



# Literary Journal



*volume 4*



# Literary Journal

VOLUME FOUR

## **Editors**

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**Vision** iō Lit aims to embrace all forms of creative writing and artistic expression, even those works that expand the genre beyond conventional interpretations. In doing this, we hope to showcase the spectrum of experience of all people, especially those in underrepresented groups whose voices are silenced in mainstream culture.

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**Disclaimers** Fiction: The pieces of prose labeled fiction are just that. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales, is entirely coincidental.

Nonfiction: The pieces of prose labeled nonfiction are just that. Some parts may have been fictionalized in varying degrees, for various purposes.

**Content warning** The stories in this volume touch on many sensitive topics such as, but not limited to, school shootings, death and mourning, unwanted physical advances/sexual harrassment, and sexual violence.

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# editors' note

The air was stale in the Russell Hill Rogers Tent just outside downtown San Antonio's enchilada-red Central Library (seriously, look it up). Fans circulated the mid-April heat while Kiese Laymon's and Deborah D.E.E.P. Mouton's voices boomed through the loudspeakers.

In their "Myths, Memory, and Memoir" talk at the city's 11th Annual Book Festival, Laymon—author of *Long Division*, *How to Slowly Kill Yourself and Others in America*, and *Heavy: An American Memoir*—and Mouton—the first Black Poet Laureate of Houston, TX, and author of *Black Chameleon: Memory, Womanhood, and Myth*—challenged the notion of a literary canon.<sup>1</sup> In doing so, they also emphasized the message pulsing through this volume: the complexity of portraying the lived experience.

The authors mused about the possibilities for conveying pain—whether inflicted by our communities, inadequate access to resources, physical abuse, or death—while also conveying joy and humor. More than a mere duality, these experiences collide. As Laymon, recognized for utilizing humor as a storytelling tool, told *The Rumpus* in a 2018 interview, "I don't ever think of it as humor OR violence, the way I don't think of things as love OR tragedy. All of those things mingle."<sup>2</sup> The pieces you will find within the following pages pose the same claim.

One of the many reasons that we gravitated to the pieces in this book is because of the complexity, both isolated and in connection with one another, these pieces bring to grappling with our new understanding of the lived experience, especially in 2023. Much of the complexity we sought as curators of this volume of work has been influenced by the complexities we have personally found ourselves in, both as humans outside of *iō* and as ed-

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1 San Antonio Book Festival, *Myths, Memory, and Memoir with Kiese Laymon and Deborah D.E.E.P. Mouton*, <https://sabookfestival.org/schedule-event/myths-memory-and-memoir/>.

2 Monet Patrice Thomas, *Writing Back to History: A Conversation with Kiese Laymon*, <https://therumpus.net/2018/10/17/the-rumpus-interview-with-kiese-laymon/> (Oct. 17, 2018).

itors navigating new challenges and nuances (perhaps growing pains) in the indie literary scene that were not at the surface when we started this work five years ago. As we embark on a new chapter for our humble literary journal, we reflect on Laymon and Mouton’s assertion about the collision and mingling of darkness and light through the lens of our Volume 4 contributors.

**Lauriel-Arwen Amoroso**, winner of our first Flash Fiction and Nonfiction Contest,<sup>3</sup> weaves survival from school gun violence with the self-love required to remove oneself from the site of trauma in “A Room with No Windows,” the opening piece of this volume. “Marie Kondo Guides Me Through Yet Another Psychotic-Depressive Episode” by **W.C. Perry** exclaims, “What a joy it is to be organized and breathing!” (page 59). This volume’s cover art, *Before Rain* by **Kaitlyn Muldez**, captures the striking calm, beauty, and despair specific to Florida’s impending, sometimes destructive, storms. Meanwhile, **Lucie Pereira** laments familial rejection and Catholic homophobia in “heaven is empty and all the angels are queer.” Pereira concludes, “If paradise won’t have me when I die, / I’ll find it here” (page 75). Poignant with the complexity of what it means to survive, to endure, to be human, these pieces render a fresh account of what it means to “find [paradise] here.”

Undoubtedly, the stories and artwork curated in this volume will walk you through darkness. You will find misanthropy, displacement, nostalgia, isolation, and violence. However, they will also walk you through light with stories on empowerment, pride, sexuality, motherhood, and acceptance. After all, as Laymon prescribes, “We need the comedic to allow us into the memory.”

Grateful you are here with us, in paradise, on this journey,  
***Crystal, Isabelle, and Laura***

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3 Check out our Volume 4 Flash Fiction Featured Artist page, with more about Lauriel: [https://www.ioliteraryjournal.com/featured-writer\\_lauriel.html](https://www.ioliteraryjournal.com/featured-writer_lauriel.html).

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# Interview with Lauriel-Arwen Amoroso

**Lauriel-Arwen Amoroso** was raised in the Pacific Northwest and lives in Portland, Oregon. She is a writer, educator, photographer, and nature nerd. Her favorite way to spend time is walking and hiking, especially in temperate rainforests when it's lightly raining and about 50°F. Recently she earned a Doctorate in Educational Leadership from Portland State University, where she explored narrative research and embodied learning practices—her dissertation focused on walking as a way of knowing. She is drawn to themes of slowness, placemaking, and the ways in which people connect to and learn from the natural and material world. She is dedicated to dismantling those aspects of education that are used to coerce conformity into unjust and inhumane social, political, and economic systems found in contemporary Western societies. Her writing was previously published in *iō Literary Journal's* second volume, and excerpts from her dissertation will be published by Routledge in an edited collection on the making of auto-ethnography, released in fall 2022. She is writing a memoir.

Lauriel-Arwen won *iō Literary Journal's* **2022 Flash Fiction and Non-fiction Contest** with her flash nonfiction piece “A Room with No Windows.”

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**Isabelle:** We were really struck by “A Room with No Windows,” and we wanted to learn more about your background with it, your background as a writer and how you got to writing that piece and where it comes from.

When you referenced your experiences with trauma in the form that you shared with us, as well as how that related to your career and teaching and in the story, and often we hear these stories about how trauma can be recalled in these short bits and pieces, we were curious about why you chose flash as the genre to tell a story.

**Lauriel-Arwen:** I've been working on memoir for as long as I can remember, and I find that I write in these bursts where I have an idea, and I sit



down and it just kind of all pours out. And flash seems to lend itself to that really well because it ends up being a complete story. And I do think that this piece [is] part of a larger narrative. Maybe it ends up being a chapter. Maybe it doesn't. I don't really know at this point.

I had that image of a room with no windows because that's what the room was. And so [I] just started writing about my experience in that space, and that's what ended up coming out. And I was honestly—I was somewhat surprised even for myself, when that was the story that I ended up telling.

**Isabelle:** It's almost like when you sit down, you're not quite sure what's going to come, but when it does, it can be something that can grow into this larger thing. But flash is kind of that medium to get that idea out, it sounds like.

**Lauriel-Arwen:** When I wrote this piece I was actually taking a memoir class. And I had set on this theme. The theme of all of the pieces was “this is not the apocalypse.” (laughs) But then I was writing about these really kind of heavy apocalyptic-feeling stories and trying to contrast that with “but this is also normal,” like it's not the end of the world. These things happen, and so this was kind of just part of that theme of thinking about the challenges that we face in life all the time and how those can feel so apocalyptic, how it can feel like everything is ending, and that feeling, I think, resonates with a lot of people, including myself right now. It always feels like this is getting really bad and it can't continue.

But if we look [to the] past, you know, in history, like these things have always happened. It is part of life. I mean (laughs) I do think there's a lot right now that is really extra terrible.

**Isabelle:** Right before the call, Laura and I were talking about other people, other teachers, instructors who have been in the situation that you wrote about, and we don't really get to peek into their story too much. So I think that you're part of making that solidarity happen by talking about it.

In that process, too, we were curious about as you return to it, what came easy for you and what challenged or surprised [you] while you were writing this?

**Lauriel-Arwen:** It was a very emotional piece to write. I feel like the theme

of school shootings, and of just violence in the classroom, teachers do talk about it, but it's also an elephant in the room. It's also something that we don't want to talk about 'cause it's too hard to. I mean, if you think about it all the time, it makes it so you can't go in the classroom. And so it was very hard to write, even just as it was pouring it out, it felt very vulnerable, and it was a very vulnerable piece to submit. It's a story that I've told very few people. People know I left the classroom, and [the story] was a piece of it, and there were a lot of other things going on as well. But yeah, there's this—I want to start these conversations. It's really important that we don't just sit with that pain. It's also really hard to be the person that does it. (laughs)

It was very cathartic. When there's things that I don't want to write about because they're difficult, I find that when I do that it's very healing, and it felt good to do, but it was challenging.

**Laura:** What [was] that healing process like for you, which you briefly touched on? Because how I see healing in general, it's not like a linear process. It's very up and down. It regresses. So to be able to first write the piece and then get to a point where you're ready to actually share it with the world—I can definitely understand how it can feel as if you're being exposed, very vulnerable.

**Lauriel-Arwen:** I think I often see healing as a spiral. And so you go around and you touch the thing that you're dealing with, and then you come away from it, and then you come back, and you're in a different place when you come back, and it just keeps going like that. So I do find that I often will write the same stories over and over again as I grow and change and have a different relationship with what happened. Sometimes there's like the really raw version. Then it will change over time, and I think that is very healing. It also makes it sometimes hard for me to finish something, so then (laughs) I'm like, "Oh, I can come back to this and look at it in a different way later." I'm not very good at finishing what I write, but that's why I write flash, it's so great.

You know it's like I don't know what I'm going to write, and sometimes I don't know how I feel about something until I write it. And that's for me where the healing comes from putting it out into the light, seeing how I, at least in that moment, feel about whatever it is, and then being able to also

take a step back from it and say, “Okay, it’s on the page. It’s not all inside of me. I don’t have to carry around this burden.” And I think this story in particular, there was—I’d say I have a lot of guilt and shame of all of these feelings that came from leaving teaching, and that really, in many ways, consumed me, and the more I write about it, and the more I talk about it, the more it lets some of that go, and that’s been really important for me.

**Laura:** I love how you see healing as a spiral. I’m going to borrow that because it does encapsulate how it feels, because as a person, as an artist, as a creative, as people in general, we’re always changing. How we think about some sort of experience changes as we change, so I love that analogy.

**Lauriel-Arwen:** Yeah, you can steal that. (Both laugh) It’s helpful for me to think about it that way.

**Laura:** Yeah, it really is a spiral! I think in touching on just that process, as editors of a literary journal, we’re seeing a lot of [related] pieces. I think people have approached writing as a cathartic sort of experience, and the types of pieces that we gravitate towards are those ones that are very humanizing. They’re raw and real. And we have a lot of other contributors who also write about similar experiences, write through the trauma. So, I was wondering if, just from your experience, you have advice for others who have experienced trauma in some sort of a way and [are] ready to write about it?

**Lauriel-Arwen:** I am not very good at this, but when I’m able to write, assuming that nobody’s going to read it, I’m able to get things out that are more vulnerable, that are more raw and real. I struggle with that. I feel like there were a lot of invasions of my privacy when I was a child, and so I’m always worried someone’s going to find something that I write that I don’t want people to see, and so sometimes I can be restricted. But when I do let myself pretend that that’s never going to happen, I’m able to write things that feel much more authentic and healing. So, I encourage people to do that. I know there are ways you can secure things online in ways that wouldn’t be accessible. But that’s one big thing—just to really let yourself write without thinking about an audience.

During the memoir class that I took, we read a lot of—You know, memoir

often has trauma in it. That's a common theme, and we looked at the ways that a writer would move in and out of that trauma and provide opportunities for a reader to have some respite from what they're reading.

But I also think that's important for a writer to be able to write about those things, and then also write something light and fun and just silly, or, you know, whatever, that it doesn't always have to be that, even if that's what's most important to you in your writing. To give yourself breaks (laughs) because it could be really hard. You go for a walk. Only let people read it when you're ready, and that's something that I—My partner is a writer, and sometimes if I write something that feels really vulnerable, having someone else read it too soon can make me stop and not want to move forward with it. I don't know exactly what that is, but just being really intentional about when you're ready to share things, I think, is important. So yeah, those are some of the pieces [of advice]. And if you're writing something and it's too much, again, you can step back from it. You don't have to stay with it if it's not working for you.

**Isabelle:** You mentioned that as part of the process, sometimes you have to take literal breaks, you know, like stepping away from it, or writing out something unrelated or something lighter. For you, if you're comfortable sharing, what did those breaks look like, both on the page and off the page?

**Lauriel-Arwen:** So, I walk a lot. That's definitely the biggest way that I decompress. I'm very lucky. I live in Portland, and I live near a large urban forest park, so I can go walking there a lot, but I find that walking helps me. It clears my head, but it helps me be present, so I can move out of my head where I get stuck a lot. Especially [being] in nature, I think, is particularly helpful. But I'll walk anywhere, so that's a big thing, and interestingly, I also get my best ideas when I walk. So, my weirdest writing habit is that I will usually be halfway through my walk, come up with an idea, and I'll be on my phone writing while I walk down the trail, which I feel terrible about 'cause then I'm not in the moment anymore. So it kind of does both. It can be a clearing or a place of inspiration.

I also don't have regular writing practice, which I think if you have that kind of discipline, I think is a great thing to do. But I definitely work in bursts, and then I won't write anything for months and months, and then I'll write

a ton for a week. And so I think part of taking breaks is just taking breaks altogether and not thinking about writing or thinking about my past or just not being in that space at all. Yeah, I think that those are kind of the big way.

**Isabelle:** I know for a lot of people, too, walking or some kind of movement away can help with developing ideas. But I think, like you're saying in your case, this is a way to also clear your head and sometimes it clears it to the point that you have something new you want to explore. Thank you so much. It's super valuable advice.

**Laura:** If there's anything you wanted to address or share or drive home from what we've discussed or anything we might not necessarily have discussed but something you want to talk about, the floor is yours.

**Lauriel-Arwen:** There's just one thing that comes to mind as a writer and as an educator. So I love teaching young kids, especially writing. And my first year teaching in fifth grade, I found that even by fifth grade, by nine, ten years old, so many of them were terrified of writing because they'd been told they'd do it wrong or whatever. And I had similar experiences when I was young. And so I spent the whole year really just letting them free and trying to get over that discomfort of being wrong, but teaching them that has helped me so much because a lot of those ways that I was told, "You're wrong at writing," helping young people free themselves from it, I think, also really helped me. And just being able to write for fun, and again I've said it before, it doesn't always have to be serious, and whatever. It can be whatever is inside you, you know, putting it on the page.

So I still do that often, where it's like, I don't have any topic, and it's just to write. That's something I really encourage people to do. Like again, not to worry about (the) audience or not to worry about if what you say is good or any of that. And I think that's part of the healing process. If you go in, and you're censoring yourself, and you're worried, it's much harder for it to be healing and cathartic because you get stuck. I think that's a big part of my process.