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EASTERN EXPOSURE showcases the literary work of Eastern Connecticut State University's student writers. In doing so, it promotes the university's mission as Connecticut's public liberal arts university and stated purpose as "a model community of learners of different ages from diverse cultural, racial and social backgrounds."

SUBMISSIONS: EASTERN EXPOSURE accepts submissions of student poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction from the beginning of the fall term until 4 p.m. on the Tuesday before Thanksgiving. All Eastern students are invited to submit their work (up to five poems, one short story, and one piece of creative nonfiction) as a single Word attachment to englishclub@stu.easternct.edu. Each student should also include a brief (15-word) biographical note with his/her submission.

EASTERN EXPOSURE is distributed free to members of the Eastern Connecticut State University community. Current issues are available in the campus bookstore, the Student Center, Smith Library, and the English Department Office. Back issues may be available through the English Club Faculty Advisor and the English Department.

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The work of wings was always freedom, 
fastening one heart to every falling thing.

Li-Young Lee
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Feeding Her Mother Grapefruit

When I was too young to understand her speaking to her mother in Polish, I watched my grandmother sprinkle sugar onto the bitter heart of a grapefruit, stretching across the table as the pink juices dribbled down her mother's chin like rivers carving into bedrock. Where my grandmother scooped what was left with a metal spoon.
Changing a Flat
Willimantic, CT

All the way from Rhode Island
My father drives to fix my flat
With greasy hands,
Black smudging his collared shirt.

As my eyes grow heavy like the tire
He struggles to lift in place,
I see him like I did as a little girl,
Oil drizzling past his feet,
Down the driveway,
Into a puddle of rainbows.
Kileen Gilroy

You Can't Save Me

I can't fight anymore.
Tears trickle down my lips
Like rain does
Sliding slowly down shingles
Of a broken home that withstood
A fire caused by my ex-boyfriend's little brother
Who played with matches
Underneath his mother's bed,

Where kids now ride their bikes,
Gather in a circle like tribal warriors
to throw rocks through windows,
Run up and down creaking stairwells,
Punch holes
And scrape floral wallpaper
From the walls

Like death
That follows me down these vacant streets,
Like a boy who says he just wants to talk to me,
Just wants to be "my friend."
Mami and Her Baby Man

Mami had me at a young age
Another chapter taken from her young page
But Mami grew up fast and became a lady
Buella threw her out the house
Me? I was still a baby
Ma couldn’t understand why she did that
So she turned grapes into wine/ made a bad situation fine
But the clock can only tell time
Not enough time in day/ so she kept running like relays
She had to turn her life around/ went through the ups and downs
Just to fall down
DAMNNNNNNNNNNN
Now let me fast forward to my teen years
Mama had an addiction made me cry tears
So now it’s time for me to switch gears
I got to be my mother’s and father’s/ 13 but my mind’s older
Shit got harder/ I don’t let it bother/ I just work harder
Cause Mami didn’t have it sweet
So it not for us to blame our environment and streets
So I pass through the fire/ just to find a maze away from the heat
And make my Mami proud/ that’s a win
We can’t step up on the court that we call life/ for defeats
So now I take care of my mother emotionally and physically
I even do her feet
Cause Mami didn’t have it sweet
So it not for us to blame our environment and streets
So we acknowledge the weak/ and learn more by the days and the weeks
Cause we don’t want to get caught up in the waterfall or creek
So we walk on water with our bare feet/ try to do the impossible
That my peers said I can’t meet
Cause Mami didn’t have it sweet
So it not for us to blame our environment and streets
She's a Fighter

23, a tender age, when cancer kept her away
From me, the family, and child she'd given life to.
Yes, a mother of now two couldn't stand.
A right hook.
I couldn’t stand the smell, so I barely ever visited.
Like her I.V., my eyes were constantly dripping—
So much morphine. Did she even know I was there?
A left hook.
After surgery, she's still holding on.
Cancer realize that she had competition, so she called for back-up.
And that's exactly what happened: she got back-up.
Good block.
Every night, we prayed to God that she'd make it through the next round.
Ding ding ding.
Come on, you can do it. Don't give up now.
Use everything you got and knock her down to the ground.
And that she did, not by TKO, but a unanimous decision.
And the winner is...
She, for now, 'till cancer wants a rematch.
She beat cancer when they said it was impossible.
I tell you, this fighter is phenomenal.
A Poet's Life

The flowers are green and the trees are all blue
The origin of this world unknown by you
The birds and the bees cannot be seen by all
The start of the spring is the start of the fall
The pain and the rain and what you have to gain
The smartness that's trapped inside your tiny brain
Your lover, your revolt, your laugh, your haul
The mentally seen leadership over all
The singing, the dreaming, the rhyming, the poems
The poet's life where the mind constantly roams
The sadness, the gladness, the good life, the bad
"It's a wonderful life" not to be had
Some think that we do this for pleasure alone
But we have the gift to tell what must be known
The lawyers, doctors, desk slaves and the tycoons
The face painted clowns selling children's balloons
Their jobs must be fun but they cannot compare
To working at your home in your underwear
The benefits cannot be understood by
The mindless office drones telling life good-bye
We poets, we dreamers, we sages of life
We know how to handle the torment, the strife
We see all the bad things that life has to give
We see all the reasons that life has to live
Some say that we're cuckoo, some say that we're nuts
And when we wander, each one looks like a klutz
But we are just different, and we aren't insane
No more than the person who stands in the rain
And though the one in the rain is probably
Either a good poet, or maybe it's me
We just have our fun in very different ways
We don't spend our good times in a drugged up haze
Well, some do, but those are the challenged at soul
The ones that cannot fulfill their earthly goal
But mostly, the main part of poets are good
And if they could be normal they probably would
But with their ideas they write down with a pen
Normalness is not something that they can
The deadlines they must meet to just pay their dues
Will leave upon their mind a lingering bruise
The hardships of life and societies cuts
Are what make them want to live in forest huts
The knowledge, the sacrifice and all the strife
Are what must be endured in a poet's life
Ennui

Repetition breeds habits and/or vices.
Routine creates life without thought.
Every day is the same.

Remember to brush my teeth. Wash, rinse, repeat my hair.
Eat my vegetables and wear clean underwear.
Repetition breeds healthy habits.

Every morning alarm clock buzzing, slap the snooze for five more
And roll over to find a familiar face.
Every day stays the same.

I drive to school on the same route in order to obtain that loot,
Puffing half a pack to pass the time.
Repetition breeds enticing vices.

Out the door to work at the store for boring chores to make me quit.
It's so redundant. I break for 15 to take a shit.
Every day is always the same.

Every night I return to my bed to rest my head,
Close my eyes, fall asleep, and begin the process again.
They say that repetition breeds habits and/or vices.
Neglecting that, every day remains exactly the same.
Monogamy

I keep my butterfly in a jar
And it stays displayed on my mantle.
I drill air holes in the tin lid
And spread grass across the bottom
And a twig for perching.

But my image desires to fly
And unfold the black and gold wings
So I have to unscrew the cap
And discard it far out of sight
And wait for flight.
Brain Fart

I find myself pondering my writer's block,
Stroking chin hair, but lacking a thought.
I cannot find something to write about.
Thinking I should start making stuff up.

Searching through Post-its for lines ending in rhyme,
Trying to meditate, but I cannot find the time.
Scribbling brainstorm, but the sun still shines.
Considering construction upon clichés a crime.

My new ideas previously outdated.
My creativity currently constipated.
Writing nothing but a diary of verbal diarrhea,
Unable to articulate an auditory onomatopoeia.

Um...Um...I think I'm dumb.

I am incapable of measuring lamb; it all sounds the same.
Staring blankly at the blank page with only my name.
The ink in my pen has dripped dry,
And still there is no reason why.

My muse has found a new suitor
Because my style does not suit her.
Now my mind continues to wander,
Searching for something over yonder.

I'm antsy so I place in a random pattern,
Staggering in the direction of the local tavern
For consciousness expansion with the Mad Hatter,
But I find nothing to say that matters.

I no longer have a personal choice.
I must clear the fog to find my voice.
Until then, all will go in the recycle bin
As motivation to begin again.
Concession of Flaws

I kept my knees under lock and key
As contradictions winked at me
But buckles broke and grindstones spoke
And reason slept in fear
Awoke
A string of mares through twilight skies.
Winged and strange with varicose eyes
From narrow spells of sleeping wells
With cries as dry as cracking bells.

They, in paralyzed uniform
With wilted neighs, summoned the storm.
They croaked and flitted brutish wings.
Their shadows teemed with deformed things.

And the terms inside are undefined,
Aligned with foreign eyes.
Wherein are wolves born of my pride,
But that they are is no surprise.
Slowly Saved

Five-point stars sketch paper lands
And ratios speak infinite
Silicon grace to our agile hands.
Their artists do not give a damn.
Our tenure will not weigh a gram.

Forlorn men see the universe
And bombshell arguments ensue
With musings about Cupid’s curse.
Bless this atom we call the earth,
But do not wager on its worth.

Three-step cosmic enterprise
(Binge, purge, repeat) the planets
Of life at a certain scale and size.
We remain to watch creation bide,
Perhaps stalling for a higher tide.

Tulip sighs, nostalgic lean
On galaxies in nova, rasp
Secrets to honey skies of green.
Expiring suns blush and beam,
And everything is ripping at its seams.

Wondering, lost, out deities breathe
And pray in steam to us (we)
Cellophane statues in gold wreathes.
These microcosmic colonies
Judged their worth by their economies.
**Rooftop Hero**

I remember the time
he climbed up there
high above the rest of us.

Fearless & determined,
he found my prize,
the little yellow ball I'd missed.

Smiling, he tossed it to me,
my big brother;
he always made it look so easy.

---

**Sea of Faces**

Even now,
in a sea of faces,
I look for hers.

Sometimes, a smile or a long,
wispy strand of red hair
dancing in the wind.

And even though
I am surrounded
by many faces

that love me,
I never stop searching
for my mother's face.
Sea of Faces

Even now,
in a sea of faces,
I look for hers.

Sometimes, a smile or a long,
wispy strand of red hair
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Needle

A throne of rubble,  
Glinting, but discarded.  
The long-term effect  
Of a deadly one-night stand.  
Was I nothing more than a silver bee  
Destined to sting only once?  
The need to be and to feel wanted;  
The role of the sadist; a memory.  
Emptied of everything once held,  
A dirty shell left behind.  
The choice of my demise wasn’t my own.  
I wasn’t allowed to find the moment  
In which I would have been happy.  
But it was necessary.  
I have no regrets.  
Thrown around by the seagulls,  
I continue to migrate  
Through an everlasting hollow.

Dale St. Onge

You enveloped me in your arms,  
Sealing me in with a stamped kiss  
Like a loved, secret paper  
Now sticky with your sweet-smelling sweat.  
And in this moment,  
Grasping blindly in the dark for your warm hand,  
My curious fingers fluttering towards yours,  
I am so happy  
Just to hear the wild beating of your heart  
Echoing in my head.
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This Moment

Time for class, but I don’t want to leave. I’ve settled
in at a small table by the fire—warm and
cozy. Can’t bear the thought of going into
the icy grip of the December wind. I have
managed to slow my mind down just enough to think
a little. I didn’t accomplish a damn thing
today—I couldn’t think, there was too much going
on in my head. Quizzes, exams, papers, poems,
homework, projects overdue—everything has been
a huge blur, smudged and smeared together—my brain hurts,
I can’t see straight though my eyes are just fine—the world
around me is spinning out of control—almost,
but not quite there yet. Have to go, I’m going
to be late if I wait longer. In this moment—
the warmth of the fire is so soothing, comforting—
calming the storm the end of the fall semester
brings. I collect my things and get up to leave. As
I open the door, the freezing air smacks me hard
in the face, and in that moment I realize how
overwhelmed I am by all this. I hold back tears—
I want to break down and cry. I want to scream. I
want to just give up and call it quits, but I know
it won’t last long—only two weeks and a couple
of days—then I will be able to breathe again,
let my mind rest, and sleep in on weekday mornings.

In Sanity

Where fairies come standard with glistening wings.
Where the mushroom condo is the latest must-have
   And a dragonfly parks in every garage.
Where rose petal blankets cover beds of Irish Moss
   And fireflies turn on at night when no one’s at home.
Where meteor showers make the Starflowers grow
   And sisters are born from two peas in one pod.
Where Dutchman’s Breeches hang on spider line
   And Pink Lady’s Slippers cover tiny feet.
Where sweethearts and lovers exchange fairy rings
   And brides wear Blue Bonnets, grooms acorn caps.
Where elves sip pink Champagne from Pixie Cups
   And a toadstool makes the best seat at the bar.
Where newt races and snail slugfests are popular sports
   And nymphs get together to play Touch-me-not.
Where legends are carried on by the Babbling Brook
   And lullabies are sung on sweet summer breezes.

Where fairies sleep all winter long then awaken to celebrate spring.
This Moment

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I Repress My Disgust

after Len Roberts's "My mother catalogues the wrongs"

At what life has dealt me,
at the stench that greets me at the door
each evening——
the litter box that hasn’t been cleaned,
dirty dishes that never seem to get washed——
you know the ones——
they sit in the sink all week. I can’t stand the mountain
of bills rising higher
and higher from the top of my desk, shirts
and back-packs and jackets draper over the chairs,
A teenager whose temper tantrums
are like a two-year-old’s, kicking and screaming and swearing,
slamming doors,
A wife who won’t push the vacuum or pick up her dirty
clothes or make the bed or wipe crumbs
off the kitchen counter.
I want to smash the scale that says I’ve gained
five pounds in twelve hours,
the mirror that says another hair has gone gray,
the alarm clock that insists on waking me
from a sound sleep at 4:30 am. At the thoughts
of having to deal with everything all over again.

The Father Figure

I see a piercing love
In your eyes
Gazing at me unfaltering
Constantly assured
I answer it
You will be proud of me
I already am
The words are in your glance
Doubting my strength
Weak and rebellious
Living fatherless
I know I need you
I Repress My Disgust
after Len Robert's "My mother catalogues the wrongs"

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Weak and rebellious
Living fatherless
I know I need you
You're Just Gone

What is your death to me?
It's not dramatic
It's not romantic
It's a fucking shame
You're just gone
The years I've spent
Trying to understand
I'm getting no closer to
Solving the mystery
Rage and cry all I want
In the end
There's nothing

Blue

I was never born, but torn from my mother's womb. They sliced her, a melon to gorge. They cleaned me and sedated her.
A blue sheet blocked me from her face. They seized me, trembling, screaming for her.

People say she must have given me her eyes. Clear and precise like a wave.

She never wanted me. She tried selling me to some white couple in Queens while I was still inside of her. They stopped calling after they found out I was tainted, too.

I tracked her down three years ago in an abandoned tile factory. A wave frozen in time. Even in dreams, her face is blue.
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Blue

I was never born, but torn from my mother's womb. They sliced her, a melon to gorge. They cleaned me and sedated her.
A blue sheet blocked me from her face. They seized me, trembling, screaming for her.

People say she must have given me her eyes. Clear and precise like a wave.

She never wanted me. She tried selling me to some white couple in Queens while I was still inside of her. They stopped calling after they found out I was tainted, too.

I tracked her down three years ago in an abandoned tile factory. A wave frozen in time. Even in dreams, her face is blue.
Peace of Mind

is hard to find when you're six weeks pregnant
and you've had two abortions
and you know a third will leave you barren.

When he walks by you at the party and taps your arm,
and his date looks like goddamn Cinderella at prom.

When you see them leave together
hand-in-hand, knowing that they'll
fuck until dawn like rabbits on E
in the mirth of his Egyptian cotton sheets.

When you know later they'll take a shower
to get clean and she'll put
his overexposed dick
in her lip-glossed,
Crest-White-Striped mouth
until he busts.

Later you see the same girl
when you leave the doctor's.
It's your eyes you look into, your fear;
she is the same alone, used, tainted girl
you are.

The Battle

Your hands clutch the steering wheel,
Mangled knuckles white from the
Strain of your grip.

Sad russet eyes glazed over
From the Majorska one-hundred proof.

The same hands and eyes that seized her skirt
That fall day when you were six and she left,
Dragging you down to the sidewalk.

Face illuminated in the street lights
Like a fallen angel.
Vodka and tobacco seep through your pores.

The air is scummy and sizzling
Like a hot bathroom.
Sweat drips down your cheek,
Follows the crease of your mouth
To the corner of your wide, chapped lips.

Heart pounding like a drum
Tallies the wrongs you've done,
Knows how long you've been lost,

How long you sat on that stoop,
Picking at your skinned knees,
Waiting for her to turn around.

Mangled hands grip the steering wheel
Not knowing what else to do.
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Paper Doll

You cut me out of cardboard
With children’s safety scissors,
Carefully cutting along the lines,
Trying not to leave rough edges.

Then you cut out my clothes,
Matching bikinis,
Preppy polos and
Pink sundresses.
Next you dressed me
And undressed me,
Carefully choosing the right attire
For the right occasion.

I was perfect,
One-dimensional,
With a painted-on smile
That never showed expression.
A perfect female shape
To carry around proudly,
To smirk at when your friends
Checked out my perky chest
And smile at when the ladies
At the country club
Complemented my perfect complexion.

Then one day, when my paper body
Began to look worn and creased,
You tossed me in that orange bin
With yesterday’s paper.
Now I bet you’ve made yourself
A new paper doll,
A newer crisp creation…
I hope she gives you a paper cut.

Nine Months

Your pink and purple baby clothes,
Washed and folded,
Are neatly stacked under the white changing table
In your pink room.

Just one more week ’till she pushes you out.
The ultrasound waves penetrating purple stretch marks
And permeating the room with tense energy.
No pumping…No pulsing…
No ticking from the speaker on the monitor…
Is it plugged in? Is the volume not turned up high enough?

A silent fear prickles up the back of her neck.
Tiny hair by tiny hair,
No more tiny life to love,
No perfect hair to brush and braid will ever grow.

Overwhelming sacrifice and pain
Replaces joy and excitement.
It spreads her legs wide open,
Splattering creamy white skin with blood and amniotic fluid.
No tiny shrill cry when you first touch the cold air.

Empty arms…
your my first blanket still folded in an empty seat
In a silent car filled with a rolling flood of tears
And air so thick you could slice through it with a knife.

Blue lips, blue eyelids, blue-gray skin.
No pink. No pink heart. No pink cheeks.
No pink booties.
No pink bows.
No pink bears.
No perfect tea parties with precious pink china.

Just blue. And gray. And cold. And silent.
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Distracting You

Why is it I love you most
When you are sprawled out on the floor
Bent over a project,
Tinkering away like a child,
Ignoring me for something
Momentarily more important?

Why is it I can't stop myself
From tiptoeing over in bare feet
To sit behind you
And kiss the back of your neck,
Your ear,
Run my fingers under your shirt,
Down your arms,
Over your huge bear claw hands?

I don't really want to take you away
Or distract you,
But I can't help myself.
For a second, I feel guilty
Until you turn to face me
And I see the mischievous smile
Illuminating your face.

When you take me raw
And naked on the wooden floor,
I don't notice the bruises forming
Along my spine
Or on my knees,
Because I'm so distracted
And overwhelmed
By how you feel,
Your lips hot against my neck,
Your hands grabbing handfuls of hair.

But it is your eyes I notice most
As they reassure me that it's ok to interrupt you
Anytime.

A Dream of Night Prayer

It doesn't matter that church is locked.
I can walk in whenever I please in my dream,
   Alone in the cathedral at night.
   The only lights are candles.
   The darkness soothes my eyes.
   In the distance are the sounds of cars
   Driving in the rain.
   Wet life,
   Wet with the dew of worry—

Here in the light of a candle,
It all falls away.

Kneeling in the presence
Of one who loves me,
I am really dancing for joy
But totally still.

An inaudible whisper of love
Comes from the tabernacle,
A golden home for hosts.
   I love you, I love you.
   Don't worry, don't worry.

My heart yearns to touch you
But You are hidden
   Behind blackest and layers
   Of silence.
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Emerson Williams Playground: A January Night

We're making snow angels by the playground as it snows.
Words are bursting out of my silence—but she'll never hear them—
Not again—

Katherine,
My Katherine, look at me
Instead of the stars! I love your eyes
And hold head shivering in warm fur—
Penetrate my heart with your smile, your laugh.

"It's cold, isn't it?" you say,
But in the deep beauty of a moment
Alone with you,
I am too vulnerable, too paralyzed to reply.

O Katherine—will I ever be able to write of you as you deserve?

My heart falters.
If that's all I can give you,
Dear friend,
I respect your wishes.

It Was Summer, 1969

I heard the hissing sound of the steaming sun
And saw the burning blazing from all around.
I felt the heat burning inside of me
And drank some coconut juice to cool down.

In my mother's teak house,
My two elder sisters, a brother and an infant brother
Were keeping each other company
While my mother was busy cooking chicken curry for the visitors,
My uncle, his wife and their infant daughter, who had not met often.

Suddenly, the voice of my horrified youngest aunt
Da Boe, who lived across of the street, yelled
The Burmese soldiers are coming!
They are at the edge of the rice field.
Quick! Move! Escape!

Run to the bunker, my mother ordered.
My sister, my brother and I climbed down the stairs onto the ground.
I took a glance at my mother and saw her grab my little brother
And rush down the stairs behind us.
I turned my head and saw my aunt seize her infant daughter
Tight to her chest and jump to the ground.
Thank God the Father, our savior, that neither was harmed
From the ten-foot jump.

We were in the bunker conversing with our eyes
When we noticed that my uncle was not there.
My mother widened her eyes, telling us not to cry.
We blinked back tears.
Thank God for creating our magic eyes that could talk without voices.

The sounds of guns were blood-curdling,
Its shells fell like monsoon rains.
We heard boots passing by.
We listened and we waited
Until there was silence,
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We're making snow angels by the playground as it snows.
Words are bursting out of my silence—but she'll never hear them—
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Thank God for creating our magic eyes that could talk without voices.

The sounds of guns were blood-curdling.
Its shells fell like monsoon rains.
We heard boots passing by.
We listened and we waited
Until there was silence.
Until there was no sound of guns and falling shells.
We quietly waited and waited.
Suddenly, we heard the sound of the footsteps.
It came closer and closer until it reached the bunker.

It was my uncle, He called out
For his wife and his child,
And they left for good with their lives.

We were safe for the time being.
A few years later, my Aunt Da Boe was shot
Dead in the middle of a road
In between my mother’s house and hers.

The Words
for my great grandma, who was a survivor of Auschwitz

The smell of mahogany
And creamy silk
Blended peace
Into the
Chaos of the moment.
The lament
Rosary
Echoed in my ears.
I was not really there.

The time you held
My small hand
And gave me
The pendent with a
Face of Virgin Mary,
Another necklace
Was the first thought
Came to my mind

All you said:
My Dear—
Ave Maria, keep your faith strong.
You will never be alone.
I did not understand.
You are now
In the hands of Lord.

The future
Of who I am
Is
In the hands of faith
You gave me.

The mahogany box
Is closed,
But your words live on.
Kocham Cie.
Words

I'm shaving my face
when a bead of blood drops onto the porcelain
and I see my father over me a week after the divorce,
pouring peroxide
on my throbbing knuckles, watching it sizzle white
as it congeals where they've been pushed back
from the bone.
I hear him saying words like *avulsion*, *ibuprofen*
and *steady pressure* again as purple pools
under the skin
on both sides, expanding my hand into a swollen plum.
I'm staring at plaster I smashed through the wall
and at chalky powder
caked on my stinging fingers. I hear the words
*disorder* and *medication*. I hear my father saying *no.*
He's the physician,
and *no*. Following the scars on my knuckles,
I feel him press my palm into the ice pack,
showing me what I've done.
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for my great grandma, who was a survivor of Auschwitz

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And creamy silk
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Kocham Cie.
Dead Fire

The moon rises and sets ablaze a wilting willow dripping ash through sod and wood so the dead beneath are coaxed to rise and take the wild orange flames burning life into their crumbling bones.

Like pedophiles out of jail, they find their way along old roads toward their undone, bleeding past.

Thieves and liars, watch your backs; adulterers and drunks alike. There's undead fire after you.

Cursed, angry, flaming flesh.

They tear through living, breathing lives and drag their prizes back with them. Glowing fingers wrap around the limbs and torsos, wide-eyed heads.

Their fires die when dawn awakes and they descend with ashy bones, leaving the willow to disguise the sagging flesh dripping from its wilting branches.

A One-Night Stand, Entitled for the Untitled

Thursday night as a woman newly single. Tony's Pub, I am all too regular. Time to tune karaoke and possibly mingle, Please! Bring the shots, for no talks secular. As if it were Saturday, I dress for the surprise... High-haired and thigh-high, entitled, Black leather and quill-laced underwear, A desperately humble guise. He's not you. He's an unentitled You. I feel your stare.
A One-Night Stand, Entitled for the Untitled

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Time to tune karaoke and possibly mingle,
Please! Bring the shots, for no talks secular.
As if it were Saturday, I dress for the surprise...
High-haired and thigh-high, entitled,
Black leather and quill-laced underwear,
A desperately humble disguise.
He's not you. He's an untitled
You. I feel your stare.
Elegy Written in Heroin Town
Willimantic, CT, 2005

The bell tolls for this town in 2005,
Once a township of mills, The Thread City
Streets of milled humid caves are now holed, dry hives.
Townies, we march the thrash to pain or pity.

Lichen embelished on his red marble stone.
Seth C. Hooker, a name echoing famous.
Hooker sleeps here soiled, alone—but
Hookers on corners set the name heinous.

Here sleeps our history’s last words. Taken
For loss, they become life in this hollowed home
Where black-dressed salty drops awaken.
Beyond this fence, modern zombies roam,

Lips yearn for fast foods, weak flesh,
Fevered natives buying shiny glutted toys,
Their eyes vacant from television mesh,
Naïve to politically biased decoys.

A city grasses over memories
And the bell tolls for this town in 2005.
Prosperity buried in cemeteries.
Or do these chimes just resonate from the other hives?
Words

I'm shaving my face
when a bead of blood drops onto the porcelain
and I see my father over me a week after the divorce,
pouring peroxide
on my throbbing knuckles, watching it sizzle white
as it congeals where they've been pushed back
from the bone.
I hear him saying words like avulsion, ibuprofen
and steady pressure again as purple pools
under the skin
on both sides, expanding my hand into a swollen plum.
I'm staring at plaster I smashed through the wall
and at chalky powder
caked on my stinging fingers. I hear the words
disorder and medication. I hear my father saying no.
He's the physician,
and no. Following the scars on my knuckles,
I feel him press my palm into the ice pack,
showing me what I've done.
Multiple Sclerosis
For Bob

You look down at your brittle fingertips, weathered
and callused from a life of labor. You look
down at the pale skin you can't quite feel anymore.
You ask yourself why
your legs, arms and fingers are still growing weaker,
why the medicine makes you sick, but doesn't help.
Next, you can't shave, write your name, tie your own laces.
You ask yourself why,
after working so hard since you were seventeen,
you must watch your wife rake the leaves, then cook
dinner and carve the turkey.
You ask yourself why
the long, lonely days pass by so slowly, why your
medical bills keep adding up, one by one. Instead
of enjoying your golden years, you feel helpless
until you can't feel at all.
Salamanders

Eleven years old        I’m up to my ankles
in the murky stream     digging in the dirt
for salamanders behind the condo complex.

I push my hands through the cold surface
of the stream        past the smooth pebbles
and sharp stones        feeling the earth
slide and squish between my fingers.
Pulling free        mud drips down in chunks
water runs down my wrists and falls.

I take a deep breath        tasting the smells
of pollen and skunk cabbage     alone out here
with my hermit crab cage       listening
to the cicadas give way to crickets    bullfrogs.
As each thread of light fades     one by one
I plunge my fingers back in       telling myself
I won’t let this small amount of happiness wiggle
from my grasp no matter how alone I may feel
sometimes        no matter how dark it becomes.
Fallen Birds’ Nests

I was eight years old when I met Michelle. I had just moved to a new town where I didn’t know anyone. Stubborn and furious with my parents for making us move, I refused to speak to them. I suffered a feeling of alienation both at home and at school. Awkward and unsure of myself, I didn’t know how to approach anyone my own age. I wore old hand-me-down overalls from one of my cousins because I lacked an older sister to teach me how to dress. I also had no clue what to do with my hair, so it did what it wanted. My baby fat had not yet carried me to puberty. Michelle always had pretty ribbons in her hair and pretty pale pink sundresses and pretty little jelly sandals. I never even toyed with the notion that she would want to be friends with me.

We met on the playground, where both of us came across a fallen bird’s nest at the base of a large oak tree. Four hungry baby birds peeped, crying out for their mother who abandoned them. “I think we should try and save them,” Michelle said, looking up at me as we both stood over the pink featherless peepers. Then she followed that up with, “Hey, don’t you live on my road? Your house is haunted, you know.” She had noticed me! Desperate for any sort of companionship, I agreed. I had tiny Michelle hoisted onto my shoulders before the recess supervisor noticed her desperately reaching upward, holding the nest. We were inseparable after that.

Seven years later, we were fifteen and sophomores in high school. I was no longer awkward and finally had a handle on fashion, thanks to Michelle. Every day we chatted away about our upcoming drivers’ license exams, who we wanted to ask us to the prom, and what movies we wanted to go see that weekend.

One morning, while getting ready for school, I felt a lump in my neck. I remember stroking it with the back of my index finger, curious about what could be wrong. I had been having trouble swallowing lately, but I assured my mother it felt nothing like a throat. A month later, I was in surgery to have the lump removed. It was too big to biopsy and hope for an accurate result. The needle could easily miss something harmful lurking inside. Following surgery, the doctors had reached a diagnosis. “Malignant” was the answer they had for us. Papillary thyroid cancer to be exact.

Radioactive iodine treatment came next. I got my first dose of radiation on my sixteenth birthday. It was necessary that I stop taking my thyroid-replacement medication in order to undergo treatment. In addition to incessantly showering to wash the radiation off my skin, I had to drink fluids constantly to flush the foul stuff out of my body. The thyroid acts like the body’s thermostat, so without
one and without medication, my body had no way to tell that it needed to be hotter. My fingertips and toes were like icicles and my house was close to the temperature in a sauna so that I could stay warm. It didn't help that all of this happened in December. The lack of thyroid hormones also fatigued me to the point where I was simply a shivering shape under a mountain of blankets.

I was supposed to be isolated, as the radiation could be potentially harmful to others. Michelle snuck into my bedroom almost every day, determined that I not go through this alone. Every day she would find my lethargic figure crumpled up on my bed wearing endless layers of sweats and fleece. She would climb under the covers and wriggle up next to me. She would take my frozen fingers in her hands and rub them between her own in an attempt to warm them.

Two years later, we were seniors in high school and my cancer was in remission. While everyone was bustling about in the excitement of college applications and the senior class trip to Disney World, Michelle stopped eating. Bombed with accusations of anorexia, she persistently asserted that her stomach hurt whenever she ate. Her pleas fell on deaf ears as doctors' tests continually showed that there was nothing physically wrong with her. I was the only one who believed her.

When my already tiny Michelle dropped down to ninety pounds, her appendix swelled up, ready to burst. She refused to go to the hospital without me. She called my dad so he could call me out of school and I sped home from school to be with her. Michelle had to undergo two surgeries to remove her appendix, some enlarged cysts on her ovaries, and what remained of her umbilical cord that was wrapping around her small intestines, never having disintegrated inside of her like it's supposed to. The chance of this happening is one in a million. Michelle was on a lot of painkillers, so she was very groggy during her two weeks at the hospital. I visited her almost every day. I brought celebrity gossip magazines and prom dress catalogs. But most of the time, amidst the beeping machines, cold tile floors, and hovering nurses, I just held her hand and told her that everything was going to be okay. She says that is the only thing she remembers.
A Canvas for Skin

I’ll be customized soon.
Little bells tingle against the clean glass door.
Vibrant art fills the walls, all shapes and sizes.
The receptionist filled with silver dangling holes
Is a living canvas of color.
A fog of sweet scents hangs around us.
Sterile soap smells misting in the shut booths.
I’ve known my design for months, the money paid.
Nothing left but the slow wait.
A continuous hum and buzz like a swarm
Housed in the closed-off rooms.
Adrenaline and anticipation combine into ecstasy
Overwhelming the senses.
The machine stops its song.
The painter emerges from within his sanctum—
Another masterpiece finished.
Stained gloved hands
Covered in the palates of colors.
Latex snaps revealing the art of this trade.
Ushered into isolation
With only my pattern
Set to be worked on by a master.
Splashes of cold soap, scrapes of the razor
Preparing the area where my art will live.
I suppress fear as the journey begins.
Divine agony rips through the body
With each line cut.
Numbness quickly sets in.
The throbbing continues
With the machine’s sweet song.
A symphony of blood, inks, and pain.
The master meticulously cleans his canvas
With the cold, sweet soap.
I stand and see our creation.
The pain will soon be gone.
My art is forever.
Middle School Dragons

High! So high up,
I can't believe
She is making me do this.
Mom! Why?
I like it here in the cave—
Dank walls and solid gray floors.
It's safe and secure.
I don't want to go out there.
Please, Mom, don't push me out.
I'll do it myself.
We're so high,
The whipping wind hurts my snout.
Tighten muscles spring,
My body arcs gracefully,
Wind rushing around and through
My scales, roaring up at me.
The wind is so strong,
I told you I couldn't fly!
I need to spread my wings,
Slow down, body suspended
Above the earth
like a feather on a breeze.
Long beatings of my wings
Lift me higher, beat with my heart
Dive, rush down at the cattle grazing
and the smell wet wool on the hills.
The world rolls out for me,
Blurred and melting in colors and smells.
The constant background sounds tickle.
This is freedom, pure freedom....

Billy! Wake up Billy!
Billy, what's the answer to Number 3? Billy?
For Vivi

I
When the heavy-metal click starts the day,
Florescent fairies dance in their tubes,
Reflections of my eyes into my eyes
While hands rest on the white porcelain sink.
A dream, so real, sticks with me—
Memory of gentle breezes with summer smells.
Wet coolness tries to wash away the haze.
It seemed I had just rested my head on feather down....

II
My eyes adjust to a bright azure ceiling.
My body quivers at the breeze's cool, gentle shake.
A dream, so real, lingers.
Stale smells and blue and red flash.
The siren's call
Almost real.
It seemed I had just placed my head down
On nature's serine, bluegrass bed....

III
Are we the ones who dream?
Waiting For My Daughter

The single skylight
casts an irregular spotlight,
sparks dust on the air,
glares in my eyes this time of day.

I am tired of waiting
to get better.
I am tired of Jell-O, of nurses’
smudged lipstick, their impassive
kindness, the yellow glow
on their institutional faces.
I am tired of lying—
I feel much better today. The words come now
without any real heed for meaning. It’s terrible
what I’ve done to these words.

I will tell her
I’ve been thinking about home,
walking along the tobacco fields,
tracing their edges as twilight
comes on. I’ve been thinking of the bluejays,
the zinnias.

I’m feeling much better. I expect no
answer. But I need to keep saying it, saying
I’m still here, saying,
can you see? Saying, I am tired of waiting.
Waiting—you know? For that expansive
day, so great and open it is actually inside
the room,
so tangible it won’t let go of me.
I keep looking to that gauzy
sky, blank. All cloud.
I am only waiting.
Making Room

i.
My mother hauls the maple twin bed from her garage,
wipes off the dust for me.
In the new place there will be no room
for anything larger.

At first, my knees, feet, face
press to the wall. Around four a.m., a car alarm sounds
somewhere close. I wake feeling foreign,
eyes chafing like sand,

and say out loud, home, like a promise;
try to take in
the sloping walls, streetlight shadows—
all these new shapes.

ii.
The bed is too small for us both.
I shrink when he snores, holds me too close
as I roll in sleep.
I twitch at night, he says, making anxious sounds.

Early morning I'll be awake, making coffee,
on those days when I remember
I can peel myself away. I will creep back in
to watch his slack sleeping face;

I will count the minutes of silence and wonder
how it would be to go back—
my mind pure again,
clean of attachment, of selflessness.
iii.
I am tipping over
to make room for you.
I am leaning back as you press in,
making new shapes. Is there room

in the varying shape of my life, when a whole room
can’t hold your life or mine? Whole pieces are missing—
my morning hours, your nights,
my twin cats, your hypoallergenic dog. I leave

myself outside; you leave no way in. I am learning
to live in smaller spaces. I am leaving room for you
as anger leaves room for patience,
takes a small breath, inches over.
Why I Don't Break the Bottle

Because I remember the roadside antique shop somewhere between Portsmouth and Bangor, remember the way the faultless sky troubled me all that day—so clear—silencing as flood water and not once letting go, like you, so much like an auctioneer I was always breathless for keeping up with you—now changing the song on the radio, now your hand on my thigh, now a techno beat rattling everything in the car, including my teeth, now your hands again and you're not watching the road.

And the dozen tables outside scaled with tiny glass bottles, bright as fish. This one my favorite, the raised letters caked with blackened sand and a slick film inside that clouds the glass like mother of pearl. Because you told me someday I would stumble on our dollar souvenir and think of you.

Because by Freeport you'd pitched my CDs over your shoulder, where they mingled in the backseat with shreds from a burst can of Fix-a-Flat, and I watched, unable to protest. Because you confessed, talking over the radio noise, you felt sure you would do something careless.

Because I remember you that first night, dockside, stripping down and slipping into the water, grinning at me from the shallows.
I could not help sneaking looks back at the cabin's blank windows, searching for faces.

Because, months later, I almost did not recognize myself in your front hall mirror as I locked the door, slipping out into the dark.

Because after one six-foot blonde, one toothbrush with no business on your sink, after seven minutes digging through your trunk, two-and-a-half miles with no streetlights, my long feet padding the asphalt, I was still humming some dumb song I heard from you, swinging my arms with the tree frogs' circular melody. I lifted my arms and spun and spun, the air whistling around my limbs like reeds.

Because I hold the bottle up to the light, reflections catching in the hazy glass, your face swimming just under the surface. Winter now, I keep imagining the moment I'll let it go, see the shards scatter on some rocks far below me. The moment will snap into place like a lock turning. Shatter, and every other moment will split like ice, cracks spreading like veins from the edge of a frozen lake.
Contributor’s Notes

Carolyn Barriere is a sophomore English major.

Dracie Bathin was born in the Pa-An District, Karen State of Burma. She founded Friends of the Karen People of Burma in 2002.

Alison Blanchard lives in Hanover, CT, after graduating from ECSU. She continues to write poetry.

Kellen Brine is a Freshman English major.

Paulina Burek is a Junior Accounting major.

Chris Butler recently graduated with a degree in Communication and a minor in Writing.

Megan Clampett is a senior English major from Old Saybrook, CT.

Natalie Concepcion is a Communication major.

Jacky Curran is a Communication major with a Writing minor.

Michelle Dupuis is pursuing degrees in English and Performing Arts.

Kileen Gilroy is a senior English major from Narragansett, RI.

Cole E Goulet is winner of the 2008 Balley Prize in poetry and an English major.

Jennifer Kanyock will graduate in December 2008 with a B.A. in English and a minor in Writing.

Kathleen Mita, while working endless hours at the campus bookstore, recently completed her B.A. in English and a minor in Sociology.

Faith Montaperto, a senior English/Theater major and holistic artist, believes that creative expression heals.

Hillary Ostgood is a Junior pursuing a B.A. in English.

Denise Powers, from Stafford Springs, CT, has returned to Eastern to pursue a degree in social work.

Sean T. Richmond, Senior History Major, NFA 2002 alum, MP CTARRG.

Caithlin E. Snyder writes both poetry and fiction and has worked on the staff of the literary journal Freshwater.

Este Yarmosh, a senior English major from Orange, CT, loves to write poetry and fiction.
Writers in This Issue

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