

# quarterlife

between the lines



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**between the lines**

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*quarterlife* is a literary journal published four times a year that features poetry, short fiction, drama, creative nonfiction, analytic essays, alternative journalism, and any other sort of written work Whiman students might create. Each issue is composed around a given theme that acts as both a spark for individual creativity and a thematic axis for the issue.

*quarterlife* is an exercise in creative subjectivity, a celebration of the conceptual diversity of Whitman writers when presented with a single theme. Each *quarterlife* theme acts as the proverbial elephant in the room, fragmented by individual perception: each portion is ostensibly unconnected but ultimately relevant to the whole. Every piece illuminates a different aspect of the theme. In this way, *quarterlife* magazine participates in the writing process. The magazine is not an indifferent vehicle by which writing is published, but rather is a dynamic medium for which writing is produced.

[whitman.edu/quarterlife](http://whitman.edu/quarterlife)

## Letter from the Editor

In traditional Japanese Zen gardens, straight lines are generally seen as negative; they are softened and curved to better allow free and meandering movement of the chi. Straight lines are seen as restrictive and burdensome of life's energy.

Linearity is nonetheless the traditional imperative of American culture. Lines on a printed page are to be read in a straight line from one side of the page to the other, the lines in which we wait for our paperwork or our groceries or airline security are straight (and often long), and the lines between right and wrong, you and me, truth and fiction, are rigid ones. These lines of separation and restriction incite rebellion in many, despair in some, and imaginative play in others.

We in our quarterlives, teetering on the line between childhood and adulthood, have the opportunity to read between these lines, and many others, to create our own meanings and our own traditions, and the pieces in this issue of *quarterlife* take this opportunity to explore and challenge linearity.

The quarterlife staff welcomes in the third volume of the publication with an eye to the recreation of tradition and defiance of the traditional linear order. In this spirit of new beginnings, we have reformatted the magazine with a more approachable aesthetic. So welcome back. Take a break from your day, or remember this note next time you're standing in line with a quarterlife in your pocket. Have a bit of a read, and remember:

This is our quarterlife.





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Sam Alden

# Jimmy Jumps

Jimmy walks and hits like a girl but he has a big penis. I know cause I saw it when we did morning exercises and then went to go change. I really hate Jimmy, I think he's probably my worst enemy. He is always saying stupid things like, "well where did my lunch go, I left it right here?" when it is very obvious that Tom and Lee threw it up in the climbing tree, and I know he saw cause he was watching. And he always wants to go play with Jenna and Miriam, and never wants to play with me and Morse, who is my number one best friend, even though we ask him to sometimes to be nice. I think that maybe he wants to be a girl because he is always playing with girls and he kind of acts like a girl. I guess I think that I should treat Jimmy as I would like to be treated myself, but it's very hard because of all the dumb things he's always doing.

Yesterday at morning break we were all sitting around and talking about what we are going to be when we grow up and, what do you know, it was just like I said. Actually Morse said it and then I copycatted from him. Jimmy said I want to be a ballerina and we all laughed, even Jimmy laughed which was funny. Then at recess Lee said hey Jimmy and did a little ballerina dance and made music with his mouth and Tom and Lee both laughed so hard at Jimmy. And Jimmy was eating an apple and he was laughing, but then he all of a sudden yelled and threw the apple at them. But Jimmy can't throw and it just went thud right into the ground and then Tom and Lee started laughing again and Jimmy started laughing too.

Then today at music we had to do dancing outside on the soccer field and the girls all lined up on one side and the boys lined up on the other, and then we had to do grapevine down the middle, but Morse and I didn't touch the girls because even though I like Jenna, who was my partner, she is obviously a girl. Tom

and Lee were so funny. They did this really funny dance down the middle with each other like Lee was a girl. Then Jimmy came up and his partner was supposed to be Gretchen, but he wouldn't touch her. He didn't even look at her, he just looked really hard down the middle of the lines. And then he started sort of dancing down it by himself, ballerina dancing, and you know I don't really like ballet dancing, I think that if I were a dancer I would be a breakdancer, but you know when Jimmy did it, it was actually really beautiful. He was just so good. And he didn't stop at the end of the line like he was supposed to, he kept on going and spinning and doing these big leaps into the air, and they just got higher and higher until he was above the trees by the swings and then he took one big leap and was just this little speck in the sky and then we couldn't see him anymore. He was just up there somewhere like a bird or a satellite.

Samuel Martinez  
**Two Truths and a Lie**

I love you.  
I love you.  
I love you.

Roxanne Valdez  
**The Colors**

The colors, the  
vastness, the sheer  
power of whatever  
force moved all  
this earth, the life  
that exists here,

the *colors*,

the *vastness*.

I think about what if I just throw myself from  
this ledge here I'd just flail around like a  
rag doll until I hit the bottom maybe a song  
humming in my head maybe fear but no one  
would know because I'd be dead in a few seconds  
and I couldn't tell anybody anyhow.

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“Wow  
look at that  
view,”  
someone  
would say.

Valdez

“Yes so  
gorgeous  
so breathtaking  
yes

yes.

And then  
they'd see  
me flying,

a little spec hurling into  
the canyon.

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Flying.  
(Imagine that.)

There are lines drawn where I stand:  
love/fear, knowing/uncertainty, admiration/pity  
all things that I feel.  
And God to be able to cross those lines,  
confuse them...

there are no lines. There is  
only loveALLfearknowingBUNCHEd –  
confusionadmirationUPpity,

none of it concentrated where I am.

But what a way to go:

(over the ledge/across  
those (imaginary) lines/between which  
there is no space to breathe)

impulsively  
in perfect youth.

Valdez

between the lines

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Jenna Mukuno  
To a Loving Wife

Let my eyes speak  
from the wake  
of the finite point of death (for there is one)  
the grand crescendo of a bizarre  
orchestration that ends with  
talk of weather, distant relations,  
calls to the funeral home,  
the fiddling of a wedding band at midnight  
hither-dither chit-chat, and  
idle cars spuming cold exhaust.  
they wrapped me up in  
tubes, wires, stickers and nodes  
a body marred unrecognizable  
registered only by the  
shake of your contorted sighs  
what I wanted was your eyes  
submerged in mine  
entwined together in one unified breath  
for your eyes would meet my battered lids

and then— momentary soaring  
you, steeling upward like the waves  
in a chasm, and I, pitching downward  
toward earthly erasure  
in this pilgrimage of consciousness  
where to live is to walk with death  
it is inversely proportional  
a relationship defined by your eyes  
exhuming life from mine.

you averted your gaze  
as I walked solitarily.

Mukuno

between the lines

Rachel Hahn  
**Summer**

I had forgotten how suffocating summer can be,  
how it creeps up and over shoulders,  
backs,  
hands,  
extending tendrils with feigned nonchalance  
allowing us the choice of un-seeing.

she found me lying beneath a tree, twirling  
fingers in the air  
half-heartedly mapping an escape route, losing  
the words as soon as they passed my lips.

of course I knew:  
if I allowed summer to devour me whole there  
would be no more pretending that I wasn't  
already disappearing  
that I couldn't feel myself pulled by the suction  
of your absence,  
your maybe-never-being,

your bending of time and space and truth and  
truth and truth.

Hahn

no, I'd rather let what was left of my frame,  
sinews, and bones descend.  
a sadder, softer exit.

the epitaph would read  
here she lies,  
swallowed  
by the 7th of June.

the heat stole her  
without much struggle.

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Robin Lewis

## Animal Smells

Turkey shit perfumes the wind gusting from the east, an odorous sign that simply means rain. The birds live across the road from us in a long, hot shed until big, compartmented trucks arrive to haul them away. Scattered feathers on the black road leave white shadows as the semis drive towards the processing plants. I could look down at the asphalt and probably find some blood, but it doesn't matter, really, since the white will turn completely red in only awhile longer, when the birds are finally slaughtered. I like that it won't smell for the few days before the next batch of chicks arrive and then when the smell returns, it'll be different, although not quite new.

I take milk from a goat—Lucinda—that has never had a baby. The milk's sadly maternal scent clings to me and sometimes nauseates me. Tying her up, squeezing her tits, I finally understand what Sethe meant.

I never looked the pigs in the eye because that's where they show their intelligence, and I didn't want to see that because I knew we'd be killing them in a few weeks. The last pig fell about the time I wanted the guns to stop, convenient, I thought, as it convulsed unalive before me, leeching blood from the line across its neck. Two hours later, the only remnant of the slaughter was some blood-soaked grass. If you've ever tasted your own blood that was the smell the grass took on—iron-y and sour and not completely unappealing. Each rain dulled the scent more and more until suddenly the smell emerged in the faintest of ways in the sausage popping on the stove three weeks later.

His cigarillos' smoke made me nostalgic for friends and music and dark nights. That was until the rape. Now I smell smoke and I think about him and I think about the girl. Did the hay dig into her back? Did his dog watch? Did he look her in the eyes or was there too much intelligence going on in there to stand doing that? There are no bad people in the world, just

people doing bad things. That mantra creeps into my head whenever I smell a cigarette. Maybe one day I will truly believe it.

Back in the city, away from the country, I can't smell anything. Sometimes I bring my palm to my nose and search for the shit or the milk or the blood or the blood. I found them once while I sat outside in the growing blackness thinking of nothing except the smells but I ripped my hand away because they'd say it wasn't right. Too long for sadness and violence and evil, I mean. Even when what I truly wished to find was the possibility that goodness lurked in each scent too.

Martin Stolen  
**Canyonlands**

there is something here that cannot be seen  
through mired eyes

it is a mix of sage and tang  
a redrock jumble  
cleared away and thrown up high  
as if on stage

it is a desert green  
not green to someone new

it is a slowly burning soil  
come down long ago  
from a lacquered canyon wall  
wishing, only wishing,  
to be pressed open  
in the wide wings of a horsehair brush  
to become again, a part  
of another hue and cry

between the lines

facing outward  
to another and a different set of eyes

perhaps a squarish kite could see it  
8 <sup>1/2</sup> ' lengths of tether arcing up  
the warm persistence of a barometric truth  
crackling in colored vessels open to the air

perhaps a kite could see it  
a buoyant and an eyeless view  
from some on high  
not high enough  
to beat out the canyon rims  
in altitude

Leah Koerper  
**Thing Dog**

After I decided to cook/invent myself a dog  
It was only a matter of finding the right  
ingredients  
For its head I used a trail that I once walked  
when I was younger  
Eyes I borrowed from a potato  
    (for they have many to spare)  
My doggy's nose I got from a wise professor who  
said:  
    "A dog is never what he seems."  
For ears was easy I grabbed two cobs of corn  
    (able to pick up those high pitched  
    whistles, that only dogs can hear)  
Paws was easy too  
    I took a break from working  
    And connected them to legs I stole from the  
    last part of a race.  
His sleek dog back came from my car (but  
going in reverse)

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His bark came from a generous tree, who let me  
use its skin  
and his tail  
My doggy's tail came from a story I once read  
about a dog  
made out of things.

Kristin Mittelsteadt  
**Quarters**

When the balmy summer months hit, the tarnished silver sticks to the skin against my sternum, like a magnet pulling towards my heart. I subconsciously reach for the small, feeble ring that keeps the pendant dangling from its chain. It's a wonder to some why I haven't looked into a sturdier set-up, but obsessive lookout and needle-nose pliers seem to do the trick. The ancient chain is tarnished too, and carefully braided. There is an ever-so-slight undoing in the braid where the chain joins a clasp stamped "925." Every now and then, I come to the realization that the pinching sensation on my neck isn't the sting of a bee or bite of an insect, but the tension of hairs caught in the fray of silver. One rotational adjustment, and three or four are lost.

We sat cross-legged in the shaded grass next

to one another.

“Your skin looks like my skin.”

I told her that it must be the Armenian blood.

“So you’re a ‘halfy’ too?” I knew that her mom was born in India.

“No, a quarter.”

“Oh, never mind. A quarter doesn’t count.”

The scent of freshly prepared dolmas permeates the warm, heavy air of the dimly lit dining room. Bowls of dried apricots and plump dates are passed around the table. Candles flicker, sending streams of hot wax onto the intricately laced tablecloth. Pistachio shells crack. The juice from sweet peppers sprays with each bite. The names Farhad, Morteza, and Bahram, as common as Tom, Dick, or Harry, are uttered among muffled fragments of Farsi. Quarters clank. Fingers tap and dark eyes dart in anticipation.

I am seven years old and the distance between us is unbearable.

Papa may be Armenian by blood, but he

worships poker like the Iranian men of his birthplace. There he sits: Armenian parents, born in Iran, an immigrant to the United States with every intention of raising an American family and blending in, save for this ritual that I watch from around the corner.

The American Dream, right?

Unfamiliar words float between delicate spirals of steam from cups of green tea. Cards are passed, bets are made, and the pile of quarters in the middle of the table grows.

I remember when my mom gave me the necklace that had been her father's. It crumpled into my hand the way I crumpled to the floor when I heard that he had become too weak to go on living another day. Mastodon ivory, she told me, reading my quizzical look. A teardrop-shaped pendant of mastodon ivory encased in silver, nearly the same size as a quarter. Mastodon ivory. Four million years of history for an elephant, and all I have is this necklace.

Mittelstecht

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I never told her, but I will. A quarter does count for something. This something became everything when everything else died right along with him.

I could get a new chain. One that isn't tarnished. One that is braided to perfection and refuses to tug on my hair. But what lack of character. I could buy a new ring from which the pendant could hang. Maybe even a double ring for extra security. I wouldn't have to constantly reach for the teardrop. But then my hands would miss the smooth texture of rubbed silver. Why don't I just keep the necklace hidden in the depths of a jewelry box? Because then I might forget about it and the way the quarter-sized pendant reaches for my heart whenever I wear it.

If I lose this, I might just lose the rest of him. And myself.

Jesse Phillips  
The Un-Organizable Parts  
of Our Minds

Wallace Stevens was a twentieth century poet from Pennsylvania with an active imagination. Some say his poetry doesn't take place anywhere, or doesn't take "place" at all; others say that it takes place in the space between places. But I say it takes place in the dream just beneath waking reality. In "Disillusionment of Ten O'Clock,"

The houses are haunted  
By white night-gowns.  
None are green,  
Or purple with green rings,  
Or green with yellow rings,  
Or yellow with blue rings.  
None of them are strange,  
With socks of lace  
And beaded ceintures.  
People are not going

between the lines

To dream of baboons and periwinkles.  
Only, here and there, an old sailor,  
Drunk and asleep in his boots,  
Catches tigers  
In red weather.

For me, Stevens' verse is reminiscent of the ambiguity of childhood--of both the strangeness of *Where the Wild Things Are* and the soft-textured reality of *Goodnight Moon*. The poem smacks of childhood daydreams: the dreamlike colors, the objects of special importance, the whimsical style that pays attention to some parts of consciousness but not others. And like childhood, "Disillusionment of Ten O'Clock" paints a friendly picture of whatever reality it describes, yet it still holds the mysterious and the haunted that every child knows is a real threat to his or her receptive mind.

The house I used to visit during summers in Colusa, California was a haunted mansion that could dwell in Stevens' poem. It sat on a ten-acre plot of flat Central Valley land in the part

of California where you can see tens of miles of brown farm in every direction, and the smog colors the sky at the horizon. The air was rich: stinky with rural smells of strange families, old houses, a history of farm and wealth I would never know, and social sagas that continued with the friends my age that lived in that flatland. About three of the ten acres were occupied by the house's front lawn. Imagine a huge, symmetrical garden, replete with greenery and symmetrical pathways leading behind shrubs and flowers. The front lawn was like this, except dried to crisp yellows and browns, with exotic loquat trees ringing the fringe and the shrubs almost sparse enough to see through to the other side. Here, in this strange abandoned garden, I experienced a mystery that still haunts my memory.

I spent days running over the thick alfalfa, playing tag with the children whose grandmother owned the house. The property was too big, too full of possibility and sensation for me to wrap my mind around. Not to mention the house itself--a three-story whitewashed

Victorian presence that I was sure held secrets I didn't want to learn. The memory of my visceral experience there consists of watching someone search for me from my hiding place inside a shrub, of the terrible ferocity of a dog-fight that broke out between two strange mutts, of the white porch-swing hanging ghostly in the midday heat at a distance that seemed like a quarter mile away across the property. This was the haunting of the place; its size created the illusion that no one was ever on the property except you, alone in a primordial, deserted ghostworld in which white night-gowns could be very much alive, and a child at play could very much accept that his imagination and reality, consciousness and dreaming, were one and the same.

And even now, once in a while, you might give your mind to your eyes and awaken.—to chance upon an old sailor asleep in his boots by the fire, in a room where the immense tasseled blanket, sewn from old night-gowns, and the wolf-mother wallpaper, give way to constellations of tigers stalking the night sky.

Anastasia Zamkinos

# No

Sleep slicks off of my waking mind like water  
off of oiled feathers. I ignore the soreness  
until after I remember the dream in which

A pomegranate nesting in my palm cracked  
open and spilled out seeds.  
The gel around each hard grey heart melted  
into the lines of my palm  
and the black dots overwhelmed my hands  
like endless ellipses  
covering a page.....

They spilled to the floor where  
a rattlesnake sang and  
slithered amongst them  
and the waves of tiny seeds  
tempted him to slip  
out of his own skin and  
wrap around my ankle and

between the lines

he squeezed and  
I did not  
could not  
move.

When it died, finally died,  
I was finally animated  
and I palmed a plastic bag  
and gathered the raw limp body of the snake up  
and threw the two out  
and the bag drifted, and I followed,  
to the toes of some distant body  
where the one baby sea turtle, the one  
that made it from the beach to the water  
without being snatched up by a gull,  
suffocated on the clear plastic

And I watched the body fall  
and land in obscurity;

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I brush my teeth with my elbows close to my  
bruised sides and think that somewhere there is

comfort, there is a hand that can hold my hip  
and wake me from my nightmare without a  
piece of me coming off in its palm.

Zankinos

between the lines

Kaley Lane Eaton  
**Printed Black Dots**

Rachmaninoff. He loved the crystalline bricks of the chords, the choreography of each triad which whispered of mystic Russian moors; he loved it so much. I could never play it. He never heard me. He never knew I kept the Rachmaninoff anthology closest to my body when I carried my scores. It was just fine that way. Every so often I would pick up my bent score, mustard yellow and olive green in its glossiness, and stare--seeing his face in the shapes of the glare. I'd open to my favorite and play the first few measures in seriousness, forgetting that I had never learned it. I don't know if it was the complexity of the runs or the frosty evocations echoing from the lower strings that stopped me; but there was a nuance there too strong, too urging, and too reminiscent of the fog behind his eyes.

He spoke rarely to me. He spoke rarely

to anyone. Maybe this is why he loved Rachmaninoff, who said everything you say in your dreams but never when you wake. The music was built of shadows just like the black, undulating curls that fell so sheepishly about his forehead.

But I grew accustomed, obsessed. The more distance between our bodies, the more lines between the melody of his soul and the melody of mine, the more I wanted them to touch and harmonize, and the more I felt the more I loved the agony. What is painless is heartless, pointless, I told myself, and otherwise there would be no music of Rachmaninoff. No counterpoint if there is unison. No harmony without empty intervals. I thrived on the potential of unrequited love: those syrupy and sensual moments when your hidden proclamations and those ones of your beloved become twin seedlings, planted in the shape of eternity, growing silently and wildly beneath the shadow of the crimson rose.

I never finished learning the piece he loved,

Eaton

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but I will always clutch it as I did that wrinkled score because it had beauty in it that surpassed me. It had value and profundity that I can appreciate more when kept at bay.

The dissonance that lingers after the first few measures never resolves. That is Romance in music, and that is Rachmaninoff, and that is what speaks of tears and sleepless nights where images and colors of that one face seem to run past you at the speed of sound. This is the music that I love.



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