadequate (Ellman 320). Perhaps, Wilde was really Sibyl Vane, Dorian's suicidal girlfriend. She was the actress "who could play any part," who "embodied Wilde's ideal" until she decided "to give it up for a part in a middle class marriage. For that, Wilde killed her" (Gagnier 98-9).

Wilde once told Andre Gide that he had "put his genius into his life and only his talent into his work," and it seems to be true (Norton 1658). Wilde felt that "the object of the living," was "to become a work of art" (Ellman 313). Many felt he did, and the Wildean dandies tried to imitate their revered prophet. One such pupil was Aubrey Beardsley, a young poet and illustrator, whom Wilde befriended on July 12, 1891. "It was perhaps under Wilde's influence that Beardsley's style" changed. Wilde "would say later that he had created Beardsley, and perhaps he did" (Ellman 301). Wilde's affair with Lord Alfred Douglas was also filled with instances of life imitating art; in this case Wilde had found his own Dorian Gray. He fell passionately in love with Douglas, whom Wilde described as being "quite like a narcissus--so white and gold" (Ellman 305). Wilde had

fallen into the same trap that Basil Hallward had. The difference was that Wilde's excessive behavior progressed into the three famous trials that ended in a sentence of two years' imprisonment rather than being murdered. Even Wilde recognized that his life was imitating art in some ways. While he was sitting in court during the final trial, "listening to . . . appalling denunciations of himself," he wrote that he was "stricken with horror" and it "suddenly occurred" to him "how splendid it would have been if he was saying all those things about himself" (Roditi 192-3). What Wilde failed to realize was that he had written these things about himself in the form of Dorian Gray's unnamed acts. Each person could see his own sins in Dorian Gray. So, since Wilde's sins were his homosexual relationships, the hints of homosexuality between the three men in the novel express Wilde's fascination with a type of love that he thought was beautiful, but that Victorians felt was sinful. Others had noticed these homosexual themes and "many young men and women learned of the existence of uncelebrated forms of love through hints in Dorian Gray" (Ellman 305).

Besides his problem with a sexual preference that was prohibited in Victorian England, Wilde was truly unhappy with the fame he had strived for throughout his life. In his poem, "The Artist's Dream," an artist dreams that he is sitting in a beautiful garden where he meets the personification of glory. The artist begs Glory to let her "imperial laurel bind" his brows. She says, "Child, ignorant of the true happiness, thou wert made for light and laughter" (822). The artist ignores this and he is given his wish for glory. "With wild hand," he tries to tear Glory's laurel crown from his "Bleeding brow" but finds it is "all in vain" (824). Wilde could not handle the legend that he had created for himself. Thus, his philosophy of life imitating art was unable to rescue him from the depression of his times.

Wilde wrote that "we spend our days, each one of us, looking for the secret of life. Well, it's in Art" (Woodcock 118). As a work of art, Wilde's life was as destructive as Dorian's, for he failed to listen to his own warning. However, Wilde's philosophy seems to belong to the twentieth century. Several years ago, teen-agers imitated Madonna, by wearing clothes like her and mimicking her style. Many other musicians, actors and athletes seem to set trends and fashions that people accept and mirror. Wilde's other maxim, that nature imitates art, also has truth to it. The popularity of Impressionists in the 1980's has made any pond besides the one in Monet's "Water Lilies" appear to be common, even banal. Just as Madonna and Monet demonstrate to us that life imitates art, Wilde achieved a state of existence which mirrored his aesthetic theories. Unfortunately, his "sins" caused him and his ideals to lose

validity in the Victorian era. Perhaps Wilde's doctrines have achieved legitimacy in the fact that his works are undergoing a revival in the more open minded 1990's and "now, beyond the reach of the scandal, his best writings validated by time, he comes before us still, a towering figure, laughing and weeping with parables and paradoxes, so generous, so amusing and so right" (Ellman 589). Wilde's genius has given him the very gift that Dorian loses, immortality.

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Prochristination

There were several disjointed hypotheses
When he died
Several mismatches, uncogent bits of
trivial half-truths
That translated smoothly
Into the seven causes of his death.

The first,
something about witchcraft,
too large for him to control;

The second;
an old Mafia connection,
some sadistic involvement
in drug smuggling;

The third,
a heart attack;

The fourth,
old age;

The fifth,
an allergic reaction
to some new medication Dr. Evans
prescribed for the old man's hemophilia;

The sixth,
a fatal stroke.

and the seventh,
something about
his having been dead for years,
a walking corpse,
kept alive only because no one had realized he had died;
he never said much, any way.

Staring into the open casket
at the Our Lady of the Lake Holy Church
the little Evans boy
could see the skin of the old man;
peeling off,
the hair, mostly gone,
the skull,
showing through.

He sat down between his father
and his mother, and prayed to God
that they would bury him the same day he died.

Ten Days Before Christmas

The sharp ices, the aura of cold
Floated around the edge
Of the room's single window
And convicted killer #10
Enjoyed the cool sharpness on his feet
Propped up and staring out.
The trees blew but stiffly,
And it seemed that any strong breeze
Would crack the clicking branches.
The pond was frozen to itself
Layer upon layer, iced over
Thickness and Strength.
At length,
The deep crack and grumble of a cannon
Firing out the dawn.
Today convicted killer #9 would hang
And he, lucky #10
Was allowed another cool week.
But the cold had spread
From the icy window ledge
Working its way up his legs.
And if the warmth inside
Was elixir for his hide
Number Ten would have drunk it to the dregs.

Knowing Where to Look

It's cool out here tonight.
I mean,
That typical chill New England Air.

Not really cold,
per se,
But more penetrating-
And strangely damp.

And then, of course, there's the moon . . .

Smooth yellow blue light hole,
the edge is what seems to make the moon
anything at all
(At least here, in Mystic)

The moon itself is just an

inconceivable spat of white,
Not a hole,
Not a ball
Not a globe.

Just white

Kind of plain, in that respect
the moon isn't so much
The moon
As it is what it does.

Its light filtering through the trees

Of the cemetery
Makes the two larger, blocking trees
Coalesce into one tree
In the middle, like a phantom willow,

Out of the light and dark, self-illuminated.

A great canopy of leaf light.
The moon looks moonish . . .
But the trees are exquisite.

B.U. Soccer Bus: One Fan's Reflection

Well, I quite plainly recall
Standing here in the rain
A bloody B.U. catastrophe
Catastrophe
Dragged again to another sporting event
And marking
the beginning
of an end.

She was a friend, at first
And not so, and now she
Is flying further forward
Toward
Life in the noncommittal money fashion
Maturity
at last her own
Conversion

And of course, I attempted
Neatly, to write her off:
She, wishing woman willingly wandering
Wondering
Why her memory keeps popping up
A bother
Or a lingering
An amend.

Quite amazing, how, places
Evoke invoke the spirit
As I, indignant, irate in innocence
In the fence,
Exactly where I leaned
The cold drops
Her cold love
Still warms me.

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He wrote these poems for the 1990 Wallace Stevens Poetry
Competition.

Farewell Solstice

The longest night
was sleepless hours
spent peeling the black hide
from the dawn
that just got darker
beyond windows like mirrors
and eyes like windows.
The sargassum of silence
that slowed currents of time
became a friend
like stale light
from Georgia O'Keefe
shadow corners
reflected on
that pane covered night
as deep,
as dark,
as closed lids
and the echo chamber
of a soul
set free.

I came to the mountain
through the cotton brains
of mourning,
shrouded in fog
that suddenly dissolved
and revealed the star-peppered
terrapin-shell sky
and the darkness
chased into the void
by the dawn
that would come
to this little niche
on this turtle shore.

They called it Tranquillian.
It stood high above
the barrage of surf
that pounded the seal and pelican crags
of Point Arguello.
It had been an altar for the Chumash
before they were driven
as heathens down
between stifling adobe
valley mission walls.

I walked a gravelly path
whose side fell two thousand feet
down rilled grass and rock slopes
to the white shore brow.

Under the watch of the Coyote and the Hawk
the ascent ended at a rock out-crop vista
just as a winter solstice
was borne
on turquoise whisps
above the Sierra Madre,
where myths once soared
on outstretched Condor wings.

Across an expanse of
Mother-Of-Pearl sky
He was a fading shell
awaiting release.
I wanted to be there;
a son keeping ritual vigil
by a death bed
in a hospital room
with its disinfectant,
ammonia and laundered linen
fetid smells,
and the vegetative morphine slumber
a lifetime of labor
had earned him.

But on that mountain
He was within
and spoke in my breaths
that hung iron-grey
in mute requiem
and diffused to eternity

The farewell was done.

Day began to assert herself
with the red skull
red sun.

A slow descent
along the razor ridge
was halted
by a Shaman
who danced as red hands,
ancient on the scintillant grains
of an igneous rock cliff face.
I stood against the cold,
against the chill
permeating my spine,

and I cupped my own sun-red
seashell palm to an ear
and listened to the wind
that whispered in tongues
above a faint ventricular shore.

Bob Armstrong is an 8th semester civil engineering major who won an honorable mention in the 1990 Wallace Stevens Poetry Competition.

SUMMER HOUSE

John Rawlings

As you drive you remember this trip to Squirrel has always been a bitch, full of yearning anticipation, stiffening limbs.

With the sound of wind through your half-cracked window, childhood journeys echo in your head, the chirps and squeals of your brothers and sisters as they play the squish game on corners, endless choruses of "are we there yet?" You always got the way back, your special fort, packed in tight with steamer trunks and a panting golden named Ilsa. Through the tailgate window you learned as a child to note the landmarks that tell time along the highways north to Maine.

First the New Haven tunnel on the Merrit, gaping half-binoculars that bore through the hills, "Please remove sunglasses before entering tunnel," five hours to Squirrel Island. Then the Ho-Jo's outside Worcester, grilled hot-dogs and salt water taffy for all, three hours to go. Halfway up 495 is a rest stop, just a cement crescent ringed with trees, their bark peeled away by urine. Walk the dog, everybody pee, two hours to Squirrel. At the bridge between Portsmouth and Kittery, your mother's shrill voice-- "Come on, everybody! Open those windows and smell that good Maine air!" You all did, and the car filled with the scent of pine, of fried clams, low tide. Soon enough you could see the giant Indian off route 1 in Freeport that meant twenty minutes till the turn-off to Squirrel Island.

As you drive you still watch for these signs. At Portsmouth, alone in the car, you still roll your window all the way down and smell that air as you cross the bridge into Maine. The ritual seems an unconscious comfort now. You think back to last year, the two of you on your way to Squirrel for the last time. You crack a beer and light a smoke, the memory still as pained and fresh as if this were the same trip. Up ahead you see the giant Indian, then the exit marked Squirrel Island.

Down the dirt road to McGinty's boat yard you can see your family whaler bobbing on the afternoon swell at the end of the pier. You park, get out to stretch, and in the distance out across the bay you see Squirrel for the first time this season, emerald green and granite on the horizon. They have the boat all ready, two tanks of gas in the stern, the key under the leeward cushion, a six of icy Buds in the bait-well. You swing your duffel in and step down off the

dock. The ancient Evinrude coughs, you give it more choke, then it sputters to life. You cast off the bow line and turn slowly out into the channel.

Halfway out, just past the nun that marks the beginning of the harbor, you cut the motor and begin to drift. You look at your watch, a beautiful stainless chronograph, her last gift. You remove it and stare for a moment at the puckered flesh the tight band leaves behind on your wrist. Then with a flick you send it overboard, seeing it sparkle like a silver fish before disappearing into the current. You light a cigarette, content to just sit there for a minute or two, suspended on the water's strength. Off the port bow you see the Island Queen, carving a wake between Squirrel Island and you. The people topside wave, but you don't return the favor.

The house is on the northeast side of the Island, away from the other houses, the ones rented by off-islanders. Your father was born here, and your grandfather too. This is important in the state of Maine: anyone not a native is treated with suspicious disdain. By birthright you too are an islander, even though you were born on a cold January day at Peter Bent in Boston, even though your family has lived mostly in Connecticut for the last twenty-five years. Your roots go deep into this rocky soil, your house belonging here as much as the blue and green pots that mark your family's lobster traps out on the bay. Later in the week you'll set them out, announcing for another summer your arrival at Squirrel. As you wind your way up the path from the dock a familiar feeling comes over you, again you're that child returning for another glorious summer. She never understood that elation, often trying to extinguish it with snide remarks and sour moods. The first time she stepped off the boat at Squirrel, the natives had her pegged as an off-islander. The fact that she was your wife did little to change her status from that day on.

There's a stand of rose hip bushes that line the approach to the house, their fruit just turning from green to red. The house is large and sprawling, grey clapboard with a wide porch that skirts the ocean side. Since you're the first up this June, you've drawn opening the house duties, the checklist etched in your mind like an old song. With the shutters closed and the front door boarded shut, the house seems to be sleeping, waiting to open up and embrace the warm southern breeze. Inside it is dark and comforting, the air stale and smelling of cedar. Upstairs the beds have a stuffed musty smell that first day. So you throw open the windows, and that fragrant air brushes through the screens with the sounds of leaves. The closets are full of summer clothes left at the house every year, sweat shirts, old Jack Purcells, jeans worn thin at the knees, yellow rain slickers

made of oilskin. Hanging in the closet in your room you find one of her dresses, black and strapless, much too elegant for Squirrel Island, Chanel No. 5 clinging to it like an old accusation.

The first night back on Squirrel is like a dream. You sit on the porch with a cold glass of beer, knowing that the hour between eight and nine is an hour that only summer on Squirrel Island sees. As the evening fades like pages in an old book, the crickets come on, then the lights in the houses across the bay, one by one. The trees grow as deep and black as the sky, then they fill with moving stars, the fireflies you chased as a child with mason jars. You stay on the porch until night's chill air sets in, listening to the wind tickle the chimes that hang on the porch, a sound that has lulled you to sleep for twenty-five summers. You go inside and find a book from the stacks in the den, summer books, Moby Dick next to The Bobsy Twins next to Robert Ludlum. Under the crisp flannel sheets upstairs you remember the last time the two of you made love here, the old bed groaning in protest, the hurricane lamp flickering before you turned it down.

At least you don't dream of her, and with morning comes that feeling that only waking up at Squirrel can bring. You find the morning paper rolled in a tube and wrapped in a rubber band against the back screen door, and you lounge on the porch over coffee and a plate of eggs, doing the crossword, checking the box scores from yesterday's games. Sailboats begin to appear out on the water, two of them with their spinnakers out on downward reaches. You're trying to get up the nerve for a morning swim in that cold sea. You learned off the sagging dock in front of your house, six years old, tossed in by your father. As you walk down the path to the water your feet become a part of you again-- a little unused to being bare, too tender on the road you cross to get to the dock, a sandy instep and a sticky piece of tar between two toes. Across the cove, by the beach the off-islanders use, you see two girls, fifteen or sixteen, shivering on a float. You hear them giggling, and they wave to you. They remind you of another summer, when you were sixteen, a sweet girl named Molly, the two of you in the boathouse under piles of stuffed sail bags, the mystery finally solved. Or so you thought.

Once in the water and over the initial shock, you float on your back, the blue sky hovering over you, gulls curious enough to swoop down for a closer look. Your wife didn't like to swim, but you didn't mind then. You should have noticed the way her nose wrinkled up when she saw the house the first time you brought her up to Squirrel, but you didn't. Instead you were blinded by the whiteness of her suit against her strong tanned legs as she lounged in the

bow of the skiff tied up to the dock, chain smoking and reading Tama Janowitz. She hated the house, the Island. She even hated the lobsters that came fresh from your traps each morning. She was afraid of seaweed. You should have noticed, but you didn't.

As you get out of the water the memory of floating begins to go, like something evaporating. You dry off with one of the rough cotton towels that have been around the house since you can remember, thick and absorbent and slightly frayed. At Squirrel it seems you're always drying off, but how good it feels after long days in the water, your skin covered in a salty patina. Fresh clothes, the midday sun warm against your back, it's hard to remember ever feeling cold. Hard to imagine the harsh northeasters that licked and sucked at the house during the past winter.

Back on the porch, you shake a smoke out of the crumpled pack in your shirt pocket. You light it and lean back in one of the cracked wicker rockers your grandfather made in the shop off the barn. This summer house feels smooth with wear, like it's furniture. Lazy days like this polish them. You don't miss the watch: instead you track time by watching the sun move across this great porch. By late afternoon the cigarette pack is empty and you're ready for a nap. A moth has found its way in, beating against the screen as you lie on the cool bed upstairs that hot afternoon, the dusty flutter of its wings the only sound in the house.

Fog comes in quickly at Squirrel Island. You wake up in a dark house, and outside the fog horn moans a blue note. Every four minutes the beam from the Ocean Point light washes over the house. You go downstairs and start a fire in the fireplace, standing in front of it until the birch logs are a roaring blaze. The den is lit with an orange glow, and on the mantle you notice a picture of the two of you on your wedding day. Picking up the battered silver frame you remember: you with your hair mussed and your glasses slightly askew, her with a smudge of wedding cake on her chin, the two of you beaming from champagne. This was the picture your mother picked out to keep up at Squirrel Island, as if the reality of it could be better preserved up here. The photograph her parents have at their Fifth Avenue duplex is the more formal, stylized pose: you rigid, fear in your eyes, their daughter appearing distant and slightly bored. That was the picture they paid for, taken at a studio in Manhattan, suitable for the Sunday Times. You pad into the kitchen and make yourself a sandwich. Back in front of the fire you sit cross-legged with a glass of wine, the lights still off. Outside there has been a subtle shift in the wind, and you can hear the surf increasing on the rocky shore. The fog horn sounds again, and the beam of light sweeps through the room. This is your favorite time

at Squirrel Island, a sweater night, lonely and cool. She could never stay warm in this house, even on nights like this, the two of you curled before the fire with a cheap jug of wine. She missed the city, the telephone, the action. After a few days on Squirrel she would get cagey and restless, pacing the house, muttering under her breath, snapping at you.

Dawn comes in and finds you sleeping on the den floor, the fire down to embers, your wine glass spilled on the rug. The sea is whipped into a chop, the sky a strange pink, "Red sky in morning, sailors take warning." The brass ship's clock on the wall rings out seven bells, and you notice the barometer is dropping fast. One of the shutters outside the kitchen window has come loose, banging out an awkward rhythm. The rain holds off for most of the morning, but the sky grows thick and grey, swollen thunderheads sliding across the bay. At noon there's a note slipped under the back door: "Cocktails and storm watching, The Chamberlains, Six P.M. Island Attire."

Storm party. That was when your marriage finally came loose last summer, ripped from its mooring of respectability. Every season with the first summer storm, comes the Chamberlain's gruelling cocktail party. All the old families are there, the men in blue blazers and Nantucket reds, the women with their broad haunches shifting under loud print skirts, Island attire. You've known all of them since you were a child, you've seen how like the storm these parties build and swell to a drunken crescendo, tempers and winds fueled by gin and dry vermouth. The Chamberlains are at the head of the Island pecking order, presiding over the shabby gentility of Squirrel. He's in stocks and bonds, she's in scotch and soda. You can almost anticipate the questions, the same ones you were asked at the office last fall, the same ones whose answers you still choke on. "Where's your lovely wife?" "How's married life treating you?" "When are we going to hear some little footsteps?" All you want to remember of her is the gentle ache you felt making love, the curve of her neck as she arched above you, her brow furrowed with concentration, tiny pearls of sweat at the small of her back, her breasts full in your hands. Instead you'll be reminded of the look in her eyes that night last summer, of a sailing glass that caught you flush in the forehead, the blood still a slight stain on the Chamberlain's beige hall carpet.

You arrive at six-thirty, soaked through, your glasses fogged. The room is a sea of bright clothes and ruddy faces, lots of bluff and hearty "Hello's," kisses on wrinkled cheeks, shaking of cool dry hands. You slide over to the bar for a beer, feeling their eyes watching you, some filled with questions, others filled with simple and sad

understanding. Outside the bay window in the Chamberlain's den you can see the pines bent over in the wind like weeping willows.

You watch your reflection in that window, and can't help thinking back to last year. Her face was pursed and ugly that night, too much to drink, tottering around the party, slurring her words. Then through the haze the two of you in the hallway, her voice rising in pitch, in slow motion her arm cocked back, the contents of her glass spraying in an arc as it left her hand like a fastball. You awoke to a lot of nervous laughter, Doctor Ferris stitching up your head, his scotch breath moist against your cheek, your wife slamming out the door into the storm. When you could stand you went after her, but it was too late. You stumbled down the path to your house, the storm howling around you, blood caked to your cheek. On the back door you find a note, simple and direct: "I've had it. I'm leaving you." Out on the bay you see a bow light dipping in and out of sight across the rough, storm tossed sea. You grabbed the binoculars down off the shelf, and in a flash of lightning you saw her standing in the stern of McGinty's old lobster boat. He later told you that she had bribed him fifty bucks to risk taking her over to the mainland that night, though he probably would have done it for free.

At the party tonight you're tired all of a sudden, and you bid your hosts goodbye. At home you fall asleep almost the instant you get into bed, the storm outside making the house vibrate and hum. The next morning you wake up early, make yourself a huge breakfast and take the portable radio out on the porch. The air is scrubbed clean and fresh again, the sky an impossible blue. At noon you tune the radio in to the New England Red Sox network, then sit back to enjoy the games, a double header with the Orioles. Tomorrow your brother and his family will be up to the Island, and you need to set out the lobster traps so that they will have something to eat when they arrive. This morning you watched the mirror as you shaved, the face you uncovered one year older. But out on the water your last day on Squirrel, after dropping the line of traps off along the deep trench in the middle of the bay, you catch your reflection peering up at you over the gunwale, the swaying sea. For just a moment more you're the same age you were the summer you learned to swim.

John Rawlings is a 7th semester English major. He wrote this piece for himself.

POEM BY PETER GOLANSKY

Unnative

The stetson gives him away
As the lanky, close cropped figure
Stepped into the sweat slick night
His boot heels - worn nubs
Crying for a cobbler's hammer -
Make rounded impressions
In the fibrous
Maelstrom
Called NYC
Yes, East Texas meets the Big Apple

In his foolishness
He stops for a friendly word
With a wispy figure
Floating by
But the absence of response
Agitates his tumble-weed mind
And makes him wonder
If he didn't create it all
Taking a wide open, dust-blown, sun-blasted
Clean and endless plain
And raising it vertically
In a beer-sodden twist
Of mental gymnastics
But lacking the ability to cut
The Gordian logic
And turn it back
To the slow
75 m.p.h. peace
of Highway 66

Instead he turns
And, not feeling the muted stares,
Paces off the yards
Hoping to find sunrise
In the east
Only to be disappointed
Finding Sunrise-In-A-Can
The best the calico streets
Can offer him to taste

His longing for his hoglegs
Strapped to his side
Makes him quiver
With the thoughts of cold metal
He dreams of having a horse
Between his legs
Bridled, under his command

Becoming part of him
In a maddening despair
He finds his desires left empty
Again
For all that is in his grasp
Are chicken legs from KFC
And a jaunty ride on a strumpet named Joy
Pay-per-screw entertainment
With a drive in and all

You can't see the East Texas stars
Looking up through
Megalithic totems
Of gods untold

So the cowboy walked off
Down a gruel-gray street
The bob of his hat
Lost amid the vaporous waves
But I know him
He of the questioning stare
Inquiring
In softly lacking confidence
And the unnative shivers
Caught unquestionably
From the damp black streets

Peter Golansky, a 2nd semester Philosophy major, wrote
this poem on his own.

POEM BY MARY WEBB

Did you consider the moral issue?

My daughter rises up
between Vietnam and
the second World War.

A man ordinarily disliked,
barely known
(except for his root in the
family tree)
but staunch in his knowledge,
twitches and chatters
on the far end of the couch.
The formal after-dinner pause
incites this man to refer
to a packet of facts
jostling upon his knee.
Looking through my daughter
and slightly to my left,
the first topic is posed for
the room to reflect --
something about Nazis,
but my attention has diverted
to more immediate significance.

Able to exit unseen,
I make way to relieve
the pressure in my abdomen.
A thrust of fluid
Hits the water, scattering to separate
and trickle-drops pattern rings
until the surface is still.
Leaning closely, I can see
my daughter's eyes in mine.
They are more earnest in reflection.

Returning, I find
the room has exploded.
Pieces of my daughter and the
mysterious antagonist
hurl in my direction.
Her eyes nevermore demanding
for my participation in her rescue;
but her battering blunt tongue
levitates her above this.
She has cried in my defense,
protectress of choice and dreams,
of soldiers once her age.

My presence gently calms her tantrum.
I join her on the couch
and stepping out of conviction,
with a grasp on the canvas piping,
her eyes lift, and seem to understand.
"Survival," I say.

Mary Webb is a 6th semester English major. She submitted this poem to the 1990 Wallace Stevens Poetry Competition.

POEM BY ALEX KREONIDIS

Beside the sight my bed lies,
where I sigh and make my
head relax but the scene persists:
uncompromisingly present, reflecting
the figures I've relied on for what?
A mirror of his discarded, soiled
underwear in the foreground
and their motions: his abrupt thrusts,
her quiet acceptance. Her on all
four matching his groping hand that finds
a tit and rubs, with spread palms.
Pressing a cheekbone on her back our eyes
meet above the dresser in silver
stillness: the movements have faded.
His gaze steadfast, suddenly rushes
at me penetrating the surface,
fracturing the room, searching deeper,
fording the expanse to waver upon--
(Threshold).
Blurry eyed I wake to pounding
consciousness of reconcilable
presences: all too aware
of the dank stickiness.

Alex Kreonidis is a 4th semester English major. He submitted this poem to the 1990 Wallace Stevens Poetry Competition.

POEM BY MATT O'CONNELL

The Graduate

My friend smiles,
wipes the injun summer
sweat clockways round
his "thirty-three" Rolling Rock grin:
knots Dad's old anchor ropes,
webbing my seventy-six
Michigan State running board bug--
forest green like a varsity sweater.
Lets "black forest" have it--
a good hearted half shuffle thump
to her rusted maple leaf fender.
'I envy you pal'
segues to
'I remember
my last semester.'

His grey reverse, wayfarer
tourtise shell knit--
Now an insurance company escort.
Sky blue--
the color of exam books.
Decorated with four squares of
colorless glue;
once vivid accesses--
state colored stickers.
Private patterns of parking.
Purchased,
now payed for.

Matt O'Connell is an 8th semester English major.

POEMS BY THOMAS DOUGHERTY

A Lesson of Worth

White morning glory
Wearing dew-like jewels,
Trumpets her plea to the stars.
Blue Black wasp
Stinging, staccato and straining
Bites at the flesh of the petal.
Undeniably beaten,
Poor little cretin,
Licks blood from his face and hands.
Silent, smooth throated Hummingbird
Graceful air dance a measured stance,
Beats her breath with heart and feathery wings.
Quivering in the cool misty morning
She poured forth her hopes and her dreams.

Psychoanalysis

Dare to enter there, Deep and Dark!
My spirit suspended, like earth,
Cobalt-blue in space.
Black thoughts:
Ancient satellite spiders,
Spinning suffocation, to choke the
Light I might feel.
My will draws them in,
Flaming and crashing within me
Slashing my soul.
To explode and hurl them like stars
I illuminate the black pages of my mind.

Thomas Dougherty wrote these poems on his own. He is a 6th semester English major.

KIND OF HATS

Joel Hathaway

Hat first off the rack. Tweedy, grey, old hat, like the kind that an old man would wear. The kind of hat in a black and white movie, where the ladies had the shoulder-length hair and very white faces and wore modest clothing. The men, who weren't quite old yet, they had the wet-looking short, dark hair and wore casual suits. Eventually they'd smile at each other. And over that wet hair, the long coat thrown over solid shoulders, went the hat. Now old men wear them, looking in the mirror and seeing young bodies and hearing those lines that seemed so natural flowing out of young mouths and watching the lady seem shocked. The lady, she was young before, and now she smiles as she watches him remember. Those lines never shocked me, she smiles, those lines were always old, those lines were so young. She smiles at the old man, not having to remember because it all worked out as she'd imagined. "So much easier for me," she whispers, "so much easier is my only regret. My skin, it's grown older too, and yellowed a bit from the ceramic white of forty years ago. But it isn't the same for me, I never stand in front of the mirror and regret. I look at pictures that were never there so long ago, graduations and grandchildren and weddings and I smile, I'm sorry but I have to. Being this woman, this grandma, I'm sorry a bit, because I see it happening to you. I see you stand in front of the mirror." She sees him put on the hat. The tweedy, grey hat he's worn for forty years, the old man's hat. He's silent, but eyes seem to ask her, "Aren't these the latest though? But aren't these the latest . . . in magazines and commercials and . . . Aren't these, well, aren't these what the fashionable wear?" "No dear, they're not." They're old man hats now, the kind of hats that old men wear. Charles is the old man putting on the hat, lighting a cigar and walking outside.

Charles walks onto his porch and looks up to the clouds to see if it will rain or not. The lady standing inside interprets his actions, after years of being married to the man she understands most things that he does. "My bones feel like it will rain, Charles," she says to him, reaching for his big grey overcoat and black umbrella. Charles mumbles and immediately begins walking to the car. She doesn't realize but Charles does not want to know what her bones feel. "I remember, I'm no fool, the years haven't stolen my mind just yet, no way. I know that only old people feel weather in their bones. I don't need today's elderly forecast, thank you." He doesn't say this, he loves his wife, he only feels this. Charles gets into his car, his wife still watching as he prepares to drive away. She

knows now that she's bothered him, only trying to be helpful she's reminded him that not only is he old, but also he's married to an old woman. "Not the youthful figure you agreed to stay with, I'm sorry Charles, that my bones are no longer meant for speed and power, no longer do young men wish to feel these bones moving. But I forget, it's been so long and I've always been happy. I'm sorry for you that my bones can tell the weather." As Charles drives off, he honks the horn, waves and smiles. He feels content that he hasn't upset his companion. "He's always been such a good boy," Mrs. Charles Johnson says to herself with a tiny smile. "Always he's meant well."

Charles drives off, as he's done for thirty straight years. He's never missed a day until his retirement came, same job, same hours, same stories to tell the family. He was so proud of his work, his salary, his job as breadwinner. During those thirty years he missed a few things, like when the second baby came and he was working because he was sure his shift would end by then. Like some school plays, like a few little league games. He made the important stuff though, that's what he always said he did and what he always tried to do. He was no workaholic, seldom would he stay too late and miss dinner, he was just a busy man. He won the bread of course.

Mrs. Charles Johnson sits in the empty house, empty from the five kids who had grown and left there. Empty from three dogs, two cats, a rabbit, some fish, three hamsters and a mouse that was only allowed to stay for a few hours. "When I was a kid we had those things running around under our beds and we'd have to try and kill them with traps and more and more kept coming and who knows where they all lived inside those flimsy walls. You kids, thinking mice are fun, you try eating dinner when a mouse runs underneath the table and picks up your scraps and we'll see how much you like mice. No mouse is going to live in this house."

Mrs. Charles Johnson sits in the empty house as she used to when the youngest, James, had left for kindergarten and the others were all in school and Charles was off to the job. "A wife of mine working? Are you crazy? I didn't marry a girl and go and have her making the money and didn't I pledge to provide for you nineteen years ago at our wedding? What do you want, a new dress? I'll buy you a new one, or what, some nice shoes or one of those fancy dishwashers or what? Since when can't I not afford to get you something you want . . . Is it me or is it you, Joan, are all your girlfriends getting jobs? Is that it? I don't like it, Joan, I really don't like it." And so Joan never asked again to get a job; an insult to his masculinity was what she was dealing with. She shrugged when she thought that a simple idea to get out of the boring house and make

some extra money for the family was an insult to Charlie's masculinity. Mrs. Charlie Johnson had been alone in the house many, many times.

Joan walks down her hall and smiles at all the pictures hanging on the walls. She goes over to the far corner where the sun never is and shadows usually come sometime late into the afternoon and she finds the bottom drawer of the old dresser that Charlie had bought when they first got married. "Look at this beauty. Strong wood, this baby'll last for years and it's a really good investment. I bought it off some friend at work, only fifty dollars, what a sucker."

Mrs. Charlie Johnson could only nod even though fifty dollars was a lot of money. "Fifty dollars is a lot of money," she said and nodded.

Charlie was insulted a bit. As a slight scowl came upon his face he assured his wife that the investment was well worth it.

Joan goes into the bottom drawer of a dresser that used to be made of strong wood and dark stain. The dresser stands tall, tired, aging, scratched and worn with abuse of a family of small children. Not worth more than five dollars at a neighborhood yard sale, the dresser is no longer Charlie's favorite possession. This dresser wasn't Charlie's prize possession very long, Joan thinks. She opens the drawer and under old sweaters, family albums of aging pictures and baby books, she removes her diary.

Turning a bit pink from amused embarrassment, Joan reads the thoughts of a similar girl, a girl with the same name and loves and ideas as herself. She reads the prose of a very young girl. She reads poems unread by anyone else. Although she's often wanted to share them with Charles, and although she's even entertained girlish thoughts of sending some of them off to a publisher, there never seemed to be any great reason for exposing the young girl like that. Publishers would never take a second look at the stuff. Charlie, he might laugh, no he'd probably do something worse, he'd probably ignore the dreams and wishes and joys of the girl he loved and dismiss them with an "I don't get it" or "I'm tired but why is this the first of this diary thing that I've heard. You don't see me hiding some little book away in my sock drawer. You don't see me writing down words like they're more important than life." Still, Mrs. Charles Johnson begged sometimes, to the diary writer inside herself, that she please open the book to Charles. Charles Johnson is the man that Joan Johnson loves.

An old tree somewhere near Joan Morning's old house still says so. Carved with a tiny jackknife, if you stare closely

enough, you can still see the tiny heart and initials. Joan Johnson showed her kids once, on a Sunday afternoon, while she was taking them for a drive. "People used to do that sort of thing," she told her oldest, "especially little girls."

Joan Morning was the littlest of little girls. A long time before Joan Morning grew up and became Mrs. Charles Johnson, a longer time before she was mommy to five young children, an even longer time before she was mother to five adults, and a long, long time before she was a grandma, she was Joan Morning, age ten. The calendar said January, 1935, but Joan said today is my birthday. She got a little cake and some hand-me-downs from her older sister and a used bike with training wheels that her dad had found at a junkyard but painted pink. Joan's daddy had to work most of that Saturday, and when he got home he was dirty and tired, but mom had made the day special. Joan laughed a lot that day, like most days when she was ten. Her big sister gave her a little diary. She hugged her big sister and was the happiest, oldest little girl in the whole wide world. She might have cried with happiness when her sister gave her the diary, but only if she'd been older. Little girls never cry when they're happy, they only cry when they're sad. Little girls only giggle when they're happy.

"Today I'm 10. and I have a new bike and a diary. I love my sister and my mommy and my daddy too and I love god."

Joan Johnson wants to write something about this day in the 65th year of her life, but as is the case whenever she begins looking through the yellowed pages, she's trapped herself. Unlike pictures and dreams and other memories, diary-reading doesn't give Joan highlights of the important days. Joan flips through, picking out pages, randomly selecting forgotten moments that were once the most important days of her life. Joan skips past childhood and into real life.

Mrs. Charles Johnson slips the book back into the dresser. Not an attempt to forget, more like a tiny peek that is always so wonderful she doesn't dare ruin it with indulgence. Like a giant chocolate bar that tastes so wonderful piece by piece. With years, Joan knows better than to ever enjoy the whole thing at once. Once when she was younger she ate a whole candy at once and her mother had warned her and later she would warn her own young children and they would warn others . . . And so it goes, generations of wisdom, Joan thinks to herself. Generations of mothers warning kids about the great chocolate threat and other hazards of life. Generations of times when warnings never ever help. Joan smiles, she loves the thought of

generations, she loves that although her name will never be passed on, her thoughts and ideas will. Charles has always been so concerned with how the family name was treated in future years. Unfortunately, there are many many Johnsons and only so many old ladies who can give the chocolate warning. The man she loved has pinned too many hopes on the names inscribed on grave stones, and not enough on the memories and secrets the names stood for. Mrs. Charles Johnson understands the man she loves and sympathizes with his not understanding the younger generations of Johnsons. Joan, however, knows that she has avoided such problems with the chocolate warning and other tricks.

The bed is covered with a flowered print. It is old, but not as old as the dresser. "These old things," she thinks, "they still have life in them." Joan lies on the bed and stares at pictures and feels content. She wonders where Charles is, but this is nothing new. She walks to the kitchen to have a cup of tea.

Rain splashes onto the windshield of the car. Not many things make Charles think. He was never the pensive type. Death, though, death is a tough one for him to handle, and it's not seeming to let up on me and my friends, is it. No, it doesn't seem to be going away really, no it seems that more and more it's just arriving and it's fast and maybe painless and certainly no surprise yet tough to handle every time isn't it. Yeah every time it's tough to handle. The car parks and Charles dashes out of the car, holding his old man hat tightly over his head and wishing he'd taken that overcoat with him. She always knows, Charles thinks. She is Joan and even though she doesn't know everything, Charles is telling himself that he never knows even enough to listen to Joan. Joan Johnson is the girl that Charles loves.

Running through the mud, he finally arrives to the stone which is in ground that his longest friend rests in. "No, no he doesn't rest there, Charlie, he's dead there and maybe not even that, maybe he's dead somewhere else. But he was never one for resting, no way. Old Pete Curly rest? Who'd ever believe that, that Pete Curly would just take and lie down and sleep somewhere. No way, not Old Pete Curly." Months ago he wanted to yell at a man with black clothes and a white collar that no, Pete Curly wasn't resting. Pete was dead, and he had lived all the life anyone could live and the only way he'd ever allow these fools to stand and cry and mourn would be if he was dead. He wanted to yell but he never did, instead he stood and mourned. But he didn't cry, not for Pete Curly.

Standing by the stone Charles thinks of his wife. He worried about her dying for a lot of years but not anymore. She could do it so easily now, she really could. Death had

always frightened Joan but not now, now it was logical and the order was so clear to her and little ones would grow and the even littler would be born and the older would die. It made much sense now, it wasn't hard for Joan anymore. But after years behind a desk and staring at the company's files and sometimes going out with the guys and the wives, it wasn't making so much sense. Death shouldn't happen to guys like me and Pete Curly, Charles thinks. Death is something that should only happen to old people, to people who are finished with life. I'm not finished with life. Pete wasn't finished with life. Charles turns his head from the stone, whispers goodbye to his friend and walks back to the car.

He steps into the house and is greeted, of course, by Mrs. Charles Johnson. She brings him coffee and he smiles and says thank you. She knows that he loves her although he'll never tell her. An old house it is, and an old saucer that holds the coffee. The phone doesn't ring so much anymore. Old quilts on the bed that once breathed fertility and youth, now they simply sigh security. The kids have all moved away. The dresser is still as sturdy as the day it was bought and probably will be for years. Joan stands on the edge of the kitchen, near but not in the living room and smiles at the man she has loved forever. Old Pete Curly has been reduced to a body among many bodies of old friends. The house smells of comfort and age and generations of Johnsons. The old man hat lies on the floor and Joan wishes that Charles, the man she loves, would sometimes wear his overcoat in the rain. Charles Johnson lights a cigar, Mrs. Charles Johnson smiles to herself and watches him remember.

Joel Hathaway wrote this story in English 146. Joel is a 2nd semester English major.

REGRESSION

Peter Turco

I thought it was odd that the door was left open; but it was a thought that remains in the mind only long enough to think it. I fumbled for my keys out of habit, soon realizing that my efforts were unnecessary and I pushed the door open. I'm sure that it was an oversight -- leaving the door open. My sister hadn't been getting much sleep lately. Actually, for the few previous nights she hadn't been sleeping at all. She tossed in bed, left the bed periodically, ate, returned, and tossed some more. My bedroom was right there next to hers, and sometimes I heard "Damn! Damn this!" and a subsequent cry, or, more frequently, the cool, solid "tlink" of a small ice cube swimming through Scotch and hitting the side of a glass.

I knew her mind was going in a thousand directions so I didn't even question the fact that her coat was thrown on the floor or that her shoes were on opposite sides of the living room. I noticed the broken glass, too. I nearly stepped in it for Christ's sake. She wouldn't have normally thrown the glass. She didn't do that anymore. I assume it was a drinking glass. I never asked.

Something troubled her deeply today. I can see her nervously groping in her purse for her keys. She struggles to get the right key in the lock and finally gets the door open. The keys fall and she immediately lashes her coat against the wall and watches it fall to the ground. She imagines a face burned into the white spot in the wall between the electric pseudo-fireplace and the "authentic" eighteen century Ladies masque. I can hear her now the way I would've heard her if I had been behind her then. "Idiot!" she screams, "Ass!" Psychologists would say that she regressed back to the last time she got this angry and she acts the same way she did then. The shoes come off! Before she checks to see if they were expensive shoes or not she heaves them one by one at the same image her coat just attacked. Both shoes. If she had three feet, all three shoes would've flown. She looks to the table for more artillery and she spots the drink she didn't finish for breakfast and "What the Hell" throws that at the wall as well.

Even before her cameo appearance gets fully underway she is sick of the spotlight. I'd bet she feels like an animal or like a baby that wants to be fed and she feels she has no control over anything under any conditions. She feels a lot of things but she doesn't feel twenty-nine years old. I'm sure all she wants to do at that moment is take off all of

her clothes and get into the bathtub and fill it with one-third water and two-thirds bubbles and read Redbook and eat Ben-N-Jerry's and watch "Arsenic and Old Lace" with Cary Grant. So she retreats to her bedroom, and . . .

I knew when she wanted to come out of hiding and talk about it she would. She confided in me. I don't know why she did but she did. Sometimes I was so bored that I sat there and thought about existentialism and walking from Iceland to Peru and back and when she was done she'd thank me and kiss me and tell me that she loved me. I solved many of her problems that way.

But this one might have called for my partial attention. This one may have called for periodic interjectory comments. A few "wait, I think" and perhaps a "hold on, now, you're dead wrong here!" or two. I sat and waited for her fearing that if I went in after her I'd catch her at a bad time. Maybe she didn't want to tell me. I am her best friend, but there are things that you keep from your best friend forever. Maybe she wanted to tell other people. Maybe she wanted to tell a priest or a minister or an analyst or a stranger or a plant; or maybe she wanted to tell every living and non-living creation of God that existed on the planet -- all except me. OK. I loved her and I would wait.

So I waited. But how long did I have to wait? It is a tedious and monotonous task, waiting. Five, ten, twenty, forty-five, then NINETY seconds. I couldn't wait anymore. I had to go in there and tell her I loved her and that she would be OK no matter what it was getting her so upset.

I stopped myself before going inside. I couldn't disturb her yet. But I just had to know what she was thinking and feeling. I needed to help her, but I needed to know when she needed help and if she wanted it and from whom.

I stood at the door for a few minutes. I wondered what she was doing and where she was. Was she at the window? or in bed writing? or in bed crying? Maybe she was taking that bath, or looking at old pictures, or maybe she was at the vanity looking at herself. Last week she was at the vanity doing her hair and drinking her breakfast at the same time because she was in a rush. When she finally took a long awaited slug, she swallowed, gasped, and said, "Hmm. Tastes like hairspray." When I couldn't wait any longer I called her name and asked what she was doing. She said she wasn't doing anything and that she'd be with me in a minute. Her voice was so faint that it sounded as if she was talking into her hands or that she wasn't talking to me.

I poured the two of us cups of tea and set them at the table. I sat down and put her tea at the empty seat. When

I was through fidgeting with the tea it was quiet. The way quiet feels when you're in church on Sunday morning and you had sex the night before. So quiet, in fact, I could hear the currents of electricity illuminating the lightbulb.

Then I heard a quiet but ear-shattering sound. I thought of all the times we talked and all the things she said and I got very nervous. I remembered that shit she pulled when she was fourteen and I tried to think of another explanation for that awful sound. It sounded like the tow of a boat being secured and sounded like a ceiling beam straining to support the weight of a grown woman. I could feel my blood beginning to race faster, faster until I thought it would make a sound. I tried to get up but my palms were already sweaty and I had no balance against the table. I rose somehow and stumbled backwards. I leaned forward and caught the table for support and knocked the tea to the floor. I went towards her room and her coat was in my way so I kicked it and it was still at my feet so I picked it up and hurled it at the same spot she did. I looked for the shoe. The shoe was in the corner -- not in my way. The door! The door was shut. I reached to open it and my palms were too sweaty so I couldn't clasp the knob so I rubbed my hands on my sweater and I went for the knob and I opened the door.

Peter Turco, a 4th semester English major, wrote this story on his own.

POEM BY JASON BEDFORD

Untitled

I want spaghetti
I want salad
I want chimichangas
and nachos
and pizza
and beer
 on the beach
wearing blue doctor pants
wearing a snoopy t-shirt
wearing a green cardigan
 and huarachas
I want music
I want James Taylor
Steely Dan
and maybe some Grateful Dead,
I want pillows
and tapestries
and incense
I want old friends
to be there too
I want cool moonlight
and warm water
I want frisbees
and guitars

Jason Bedford is a 7th semester double major in English and Spanish. He wrote this poem for English 146.

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