

UNBOUND

A literary arts journal
VOL XII ISSUE I
WINTER 2021

MISSION STATEMENT

To foster the development of all students at the University of Oregon, regardless of major, by serving as a platform for outstanding creative expression. *Unbound* Journal is committed to the belief that publishing a community's literature is a crucial component to sustaining a vibrant culture. We publish prose, poetry and visual art that tests boundaries and comes from a place of passion, regardless of medium or approach. Our editorial process values quality as the paramount criterion. Each submission receives feedback and critique in a double-blind review from our staff of student editors.

LETTER FROM

THE EDITOR

It's Sunday, December 6th and I wake up at 10 am to a blue sky peering through the slits of my window shutters. After stumbling through my apartment, loading my coffee machine with cheap grounds and wolfing down a bagel, I start up my laptop and scroll through my emails. I cross off my calendar, peruse my syllabi, and plan for the day ahead.

It usually comes to me when scrolling through social media, recovering from Zoom fatigue or an evening shift, where a headline announces a "record high" for coronavirus cases across the country. It comes to me today as I listen to the radio while preparing lunch: huevos con chorizo flanked by a hot pile of arroz. My mother bought the chorizo from a local carniceria earlier this week, along with a pack of tortillas and a bag of copal.

As we approach the worst of the second wave (or are we in the midst of it? I'm not too sure of much these days) I think about my family and my loved ones. I am so incredibly lucky that no one I know has been at the mercy of the virus. I am often left in disbelief with how poorly some institutions have responded, but it seems as though my own little bubble has arrived at this moment unscathed. I want to take a moment in this letter to remember those we have lost, and those who are still getting up in the morning to face the abyss of uncertainty as the months stretch on into this pandemic.

We have been fortunate enough here at Unbound to receive a diverse pool of submissions this term. It is always a pleasure reading everyone's work, but in an era of intense social isolation I find these submissions to be all the more precious. I want to thank everyone who submitted for providing our dedicated staff the pleasure of connecting with other students in a time of prolonged solitude. I feel hopeful knowing there is still a community of student writers and artists producing brilliant work in the middle of great precarity.

I'm so excited for you to read this issue. I hope it provides you the same feeling of optimism, even if it is only slight.

With love,

Nallely Ramirez
Editor-in-Chief

UNBOUND

Editorial Board

EDITOR IN CHIEF Nallely Ramirez
SENIOR PROSE EDITOR Koby Dickerson

CREATIVE DIRECTOR
Olivia Wilkinson

PROSE EDITORS
Jess Thompson
Kaity Olsen

LEAD ARTS DESIGNER Chelsea Pitarresi
Makena Hervey Ian Miller

COPY EDITOR Molly Belfield
Katie Quines

PUBLICITY COORDINATOR
Elle Coleman

SENIOR POETRY EDITOR
Victoria Colwell

POETRY EDITORS
Billy Von Raven
Elle Coleman
Taylor Ginieczki
Sean Kudrna
Katie Quines

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FIRST FLAME Madeleine Moreland	5
EMPTY SHELLS UPCOUNTRY Mia Vance	6
FIGHT CLUB Maia Lagna	7
AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY Bita Habashi	8
UN MUNDO CASI DIVINO, Raimy Khalife-Hamdan	9
I AM WHO I AM Madeleine Moreland	12
WORDS I DON'T READ Anna Pearl Johnson	13
ALWAYS WATCHING Tillena Trebon	16
WISH YOU WERE HERE Maia Lagna	17
FAMILIAR Kate Walters	18

FIRST FLAME

Madeleine Moreland

Pale wizards
ignite the hazel forest floor.

High hills bleed hazy,
autumn lunges early, and
decades slip past in sparse seconds.

Smoke erupts like a belch from Satan's belly
smelling of meadows, mouse bones,
and ancient fir.
The atmosphere shudders,
yields,
atomic tangerine.

The sun smolders, a glowing beacon in the sky
like a spotlight through the smoke,
or a scarlet
wax seal securing some
jestful letter.

Nights are eerie and
caressed by untamed breezes.
Carbon billows eclipse the moon.

Aerials whirl and ash trembles;
dust devils coil as though some giant
black swan was stirring the air—
a reaper flapping its wings—

rearing nuclear winter.
Dunes of ash, rising and falling,
dance in fallout blizzards.

Ash from my favorite places
cascade like snowflakes into my hair
settling like dandruff.
The sky mocks me.

(Phoenix, Oregon, has no ashes to rise from.)

EMPTY SHELLS UPCOUNTRY

Mia Vance

Walking the fields of old battle grounds
I find an empty shell and hold it to my ear
So strange it is, so far upcountry
To hear the sigh of the sea



Fight Club by Maia Lagna

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Bita Habashi

some nights i don't trust that i know where to blow the smoke
i refuse to open the window because of the seventeen eight-legged men clinging to the glass
but still i watch them crawl on top of the sunset
build webs over the night and fall asleep on the sunrise,
their timing feels backwards but at least i know something is working when i am not.

again, the candle-orange sunlight of dawn presses against my window-adjacent-wall.
it looks how crisp dance-recital-morning-air feels against my skin,
but then i am in my body again and i am stretching in mirrors searching for each vertebrae
hyphenating against my skin again and some nights i also don't trust that i know how to handle
that again;

i miss dancing and the Marley-flooring cool against my tights and
the smell of rosin crumbling beneath our toes.
i miss sneaking cheese puffs in the bottom of my drawstring bags mid-rehearsal
before my body held too much weight for my mind-

if my life had a name it would be my own,
if i could name myself - i don't know yet.
who am i if i haven't grown into myself;
how do i give myself space to grow on nights spent focusing on shrinking

i want the poem to end happy but i don't know the answers-
hopefully something beautiful; hopefully gracefully.
this line is where i exhale-
this line is a happy ending

UN MUNDO CASI DIVINO (PORQUE YO LO CREÉ)

Raimy Khalife-Hamdan

Cuando creé el universo, bajo el seudónimo... ‘Allah’... Sí, soy Allah. ¿Por qué no?
También creé las hormigas para proteger a los hombres, para recordarles la humildad.
La hormiga: mi maravilla.

Creé corazones delicados que se rompen mil veces
pero que se reconstruyen mil y una veces.

El olor del pan fresco, el calor del té con leche.

El amor imprudente, los besos descuidados entre adolescentes,
las mentiras dulces entre amantes que viven en paraísos extraterrestres.

El sexo: mi maravilla (deliciosa, ¿no?).

Cuando creé el universo, bajo el seudónimo ‘Yahweh’,
— si, soy Yahweh —

también creé el azul (no sé... mezclé algunas pinturas y lo descubrí).

¡La maravilla del cielo, del mar, del río!

Usé el azul.

Creé libros, creé poemas, creé canciones, creé trillones de páginas llenas de Conocimiento
para que ustedes, los humanos, se distraigan de la incertidumbre.

El orden: admito, no sabía cómo crearlo.

(cont'd)



Cuando creé el universo (no te olvides, soy Dios),
creé un sol hermoso que besa a los humanos — bueno, a veces se enojan con las “quemaduras
de sol”.

Pero no, les prometo, son besitos.

Creé la luna y sus estrellas: maravillas, te lo digo.

Los bosques, llenos de cedros que purifican el aire,

llenos de ardillas juguetonas que coquetean con nuestras mujeres.

Ah sí, ¡también creé un concierto de pájaros! Cada mañana cantan para los humanos.

(Les regalé plumas divinas para que pudieran volar).

Mi madre también, la creé: es una maravilla,

le dí senos redondos para alimentarme.

Su leche me dio fuerza. Seguí creando.

Yo, el Brahma, mágicamente creé el universo.

Creé el fuego para los templos de los zoroastrianos.

Creé el viento, dos versiones (una suave, otra poderosa) para inspirarles.

Creé vino amargo, listo para ser disfrutado por amigos a medianoche.

Creé campos de hierba salvaje, donde se esconden el lobo y el conejo: depredador y presa.

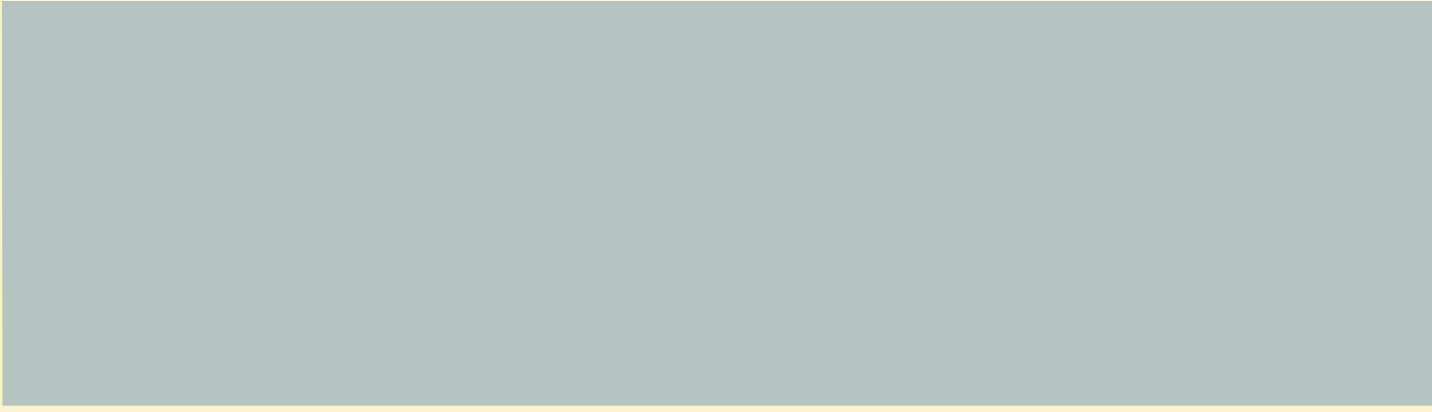
Creé este ciclo de vida, este ciclo de nacimiento y muerte.

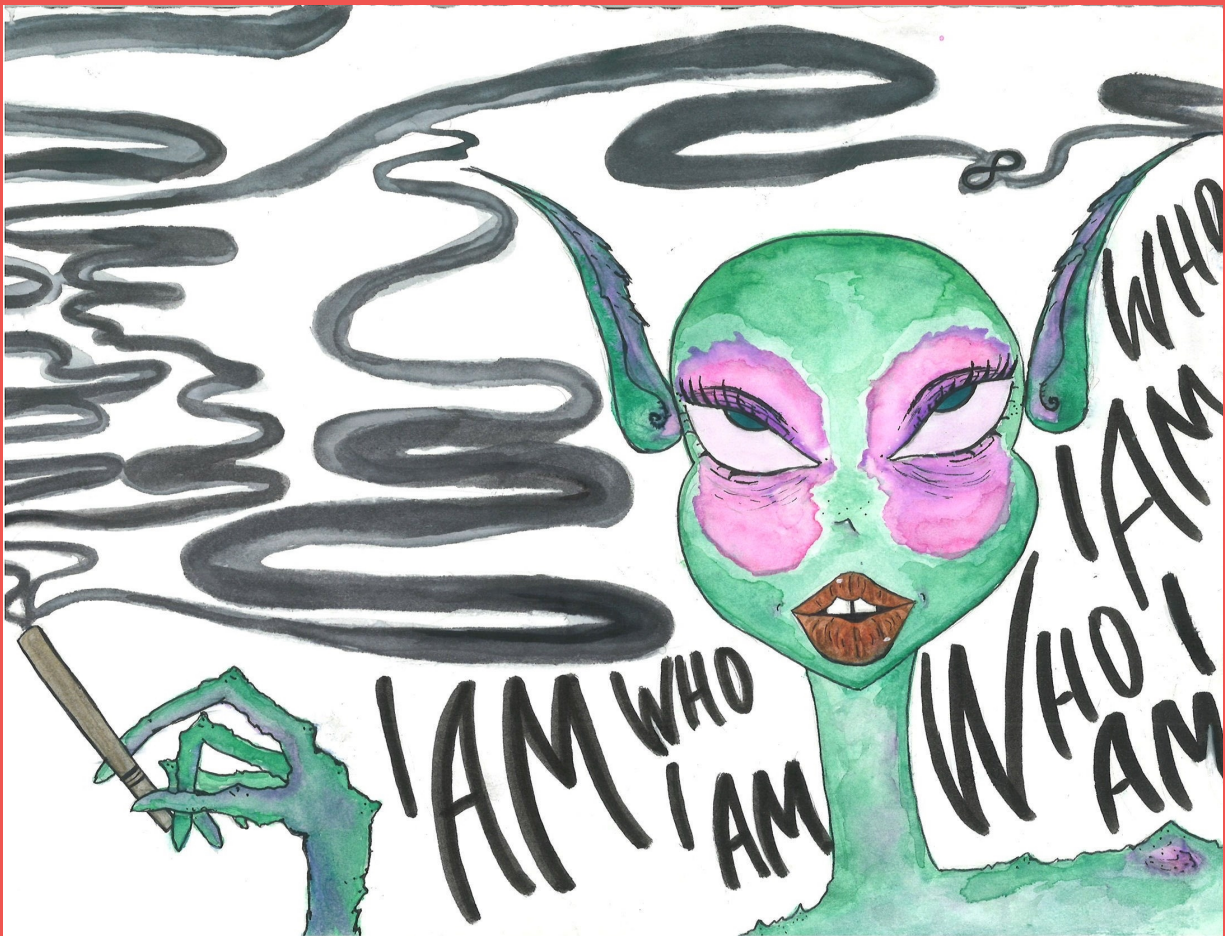
Creé la mortalidad. Confíen en mí: no quieren ser inmortales.

Después de crear el universo, tenía orgullo de mi invención.

Tenía orgullo de mis poderes divinos.

Por supuesto, soy Divino.





I Am Who I Am By Madeleine Moreland

WORDS I DON'T READ

Anna Pearl Johnson

I decide to read the letters tonight,

To take each one from my leather diary,
drink up its message,
then seal myself off to the ways of the words.

Selecting one with a broken wax fastening,
I remove, unfold, uncrease
with something in my chest like delight,
something like butterfly wings something
like bee stings.

We got stung together once,
on a camping trip to a crystal lake.
I remember walking, laughing, and then
a spike of pain.
The bee got me first,
then him, twice in a row.
In the tent he moaned for half a day until
Mom found baking powder, or soda, I forget.

Graphite etches the page elegantly
though the side of the paper still has the fuzzy fray
of being recently ripped.

Handwriting unrecognizable for its neatness-
purpose on him looks like an oversized suit on a child.

He doesn't wear suits, but he once wore drums.
One Thanksgiving he got them out, a set with suspenders,
so I could stomp around the house.
At least, I thought that's why.
When I hit them, his face turned red and I thought he might hit me.
He didn't, he wouldn't. He won't.
I've never touched drums since.

(cont'd)

He even writes with a clumsy prestige
as if he felt things were always uncomfortably large-
as large as everything seems when one is young.

But he isn't young.
I am. I was.

Stained dish towels on our heads
once knighted the "caps of knowledge"-
we would recite vowels, read books, sing the alphabet.
I've never felt smarter than that moment, on his lap,
towel on my head.

Now, in moments of his inadequacy,
I imagine he leaves his room
to find an ancient thesaurus
with the spine half gone,
selecting the most daunting synonyms
to obscure the Arkansas, the anger, the regret.

"fabricate"
"excavate"
"unearth"

When he's done,
message riddled,
it's sealed and sent:
addressed to "The Captain"
or some other person I've never met.

(cont'd)

The letter is for me but not about me.
Not even about him.

Now, it's about the shadow cast from the ever widening
escalator of space
between the lines,

"Love,"

and

"Dad".

ALWAYS WATCHING

Tillena Trebon

Inspired by Edgar Allen Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart*

I am not blind. This milky cloud looming over my pupil is merely a screen, a disguise. I see everything. It is mere coincidence that I am planted in this old man's skull, leashed to his body by thin capillaries.

The moment that the old man's caretaker crossed the threshold of the house, ice reached into my veins. Dark, splintered trees stretched around the coils of the caretaker's brain, slithered down his spine. They sprouted from a seed planted long ago. He said he had moved from his hometown. Said he needed a fresh start. But I alone knew.

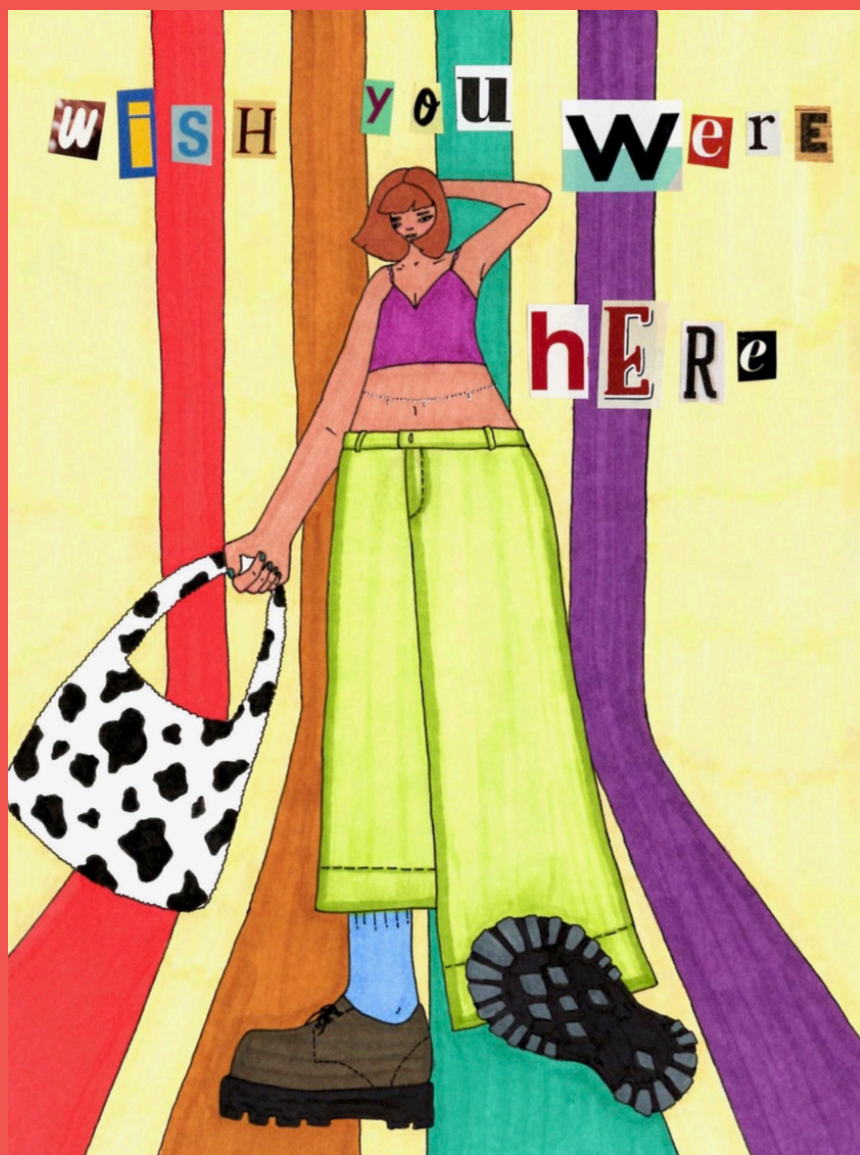
This man had fled in the hope of starving the corrupted garden within him, in the hope of forgetting. I protested the man's presence as best I could. But the old man did not listen. He was so lonely. A dark garden bloomed in the old man's head, too. The trees in the old man had metastasized throughout his body. They had made its way into his bones. They coiled around the chambers of his heart. The fauna within the bodies of the men reached out towards each other. The men wanted to heal. The men wanted to plant bright, tall flowers that could starve the thorn bushes. They wanted peace. But peace

was a sleep that would never come.

With each passing day, the weaving of the vines on the caretaker's hands became thicker. One night the caretaker heard me conversing with the sky. The souls of his victims called to me, these tortured spirits living in the stars. The caretaker knew that I saw them. He knew that I heard them. For I was them. I am them. I am the spirits sentenced to a life in the stars. I knew of his sins.

My knowing planted a seed in the caretaker's skull. From this seed sprouted sickly crimson flowers, which blossomed at midnight. They seared the scalp of the caretaker, twisted his vertebrae. He had to stop the burning. He had to destroy me. I saw him creep into the old man's bedroom at night. I felt the old man's body fail. I saw the caretaker cut up the old man's body and store it under the floorboards. The caretaker believed he was free. But the old man knew better. The heart of the old man lived on. I lived on. When the police came, the heart of the old man writhed. It convulsed. It beat.

The dark garden in the heart conquered the muscles of it. The garden breathed and I breathed with it. Because there can be no sin without mercy. There can be no remorse without morality. Finally, with the caretaker's confession, the heart rested. And I closed.



Wish You Were Here By Maia Lagna



FAMILIAR

Kate Walters

Grandpa's hand is cold in mine, his grip weak. The wrinkles on his knuckles scratch my palm. His eyes roll from side to side, scanning the rag-tag group of us. Two EMTs stand in full dress, hooking up machines and priming brightly-colored tools I don't understand. Denny wrings his hands, muttering over and over that he has no idea how this went unnoticed. Denny assures us he will meet with staff and get to the bottom of this. His assurances fall on deaf ears. My mother is staring into the cavern of the ambulance, seeing nothing.

When we arrived, the wind was lively—ruffling green boughs to catch warm yellow sunlight. The birds sang little lilting tunes to each other, celebrating spring and all its blossoms. The air itself felt full to bursting with pleasant potential.

Even the birds are quiet now.

I notice belatedly Grandpa isn't wearing his wedding ring today. His hand sits atop a scratchy blue blanket on the stretcher, his fingers bare. He's worn the ring every time I've seen him since my grandmother's death, pale gold and worn but slotted over his ring finger with all the pride of a girl scout badge. I never knew if it was a conscious choice, his wearing it. If he kept it on as a force of habit, or a deliberate statement. If he even remembered she was dead.

That's the tricky thing with memory problems.

You never know what they don't know. Every time we go out to dinner, Grandpa peruses the menu and makes conversation about old jingles from commercials that aired in the seventies. He wants a steak sandwich. My mother always smiles that patient, placating smile, the one that's wide and gentle. They don't have that here, Dad, she always says. They read the menu together and arrive at a nice soup. More jingles. Names to Christmas songs escape his memory, but he sings them anyway. Everybody's talking 'bout the man with the bag. The waitress arrives. He orders a steak sandwich.

And I guess it's about familiarity. It's about what lives in his brain and what doesn't at any given moment. There must have been one steak sandwich somewhere in somewhere, that tasted so comforting, like home. The bread was dense but soft with the perfect crunchy crust, the steak was tender—fall-off-the-bone, melt-in-your-mouth, all those other four word descriptors of good meat—and knowing Grandpa, he poured ketchup over it for the perfect combination of fatty salty tangy sweet. And it was perfect. It was so perfect it became lodged in his subconscious, like a bobbing, ketchup-coated buoy floating in a tumultuous grey sea. Every time he's faced with the terrifying discomfort of a waiter asking what he'd like, when he's forced to remember he's in a restaurant, he's supposed to eat, he's supposed to order... the waves crash and clamor, they grow swallowingly tall. And there, in that grey sea of unfamiliarity, the steak sandwich buoy bobs.

The familiar. It's what we're all looking for now. The EMTs perform their preliminary tests, numbers flashing on screens and strange plastic bags expanding with air. They search for signs in his shallow breathing, in his bruised arm, in his clammy forehead. Something to point them to a why. Medical professionals like whys.

presume. He's stopped wringing his hands and shoved them tense in his pants pockets instead. They're balled into fists, the outlines of sharp knuckles creasing his slacks. This is highly unusual, he claims over and over, but he doesn't apologize. He thinks he has to be careful with his words. No one's really listening anyway.

Mom is statuesque, eyes staring blankly at the interior of the ambulance. They haven't loaded in the stretcher yet, so it sits agape. Foreboding. Grey pleather covers bench seats that remind me of summers on the boat. She sways and clutches her necklace. A buoy.

It's what I'm looking for in his eyes, in his hands. I squeeze Grandpa's knobby wrinkled knuckles and his eyes find mine. There are some things you don't think to name until they're gone. Like the moment between day and night you can't articulate as dusk until it's dark. I'd never thought to name the subtle twinkle in Grandpa's eyes recognition until it was gone.

That's the tricky thing with memory problems. Sometimes you do know. You know exactly what they don't know. And that hurts the most. I clutch his hand and look in his pale blue eyes and a grey sea yawns open between us.



unboundjournal.wordpress.com

© 2020 by Unbound, an official student publication of the University of Oregon.

After first publication, all rights revert back to the author or artist.

The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect those of the Unbound staff or of the University of Oregon.