

University of Portland
Fall 2023

WRITERS LITERARY & ART MAGAZINE



GRIM & GORY

WRITERS

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Letter from the Editors

Dearest Friend of *Writers*,

In its three years of existence, the Fall edition has continued to give voice to the uncomfortable and taboo topics that our society sweeps under the rug. We are often faced with the gruesome reality and state of the world that we did not choose, and a future that feels increasingly unknowable. It is placed upon us, the new generation, not only to brace the volatile and grim circumstances left to us, but also to take the dreadful and turn it into something new – and by chance, even hopeful. Our goal in this Fall edition is to illuminate the repressed fears too often hidden in the shadows, and to present them as the unconventional and beautiful parts of our complicated – and at times, ugly and horrific – humanity.

In a time of seemingly endless darkness, we challenged you. We challenged you to face your fears, the monster under your bed, the most grim and gory aspects of your psyche – and you rose to this. In a world of the tumultuous and the unpredictable, you found art, creativity, and a voice. You took fear into your hands and rid it of its power. This passion, this love, and this desire to know is what keeps the darkness out, or makes peace with what feels so overpowering at times.

Art and literature should draw out the visceral reactions that can be difficult to access, and even more difficult to express fully and honestly. Here, we urge you to invite the uncanny and the uncomfortable in for a moment. Our contributors pushed the boundaries of conventional horror, skillfully weaving narratives and art that delve into the unknown, tapping into primal fears and unsettling emotions. Visually, we encounter an uncanny lamb from Lidia Téllez Flores and abandoned haunted houses put up for rent by Faith Scheenstra. We are invited to ruminate on the worms in Kat Motley's prose that assist in our decay and Soleia Yemaya Quinn's swarming mosquitos that thirst for blood. Inside this edition you will find abstract poetry, chilling prose, intricate drawings, and thought-provoking paintings. Let the gross, grim, and gory fill your body, and know still that the terror is not an end in itself, but a door to something deeper: something not purely monstrous, but human too.

It is a skill, to allow yourself to be disturbed, to be uncomfortable, and to grow from that experience. The only way out is through. Be scared and disgusted, scream and thrash, feel your heart racing and hold tight to the edge of your seat. Remember that the fear, the adrenaline, the chill down your spine act as confirmation that you are alive. The world in which we operate is full of horrors. Be afraid and do it anyway.

Mia Tierney and Valencya Valdez
Senior Editors 2023

“I have cultivated my hysteria with
pleasure and terror.”

- *Charles Baudelaire*

Harakiri

CAMILLE KUROIWA-LEWIS

Possessed as of three years today,
father presses onwards
from the home to the violet forest.

Flies drop into the pores of his acned shoulders—
black eyes trailing left and right,
methodically seeking the soil.

From afar, water tumbles.
Blue flowers sprout from diseased wood
and the feet of doe patter on pools of mud
where grass manages to grow and drown all
the same— yellow spores yearning for
stumbling bees.

Shovel dragging from his left hand,
father uproots worms too dumb to escape the sun.

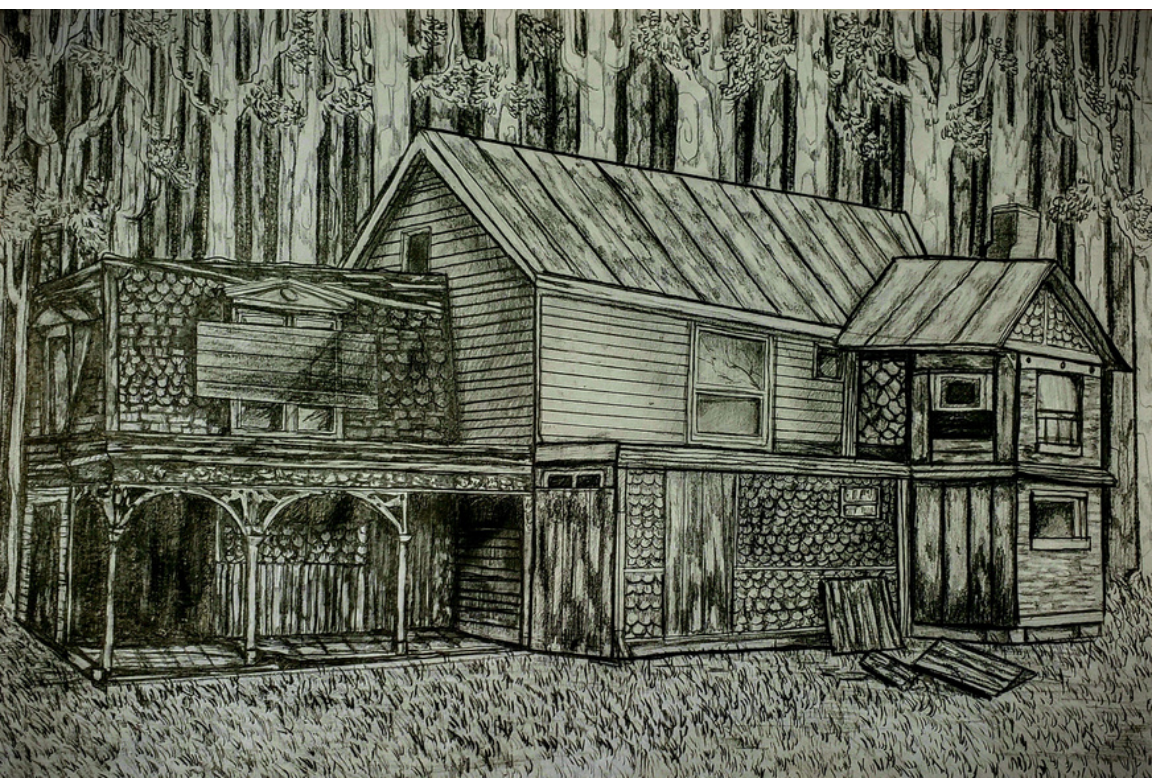
Finally, he falls upon a meadow—
and though he is dying, he remains
simple, searching for the treasure
older boys tricked him into believing
was there all along.
He digs and finds

beetles which shine in the dark,
matrix of red spiders and more
blind worms—
yet nothing for mother nor babe.

and so man takes shovel,
pressing the dull curve of silver into
the white fat of his stomach
pushing that metal deeper
further
until it taps against his spine from the inside.
Ripping, the sound of earth-making, his own body.

Rubied piss sinks into the ground, steam quickly rises—

disemboweled, he falls into that burning circle
thin, as feather stem, without guts.



The Beauty of Abandonment

FAITH SCHEENSTRA

Fat the Thorax Dripping the Abdomen with Grease

SCOTT WINKENWEDER

zombielike in the dim morning the king
rotates voraciously on his finger the ring, the
macaque cackling clothed in silk or gold
resins, leather in the palm of the giant–
whole tenements rusted skeletons in his palms.

the dust gladiatorial ringing the red return of the
champion: his stains blood and dust, the
vapid trickle of his eyes–lazy the king slinging
gold leaf and slithering. the choir, overzealous,
composes hymns haunting dredged up the

ragged and bloating bodies across the sea.
the rumbling humble of the slave ships–the
pilots fastened through three tubes mountained
for ambush–clock the strikes past the thunder of
hissing guns. the stampede nests flies of bugs

frogs and platelets farther from the vibrations.
uniformed rats and cats, their guns, the half-frantic
death dance: like choking thrums mediated
through drums: the king's advisors visualize
the sizes of the chunks of the country they can

weigh into paper hillocked into their pockets.
dowries and sulfur mines mocking the color of the
trees shining lining the roads along the
plantations: their rocks, garrisons, quarries.
breath high of hawks, their vicious shadows.

complicated in his haze the courier carries in a
stool pigeon strapped to his shoulder the nuclear
codes on sandpaper: on parchment scrawled in
cruel scratches the priest's signature on the
death certificate of the heretic. chariots running

high horizon and low on in the underworld,
the cleated perytons gnashing in their saddles–
in the caves the exiled keep their gardens and
the gamblers and wizards barter futilities for
rhetoric and irretrievable ambitions. the cave–

creatures refracted in the low light. at the top
of the tower the sage is not stupid enough to
expect salvation: leap of faith from the top
of the tower into the cyclone's stretching eye,
or otherwise the length of the gun in her belt.

or otherwise the length of the gun in her belt.
in the depleted decrepit tower-ruins the
ant-people ruminant colonies under ozones
of lead paint, dogs dissecting the rude bones
of overseers, vultures, the clairvoyants.

people dredging up from sand the joints of
giants, the crunched brittle bunches of rocks
calcified. issue again from the king a burst of
blood from the throat, again the movement
of people seismic, the purpose mostly cursed.



*Gurl U R the Nail in the Coughing
of My Nervous Tix*

SCOTT WICKENWEDER

SARDINES

LILLY GREY RUDGE

There is a tap, tap, tapping coming from inside the sardine tin. After tearing the intended “pull to open” tab straight from its aluminum hinges, I’d been forced to stick a butter knife into the barely visible crease between the tin’s outer shell and brightly colored cover, resulting in the unfortunate image of a cartoonishly fishy friend meeting its grizzly end. Lodging the blade firmly, I had begun to leverage the handle against the edge, ever so slowly forcing the aluminum to peel away inch by inch. It is only when the tin is a third of the way open that I hear it: something thrumming against the lid. It is a rat, straight from the factory and rabid with the need to sink its teeth into the pink flesh of my forearm. Or a cockroach, it’s hard little body trembling with excitement to infest my long rotten produce drawer. Or perhaps, simply a sardine, somehow accustomed to the earth’s atmosphere and resentful of my plans to deposit it directly into my gut.

It is awfully polite. Minutes spent tapping away and its urgency has yet to increase. My hands must be cold, the handle of the knife burns my palm. One breath, two, three, and it is out with a single yank. A sliver of silver can be seen within, shining under the dusty kitchen light. Three tails, like the ends of feathered arrows. Poking them with the blade, there isn’t a single twitch. The tapping continues, volume increasing. The handle is wet now, and I can see my sweat dripping down the blade as I lift the knife to hover just above the tin. With what little confidence I can muster, I slip it under the still intact cover and, using a reluctant palm as a counterbalance, leverage the blade with as much force as possible. The seal begins to give, aching slowly. One inch, two. The tapping seems to increase in rhythm, in anticipation. Tap, tap, taptaptap, taptaptaptap. The knife is officially of little use, its handle bending away from the blade. Blood pumping in my ears, I rip it out of the tin, throwing it into the sink a few feet to my left, and peer directly within. Three beady eyes stare back at me, and is it odd that my mouth is beginning to water? Four sardines, exactly where they are meant to be. Four sardines and three eyes. Four narrow frames, each of them silver except one; long and gray and flexing against what remains of the tin’s seal, bones standing out against translucent flesh. The source of that horrible tapping. Elegant, sharp, undeniably well manicured. Three sardines and one finger.

I should call someone; the FDA? Do they deal with incredibly anxious, oddly attractive, zombified fingers? I suppose it never hurts to ask. Yet just as I begin to reach for my pocket, the finger stills, curving in an accusatory stance. This new frozen state is somehow worse, and I can't help but mirror it. It's a game of freeze. Whoever moves, flinches, blinks, breathes loses. Everything halts: the clock on the microwave, the wheeze of the ancient refrigerator, my own heartbeat. The calm is riveting, and I can't look away, not even when the finger begins to oh so slowly reach out towards the edge of the tin. One knuckle, then two cross the boundary, until the silence is ultimately broken by the deafening click of that perfect nail against cracked tile. Free at last, it wastes no time. Tap. It drags itself an inch across the counter. Tap. Towards the sink. Tap. Towards the drain. Tap. Towards escape.

It's right behind my eyes, small black spots crowding my vision with every beat. I'm not quite convinced that my skull hasn't become tin itself, each strike of that finely manicured nail wearing the metal away. It's going to break out. But no, it already has. Where is it? Where did it go? That stinging, like ink is pouring into the whites of my eyes. Not pouring. Seeping. Out of me. Not much longer now, with the blindness creeping up like this. Groping ahead, my knuckles make contact with something solid - the tin. It can't have gone far, crawling along like that. Grasping the tin with one hand, I use the other to grip onto the cover, finally ripping it free. It should be sharp enough, the way the edge slices into my palm. Gripping it as firmly as I can despite the mix of sweat and what must now be blood running down my wrist, I strain my eyes as wide as they will go, and... there. Clawing its way towards the sink and the safety of an open drain. I lurch towards it - one final beat and the curtain is drawn, the final strike ricocheting around my skull, ripping through soft tissue to lodge itself deep within bone - and manage to smash it against the counter with the meat of my palm. The blackness is wet, gushing through my sinuses and out of my eyes and the tapping has finally stopped but for how long? This is temporary, I'm only smothering when I need to slice, hack, sever, grind, strip until it was never here at all. The air feels cool against my clenched fist as I bring it down, again and again. And while I can't see, I can feel the heat of the slice, the metal tearing its way past flesh to saw at muscle and bone. How much lighter it feels, when the scrape of the counter vibrates through that piece of tin. I have lost feeling in both hands, making it difficult to release my grip.

Inky darkness disintegrates until I am able, bit by bit, to take in my surroundings. Ugly yellow cabinets, the rusty stovetop, an alarmingly large cobweb just above the refrigerator. Finally, my gaze drifts down to the counter. There, almost floating in a pool of red, lies the finger, fully intact. But no, that can't be right. What was once slender and effortless now has a layer of pudge. The knuckles of a child, deep set and shockingly defined, stare up at me. I've always hated those knuckles. Forcing my still stinging eyes to continue down the tiled surface, I can feel my tongue recede down my throat when they finally land on my left hand, still pressed firmly in place. One. Two. Three. Four... Five. Air I didn't realize I had been deprived of fills my lungs. And is promptly snatched away when I lift my hand to hover right before my face. Four fingers, short and childlike, nails chewed to ragged nubs with raw cuticles to match. And one index, so much longer than the rest and a paled gray, resting in an elegant curve, further enunciated by a shiny, lustrous nail.

Neither the tin nor the artist formerly known as my finger are anywhere to be found when I creep back into my kitchen the next morning. It's tempting to chalk it all up to some perverse dream, — “sexy finger replaces severed counterpart” has got to describe at least one person's search history — but the hulking pallet of sardine tins sitting in my cabinet suggests otherwise. The gray pallor has all but disappeared. Flushed with blood, the finger's arc is even lovelier, and I can't help flitting my gaze to the mysterious digit every few moments. Have my hands always been this meaty? My palm this sweaty? My skin this calloused? That's the thing about beauty, it makes everything around it all the more hideous. So I pull another tin off the shelf. Lifting it to my ear, I am met with silence. The tab stays intact this time around, and I am able to remove the cover with a decisive yank. The sardines stare out accusingly, and nestled among them, completely inert, another finger. This must be the ring, at least half an inch longer than the first and pointing daintily, like it belongs on the hand of a biblical cherub. My heartbeat has migrated to my left hand, the pulse point now centered on the pad of my own middle finger. I can practically feel the blood draining from it, an icy throb of anticipation. So why is there no tapping? It's shaking now, I can feel the bones in my wrist practically vibrating from the intensity. How did it go last time? There was tapping, and then what? Darkness, as there always is before light. Before the slice. The kitchen scissors are at the front of the junk drawer, further confirming last night's fear-addled state. Now, there is only clarity.

And pain. A lot of fucking pain.

The thirty-six tin pallet has proven to be a worthy investment. Five more fingers, six more toes, an ear sporting a surprisingly large diamond. I find a pair of gardening shears which help to expedite the process. The eyes and nose get a little trickier, but has my own always been this crooked? And why has no one ever told me how bland my gaze is, how completely colorless? Not like the chocolate depths of the ones rolling towards my waiting palm. A few snips, an enthusiastic scoop, and the world is so much livelier. It's the tongue that gives me trouble. Having already removed my own and trying not to choke on the metallic waterfall gushing down my throat, I eagerly reach for the soft pink muscle lying demurely against a silver backdrop. Bringing it to my lips, I press it firmly to the floor of my mouth, willing it to seal into place. I can feel it flexing, beginning to lick away at my gums and teeth in tentative exploration. All seems well, and taking in a confident breath, I allow my lips to part—

“THAT’S MINE YOU BITCH THAT’S MINE YOU STOLE MY TONGUE YOU CUT IT OUT YOU TOOK IT FROM ME WHAT ABOUT ME WHAT ABOUT MY TONGUE YOU BITCH YOU’RE USING ME THIS ISN’T YOURS IT’S MINE YOU BITCH I HOPE YOU DIE I HATE YOU BITCH BITCH BITCH BI—”

It continues to seize in my palm, covered in what has become a projectile gush of red. An entire roll of paper towels later, I spit out yet another round of bloody pulp and shove the squirming muscle in my grip as far down the drain as possible. The disposal clears after the fifth try.

Thirty-six is a surprisingly low number. The store is aggravatingly crowded for a Sunday evening, and turning into the canned goods aisle I am met with entirely bare shelves. The panic tastes rancid on what few taste buds I have left. But wait, third shelf down. One final pallet, in all its eight dollar and ninety-nine cent glory. My intention is clear, my footsteps swift, yet just as I lean down I am met with a sharp gaze not two inches away from my own. A gentle green, so soft it is almost gray. My eyes drop further to a nose, charmingly crooked and scattered with a pleasing array of freckles. It scrunches up in protest, and in how many photos have I seen that very look? Deleted because of that look? Since when was it all so... splendid? I've been knocked off center, ensuring that this stranger — but no, that's not right — is able to scoop the pallet off the shelf. In a final moment of desperation, I grab for it, fingers scrambling for purchase. But they are much too weak; and all it takes is a single tug from the woman's worn but reliable grip to wrench it from my own. Her fingers flex against the pallet, strong and respectable. The aisle is empty now, as I stare down at my own.

Thin and frail, subject to snap under the slightest duress. And my knuckles, sharp knobs of bone pressing ruthlessly against tissue paper flesh. I've always hated those knuckles.



after the party

CAMILLE KUROIWA-LEWIS

bleach stains

VALENCYA VALDEZ

do you like that?
the rancid stink
the purple on my lips
venison, green leaf,
and sticky kief
stuck in my teeth
i got holes in my thighs
where the fat should be
big wrists and ribs in the night
your mama smokes red one-hundreds
 just like me
there's a cavity in my mouth
that bleeds
(and BLEEDS and BLEEDS)
and all the people i know
hate my honesty
it hurts like hell
when i bend my knees
i have faulty wiring
and a bed frame that creaks
i must rub myself
every night
just to get to sleep
the neighbors are moaning
or perhaps those are screams (?)
neon mold has made home
crusted over my dreams
i don't use soap
i just lick myself clean
and the bug guts stain
the windowpanes
leaving bloody streaks
and my breath fogs up
the glass screen
between your nostrils
the rims turned black
from secondhand smoke

you used the grounds
from the ashtray
and the remnants of
cocaine and brown sugar
piled up polite and neat
on a freshly cut house key
making dripped coffee
 just for me
you cannot see
cannot seem to breathe
through your broken nose
the dissolved cartilage
the tricky knots where tendons meet
and sticky platelets coagulate
i'm begging you
(BEGGING PLEASE)
take bolt cutters
to the locks of clots
tenderize and salt the meat
i like my steaks rare
and high
you like the smell
of rotting bleach
 and me!

Hunting Season

CLARA SMITH

He was ten-years-old
When his daddy first
Put a gun in his hand
He shot the poor thing,
Straight-in-the-head

I won this one with austerity, He said
Let's go for another one
I won this (one)
With extremity, He said

I'm still waiting,
Waiting still,
Still waging a price

Mother, Oh!, Mother
I'm still waiting for it all

Take my antlers
Mount them to your wall

I'm sorry I couldn't make it to Summer
I'm sorry I didn't carry you through Fall

You're like roadkill on my lawn, He said
(I stood outside his house all night.)

He asked if I wanted to come hunting,
Slung in the passenger seat of his truck,
Said my big doe eyes
Reminded him of his first-shot-baby-buck

I figured a game could be fun,
Didn't know I'd end up
With a bullet lodged in my head
Never thought I'd be
The dead deer in his bed

Sweet Oddity

LIDIA TÉLLEZ FLORES



Pestilencé ! - pest, there it is

SOLEIA YEMAYA QUINN

A mosquito bites you twice. And the bites, they itch and pester you. You may feel annoyed, might search for a cream to soothe the bite, even avoid the park with the thick stagnant water and the infestation of breeding buzzing bugs. You would exclaim your hate for mosquitos, you would slap them away or wear things to keep them off, maybe light a citronella candle.

Now,

What if the mosquitos continued to pester you? Found their way into your house, bred there, bit you in your sleep, in the bathroom, while bathing. Big red welts, itching itching itching. Your fingernails might start peeling backwards like those antebellum corpses of Savannah Georgia. Sent into the swarming worm ridden earth, with a prayer and mahogany tomb. But dead they were not, rather in a coma, peacefully asleep. These living corpses would wake up under six feet of earth. Suffocating and straining to breathe. In futile desperation, clawing at the wood until their nails peeled back into nubs and their own output of C'o2 caused asphyxiation .

If that was the case for you, if your skinned digits were chafing down to white bone from itching itching itching, then there would be no rationality. There would be no talk of three wicked citronella candles from those sterile air conditioned block stores, or mesh nets and screens. You would be insensible to such things if you had raised boils over your eyes, on your scalp. Trapped in a coffin of your own body. The effort to quell those gruesome hives result in ripped away hair, barren eyelashes, in raw pink blooming skin. What if the mosquitos had found that precious tunnel inside your ear, nestled in and sucked sucked sucked until you heard only buzzing. Infernal buzzing, such that even Beelzebub would think you a cursed thing.

And what if those pests have somehow made it down into your throat and your wet caverns, perhaps it reminds them of the warm swampy place they were spawned. The blood there is fresher to them and so they welcome themselves to bite and drink from you. The itch is everywhere now. Your raw fingers paw at your red throat, your tongue is swollen and covered with cankers.

Would you not then run through the streets? Naked and raving? Mad for an end to the itch. Desperate for a cessation of that incessant buzz? Would you not become hysterical with agitation? Would the cool cold ocean not invite you to soothe those burning bites like sea spray in 100 degree heat? Would a gun not end the sensation for good? Would a rope not still the blood those mosquitos so desperately vie for?

And if the full body inflammation and constant buzz did not drive you to the calming stillness of eternal sleep,

Then wait.

Just wait for the arrival of the masses of mosquito men, and the women that drink calamine lotion by the chalice. Of those that slather their prone bodies with cooling cream. Even still, wait for those that have learnt to enjoy the itch, to crave the bite. Deriving perhaps some carnal pleasure from the sting and itch, the eroticism of an itch you must scratch. Even some think they deserve the sting, that they owe the mosquitos their beautiful cardinal blood. These will speak to you of the non severity of your situation, they will whisper and rasp over the buzz buzz buzz buzz buzz. They want you calmer... you are acting severe, too severe, you are causing a stir, you are sensitive to the mosquitos, too sensitive. You are hysterical, we think you need help, it's all in your head.

Yes there are mosquitos, and yes you have some bites, but come come see we've all got some welts and nips, you really are overreacting here, it can't be so terrible if we've all handled it. Truly, most mosquitos don't even drink blood, most just want to be near you, they just admire you...

No? It's bothering you that much? Well then really it's time to get you to the doctor, it's just a small operation. Just say nothing if you mean yes. Yes yes yes dear darling tumescent girl just a poke through the eye now. A little jiggle, and soft soft creamy scrambled eggs in their shell.

You are so still now, low moans and *quiet*. No more talk of salty serene oceans or tight ropes. No more deliberate steel in your puffed mouth. Very good girl, see how you don't complain of the itch? See how you sit still, so still. Sit there still, good girl.

Still, like a nice flat clear lake. A lovely, calm, stagnant place for mosquitos to be. Foaming thrashing ocean water is not a nice place for mosquitoes.

Look now! How nice to sit and watch the quiet water, see how the wind hardly moves it, see how the bugs can stand and walk on the water...like

Jesus, yes.

Just like Jesus.



like goldfish in the mojave

DARCY HAYS

all at once, im
moth-ridden, fur-rotten. youre a scarf,
apple-run worn placid and tied loose
'round the base of my skull holding my
hair back as i spill Kool-Aid onto the linoleum i see you in the sugar-
coated legs of the
hunter prowling the basement stairs at night you were eyed like Red
Hot, fast heart
when i saw you decay on the concrete steps,
seeping oil and blood from under your red-lined fingernails. the space
heater caught fire then,
and i called someone to fix it
i thought you were the notch of
vertebrae that sticks from the base of my neck: the tip of the spinal cord
severed
from every stray animal on the side of the road id swrv across yellow
boas on asphalt
red lights red lights
the stellar fire is back, electric blue pumping
celestial blood from the cavern in ur chest
youre perched on geriatric flowers torn from milk glass vases and
scaloped with gold tining
you were a piece i pulled from the wet-strewn marsh, full of kelp and
glittered gull-torn scales;
we drank freeze-dried soup from stolen ocean barrels and ate the limbs
of thin-webbed creatures
its 2am already and im still awake!! i cant think abt her or him and i dont
want to run my hands thru
the blinds anymore and grab stray
threads of silk from the passing bushes
to sew my wounds closed and i dont wanna feel the worms buried in the
soil bc
i cant stand that i'll be buried there too
please dont take me from half-rotted cardboard soaked with takeout
grease and leave me to rest in the folds of unironed curtains, limp and
covered in wasps i wanna lie somewhere between the recluses and
moray, and you can turn the overhead light on if it still works, but i dont
think it does



Take a Walk Outside Yourself

MOLLIE KLINGBERG

Ophelia's

BRANNA SUNDY

i float in the current of time
hands open
a helpless, flawless maiden head
welcoming death into my body
welcoming the river under this dress, over this mouth
tasting the heady bliss of roses, poppies, violets
a garden of life surrounding this corpse
i handed you rosemary, did you keep it?
i wanted you to remember
but you forgot
as always
i sang to you
the language of flowers
you bloomed in me
you touched me, watered these seeds, caressed these petals
i turned to you
the sun, the gilded crown, the hallowed prince of denmark
and you ripped me from the ground
you trampled on the untouched snow
and wiped your hands on this delicate skirt
then buried me deep
in a prison
not rosemary but rosaries
my poppies laid at the feet of porcelain angels

and now i look as ghostly as you wished.
preserved in salt, a sack of meat carved into a pretty likeness,
brushed onto a canvas of leather, the skin of an animal, bleeding out.
you think you know blood?
you think you know pain?
you think you wear thorns upon your brow?
my hands are stained with dirt.
my arms are scarred, my thighs bruised.
i have lived my life under the beating sun.
surprised, are you? that the body you undress from your tower window
has withstood this?
not the virginal, paper-smooth skin you wanted.
i see you in your foulness, your bone-white power, your unwanted
salivation. you drooling cur.
you would have me embalmed in a convent.
dragged from my home, veiled in lace, ravaged by your soft,
unblemished hands;
hands that have never known the earth, nor what grows upon her.

No.

You cannot have me.

You cannot hold me.

You cannot pull me from the soil.

You shall not touch me.

I am water, soil, life bursting from the earth. Crowned in flowers, not made of them. Woven of words, but breathing beyond them. No longer singing. I am screaming. Howling.

I know the depths of myself. They are not yours to ogle. Stay lounging on your marble throne in your castle of stone, moaning for a woman's touch. I rise from the earth with golden light pouring from me, sitting cross-legged on my own throne of wood and branch and ridged leaf. Mud on my hands. Sap in my veins. Fire in my eyes.

I am Ophelia's.

I belong to myself.



Medusa's Plight

ALEX KANALAKIS

I Think My Blood Bitter Trudging Yr Blood

SCOTT WINKENWEDER

Mangled the rotting tree in the strip mall
the skeletons of squirrels the crows ragged
mangled the specter of the shovel raised
I cave in yr chest first-spirit, the soil
between yr blank ears there is only soil
I have always known how to hold this thing
mid-air the coins fail to cover yr eyes
feet ragged the blankness I abandon.
When we sauntered soaking from the ocean
sucking plankton from our gums the puddles
coughed in our lungs eyes glassy and shaking
charcoal scrawling holy in maps the soil—
when the grimace of your absence unfurls
into a shape only the names can see.



DON'T TOUCH ME

RUSSELL PAGDAN

Worms

KAT MOTLEY

Worms will eat you one day. Worms will work you down until you are nothing but a pile of bones laying in the soil. The skin that you have worked so hard to keep soft and wrinkle-free will slip off of your bones to be devoured by wriggly creatures and crawly critters. Your lungs and heart, which have kept you alive for so long, will turn to soup in their cavities and melt through to the ground. The nutrients that have sustained you for a lifetime will no longer be yours to have or yours to give. In the end, you belong to the dark, damp soil.

Worms will colonize your body and claim it as theirs, taking up residence where your consciousness has failed to pay the rent. Of course, they can *have* your body—you won't need it anymore. When you die, you will not grapple with life as if you regret living it. You will not claw your way from the grave. There will be no dirt underneath your fingernails from raking at the prison of soil, and you will not struggle against the cool, dark earth as it swallows you whole, for you have always belonged there.

Let's hope they aren't too critical of your flesh. You try to take care of it, but when you're old enough to die properly, your skin might be tough and your fluids may have gone sour. Your heart will work harder as you age, so the chambers will shrink as the muscle thickens, and it will lose its enticing tenderness as the years go by. You will be their gracious host, providing both the venue and the catering for the few days that they are drawn to your limited-time-only reservations. The nicest thing about your venue is it will only get more spacious as time goes on. You'll begin to bloat as the hard-working bacteria digest the solid components of your body and release gasses—the rooms will become roomier, and the suites will become sweeter.

As your skin bursts open and the mounting pressure of fluid and gas is released, you will begin to shrink back down to your normal self. So much nitrogen will be released that your body will kill any of the vegetation surrounding it. It will take weeks or even months for the fungus to find you, but you will look forward to its arrival as the crowds of worms and beetles gradually lull and the feast comes to an end. The fungus will be greeted gently by your soft chemical emission. Even after your tissue has been consumed by the ravenous bugs of previous weeks, the fungus will subsist off of your nitrogen and ammonia, marking the place where your lifeless body once fell, and the nutrients from your body will nourish the soil for years to come.

The decay process is slow, and even without your stolen tissue and nutrients, your bones will persist. Depending on the environment, they may take years or centuries to break down, a reminder of the stubborn persistence of a human life. Your bones may be spread apart or overgrown with vegetation; your rib cage will be a cavity for photosynthetic life and your skull will be a planter for poppies and yarrow flowers. Their stems will poke through your eyes that you once used to see. Only the holes will remain in your skull, but they will be filled with pinks and reds and whites in flowers with light stems and small leaves. These flowers will grow through your open jaw and nasal cavity, where you once took so many breaths. So much laughter will come from your mouth that your jaw will unhinge to let the flowers through. Moss will blanket your limbs to keep them warm on the damp forest floor, and mushrooms will line up against your ribcage, holding you in place. Your guts will be teeming with clovers—some lucky and some not—that will spill out into the tall grass and the wildflowers. Cordate leaves will furnish the cavity where your heart used to beat, like a reminder that there used to be someone in there, that blood used to pump through veins and arteries now chewed away. Somehow, because these bones are so full of such lush and varied vegetation, they will not look like a husk of a person but rather they will represent the profundity of a human life. Spirits will linger there, paying their respects to the body that supported so much color and greenery, and they will share breath with onlookers and passers-by. Your soul will not be tethered to these bones, but you may visit from time to time. The moss will whisper and the grass will reach out, longing for another soul to join. *Lay down with her, they will purr. Curl up inside of her rib cage and let the moss grow over you.*

This is a resting place.

Worms will eat you one day. You will become the moss and the mushrooms and the flowers. You will grow the grass tall through the gaps in your ribcage as it stretches for the sky, desperate for the licks of sun beams that filter through the forest above. Bugs will rest on your bones, but they will be gentle now, crawling over the vegetation and seeking refuge in this aged and hoary sanctuary. There will be life after your death, for you will sustain so much creation, even after the worms have left.



Beaver Teeth

SOLEIA YEMAYA QUINN

too much to bear

SOLEIA YEMAYA QUINN

there is the beauty
the absurdity of a pale moon in the day
blue sky and twinkling stars
the wind tickling my cheek
and
there is the opposite
or rather the rotting of a beautiful thing

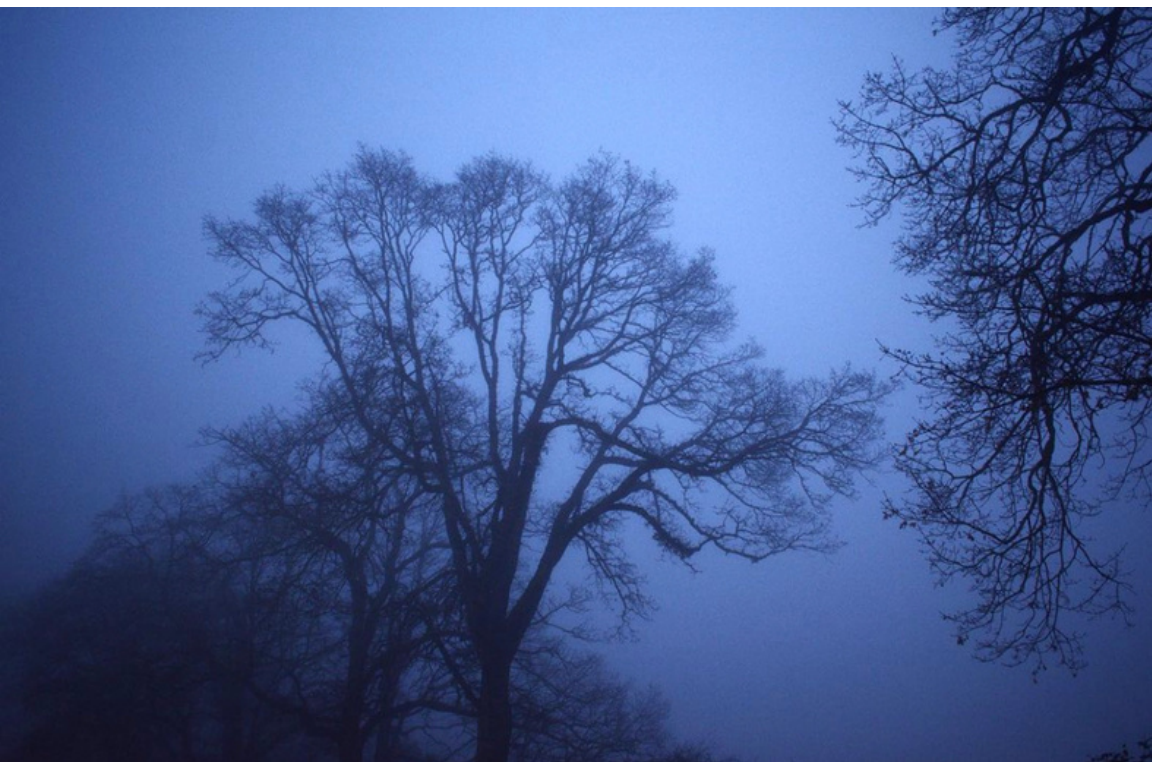
six thousand deaths every hour

the loneliness of a crowded piazza
each humming soul bearing unbelievable weights
and again a full moon rises over a wet something
sex and death and sex and birth
that dead skin begets the dust
roll that stone up a hillside again and again
you dust books and water plants
we repeat
it is harder and harder to bear
we buy a dog and the years melt like butter in a pan.
out of the skillet but into the oven
with all these sticky feelings
the mess is everywhere,
there isn't time enough to clean the whole of it
I crack an egg with the whole of my palm
the shell cuts my hand
a blood yolk like a blood moon rises
as I raise a vicious hand to my face
declaring
let the kitchen become messy!
let the garnet yolk turn dry and stick to the walls
like a nuclear bomb sent into the blood moon
let the dog die slowly over days and days
let the hair gray strand by strand

it will always be as it has been
if each person has a world in their head
and
if like atlas we must bear it
divert yourself a moment
think not of the bearing but the begetting
lend me your name and your story
it is all too much to bear
so bear it with me

Mother's Hands

FIONA HASELTON



About the Contributors

Lilly Grey Rudge (she/her) li-lly grey rudge, proper noun:

See definition for 'Editor.'

Fiona Haselton (she/her), fee-o-nuh has-el-ton, proper noun:

1. just like other girls; 2. will go on an adventure at any point in the day;
3. thinks olives deserve a second chance

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1. indoor cat; 2. community college survivor; 3. deeply afflicted by senioritis

Alex Kanalakis (they/he), al-icks can-uh-la-kiss, proper noun:

1. 80% grandpa sweater; 2. avid bug rescuer; 3. court jester's apprentice

Mollie Klingberg (they/them), mol-ee cling-burg, proper noun:

1. wannabe cowboy (already has cool boots); 2. tofu eater; 3. the charcoal on your hands that never washes off

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See definition for 'Editor'

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3. yes, it's motley like the band

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See definition for 'Editor.'

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1. number 1 fan of the color green; 2. addicted to Roblox and Duolingo;
3. Jennifer Tilly stan

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See definition for 'Senior Editor.'

Scott Winkenweder (he/him), scott wink·end·weed·der, proper noun:

1. pale as bones at the white illusion of the sheet; 2. a horizontal, squirming thing, bracing for dust and rebar; 3. the howl of arugula behind his mother's mother's house.



About the Editors

Mia Tierney (she/her), me-yuh tier-knee, proper noun:

1. devastated to be graduating; 2. fan of pasta; 3. can make a one-second interaction into a 10+ minute story

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1. written in sharpie on the public bathroom stall door; 2. martian; 3. liminal space occupier

Murphy Bradshaw (she/her), mur-fee brad-shaw, proper noun:

1. twin (fraternal); 2. quilt lover; 3. clog wearer

Lilly Grey Rudge (she/her), li-lly grey rudge, proper noun:

1. conglomeration of circus mice; 2. neil gaiman/leslie knope lovechild; 3. future pink palace tenant

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1. 5 star Lyft passenger; 2. closeted Disneyland enthusiast; 3. climber of rocks

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1. aspiring Addison Shepherd; 2. lover of dry lightning, iced chai, and stray cats; 3. The Worst Photographer™

Clara Smith (she/her), clare-uh smith, proper noun:

1. obsessive; 2. compulsive; 3. happy to be here

Branna Sundy (she/her), bran-nuh sun-dee, proper noun:

1. three crows in a trench coat; 2. gnawing on my bones; 3. waist-deep in the cold waves, screaming

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Submission Policy

Writers Magazine accepts submissions of original creative work by current students of the University of Portland. These works include but are not limited to short prose, poetry, short plays, photography, visual arts, and cartoons.

All submissions are evaluated by the editorial board. Submissions are kept anonymous throughout the evaluation process.



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