Wetlands Magazine, Issue 18

Gender and Queer Studies Program, University of Puget Sound

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Dear reader,

After nearly three semesters of online classes, I think the pandemic has fundamentally changed our campus community. It’s made us reevaluate our methods of teaching and learning and how we listen to one another. It’s also given all of us an intense sense of loneliness and longing to be together again, and I think it’s palpable in many of the works this semester. The challenges that this year has brought have affected marginalized groups the most. Feeling overwhelmed and exhausted by all of the challenges that we face now is valid and expected. Yet, it’s important to remember that along with systems of power that protect societal injustices, there will always be a corresponding revolutionary movement that Wetlands hopes to aid.

The mission of Wetlands has always been to elevate the marginalized voices of our community, and it’s never been more critical than now to listen to those who have the courage to speak. This issue contains pieces that address a variety of important themes, including race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability.

I want to sincerely thank all of the Wetlands staff for their dedicated work on this publication made in an entirely new way. Although the semester was not without difficulties (so many meetings on Google Meets and emails), we came together once again to uplift students’ voices during an essential time. I’m so grateful to be a part of this publication, and I hope that it only continues to grow in the future. I also want to thank all of the people who submitted their work to Wetlands — you are the reason this publication continues to exist, and we appreciate your courage to have your pieces on display for all.

Finally, I want to thank you, the reader, for taking the time to read these narratives that express deep vulnerability. I hope that in reading this issue, you have the opportunity to think about your own identity, positionality, and privilege as it relates to your time at the University of Puget Sound.

- Rachael Stegmaier
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Wetlands Magazine provides an inclusive, accessible, critical and safe form for students to amplify marginalized voices and facilitate mutual education through the celebration of intersectional art, poetry, literature, performance, and advocacy on the University of Puget Sound campus.
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evening sweet tea
by Liz Rasmussen

Gawky limps and bumpy skin,
When poured I can't help but overflow.
Loud hips and tone like gravel scratching bare tires,
I do not settle easily
Rolled ankles on invisible curbs,
My sour moods can make a lemon wedge superfluous
Always sober, yet
I walk as if the world is titled left ten degrees.

Women like me don’t float downstairs
fingers glazing the banister.
Women like me stomp through life
knocking over shelves
and calling tech support.

Women like her smell of spiced rum,
One glance and you become drunk off her merlot lips.
Women like her
slide down the throat,
Swallowed straight.

But, she leaves a rindy after taste
with nodes of regret and grapefruit.
A morning headache.

Women like me take longer to brew,
Must be dosed in sugarcane and bathed in ice to calm our mood swings.
So sit back, relax, rock back and forth as I steep in the autumn rays,
Women like me taste of honeysuckle and tenderness,
I can guarantee we are worth the wait.
ecstasy

by Daniel Sackett
“This piece is a physical representation of my relationship with a quilt that was gifted to me by my mother, as well as an exploration of the role of color and how we relate colors to people, relationships, and material things.”
disconnect patch
by Miranda C Mireles

“This piece is a physical representation of the feeling of disconnect between my mind and my physical body. During quarantine I have felt a major disconnect between my mind and having to mentally consume things like normal, while being physically stagnant due to COVID. This piece is a representation of the constant push and pull of the racing mind and the stagnant body.”
When I met her, her name was a brittle weapon snapped off between her teeth. She walked with her shoes untied, but didn't trip on the laces. Her name softened when we added the "s" to the "he" she'd carried all her life. Her eyes softened when I taught her how to put on mascara, and added sparkles in the corners of her eyes. Her chin lifted, proud, when she wore a skirt at pride, when she wore my heels. It was at a quinceanera. Ironic, I think, that someone else was becoming a woman as she was becoming a girl.

i’m sorry, i love you

There’s a lot of words that get worn out when you say them too much. “I’m sorry,” and “I love you.” I love yous get wasted, at least by me, so when (if) I tell you I love you, I’m going to kiss it into your skin and mouth it wordlessly, I’m going to tell the knuckles on your fingers and the lashes on your eyes but I’m not going to tell you, not until I’m sure that I’m not just wearing through the fabric even more.
revisiting corners
by Patrick Selner
lgbt locations
by Austyn Smith

“The heart is an lgbt location and the collage captures a place for experiencing the emotions that comes with being gay.”
She smelled like wood smoke. I didn’t understand how someone could do that, could manage to smell like a campfire so clearly and consistently. It occurred to me that she might do something ridiculous, like airing out her clothes over a fire pit, or washing her hair in charcoal, but clearly these ideas were nonsensical. Regardless, I loved the way she smelled, and as I held her close I felt as though I was drowning in it. For a long time after she left, I would greedily soak up the scent, and it would linger on my skin and pillow. When she left, I grew desperate.

With a broken heart, and sapling twigs for kindling, I lit the biggest fire I could, basking in the flame and the smoke until I reeked. Alas, it was in this way that I learned her scent was not merely smoke; there were layers of it, layers and layers and nuances and imperceptibility. Even if I’d studied her as a scientist would study a mouse, plying her with cheese and affection, I never would have been able to figure out the exact balance. There was an underlying, non-reproducible foundation, a sweet musk of flowers and citrus and laundry detergent. I lingered in the grocery store once, my nose pressed to the grapefruits. They smelled like pesticides.

Sometimes I’d catch whiffs of her, in the oblivious laundry that had not yet learned of her departure. Like a madman, I lived in the space between her. She crept into the cracks in my thoughts, the silence in the driveway when the car is off and the engine is ticking down. I cried over her, and obsessed over her tears for me, on the daydreams of her woe. Or lack thereof. Did she drape herself over the couch in her sun-drenched apartment, wailing my name? Did she drown in another’s scent, between the legs of a smirking siren? Where in her apartment did my scent linger? She told me I smelled like sunflowers, earthy yet floral, midsummer. Did she buy bouquets to smell me often? Was I in her kitchen, in a vase? Did she remember me as she passed from the kitchen to the dining room with soggy cereal in her hands?

I obsessed over daydreams, memories, snippets, the elusive taste of her lips and curve of her jaw, the silkiness of her hair. I rebuffed flirtation, particularly that of the men that called me a liar, and relished in my own pain. Like a miser, a monk, or a
mistress, I evaded even the women in which I saw her, her smile, her hands, her nose, her voice. I met her doppelganger, and closed my eyes to submerge in the rumbling music of her voice. I lay my head in her lap, let her fingers comb my hair, her voice tickle my ears. When she kissed me, the dream was broken. She tasted like cheap beer, not the sweetness of summer fruit. A poor imitation.
the foil

by Yuki Morgan

catch me, i’m a card sharp
i’ll cut loose quicker
than you can shuffle a deck and
deal Aphrodite in

watch me, i’ll defy you
like Romeo said
‘cause like him, i’ll drink poison
and like Westley, i’ll live

how to break this to you
how to put it gently
stars, be my witness! as the lights grow dim, as i
kiss my friend’s hands and leap to the balcony, as
purple-grey skies paint my skin, i promise you
these hands might be cold but they warm each other
The Music of What Happens by Bill Konigsberg
“This is a heartwarming read about two boys in high school who both come from very different backgrounds but meet each other as one helps the other work his family owned food truck to help pay for him and his mother’s home. Over time the two fall in love while working through their own personal obstacles they face in life. The books deals with a sexual assault, racism, toxic masculinity, self esteem, and addiction.”
- Grace

A Little Life by Hanya Yanagihara
My favorite book! Technically about four college roommates, following their lives through many years, but I think it really focuses on themes of friendship, chosen family, love, reconciling with our past, and queerness. CW: sexual violence, self harm, addiction, internalized homophobia.
- Allie

Such a Fun Age by Kiley Reid
This fictional novel follows Emira Tucker, a black babysitter, after she is wrongly accused of kidnapping the child that she takes care of. Such a Fun Age deals with race, prejudice, privilege, and class as it explores the connections between Emira, her friends, and her employer. Through a fast-paced story, Reid asks her white readers to think about their relationships with people of color— friends, neighbors, coworkers, employees... Not only did Reid take on tough themes with grace, the novel is also full of twists that make you want to keep reading to find out what happens next. CW: racism, racial slurs
- Rachael
We Both Laughed in Pleasure: The Selected Diaries of Lou Sullivan

When my friend recommended this book to me, I was immediately intrigued by the the color (#f8cfe1, a lovely shade of pink) and the butt on the front cover. What maintained my interest though, was Lou. This collection of diary entries are curated to tell the story of a gay trans man exploring gender and sexuality and sex and identity in the 70s and 80s. Lou’s entries are intimate and rich and engaging, and I found myself relating to his questions and struggles with identity as I read. If you’re queer, questioning, or curious, this book is a wonderful read.

-Mae

Soft Spots by Adult Mom

Aside from being a brilliant and delightful indie album (which it is), Soft Spots is a wonderful introduction to Adult Mom: a band I absolutely adore. I know that’s a lot of flowery language, but I swear I mean every word. Adult Mom’s lead singer, Stevie Knipes, is a Non-Binary queer person, and those identities often find their way into the band’s lyrics. If you’re looking for a new soft indie band or are simply looking to listen to more queer artists, I highly recommend you check out this album.

-Alice

Stone Butch Blues by Leslie Feinberg

Very intense queer story and navigating queerness in the 1940s - CW: homophobia/ transphobia/ graphic sexual assault descriptions - take care of yourself while reading this if you choose to read it.

-Lydia
I talked to my therapist about the gender of trees today
He said they wanted to use whatever pronouns trees use
To which I exclaimed
‘Same! I want to be reincarnated as a tree if I ever die.’
To be a tree means to exist to help someone breathe.
I want to exist to help someone breathe.
Even if that someone is just me.

My dad used to name trees on hikes.
He would always know the difference between
Every green Cedar and pine, Douglas and fir, even hemlock
I would ask him to identify them as we walked
Before we leave, I wonder Dad,
How do you know so much about trees?

We had a tree in our front yard that I named
Wilbur. Wilbur never told me about gender,
In hindsight, I never asked. How do you ask a tree their pronouns?
My dad would say ‘You place a gentle hand on them and speak
Your question. That is how you communicate with trees.’
But mostly people bark too loud to hear a response.

I matched with a tree on Tinder the other day (True story!)
Tree told me that many trees use pronouns specific
To their species. Cedar trees may use cedar/cedars
Pronouns and so on. I asked Tree what the gender of trees are
And tree said, “We often are non-binary.” Of course,
Trees are above the binary, they are free from foolish philosophy.
Instead, they are defined by poetry.
The gender of trees is not what really matters to me.
I know by now gender only matters when everyone
Tries to uproot me with words they can comprehend. I want to be free
Like trees. I want to be alive in the way trees are. I want to be
the reason someone stops on a hike to place
Their gentle hand upon me and breathe. I want
to exist for the sole purpose of continuing someone's life.
For now, that someone is going to be me.
t4t
by J.D. Cotton

A trans joy lives in my heart
And lies beside me in our bed
They breathe in the strength of our elders
Indigenous Ancestors
Act Up Kin
With each touch of their euphoric skin
I shrink and grow to the shape of our togetherness
We dance and we love and we survive in our queer unremarkable way
That our Parents before us could not
We drink defiance
To our health
And absent friends
bettie molinier
by Daniel Sackett
behold
by Bismikado
the ins and outs of christian weddings and coffee shops

by Daniel Pollock

When you’re a groomsman, it’s easy to think all eyes are on you, standing up on the stage so near the Happy Couple. A photographer or two lurks in the shadows, ready to pop out and catch you, so you have to always be prepared. Smile. Clasp your hands together as if you’re praying. (But don’t keep them too near your crotch, the wedding planner in the shapeless denim dress at the Presbyterian church tells us with a giggle.)

My family decided to make the drive to my sister’s wedding into a summer road trip. I had just finished my first year of college. If I had to be dragged across the U.S. in a van with 8 other people, I could at least choose where I bought my coffee. Mom thought that was reasonable. This had already become a sort of tradition on family road trips. I’d hide in the backseat with my phone like I was lost in some game app, but really I was scrolling through lists of coffee roasteries across our path. Coffee was my escape. Now, my maps app shows a Hansel-Gretel trail of coffee shop pinpoints across the U.S.

My sister was tense as we barreled through wheatfields towards her future life. She didn’t speak much, just kept texting her fiancé. She snapped at our little brother when she realized he forgot to pack the sparklers. The lovely bride. She was 22, a recent college grad; her husband wasn’t even 21. She didn’t know yet that she’d be pregnant in a month. Or that I was gay.

In Bozeman, I routed us to a coffee shop across the street from an organic food co-op. Bozeman really puts the West in Pacific Northwest. In Bozeman, they wear cowboy hats and Tevas. They chew tobacco, probably bought from an organic, ethical source. I eye a customer waiting for his cappuccino. His beard is neatly trimmed. He wears Blundstones and a gingham button up—he looks like a professor, a hot professor. My brother calls my name and I quickly look away. My drink is ready.
In high school, I’d hang out at coffee shops just to get out of the house. Some days I would order cappuccinos and sit at the window and look out, not even reading or looking at my phone. Just enjoying the feeling of being alone. I sometimes plugged in headphones; if I was feeling especially dramatic, I’d play opera, a taste inherited from my Dad. I probably thought I looked mysterious, maybe even alluring. You never know who you’ll meet at a coffee shop.

I would schedule coffee dates with friends; we talked about Bible verses and prayer requests. I pressed my foot on his under the table; the coffee was hot, making me sweat.

As a groomsman in a Christian wedding, you should find ways to startle the relatives and parents—but nothing too daring. Don’t do anything stupid like tell them you’re gay. You can wear silly socks. Or, on your maps app, find the club where the rehearsal dinner will be: Zoom in on the pool in the back. Tell the other groomsmen in whispers. Together with the other groomsmen, take off your belts and socks and shoes and run and jump and pretend you don’t hear the grandfather shouting at you. Say loudly that it was your idea when the grandpa is angry. Let them know you’re the wild one. Strip your wet shirts and snap them at each other. Your older brothers will sigh and shake their heads like a chorus of puritan deacons.

In my first year of college, I kept returning to the same coffee shops I visited in high school, but now with new college friends. In these same coffee shops, I read ancient philosophers who had no notion of a Christian god. The baristas recognized me, knew my name, said hello.

I was prepared to hate the Midwest as the van trudged further and further from Washington; it represented everything I had spent my life running from. Nebraska is what you’d expect—wheat and corn and blinking, haunted farm houses—until you pull into Lincoln. I say it laughing now, but it’s not a joke: I’ve eaten avocado toast across the nation, and the best avocado toast I’ve ever had was from a farm-to-table cafe in Lincoln, Nebraska.

I chose the restaurant where we’d meet our Nebraskan relatives. I watched the barista with the body piercings and tattoos flip their wrist as they steamed milk from grass-fed cows. Our aunt and uncle glanced around the place. “We’ve never been here,” they said. They asked our server: “Do you just have eggs?”

These were the aunts and uncles my grandpa left behind when he left Nebraska. I
don’t know why he moved West, left his siblings, a ranch, and weekend tailgating at the Cornhusker football games behind. He died before I was old enough to know that it’s okay to run away; he died before I could ask him how to do it.

I ordered an iced latte with the grass-milk. I took a sip. You could taste Nebraska. The grass, those unending fields we so quickly passed. It tasted herbal, vegetal, like spring. This was nothing like the coffee I’ve had in Seattle or Portland. Nebraska left its mark on this latte.

Coffee is a language. Walk into a coffee shop, order a cortado and ask for the sparkling water to cleanse the palate; ask the barista about their roasting process, or the origins of the beans. That feels fucking good. To know the words. To have this shared language. To belong. Sing a hymn for light roasts. Curse the dark. Coffee is religion.

You shouldn’t roll your eyes when the pastor tells the bride to submit to her husband’s authority. You shouldn’t cringe when you remember that the pastor is also the groom’s father, your sister’s soon-to-be father-in-law. Don’t grimace when he prays that they’ll have children soon. Keep your eyes closed as they pray. Or maybe don’t. Peek at the audience. Who else is peeking? Maybe someone to meet up with in the bathroom later?

My grandpa left Nebraska and wound up settling down in the progressive wilds of Portland, Oregon. He still found ways to hold onto the traditions of his childhood: He was an avid fan of Cornhusker football, he took his sons hunting, and he drank like his father and brothers did—violently. I’m not sure how these traditions changed after he moved away from his family, from his childhood home, or which traditions he lost or gave up in the process.

My dad left Portland, found god, went to seminary, started a church, and denied alcohol—but he still listened to Cornhusker football games on the weekends. Instead of alcohol, Dad drank coffee. When I was young, I’d watch him brew a daily pot before settling into an armchair to write a sermon; he drank it black. He died when I was nine. I think of him when I order iced americanos with no room.

Church sanctuaries are much holier once all the people scuttle out, looking for the cake and ice cream. Your voice echoes against the stained glass and glossy hardwood floors, your voice speaking back to you. You’re in communion with yourself.
I order my coffee to-go in Salt Lake City. The barista convinces me to try their house-made vegan caramel sauce. My siblings wait outside; they say they feel uncomfortable in coffee shops. We pass a bar with a patio where men wear striped purple tank tops draped on their chests, their shoulders tanned and red under the evening Utah sun. I pull my gaze away from the rainbow pride flag that hangs in the window. My family walks past. I look back. The men on the patio sit with each other, laughing, their glasses clinking.

We turn the corner, I’m trailing behind. At the ghostly Mormon temple, a young bride in white stands outside. Clusters of boys—they look straight out of the Broadway play, or like the search results of “gay Mormon porn”—stand in white shirts near the bride and cross their arms across their chests and try not to be 17 or 18 or whatever age they are. How does it feel for them to walk past that patio with the pride flag? Do they slow down, glance back, hope their family doesn’t notice?

Don’t be surprised to find travel-sized Fireball shooters tucked in strange corners of the church (you may even find one in the shoes you took off before the dancing started). It’s a dry wedding, which only means you should keep the alcohol hidden a little more carefully.

Christian weddings are fun. It’s not like these guests usually go out to clubs or college parties on weekends, so they save their dance moves for the wedding season. They go wild. Women grinding on their husbands, six-year-olds tossing their jackets off like strippers, the teenagers one or two years from marriage crowd-surfing. It’s a purge of sensuality. A Christian bacchanal all in the name of Sacred Heteronormativity.

Boise was the last stop on the trip back to Washington. It’s a flat city. The buildings are short; there are few skyscrapers. We pass construction cranes, and tall chain link fences with signs announcing what this or that pile of dirt is about to become. I yell the name of a coffee shop over the recording of Dad’s sermon that Mom had turned on earlier.

It’s a beautiful shop, which I didn’t really expect in Boise. It’s all new: black and white tiled floors, huge pendant lights hanging from the ceiling. Young people swarm through the space. It’s a Sunday morning; they’re here instead of church. College students take pour-overs to go; young professionals in camel overcoats sit on the patio filling in their
bullet journals. The surrounding neighborhood is bare. The shop feels out of place in the Idaho I thought I knew, where the alt-right, and gun-toting militias, and unhinged religiosity reign. The shop feels like an outsider. I feel at home.

At the wedding reception, you should offer to help out with ice cream scooping; this will help you feel like you actually have a role here. Keep thinking about what your mom said as she straightened your tie. She’s looking forward to your wedding. Laugh and flirt with the girls asking for extra cherries. Flip your hand. Oops.
にこにこする
(knowing smile)
by Yuki Morgan
halo by Bismikado
She laid her head in my lap, silky hair loose and tangled, her cheek on my thigh and her body curled into a ball next to me. I sat criss-crossed, enjoying the weight of her, the warmth of her, where she pressed into me. Tears clumped her eyelashes, snot dripped from her nose, and she’d dug little crescent moons into the soft skin of her palms. She tucked her hands between her legs, where she thought I couldn’t see them, and tried to breathe evenly. Every other breath caught in her throat, and she rasped through her mouth, her nose so clogged as it was. Her eyes opened and closed like a time lapse of a flower blooming, sleepy and hesitating, unsure of whether the world outside was worth seeing. She’d drawn into herself, drawing me with her, and even in her ugliness, she was beautiful. I stroked her hair, relishing in the softness. The vague scent of her cheap coconut shampoo rose in easy companionship with the cloying tropicality of a guava perfume she only wore when she thought she didn’t deserve expensive fragrances. I knew this about her, knew so many things about her, such secret little things that made me feel like an insider. Or maybe a pervert. And I drank it in, hoarded the smell of despair, the intimacies of her inner life. She hadn’t shaved her legs in weeks; I knew because when she did shave, she sat down in the shower, and stayed in a full ten minutes longer. She hadn’t done laundry in a while, and I could smell the sweat on her re-worn clothes. The hoodie she wore was a man’s sweater, stolen from her college roommate’s boyfriend after she got irritated with them locking her out so they could have sex. She still wore lace panties, despite her adamance that she would burn all of them; even in this pit she allowed herself the luxury of secret discomfort for beauty. Or maybe it was just because of the laundry. I could see them, bright pink, in the gap between the hoodie and her pajama pants, on the stretch of skin exposed from her doubling over. She parted her lips, a small groan, out of her control, leaking from them. She forced her eyes open, turning to look at me.
“Would you kiss me if I asked you to?” she whispered.

My fingers lifted from her hair, and I shifted uncomfortably beneath her.
“Why would you ever want to kiss me?” I asked, trying not to sound alarmed.

Her eyes fluttered closed once more. “Mmm, I don’t know,” she mumbled. “You seem like you’d taste sweet. Not gritty, like men.”

She seemed to enjoy this epiphany, and snuggled deeper into my lap. “Men always taste like alcohol, or cigarettes. Or stick their tongues down your throat. But you...you wear chapstick, and drink tea.”

Her words grew softer, catching in her lazy mouth, and despite my best reasoning, I leaned closer to listen. My nose brushed her forehead.
“You even smell like you’d taste nice,” she said. “Like fruit, and flowers. Cream.” She smiled, her eyes still closed, enjoying this idea. “A picnic.”

My lips were dangerously close to her.
“A parfait,” she breathed.

Before I could think twice, smell the alcohol and vomit on her breath and realize she didn’t mean anything she’d said, I kissed her. Lightly, but lingering, not passionate or desperate. Fleeting. She kissed back hesitantly at first, but melted into me. The instant before she tried to poke her tongue into my mouth, I pulled away. As sweet and soft as it had been, it made me feel sick. I wanted her off my lap, out of our apartment. My skin crawled, my neck pricked, and I instantly felt wrong.
“Sorry,” I said.

She shook her head, reaching for me even as I pushed her off my lap, almost begging without words. I knew, though, knew that tomorrow she wouldn’t be able to look me in the eye, and that within a week she’d be pretending it had never happened. And I’d still be stuck, hung up on a straight girl who made shitty decisions. So I pushed her away, all the way away.
all roads
by Patrick Selner
I hate being naked because

my skin feels like a crime scene
tangled in yellow tape and stained with fingerprints
from someone who has long since fled the scene

and never looked back

into the inky nights that left slick dark trails of
memory
dipping over my waist and trickling between my
shoulders
only to pool in my chest where

the footprints on my lungs force every breath
into the shape of an I’m sorry

for the all things I believed—
I wish I were one of them.
self portrait based on the work of rene magritte
by Bismikado

rest easy
by Brenna Sweeny
I'm going to pretend you don't exist.

I do not rest easy in your arms.

I'm going to pretend you don't exist.

I do not rest easy in your arms.

The trouble with needing people to say a specific thing to you is that you need to tell them what you need them to say, and that defeats the purpose of them saying it at all.

He kissed me, and told me, "dude, you're so cool,"

and for some reason, that was better than "I love you."
woodblock talk

by Yuki Morgan

I’m like a woodblock print
I look great from far away
And besides, I took 15 blocks to make
Individually painted and pressed
Who cares if my edges are a mess?
But I see

Those little white streaks
Outline my eyes and sometimes my thighs
And hands don’t match fingers and knees
The lines and strokes give me away

So away I’m given in color-blocked parts split
By tiny chasms that shout
Hey look! She missed the mark!

Or do they?

On a kind day, let’s get coffee—
Lemon tea for me, and we’ll bicker over which chairs
Make the best seat
Then we’ll throw words around like they
mean nothing to us, leaning closer, getting meaner,
Our smiles growing
I’ll hear jinja bells, feel petals on my tongue as
My edges stir, they blur, they start reaching...
dressed flesh

by Daniel Sackett
grinning from ear to ear
by Daniel Sackett
Check out our Instagram for our feature piece!

FASHION + IDENTITIY