

Quarterlife



the swimsuit 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.

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.

Letter from the Editor

I would like to preface this, my last Letter from the Editor, by thanking my staff. They are articulate, witty, and intelligent—not to mention that they are a lot of fun to be around. That being said, they are not without their more apathetic and sullen moments. There are times when getting them to advertise or organize release events is like putting bags of kittens in a bubble bath, and even free baked goods don't consistently produce smiling faces at selections meetings. Don't get me wrong, they are not an unhappy or depressing group of people, but there are times when it seems the weight of the world is resting on their shoulders, and that spending time discussing poetry and prose and pagination is just too much for them to bear. To be fair, if I didn't feel an additional responsibility for producing this magazine, I would probably behave in much the same way.

And yet all that angst flew out the window as soon as some clever *quarterlifer*—I'm not sure who it was, but he or she has my utmost gratitude—first uttered the words “the swimsuit issue.” The thought of turning the oh-so-scandalous *Sport's Illustrated* magazine into a literary prompt was enough to send my occasionally morose staff into uncontrollable fits of giggles. Suddenly, they were grinning, effervescent, and positively giddy. A *quarterlife* miracle.

So, that's what I would like to leave you with, dear readers. It's a simple wish, but one I believe to be quite important: In the spirit of “the swimsuit issue,” go forth and be giddy. It may be a chilly spring in Walla Walla, but spring it is, nonetheless. Flowers are blooming, birds are chirping, and on those blessed days when the sun comes out, the campus is bustling with refugees from the library. But don't just enjoy the spring. Do something that makes you giggle. You know what I mean. Do that thing that you've kind of always wanted to do, but, at the same time, you think is a little silly. Now's your chance. Spring is sprung, the grass is green, so go don your swimsuits and be merry.

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Daria Reaven
Self-Portrait



There lies the last bit:
the trace bubbling up and under the surface until
like sea foam
You inflate and froth, pop from the inside up,
releasing air and toxin in the same breath
as water, and ripples like the rings of trees so that I
may count your age
or your smell.

You swim through the opaque oceans like a child with
fish limbs
and gills, gulping and tasting salt within and without
flesh, growing stronger
and all the days developing.

(truly without much at all except—
the smoothness of river rocks, the grainy porous
soil where the worms eat out holes of homes
and lie in pools
of bodies wringing like intestines in the sun—
that much, is yours)

My gift is ocean arms that wrap you in coral coils
and call you (dearest, of course) to rocky shores and
certain death: something, perhaps less than the space
between
a rock and water,
and more like that hard and sometimes cavernous place
in between toes and mouths and legs that work.

Don't build me an ark:

Sing something low and ancient,
and in-between the rock and the water
pare out space—
melon carved out with a spoon—
put me there.

Andrew Gordon
Nightly Zazen at
the Monastery



An armadillo stalks
between the pines and
sniffs the wet nettles
under the moonlight.
It squeals at the sting
and Kevin grins and
his mudra slips.
Stupid armadillos.
The face on the
zendo floor agrees.

Ari Frink
Breakthrough



When my sister was young,
she swore to my mother that her bathing suit was not
lost:

“it ran away to Grandma’s”

She repeated this mantra on into the night,
deflecting my mother’s attempts
to gain another answer for its disappearance.

Then, as the sun rose, the words changed:

“it ran away to Grandma’s... and I will, too!”

My sister walked night and day,
carrying a blanket, three Capri-Suns, and some Na-
ture Valley Bars (which she HATES).

But after traveling highways and railways,
my Grandmother proved her hypothesis correct;
smiling, holding a well-worn, violent pink and green
swimsuit.

(“See? Told ya”)

At once,
the Children's Science Consortium took notice of the
discovery of mobile swimsuits,
and utilized them in a whole series of experiments.
("Can swimsuits walk dogs? Carry toys over to
friends' homes? Taunt bullies?")
My sister led the experiments in a friend's backyard,
yielding an army of swimsuits
tailored to tend to children's needs (but mostly their
desires).

The streets were filled with swimsuits (trunks, one
piece, two piece, board shorts even)
helping fill out baseball teams,
playing jump rope,
selling lemonade and cookies (they got a cut, of
course).

Kids raved that it was the greatest discovery
since Hula-Hoops (which really wasn't saying much).

But my sister,

ever-stubborn in her youth,
was glad to have simply proved my mother wrong
just once.

When she came home in the summer evening,
she let my mother hold her in the old rocking chair,
let my mother gently pull knots out of her hair,
with fingers that knew their time in hair would end
soon (“Shh, Baby, shh”).

And my sister fell asleep there,
dreaming of an intentional community for lost shoes.

Taylor Overturf
This Is the Place



The Lord was not able to bring these people into the land he promised them on oath; so he slaughtered them in the desert.

– Numbers 14:16

On July 24th of 1847, Brother Brigham Young awoke from a daze of nausea brought on by Colorado tick fever; the Mormon expedition had finally arrived at the Great Salt Lake Valley. In a state of sick and ailing confusion—or, perhaps, divine inspiration—Brigham announced, “This is the place,” as he lifted his head from a makeshift cot. Though Brigham’s historical résumé includes titles ranging from founder of Salt Lake City to President of the Church of Jesus Christ Latter-Day Saints, his role as a settler is often glossed over. To feverish Brigham—on that historic date—the valley looked like a God-given paradise. Bountiful fruits and nuts offered themselves from the lush greenery, cool rivers cut through grassy knolls, abundant elk and deer ran

across inviting plains, and not a single anti-Mormon mob was in sight. However, to blunt Clara Decker, wife number six of fifty-five, the desolate area contained nothing more than a few scant juniper, cottonwood, and scrub oak. Thickets of withered sagebrush, yellowing grasslands, and ominous mountains stood looming on all sides. There was absolutely no discernible animate life. While Brigham's faith-filled first words have inspired plaques, historic memorials, bumper stickers, and tourist mugs, Clara simply cried, "I would rather walk another thousand miles than remain."

One week earlier, and 158 years later, I also arrived in the Promised Land, and my less than enthusiastic impression of the Great Salt Lake Valley was quite similar to Clara's. While the Mormon relocation was due in large part to religious persecution, my family's motives were entirely economic. Utah offered Dad a job at Media Port Entertainment Systems and good skiing, but nothing more. At first, the plan was to commute. Dad would come home every other weekend, perhaps spend a couple days or more in

Seattle, and then return to Salt Lake. Unfortunately, this plan was conceived without considering the 701 miles which separate the two cities. So he came home every month. Thus, the purpose of my trip situated itself somewhere ambiguously between a summer vacation and a test, to see if I—we—could make the migration to Utah and live there permanently. Unfortunately, as soon as I stepped off the plane, I knew the answer.

His apartment was eerily similar to a college dorm room. I kept expecting to find the mini-fridge at any moment, but apparently it hadn't been delivered yet. Though he had already lived there for six months, Dad hadn't really invested in the space or in any Utah belongings just yet. The beige walls of Apartment #304 were void of any attempt at decoration. His dishes were the 'microwave safe' plastic, rainbow-colored kind. And, sadly, I actually found several boxes of instant mashed potatoes in the pantry cupboard. Over the phone, I had heard the place described as "cute." And, yes, it was sort of cute that Dad didn't actually fit in #304's petite shower, but mostly it was just awkward. Obviously

Dad treated the apartment as a temporary existence. His travel-sized toothpaste and insect-repellent in the dingy bathroom almost made it appear as if he was simply on an extended camping trip. In the words of Hebrews 11:9, Dad “made his home in the Promised Land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise.” In scripture, God is clear: the pledge made to Isaac and Jacob is a promise also made to future generations of men. In a business agreement, God’s word gets a little hazy. This Canaan—in disguise as Salt Lake City—was there for the taking, yet Dad was hesitant to take God—also known as the C.E.O. of Media Port—up on His offer.

* * *

Before deciding upon the Great Salt Lake Valley, Brigham Young carefully considered Texas, California, Vancouver Island, and Oregon as potential homelands for the Mormon people. Yet all had obvious flaws, or attributes, depending on how you looked at it. Texas was too close to Mexico, California was already overpopulated even by 1845 standards,

and Vancouver Island and Oregon were under careful surveillance by Great Britain. It was important to Brigham that he choose a land which no one else would ever want to claim. Eventually, he decided upon the vast area known as the Great Basin. Even though this region was still technically Mexico's land, Brigham was confidently armed with America's most powerful weapon: manifest destiny. And, luckily, the area was far too dry, isolated, unpopulated, and generally ignored for any controversy to arise.

The weeks leading up to Brigham's expedition from Nauvoo, Illinois, to a mystery location somewhere vaguely in the middle of North America were incredibly hectic. Quite simply, Brigham had a lot on his plate. First, several warrants were out for his arrest. Thus, the usually composed man was forced to start carrying a small Bowie knife around, proclaiming he "wasn't afraid to use it" in front of the bemused, local law enforcement. Second, Brigham had just married nineteen new wives and paid for nineteen weddings in less than four weeks. Thus, the great Mormon relocation not only served

as a mass exodus from religious persecution but a low-budget honeymoon for the twenty newlyweds. Embarrassingly, Brigham accidentally forgot one of the newest additions to his family. Wife Emily Partridge—who would have come along on the epic journey to Utah if she hadn't been so busy birthing one of his children—was left behind. But these things happen. Brigham trudged onward.

Besides Emily, problems with the Mormon relocation were only further complicated once the adventure actually began. Annoyances included—but were not limited to—the 1846 Mexican-American War; an anti-Mormon mob totaling about eight hundred pitchfork-carrying men; and the less than hospitable Pawnees of Nebraska. Morale was seriously low. Brigham received more than a few stern warnings; many cautioned him against the Great Salt Lake Valley as a final destination. Travelers described the place as actually quite comparable to a living hell, not the idyllic paradise the Mormon expedition sought. This advice came from experienced mountain men and scouts such as Moses Harris, Jim Bridger, Samuel

Brannan and what was left of the Donner Party. In 1846, the Donner Party had been whittled down to only a handful of carnivorous survivors who considered the Great Salt Lake Valley a less than delightful stop on their excruciating journey. In Utah, their expedition had quickly turned into a nightmare of poor terrain, terrible weather conditions, plain unpreparedness and, eventually, cannibalism. Despite protests and serious doubts, Brigham kept moving westward. Though many tried to persuade him that California would be a much more agreeable option, Brigham was not convinced by the promise of the golden land.

* * *

From 1846 to 2006, Salt Lake City has steadily maintained quite a large population of citizens with one incredibly dark secret: they would trade Utah for California any day of the week (except the Sabbath). In fact, if Brigham Young had not been so determined to settle the Mormon homeland on Great Basin soil, Hollywood as we currently know it could be drastically different. Today, this unhealthy,

closeted Latter-Day Saint obsession with the Sunshine State is manifested in less than subtle ways.

Lagoon-a-Beach is Utah's six-acre premiere water park that includes such attractions as the Tidal Wave, Rattlesnake Rapids, Puff the Little Fire Dragon, the Boomerang and the Bat. Needless to say, I was ecstatic to visit. Furthermore, I can now attest to the fact that Lagoon-a-Beach completely lives up to the park's creative slogan, "It's what fun is." The best part of the experience is undoubtedly the fact that visitors do not purchase mere "tickets" to enter this aquatic playground. No, "tickets" at Lagoon-a-Beach are referred to as "passports" because it is such an international adventure.

Dad and I bought passports, Subway sandwiches, mint ice cream and upper-class, special admission to the Rattlesnake Rapids for two. He remembered the three bottles of SPF 70 and we applied it liberally every two hours to ensure that the best day ever was not followed by the worst sunburn ever. I almost believed I was in California. Afterwards, we walked to the car exhausted after a day of climbing

iron waterslide structures, waiting in lines comparable to Disneyland's, and walking without shoes on white sand "beaches." Though I despised Utah, I decided I would not have to include Lagoon-a-Beach in this category. It was logical. The fact that I had to purchase a passport to visit the park meant it existed in a space which was not located upon Utah's soil. In fact, I probably hadn't touched a single toe to Utah's soil all day. The waterpark was made up primarily of imported sand, chlorinated water and large slabs of concrete.

For dinner we decided upon a classic rock-themed pizza parlor, and – unlike Lagoon-a-Beach – there was no denying its location in the heart of Salt Lake City. The Rolling Stones, Led Zeppelin, Aerosmith and ZZ Top album covers served as thickly plastered wallpaper. Underneath the glass-covered table tops there were scattered guitar picks and ticket stubs. In order to stay with the theme of the day I ordered the "Hotel California" with no bacon. Four hours later, "Hotel California" decided to reemerge on a dark, desert highway. To this day,

I can't eat bleu cheese without thinking of puke. However, I admit the greasy pizza may not have been the only factor; my stomach had been upset for about a week. Perhaps I needed time to “acclimate” to Salt Lake City; maybe I never would.

A couple days later, Dad and I attended a Mormon wedding reception which could have easily been mistaken for a funeral. At the ancient age of thirty-five, Trevor – Dad's kind cubicle-mate – had finally decided to tie the knot. We escaped early from the quiet reception hall; I knew alcohol was forbidden but I was unsure if that commandment also included music. In lieu of listening to the painful wedding eulogies, we opted to drive along the outer rim of the city, along orchards filled with Sweet and Queen Anne cherries. Though it had taken more than a century, Utah was slowly moving away from Clara Decker's assessment that it was nothing more than brown, dry land towards Brigham's romantic vision of an earthly paradise. God's promise was slowly being fulfilled. And, whether barren or flourishing, the land was truly striking. Yet—through no fault of its own—it

was also quite hollow.

* * *

“Modern Moses” is one of Brigham’s catchier nicknames in a long list which starts with “Ladies’ Man” and ends with “the Lion of the Lords.” He not only led a religious exodus to Utah, the Promised Land, but helped the chosen people battle a full-blown plague. In the summer of 1848—two years after Brigham first set eyes upon the Great Salt Lake Valley—the harvest season was fast approaching and a crisis along with it. Legend, history books and Wikipedia all agree: it was as if a black cloud suddenly descended upon the Mormons out of nowhere. In the blink of an eye thousands of gigantic crickets flooded into the fields. The biblically-inspired insects began to devour the Latter-Day Saints’ wheat, barley and dreams for the future. Usually peaceable and soft-spoken, the Mormon settlers decided to take up arms in the form of shovels and brooms; they attempted to beat the evil intruders to death. Their efforts were unsuccessful. Resigned to defeat, the settlers began to contemplate an end eerily similar

to their geographical predecessors, the Donner Party. Yet, suddenly, a white light filled the sky and—instead of the booming voice of God as played by Morgan Freeman—the flapping of wings filled the air. Thousands of seagulls emerged from all directions! Crickets were devoured by these avian friends and the Mormons were left to devour their hard-earned crops. This event lives on in Salt Lake City history, known lovingly as the “Miracle of the Gulls.” With their first plague conquered, the Mormons were officially there to stay.

* * *

Brigham Young and his followers gave Utah two years. I gave it two weeks. On the last day of my stay, Dad and I were driving down the grid of Salt Lake City’s perfectly straight streets headed towards Temple Square. He explained that the roads were so wide because Brigham had wanted to make sure his team of oxen and covered wagons could parade down them, make U-turns, and use both sides of the road with ease. I stayed silent, concentrating all of my energy upon these unusually wide streets. Dad changed

subjects, told me some of his best Mormon-themed jokes, and boasted of Utah's surprisingly good Cajun cuisine. I looked out of the passenger's window and tried to imagine how many oxen could possibly fit into the lanes. Probably five or six. A couple miles later we turned into a McDonald's parking lot; it was the only place where God's divine word couldn't reach our blasphemous ears. Dad climbed out, explaining he suddenly had to call his boss. To this day I'm unsure if he called Brother Peterson or Mom. It didn't much matter. Fifteen long minutes later Dad explained that he was coming back home and leaving Salt Lake City and Media Port Entertainment behind.

“This just isn't the place,” he sighed.

* * *

Dad and I had been figuratively “slaughtered in the desert” known as Salt Lake City and “the Lord was not able to bring [us] into the land he promised.” Truthfully, it wasn't the Lord's fault at all. It was ours. The Promised Land is not a gift, it is a covenant, and we simply were unable to uphold

our side of the bargain. The journey to a homeland is often coupled with tales of persecution, oppression or cruelty. Mormon history includes them all. Yet all homes are not easily left behind nor are they easily created. Migrating to a Canaan—no matter how fertile—depends more upon the traveler than the soil. For Dad and me, the land flowing with metaphorical milk and honey was nowhere to be seen in Salt Lake City. Though, in Genesis 24:7, “the God of heaven brought me out of my father’s household and my native land and spoke to me and promised...this land,” I opted to reject it. It was a significant leap of faith to move one family member to Utah, but all five? To embrace Salt Lake City as the Promised Land would have necessitated a miracle involving something much more ferocious than a few dozen seagulls. Salt Lake City may have fit in with God’s plan but it failed to match up with ours. The land was there but the faith certainly wasn’t. Dad and I were unable to conceive of Utah as a Canaan because we already inhabited a home where everything had its proper place.

Three years ago, after coming to my house

for the first time, a friend named Clare told me she finally understood why my parents considered me the messy, sloppy child of the family. By the average American's standards I would be classified as neurotically clean and excessively organized. The average American hasn't seen my parents' kitchen. Once, I witnessed Dad walk towards the sink and suddenly freeze. He placed his hand tentatively on the marbled granite countertop and mumbled, "Something isn't right." Then he proceeded to relocate the rainbow-tinted, ceramic tray containing salt, pepper, olive oil and balsamic vinegar to a place approximately five centimeters from where it was. Relocation, as I have come to understand it, is an art of precision.

Michael Scigliano
White Kitchen
Supersonic



Step into the white kitchen.
The White Kitchen Supersonic.
Grab a sponge, pour a hot tea, and rest your legs.
Breathe in deeply and observe.

A great wine pours itself on the table.
A medley of sweet music escapes from the cupboards.
The whole wall is alive with sound.
The whole wall takes a deep breath, its wooden doors
quaking.
The pots begin to shake.
And the spoons begin to rattle.
It is a great vibration.
The kind you can feel with your feet as it pulses you
into a sort of groovy vibration.
Makes you move your hips like butta.

Hanne Jensen
Stories



I love listening to your stories.
I want to keep them in my pocket,

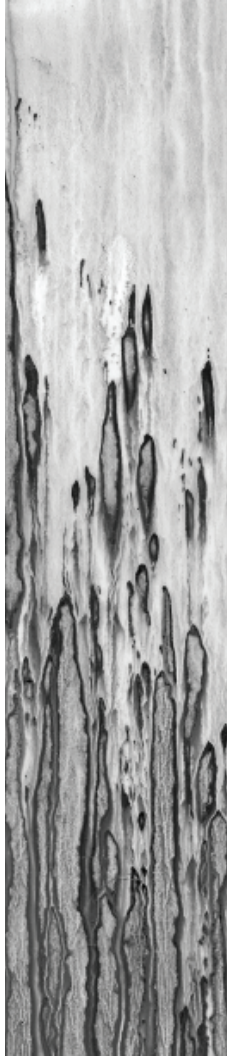
but I'm afraid they'll slip out
between the threads.

When we sat on the edge of my life
and watched the sun rise,

(only toes and tailbones now, honey)

I couldn't remember who I was before we talked—

Olivia Mitchell
Sediment Sestina



We walk down into the sediment
of the canyon, vision and desire spreading out beyond my fingers
to where old rocks rest.
We talk of swimsuits,
science, small anecdotes, belief,
but in the mild light of the canyon, I see nothing new.

The mouth of the river opens anew
pouring out bebies of small fish and sediment,
trying to teach me gravity and belief.
The waters move around my fingers,
and I plunge all of myself—soft body and red swimsuit—
into that river. Under the surface, I watch the river rocks rest.

After the icy water, I rest,
while you search the shore for something new,
ask questions of faith, questions of omens and swimming.
You thrust your feet into the sediment
pronouncing theories of me with your fingers.
Like the icy water, I am all disbelief.

There is concern in your voice, concern for my stubbornness, for the
depths of my disbelief.

But I rest
my fingers
on the old bruises of my knees, not hope of something new
and I thrust my feet into the sediment
refusing to consider omens in the same sentence as swimsuits.

The way I see it, I have always been swimming
over belief,
watching it rest at the bottom of the river, like sediment.

You rest,
in the belly of the canyon, and I try to make you see that this disbelief is
nothing new
that it has been tied into me forever, like my fingers.

The roaming of your words and the theories of your fingers
are swimming
around me, like something new
like something that is not disbelief.
But the river rocks rest,
under the surface of the water, and I see only sediment.

Your fingers try so hard to teach me belief
to remind me of floating and swimming, to teach me the value of rest.
But there is nothing new. I believe in sediment.

Andrew Gordon
Imagining Spring



A single stalk of wheat leftover from the fall harvest shivers in the wind beneath a dull winter sunset. The prison lights shine, and in the expanding darkness and the cold the formless wind chills barren fields all the way to the curve of the world and I hear echoes in the empty hallways of the prison where there is no wind and no cold but emptiness which never dims. I hear them pacing back and forth in their cells as they stare through the walls with looks as hollow as the wind. But their steps wear the concrete down to dirt and wheat starts to grow in their footsteps and it is golden under the fluorescent light and the toilet flushes and it grows on a hillside overlooking the ocean where waves glitter in the sunlight and cumulus clouds glide toward the end of the world where water and sky meet and they teeter playfully on the edge, daring the wind to blow them into the night.

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