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Editorial

The Natural Order of Things: Nature as a Metaphor for the Body, Illness, and Renewal

> Here is calm so deep, grasses cease waving . . .
>
> Wonderful how completely everything in wild nature fits into us, as if truly part and parent of us.
>
> The sun shines not on us but in us.
>
> John Muir (1938)

Nature has long been our most intuitive and evocative metaphor—a mirror to the inner workings of the body, a terrain onto which we project illness, healing, and the search for meaning. In this issue of *Ars Medica*, our contributors turn to the natural world not only for language, but for logic, solace, and structure in making sense of the fragility of the human body, the burden of illness, and the quiet possibilities of renewal.

Paula Holmes-Rodman's powerful memoir, "Storytelling on the Borders," begins in a domestic scene at the edges of death and memory. In their shared series of *Scotch and Stories*, she and her mother co-narrate, mingling her mother's final days with memory. They draw not only on familial narrative but on rooted landscapes—the Tsolum River, the pine-scented air, and the blooming of fawn lilies—as sites of scattering and remembrance. Nature here is not just background; it is inheritance, metaphor, and balm. A child's death by medical error, a misplaced faith, and a final return to soil suggest that death holds its own rhythm and fertility.

Frances Milat's "Ocean Swimming" distills this sentiment through image and gesture. Her photographs of a leaf adrift in a winter sea are deceptively simple. Beneath their quiet, we find an elemental metaphor for release: the weary body buoyed by cold water, pain diluted in waves, the sun's refracted light signaling some small transformation. The sea, Milat reminds us, is both origin and sanctuary; the sea is a body unto itself, one that receives and renews.

In Kate E. Johnson's "Prognosis in Passing," the sonic world of the of the hospital, where "fluorescents hummed like dying insects," is read for the meaning of diagnosis and prognosis. In "I Dream of a Needle," "Articulate, Please," and "When the Screen Retracts," Susan J. Sample's triptych of poems uses elements of the natural world—moaning wind, bruised skies, and joints like unhinged doors—to echo the visceral disruptions of illness and caregiving. Her language is elemental, tactile. In the clinical space, grief lingers not only in language, but in the breath between doctors and nurses as the screen retracts, exposing raw human emotion beneath procedural formality. The natural imagery pulses with feeling, bringing corporeal weight to pain and compassion alike.

Gabriel Francisco Nibungco's essay, "2 + 2 = Streptococcus," beautifully captures the intergenerational web of illness and care, using microbial metaphors and childhood recollections to explore causality and meaning. The memory of a sickly boy, a grandfather's emphysematous lungs, and the mystery of streptococcus blend into a theory of love, exposure, and resilience. Here, the metaphor shifts inward: the body as host, the home as ecology, and healing as both biological and relational.

In "Gravity Rounds," Sruthi Valluri delivers a devastating and lyrical meditation on the act of witnessing unexplained suffering. Her "rounds" through hospital floors are mapped like topography—ascending and descending the body of a hospital, a metaphorical mountain that both offers and withholds answers. Faith, like flesh, erodes under pressure. Her patients' bodies become contested landscapes that are unmade, dissected, and mourned. Yet amid this entropy, her writing plants a seed of resistance: even in the absence of cure, there can be reverence.

Zed Zha's visual and conceptual intervention, "The Embodied Pain Scale," takes on the artificiality of quantifying suffering. Through tattooed images and patient quotes, Zha evokes the emotional, historical, and social layers of pain that evade numeric capture. The body here is inscribed, scarred, defiant. It speaks in metaphor because conventional language fails. His reimagining of the pain scale brings us closer to the human truth it was meant to approximate.

Read Carol Krause's "The Art of Receiving Care" and Alisha Hiebert's "The Hub for Dying Teenagers," for perspectives on living with illness with fierceness, humour, and dignity. Harriet Squier's "Code Status" provides a visceral telling of the unintended violence of attempting to bring a body back to life, from the perspective of a care provider. Language that causes us to flinch is engaged to confront the reader with questions about the integrity of the body, quality of life, and the ethics of care.

Adding a vivid visual dimension to this issue's themes, Edison Tenecela's artwork "*Rendezvous*

with the Senses: A Brainstem's Journey" offers an imaginative fusion of neuroanatomy and the natural world. Through a visual interplay of sensory organs, limbic structures, and environmental motifs, Tenecela proposes a vision of the body not as separate from nature, but as porous to it. The piece invites viewers to consider the brain not only as a site of cognition, but as a landscape in dialogue with its surroundings.

Complementing this exploration of body and nature is Joanne Sinai's striking photographic work. A psychiatrist who finds a counterbalance to the verbal world of clinical practice in visual expression, Sinai offers images inspired by electron microscopy and made with elements from the natural world and the hands of other artists. Her photographs are abstract, organic, and suggestive of both microscopic and cosmic scales that remind us that the body, like nature, is composed of patterns, echoes, and reverberations far beyond what we can articulate.

Together, these pieces chart the contours of embodiment, loss, and healing through the metaphors of nature. Whether it is water or soil, root or scar, storm or pain, the writers and artists in this issue remind us that to live in a body is to live in a landscape shaped by time, weathered by experience, and, occasionally, renewed.

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Reference

Wolfe, Linne Marsh (Ed.). 1938. *John of the Mountains; The Unpublished Journals of John Muir.* Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.