

quarterlife

time of day

Volume 4 Issue 3
time of day

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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 Whitman 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 with which writing is produced.

whitman.edu/quarterlife
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Letter from the Editors

Rather than have a particular theme dominate the issue, we have structured the magazine around a measurement. For the average individual, a measurement is constituted by a fixed quantity or stable figure. While this serves an important function, it is also productive to think of time as governing the innumerable spaces we inhabit throughout the course of a single day. Each moment can be thought of as a room where we must pass through its various doors, hallways, and corridors. On the other hand, this may not constitute your vision of time at all. Time is personal; its conception is individualized and often private.

One of the most exhausted complaints by writers is that they would actually “write” if only they had more “time.” By highlighting the time of composition provided by each contributor, we wish to highlight the space and moment when the writer existed as they created their work. As you soon will notice, these times serve as the page numbers. The arrangement of these pieces by chronology rather than theme, effectively reconstructs a single day in which the issue was born.

Consider this the morning.

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Zoë Ballering

Assignment 16:

build an argument using
standard outline format

01:00

- I. My mother loves beautiful things.
- II. My mother loves playing the piano.
- III. My mother loves playing the piano, a beautiful thing.
- IV. My mother reads sheet music to play the piano.
- V. Sheet music is a beautiful thing.
 - A. The lines look like harp strings.
 - B. The treble clef looks like a cursive “S.”
 - C. The bass clef looks like an earring and two drops of blood.
 1. When I am sixteen I will get my ears pierced and I may bleed.

01:00

- D. The C-clef looks like a saloon door from the old movies,
- E. The notes look like minnows caught in the puddles beside the river.
 - 1. I pinch minnows between my fingers and pop them like grapes.
 - 2. Their outsides and their insides are smooth.
- F. There are many kinds of rests and they are beautiful.
 - 1. The minim looks like a bowler hat.
 - 2. The crotchet looks like a lightning bolt.
 - 3. The quaver, semiquaver, demisemiquaver, and hemidemisemiquaver look like holly branches with berries on them.
- VI. My mother has beautiful hands.
 - A. My mother has long fingers.
 - B. My mother can reach an octave on the piano.
 - C. My mother *knows* where to touch.
- VII. My mother moves beautifully when she plays the piano.

- A. My mother bows her head like she is at church.
- VIII. My mother is a saint or an angel, maybe both.
- IX. I touch people by touching them.
- X. My mother touches people who are too far away to touch.
- A. I have proof.
- XI. In concert halls my mother touches people so they *have* to stand up and applaud.
- A. I stand up because my mother is beautiful.
- XII. Even people who are far away, in the back seats of the balcony, stand up.
- XIII. My mother touches people by raising her hands, setting them down, and pressing the keys.
- XIV. My mother touches strangers.
- XV. My mother cannot touch me.
- XVI. No.
- A. It is not my mother's fault.
- XVII. I cannot be touched.

XVIII. I cannot understand my mother's beauty.

A. Mother, what is sound?

B. What is pitch?

1. What is harmony?

2. What is melody?

C. What is volume?

1. What is forte?

2. What is mezzo-piano?

D. What is sotto voce?

E. What is crescendo?

XIX. I cannot make the beauty that my mother makes.

A. She smiles when I sit at the piano.

B. She asks me to stop if I play too long.

1. I could play for hours, trying to be her.

2. I could play from sunrise to sunset.

3. I could play for one entire day.

C. She says it is loud.

1. In music, this is called fortissimo.

D. She says the sounds do not match.

1. The word for this is cacophony.

time of day

02:12

- XX. My mother loves beautiful things.
- XXI. My mother does not love unbeautiful things.
- XXII. I am not beautiful.
- XXIII. My mother does not love me.

Madeline Jacobson
Shelf Life

03:00

When I set you in motion
I accidentally fixed the furrow in your brow
so it deepens and
forms an acute downward angle
whenever you worry about your future.
And your right eye blinks twice,
clicking like a camera shutter,
when you tell a lie
(although you don't often, since
I built you with a guilty conscience).
Your vertebrae rattle
when you straighten up

time of day

03:00

because you're listening intently
and your pupils
pulse rhythmically
emitting a low frequency throbbing
when you're in love.

Your multitude of whirrs and tics
give you away every time so that
I always know
what you're thinking.
I could probably stand that, except
you think, then stare expectantly at me
waiting for my necessary
voice command.

Once you actually asked permission
to run away
with that trashy glass ballerina
you'd been eyeing wistfully
from across the room.

I, of course, said no
then immediately resented you for obeying
and for making

the scratched record noise
that always indicates disappointment.

I've found myself secretly hoping
you spontaneously combust
for variety's sake.

time of day

03:31

Aaron Baumann
The Emperor

03:47
sleepers in my eyes

Like pixie dust in my veins, that's what it feels like, like some Chinaman scampering around inside me, pricking my veins with his tiny acupuncture needles, my organs and bones, in my bones, there he is with his goatee swimming laps in my marrow, and with those itty bitty needles. The Buddha blocking my small intestine. Confucius in my sinuses.

Confucius says, Do not be angry with happiness, be happy with anger.

You forget what a joke it all is, that it's a dream, everything starts to seem so real.

And you want to keep *living* in this world, nothing more or less than itself. Pixie dust in your veins. Who are you and where are you from. You tiny Asian man.

What do you want from me. What do *you*, want from *me*. I am God. God. What could you want from me? What is it you ask of God? What could you possibly want from me? I cannot make you feel this way. I cannot. I cannot make you God. For there is only one of me. And what you ask is not within my power.

I speak and it is spoken. My words emerge in writing, my tongue is sharp and carves letters in the air, words, No, my tongue does not speak Mandarin, I cannot pay you now, you stingy, stingy and tiny man.

Where did you learn your craft? For I know all crafts. All skills are mine, are of me, and I possess them. All crafts. But I do not know acupuncture, for it is an art, No, I do not know acupuncture. You cannot tickle yourself. You cannot perform acupuncture on yourself. And

you would have to be very small to run through the thoroughfares of my circulatory system. And you might become intoxicated by the pixie dust there.

I cannot anymore listen to these adages, No, I cannot live my life by adage. Oh, oh yes, well that is a good one.

As though your eyelids might close and the weight of them drag you to the ground, weigh down your suit of skin, pull you to the ground to your knees, you want to climb out and say, Look! I am not my skin! But you cannot for you are.

Eyelids heavy as organs, bones, suffocating from the inside out. Concrete running through my veins.

If only it worked like that. The best day of my life. I had a purpose, and met the only woman I ever loved.

Beautiful in her Spandex tights as she stood in line at Starbucks:

Her lips mouthing *SOY* as she tried to hear

the ocean in her phone:

I know what frequents your dreams.

The two women I ever loved.

Beautiful in her leopard print pants as she spoke the words *NO WHIP*:

Her kids hollering as they danced in tribal celebration:

I know your innermost desires.

Bless me Father for I have sinned.

I worked at a hospital: I was Surgeon, Chief Surgeon, Chief Surgeon and Emperor. I was Janitor and Orderly and Nurse and Patient.

At some hospitals so I hear they steal medication, the Pills, Narcotics they call them, where I worked we stole Formaldehyde. They use it in hospitals as some kind of disinfectant, every day we would stash swollen bags of Formaldehyde in our lockers, carry them out with us at the end of the day. Our lunch boxes and bags of Formaldehyde.

I don't know who started it, someone must have been doing some at-home embalming and it

time of day

07:12

turned into a trend, a habit. Not the embalming but the stealing. Maybe the embalming. Maybe it got you fucked up, I wouldn't know. It's *Formaldehyde*. No, I don't know, maybe someone was a photographer.

I liked to imagine everyone going home and embalming themselves, each night, pickling themselves in Formaldehyde, then wrapping themselves in cloths or dirty rags and climbing into bed. To sleep. The sleep of mummies. Then waking.

Confucius says, Do not belong to sleep, sleep to belong.

When it plays like a movie in your brain. Like *Gladiator*, something *exciting*. And you grind your groin against the sheets and think of leopard print pants and too-tight tights and want to start humping but don't because God is watching. He might judge you for your sins. And it's one thing to fuck your hand but fucking the bed is different, beds are inanimate. At least your hand has a pulse. Unless you sit on it and

give yourself the Stranger.

I loved those women and followed them home. Screaming and waving like they couldn't contain themselves. Wanting me so bad. Foggy, foggy, foggy and a movie in my brain. Then concrete, whoomph!, and you sit down and cry.

As a Surgeon I would operate on people even when they didn't want me to. They would scream, You aren't the Surgeon!, as they fell asleep, and I would say, Shhh, you are a sick, sick man.

Like Russell Crowe in *Gladiator* when he kills everybody then stands in the Coliseum and screams at the Emperor. That's what you feel like all the time. Like you've killed everybody and are screaming, or want to scream. You are a sick, sick man.

One more fix, one more fix, embalm me and let me sleep until I wake.

Confucius says, Do not wake to die, die to wake.

You are the Emperor.

time of day

09:35

Heather Nichols-Haining
**Confessions of a
Non-Smoker**

10:57

I don't smoke, you know. It's not because I love my body (although I think I do) and it's not because I'm afraid of lung cancer (although I might be a little). It's because I'm terrified of being something other than normal. I don't really need you to think I'm unique or special, but I kind of hope you find my normalness attractive. I've worked so hard at it after all.

Once I was at a restaurant with eight or nine other friends and we were all drunk and so were you and I thought about it then, you know. I was going to smoke when Annie

quarterlife

10:57

offered me the cigarette, but I remembered all those years I've spent not smoking and it would be such a shame if it was all a waste. Were you there when everyone was smoking pot and I wasn't and Kevin said, "It's kinda chill, ya know? Like her lungs are virgins! Can you imagine never having anything poisonous run through your body like that?" I was instantly pleased, but I also wanted to tell him that I drink coffee and coke and that I have a terrible sweet tooth, and those things are almost as dangerous as cigarettes (thankyouverymuch).

My dad's a doctor and my mom's a Christian. I'm not either, but there was a time when I wanted to be both. That doesn't really mean anything now because here I am at Whitman College about as far from God as I'll ever get, and also I stopped taking math my freshman year when I got a C- in Calc I and had to change my life goals. Thanks for that one, Professor Morris. I can't smoke though because Dad gives me a checkup every year when I go

home and Mom prays for me every time I step foot on a plane, so they would both know the minute the tarry smoke courses through my veins. It's worse than if I actually believed in God, because I couldn't even ask for forgiveness, I'd just have to let my mom plead on my part. And I still wouldn't really care, except see, I think all that pleading takes something out of her.

I know you must think I'm a pretty moral person, but don't worry, I'm not. Even if I don't smoke, I have sex sometimes. I mean, just with you, but I don't think my parents would approve of that either. Actually I have a theory that most parents probably do want their kids to have healthy sex lives, they just feel like they probably shouldn't tell them that. You know, because of God or something.

At first I was afraid to hang out with you because of all your smoking. Mom told me kissing a smoker is like kissing an ashtray (and that's why we shouldn't smoke, dear), and

I used to dream about the two of us falling into each other for the most romantic kiss ever, except it would end with dirty ashes coating my well-chapsticked lips. Of course, that didn't happen and I'll never tell Mom, but I've come to appreciate the smoky taste of your breathe just after a heavy cigarette.

Even more than that, I was afraid I'd succumb to peer pressure and start smoking myself. I mean, I'm a pretty strong person, and I do love being normal, but I underestimated the difficulty of sitting in a group of seven smokers and not smoking. It sort of puts my normalness into a new perspective, you know? It's not like the DARE officer said it would be, with twelve or fifteen punks holding me down, forcing me to choose between a knife and the cigarette (with death at either end), but sometimes I wish it was like that. Peer pressure is easier to ignore when it comes from enemies, but friends who just want me to have a good time make me feel guilty for turning them down.

I guess all this is just to let you know I smoked a cigarette earlier today. I thought you'd know right away because I can always tell after you've smoked, but I scrubbed my hair and washed my clothes and brushed my teeth and you didn't even say anything when we kissed. I'm certainly not a smoker, but I'm not a not smoker anymore either. Maybe now we can spend evenings together on the porch, a cigarette dangling out of each of our hands, head on chest, love in the air. Anything is possible these days.

Elizabeth Hambleton
The Inverse

12:00

“When you stare at something long enough,
when you look away you see the exact image but
with opposite colors.”

“That’s right, sir.”

“When you’ve been hearing a sound too
long and it stops, is the ringing in your ears the
opposite, too?”

“I don’t know, sir.”

“If it is, then all tones must have
quantifiable qualities just like colors. If it isn’t,
then what is it and why is it not like color?”

“Are you a musician, sir?”

time of day

12:00

“I play. I am not.”

“Are you a painter, sir?”

“I paint. I am not.”

“Are you an artist?”

“I pray daily I may be.”

“You are religious? This is a surprise to me, sir.”

“No. I do not pray to a god. I pray. Something hears, even if it is only myself.”

“Some can’t see colors.”

“Some can’t distinguish sounds.”

“What does it matter, sir? Some see the world differently. Some hear it differently, too. It’s personal perspective. You can discern and analyze it if you wish. Simple psychology. Why do you persist?”

(Silence.)

“Stop asking such questions, sir.”

(A sigh, with a strange smile of contentment.)

“What now?”

“Everyone used to tell me that, and then they stopped. The absence made me wonder

what changed. If I had changed, or if they had, I couldn't know. It seems nothing has, after all."

"You're a right prick, sir."

"That one, too. Good night. I must gather my strength for tomorrow's execution."

"True enough. Good night, sir."

"Wait."

"What is it, sir?"

"Do you suppose when you've been here too long, a sudden change illumines the inverse?"

"Here, sir? Your bedchamber? Your nation? Your planet?"

"Sure, sure. This world. This dimension."

"Worried about tomorrow. Don't. You've had preparation."

"Will they miss me?"

"None as much as I, sir."

"A shame, for I shall miss them very much, I expect."

"This certainly is a beautiful world, isn't it."

(Pause.)

"Sir?"

“The inverse of this world is just around the corner, for me. Tomorrow.”

“You could say that.” *(Eye roll.)*

(Smile, no more words; he is asleep.)

(Watches while doubt and dread engulf his mind. For a split second the world is bright as day, and then darkness reigns in Hell again.)

Jesse Phillips
Untitled

15:02

Strange how time moves-- maybe like a camel or some sort of nocturnal leopard? Maybe it has a belly that fills with events and when it burps something happens or a limp that makes it drag when it tweaks the old pain. The longest part of today, when all the important things happened, was two hours after 9 PM. Let's call it "Lamplight O'Clock." Earlier, at Cold-Grey-Blue O'Clock, my sister and I played catch in a field. Things happened in a different light. The minutes were in pavement and grass time, which is much different from sofa or inflated

time of day

15:02

basketball time. Time while one is wearing plaid sometimes passes like a Christmas vacation where one has to pose for relatives-- but only sometimes. Sometimes, a space cloud passes behind the moon and no one can think what to say. Sometimes The River Time drinks from floods, and other times it gets thirsty for Moments like droplets. Some times make love to one another across time, and the slowest to do it get a vacation to the Museum Before Time. As for now... enough.

Nick Michal
Two nights in a
cheap motel

19:41

We are not here for fun, I say
while you land on the still-ruffled
bed, stains hidden by white sheets.
A bug scuffles across the floor,
I kill it, pass you your shirt with
the light blemish; you twitch.
I write the note on a notepad:
Don't move please thanks.
You watch the massacres on
your phone, deny a call when
it starts ringing. You pull at
the switch on the lamp and it

time of day

19:41

doesn't turn on. Please don't
Worry. Come on.

We are both on the bed. The
springs depress, but will not
let us get comfortable. *Tell me
a story, first.* OK. The Wright
Brothers. Flight. *No, not that.
The first. The fuuurst.*

I light a cigarette. You're still
against them for a little while
longer. Your nails have scabbed
over, and the red is delicious,
like Twizzlers on the car seat
floor. You have Nothing to
Worry about. Take it easy.
We'll be here two nights,
and the blinds will be
closed—Look, there's
even HBO on
TV, if it'll make it easier.

Eleanor Ellis
Untitled

20:27

*the windowpane is a
6 x 4 array of darkness*

we are the only ones that disregard time

plants tell day-length in precise intervals
they open their mouths by day and become green

but we speak long after the dark comes, and the
energy of our words come from some other light
(not the sun), and we forget about our cells,

the microscopic divisions of our day,
the precision of our speech.

time of day

20:27

I wonder sometimes about the syntax of the sky,
the way you said dawn and dusk
were interchangeable, that we fall in love with
the habit
of rising and falling and I wanted to say

time does not disregard us:
and neither do these words, these bodies:
our four-letter twelve-hour existence, particular
to this
arrangement of latitudes and chromosomes,
is ours.

I open my mouth in the imprecise darkness and
become blue,
afraid of the childhood fairy who might sprinkle
glittering ambiguity upon my eyelids
and lull me into sleep.

Madelyn Peterson
his daughter's marrow

21:19

The clock began to droop like a Dalí this morning.

The hour hand
drifted to the linoleum before breakfast.
By noon, the minutes
had settled on the foot of her hospital bed,
desiccated leaves
leftover from autumn
scattered on the laundered sheets.

He measures time instead
by her smiles,

time of day

21:19

bites taken from a bagel
just one more, honey

the number of steps down the hallway
two more Percocet

the pace of her breath
when she sleeps.

Last night he dreamt of her vertebrae--
fused and intricate, crustacean
almost. They glowed
through her skin, her profile
a floating x-ray.

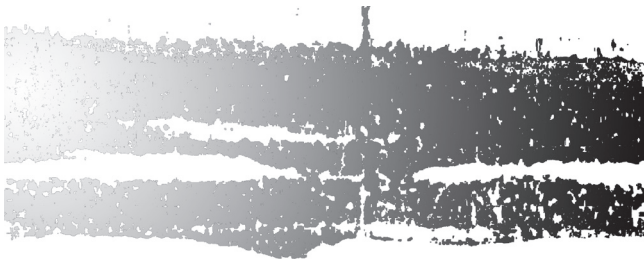
Now
he lifts her weighted
body into bed,
as delicately
as if
bones

were nothing more
than porcelain pieces
and butterfly wings.

time of day

22:53

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