

quarterlife
the food issue

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the food issue

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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.

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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.

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Letter from the Editors

Recipe for a *quarterlife* Casserole:

Infuse a predestined loaf with the crimson juice of memory. Drizzle the blood of an orange over a mound of okra in a honey pot. Adorn with slices of lemon, sprigs of lavender. Whip the concoction into graceful white peaks. Don't forget the babies and tofu. Consume with cheesy biscuits (if you're on a sugar-free diet).

Eating is universal. It is an experience that—for better or for worse—we all necessarily share, making food one of the world's most stable currencies. In using the word “issue,” we hope to conjure how the act of eating is rarely a simple matter of consumption.

The questions we encounter through and because of food ask whether the meal is a soufflé or a battleground for family strife, a piece of bread or a harkening back to childhood, a blueberry or a bearer of religious symbolism.

Tell me what you eat, I'll tell you what you are. In essence we offer to you, our readers, a bite-sized serving of the Whitman student psyche.

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cover art
Artichoke

Erin Carnahan

Mimi Cook
What It Is

(Lights up. A small cabin on a large boat. Everything in the cabin is different shades of green. Two women sit at a table. They are both very thin. An orange sits on the table between them, almost glaringly bright. Both women are gazing at the orange. The light is watery, murky, almost underwater.

SERENA

My god, what is it?

NADIA

So round. So lovely.

SERENA

Where did it come from?

NADIA

Found it.

SERENA

But where?

NADIA

Round, rolling on the water, the wave water rolling,
it round on the wave water I found it. Went down the
ladder and took it from the water, the rolling waves.

SERENA

So it came from the sea.

NADIA

The sea.

SERENA

Then, there are no words to name it what it is?

NADIA

No words. Only round, and a smell.

(She lifts the orange and smells it. She hands it to SERENA, who also smells it.)

SERENA

Ah, the smell. I remember this smell, on my hands I think . . . but when?

(She rests the orange on the table and looks at it again.)

SERENA

How mysterious.

NADIA

Yes.

SERENA

I don't like mysteries.

NADIA

Lovely round thing.

SERENA

I think we should cut it open.

(NADIA looks up at her.)

NADIA

Cut?

SERENA

To see how it works inside.

NADIA

No.

SERENA

But we must know what it is.

NADIA

You cut, silver fish flopped on counter, flopped cutting on blade and died.

SERENA

That was a long time ago. Now I know how to do things better.

NADIA

How?

SERENA

I just do.

NADIA

No.

(She takes the orange from the table and hides it behind her back.)

NADIA

No. Mine.

SERENA

Give it to me.

NADIA

I found it.

SERENA

But it could be bad.

(She reaches out behind NADIA's back. NADIA hits her. SERENA winces back with a cry.)

SERENA

See, it is bad. It has caused us to turn against each other. It caused you to hurt me.

(A long silence. SERENA stares at NADIA who looks at her feet, at the table, out the porthole, at the wall. Finally she sighs and slumps. SERENA straightens.)

SERENA

We must know what it is.

NADIA

So lovely.

(But her voice is weak. She meets SERENA's gaze and after a moment brings the orange out from behind her back and sets it on the table. SERENA rises and retrieves a large knife with a wooden handle from a drawer. She goes to the table and positions the knife over the orange.)

NADIA

(Mournfully.) So round.

(SERENA cuts. The orange splits into two halves on the table. Juice drips from the knife, from the cut edges. SERENA and NADIA lean forward and look.)

NADIA

Look. It bleeds.

SERENA

It bleeds. All that which lives will bleed when cut. It must be alive.

NADIA

Dead now.

SERENA

No. No, it doesn't have to be. Perhaps it is only pretending to be dead, trying to trick us.

NADIA

Dead, like fish.

(She points her finger at SERENA and becomes suddenly menacing.)

NADIA

You killed it!

(Black out.)

Eleanor Ellis
Nutritional advice
from the legless

You could bite that apple. I'm not
opposed to it, but then you'll know
sticky chins, tart flesh, and also
poisonous seeds.

The tree grows from this small evil
but if you consume too much of what
hasn't yet sprouted, you can't live.

I'd recommend the pomegranate, though you'll
stain
your fingers with the crimson juice of memory.

This time
it's not about exile but bondage, the obligation to
return
to the same dark places.

As an alternative, you could go for the tangerine,
lemon, lime. But even blueberries have cosmo
logical
implications, and you have to avoid scurvy
somehow.

Although caution is advisable I must say
I'm not a picky eater, myself: I take life
by the teeth, whole, and swallow.
You cannot mistake my silhouette: I am full
of honesty.

Erin Carnahan
Satisfaction



Kristen Mittelsteadt

Why do you drink it?

If hospitals are the place of antibiotic resistant bacteria, then this house is the cure.

-Katherine Anne Ceronsky

When I lived here, wide-mouth jars of kombucha, kimchi, and hard cider sat preserved on various shelves. The shelves where smaller jars of bulgur wheat and powdered milk sat, home to larva of some kind, blending into other jars of white sushi rice. The shelves where Erlenmeyer flasks and *approved* science experiments used to live, before the physical plant sale. The shelves that I'm sure are still covered in a sticky film of dust and spilled grade-A Vermont maple syrup. I unstuck one of the empty jars and took it with me.

This is how we make it on Penrose Ave.

Kombucha:

Bring 12 cups of water (preferably wrung from the towel that was shoved in the corner where the two faces of ground-level cabinets meet to catch the water that spills from the counter and then you forgot about it until weeks later when that red-headed boy asked, “Is that smell my socks?”) to a boil in a large metal pot. Allow 5-7 teabags of your choice to fully steep for 12 minutes. (If you like honey, add 20-28 tablespoons of honey.) Add one cup of sugar. (Substitute honey—*Yes! More honey!*, jam, or cheesy biscuits if on a sugar-free diet. We all gave up sugar for the first four hours of Lent). Allow tea to cool. Pour off the tea, sans teabags, into a large wide-mouth jar. Best if the jar is empty to start. With preferably unwashed hands, take the symbiotic colony of bacteria and yeast, or zooglear mat if you wish, (“mother” and “baby”

terminology may be too confusing for warranted use), and place the gelatinous blob in the jar of tea. It should float on top like a jellyfish. Cover the vessel with an old bicycle-chain-cleaning rag and place in a dank, dark place for 6-8 days. The basement will work. Drew the short straw on room-pickin' did ya? Kombucha should have a sparkling, somewhat sweet, cidery taste. Enjoy! Fill your mug! And after consumption, I hope to God that you don't end up thinking you can use poppers as asthma medication. Or worse, that you find yourself unable to figure out where the little buttons on the side of the steering wheel are that make the horn honk.

We've got these jars of things that require pickling and fermenting and those processes that if fucked up, will fuck you up. Your GI makes something that looks like the unidentifiable muck you might find in the clogged shower drain. The grimy plastic shower curtain shows a map of the world, now properly updated with "The Demo-

cratic Republic of Zaire” scrawled in permanent pen. We’re quite worldly. One shower for twelve people and “I’m at the *commbination* Pizza-Hut-and-Taco-Bell” blaring from the living room. This is no place for “mothers” or “babies,” unless you count the baby who was also a mother. The slimy mother who produced the slimy baby after a week in the basement. Or the really big baby next door whose sarcasm miraculously doesn’t fly over my head. Live the revolution, comrade. Art projects. Throw a blanket over that will you? Themed parties. I sleep through them but if I’m there, I’ll be in the lion costume, regardless of the theme. Ugh, a beverage that breeds.

I don’t live there anymore. And I kind of miss worrying whether there will be toilet paper, questioning if it’ll shorten my life to cook in a pot with popcorn charred on the bottom, wondering why I sit in that one unsteady chair at breakfast. I think about the beginning ceramicists whose non-flat-bottom mugs might tip, scalding cof-

fee nightmare. I remember once riding into the night for an ice cream run, but first into and over the camouflaged slackline, face hugging the ground. I think about bikinis made of tripe and “sketchy cheese” and the threat of Double Bubble suffocation. I laugh, crossing Isaacs one more time to go *home* for dinner, closing my eyes and walking without second guessing that someone might not stop.

I miss hearing arguments justifying why anyone would ever drink it. “I heard it can cure cancer.” “It’s just brimming with essential vitamins and minerals!” “It’s about the image.” “One cup and I’ve got energy for the day!”

“It’s a communal thing.” That’s what’s good for you. Fill it up.

I’m invincible. I love it. Even I can touch the ceiling and write crude, passive aggressive things like “Do your dishes, fuckers.” I love those

shelves, and that shower, and falling asleep to the sounds of a Come As Your Favorite One Hit Wonder Party overhead. I love the dripping countertop, and finding gum wrappers in my pockets, and waking up to the rumble of the spin cycle. I love these stories, and these people, and these jars filled with sushi rice, and critters that like bulgur wheat, and memories. They fill me up. This place fills me up.

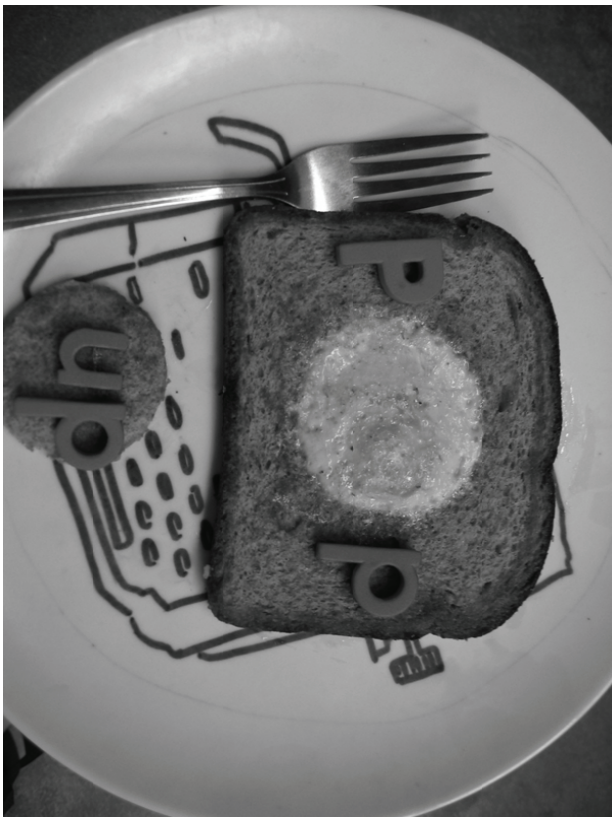
This is surely no place for mothers or babies. But I'm no mother, and I'm certainly not a baby, and the one empty jar that I have is filling up with everything about that place and those people that makes me smile. I'll have to go back and unstuck another to catch the overflow.

Lara Goodrich
Communion

At Presbyterian churches you only get Communion four times a year. This is a rip-off, or at least I thought it was when I was young. The fact that the bread and grape juice always came in such paltry portions didn't disappoint me though. Its miniature size intrigued me, made me envision I was having a little tea party with myself in the pew.

I don't quite see it that way anymore, but that doesn't mean I've matured. At church last Sunday, I took the bread and the grape juice, and downed them without too much of my former thought or excitement. The bread was delicious. Is it blasphemous to think the bread they give you for Communion tastes really good? I'm not even a bread enthusiast, but that tiny little cube of sourdough intrigued me.

Which member of the clergy went to the bakery to purchase the bread? Or was it a volunteer? And how did he/she decide on the variety? (Wheat would have been healthier, right? And after all, isn't the body of Christ supposed to be a healthy input?) How many loaves did it take to feed the congregation for two services? And how much did it cost? (Would the bakery offer a discount if the bread had the opportunity to become Jesus' flesh?) Was the loaf then placed in a plastic bag and tossed into the errand-runner's passenger seat? Was this loaf predestined, or did it remain insignificant until broken and blessed on Sunday morning? And, would it be horrible if I asked the pastor how I can get my hands on some of it? It doesn't need to be transubstantiated for me. I just want to slather a slice with some peanut butter.



Paris White
Pop-Up Book

Anonymous
“The Plot Against The
Giant”: A Translation

First Girl

When this hun comes
Wandering, ponderous,
Slabbering with savage maul,

I shall waft before him,
Loosing cordial pungence,
Of lavender and irises,
Of mock-orange and magnolias.

It will chide him.

Second Girl

When this hun comes
Wandering, ponderous,
Slabbering with savage maul,

I shall lilt before him,
Yawning clouds of happy calico,
Of Persian rose and green,
Of amethyst and blue.

It will abash him.

Third Girl

Oh,
Oh hellion!

When this hun comes
Wandering, ponderous,
Slabbering with savage maul,

I shall purl before him,
With cadences of crystal,
With cajoling warble;
His ears shall deliquesce.
I shall dew pure sibilations,
Pearly sibilations,
Paradisal sibilations,
Upon his turbid dome.

It will unravel him.

Patricia Vanderbilt
Soufflé

It's Friday and the scent of marijuana is wafting into Iras's apartment from the Sawyer brothers in room 7D upstairs. The table is set for three, a single daffodil tilts in the vase at the center of the deep pink tablecloth, and Iras is watching the oven. She is clothed in colors: red skirt, yellow shirt, green apron, and on her hands, purple oven mitts. She is staring at the creation she has spent the past several hours assembling and she is waiting, hoping, praying, commanding it to rise.

“Do not betray me, you temptress, you imp,” Iras threatens the oven with one sweaty index finger extended inside her oven mitt. She squints at her soufflé through the clouded window in the oven door and regrets the flimsy efforts she has put towards cleaning. Her mother's kitchen,

Iras knows, would be spotless, its every surface polished and the oven window bereft of a single hint of grease.

This isn't the stainless steel, freshly re-done, refrigerator-disguised-as-a-wooden-cabinet kitchen of Iras's mother, however. There is no shelf of glossy cookbooks and rolodex of recipes clipped from *Better Homes and Gardens*. There is no alphabetically arranged spice-rack and there is no drawer of the fridge designated specifically for "really special cheeses." In fact, there are very few items whatsoever in Iras's fridge, which is partially why a soufflé was chosen as tonight's entrée.

The other reason, of course, is the nature of the soufflé. Light, fluffy, fickle. The temperamental symbol of Iras's ability to function, sans-parentals, sans-suburbia, sans-boyfriend. Just her and the sallow-walled apartment on Eighth Street, only a block away from the bus station and only a bus ride away from all of the hip and unaffordable neighborhoods of the city. Nothing much could

be done about the apartment, Iras knew, but the soufflé—a perfect soufflé, a golden, puffy indicator of competence and achievement—would mean something to Rick and Wendy Alexander.

She knows that she can cook it. She grew up observing her mother, a master of the soufflé technique, whip eggwhites into graceful white peaks and fold them into butter-yellow sauce. Wendy's soufflés were perfection, smooth unblemished surfaces softly arcing heavenward as she removed them from the oven. But it was Wendy's demeanor, her air of confidence with the soufflé, that Iras sought to emulate.

“I won't *allow* you to sink,” she whispers to her adversary in the oven, then checks the green numbers on the \$4.95 digital clock she got at WalMart.

They are due to arrive any minute. Her father will complain about the price of parking and her mother will make some remark about the flights of stairs and how Iras won't need to worry about her weight. And then they will eat.

They will not linger past 7:30 because they have tickets for the opera and, as Wendy will say with a glance at the three chairs condensed awkwardly into Iras's kitchen, they would never want to feel like an imposition.

Inside the oven the soufflé is curving gently upward and outside the apartment two sets of footsteps grow steadily more distinct. Iras whispers one final prayer to whatever god is listening.

“Labor of my desires, you are beautiful, you are lightness, you are strength. When I remove you from the oven, you will not feel overwhelmed by the shock in temperature or the unfamiliarity of your surroundings. You will feel no pressure, and you will not collapse. And if you do,” Iras grips the oven door with purple-clad hands and pulls it open, “At least you will go down knowing that, god dammit, you once flew high enough to touch the sun.”

Sam Alden

seven jokes about food

I. Yesterday I began to make a sandwich, feeling the entire time as if my jaw was getting tighter. The feeling increased as I toasted the bread and sawed out cross-sections of tomatoes. By the time I had laid the sandwich on a plate beside the glass of pomegranate juice, I found that I could no longer open my mouth.

II. A man dresses himself as a roll of brie to protest the war. The government is taken aback by his costume choice, and decide to declare a temporary ceasefire while the government prepares a response. A week later, the man dressed as a roll of brie has given up his protest to spend all day making love to a secret government agent dressed as a cracker. The war picks up where it left off.

III. Soon after I was born, my father set a check for \$140 on the kitchen table and left with the kitchen still dark. For a month and a half after that, I was fed on formula, because my mother's breasts would only drip tears. This is why I am now lactose-intolerant.

IV. An old woman dies and her family decides they would like an open-casket funeral. The small-town coroner strips her and sets her on a metal table. He cuts a long X across her torso, and pulls back her skin in four triangles. To his surprise, he finds in place of a heart a single orange, which he sets on a table. Later, forgetting its origins, he peels and eats it.

V. Years ago, when you were very small, I tried to feed you a spoonful of something vile. "Here comes the okra plane," I said. "Open the hangar." Reluctantly, your tiny mouth opened, and bolted to your tiny teeth I saw waiting rows upon rows of tiny anti-aircraft weaponry.

VI. A man commits a heinous crime. As punishment, God decrees that the man shall never again taste meat. The man, being a vegan, is initially nonplussed by the sentence. Three years later, he buys a ranch, slaughters every steer on the property, and buries himself alive under twenty-four tons of uncooked beef.

VII. You are a teenage girl in love with the neighbor boy. One day, as a sign of affection, you cut off all of your hair and bake it into a pie. The pie is left on the neighbor boy's doorstep. The next day, you find another pie on your own doorstep. Baked into the pie are jeans, a pair of boxers, and a worn green t-shirt. Sure enough, when you walk into his house, the neighbor boy is waiting naked, covered in flour and lightly greased. Together, you climb into the oven.

Elizabeth Hambleton
To Winnie

I feel like half a hive of bees,
A blue balloon caught in the trees.
A burrow sunken as can be,
One two four, I can't find three.
I lost the wozzle that I caught
By the North Pole, or so I thought.
A not-quite-empty honey pot
Waits in the woods where you are not.

Rebecca MacFife
Missing

I'm sorry to come here, Officer, but I don't know what else to do! I, I, I... I've lost my appetite. I've searched ice cream parlors and Chuck-E Cheese, I put up signs around the neighborhood, I tried to contact the people at Darigold—apparently milk cartons don't work like that anymore—and I've retraced my steps all day, but to no avail. I'm at my wit's end, Officer! Help me find her, please, I need her back; I'll die if I don't get her back!

Okay, breathe? Yes, I can do that. No, I don't know how long exactly. Tuesday, maybe? I last remember seeing her in a crowd, down at the subway station. I was waiting for the E train, having a wonderful conversation with this blonde lawyer. She kept tugging on my sleeve, wanting to hold my hand, and I just batted her

away. I don't even remember when she stopped pestering me.

To be honest, it wasn't bad, having her gone for a while. Not having to feed her all the time, deal with her constant bickering and wailing, waking up in the middle of the night just because she wanted a grilled cheese sandwich... I only noticed she was gone when I got this wretched feeling of dread in my gut, kind of like my stomach was eating itself. And then I saw a mushroom swiss hamburger last night, in a window of a restaurant on 3rd, and I realized she was gone. We've shared so many mushroom swiss hamburgers together, celebrated so many birthdays with a trip to The Blue Bird Grill... I saw it, on a plate with house-cut fries and cole slaw, and I felt nothing. It could have been cardboard. That's when I knew. Good Lord, I need her back.

Yeah, you should judge me; I admit to being a terrible omnivore. I admit to batting her hand away when she pulled on my sleeve, to ignoring her pleas and wails for hours on end. I admit to

forcing her to eat green peas and tofu when she didn't want them. I even admit to drugging her once or twice with those, you know, diet pills? That's bad, I know; I just thought it would help her stay quiet and... happy. I've ruined her. She's going to hate me, blame me for all her problems, need expensive therapy... But this isn't about me, it's about her. I'll treat her better, I swear, please just find her! It's been days, she must be so cold, so scared... so hungry. She must be starving. If you find her, please give her something to eat. A mushroom swiss burger, maybe. She likes those.

Oliva Mitchell
Others

Kneecaps exist
for a single purpose:
to bend the skin that
conceals them,
to exert the force that
gravity refuses.

They are bone fractures
waiting in the wings,
the inevitability of ball-in-socket
replacements
at seventy.

Like single incisions between
slices of lemon,
kneecaps
love myths of craving,
love theorizing independence.

They are only
wishing emancipation
from connectedness.

Like slices of lemon,
kneecaps hesitate
before speaking,
rarely find their voices.



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