Crosscurrents: Spring 2019

Associated Students of the University of Puget Sound

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Editor’s Note

Leading this publication for the past year has been one of the most rewarding, joyful, and humbling experiences of my life so far, but I did not do it alone. If I could, I would use this editor’s note to thank every single person who has helped me and the rest of the staff create the past two issues of this amazing magazine, but luckily for you I realize it would drone on and on. If I might, however, I’ll thank the dedicated and enthusiastic editorial team and our advisor, our passionate and relentlessly creative club members, and the wonderful faculty and staff that help Crosscurrents come into fruition every single semester. Of course, I must give out a grateful thank you to anyone who is brave enough to submit their work to our magazine. We wouldn’t have any magazine at all without you.

Every Editor in Chief is biased, I’m sure, when it comes to their publication, but I truly believe this may be one of the best issues Crosscurrents has printed, and it is because of the amazing people who make up our organization that we are able to combine our ideas and bring this beautiful magazine to fruition. Our prose, poetry, and artworks vary in message, form, and aesthetics in a way that beautifully exhibits the diversity of thought on this campus. I am proud to present these works to you and I hope that we have done them justice. Thank you for picking up this copy of Crosscurrents! I hope that you enjoy the magazine and find inspiration within its pages.

Kate Threat, Editor-in-Chief
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A Prayer for Yellow
Asha Berkes

Yellow
present yourself so I may be less alone

I think, if Purple is deep
lives where the heart lives
then You must be
all that makes its way to the surface
a blush from within

May I drape my arms around a friend so dear
and let words soft and in Your image
tuck me in every night

Bring me a feeling
that clinks like pennies in the sun
Bring me a happiness that is not trivial
Bring me all that radiates
something born of You
“Where is the Air?”

During my thesis defense as an undergraduate I had a professor ask me, “Where is the air?” I had no idea how respond to the question, or how it related to my painting at the time. The portraits I presented had a white background, which forced the viewer to confront their gaze as present and palpable within the gallery. The works existed in a modernist sense, as objects in space, instead of a window into another world. My first reaction to this piece was also where is the air? What world do these giant fish and tiny men inhabit, how do they both breathe, float or even begin to play polo? When did the little characters domesticate fish and train them as their polo partners? Why tropical fish? Are they on the court now, or does this version of polo exist as a two-player game of catch or keep-away? Ultimately I wondered what does the surreal quality of this image say about our contemporary selves?
And Over the Bear Paw Mountain
Maya Gilliam

Exhausted and tread upon,
Worn by time, sculpted by harsh noise
We rise, from worship in the mud, to walk.
Wholly aware of the stones on our shoulders,
Of those words that occupy deep anguish.

Over plains of rolling wheat,
Marching, withering, under decaying skies
People place precocious feet.

The wind no longer carries sweet incense,
Stars have ceased to tell stories,
And instead mark places in a voyage
With no end.

In wide open space walls collapse.
The void of relic pain
Envelopes human sorrow.

A body of weathered sadness
Doubles over in defeat.
*From where the sun now stands,
I will fight no more forever.*

---

*1 Words said by Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce tribe at their surrender to the 7th Cavalry, 1877*
Wanting to save the World.
An inherited sense of righteousness,
yet an undying commitment to it,
as if it’s their own child.
Adamant of their own innocence,
filled with pride untamed.
A bee, that only knows of the stinger
and has yet to recognize their wings.
Raised like soldiers,
then scattered to find the battlefield.
Firmly planting their feet,
eyes pointed directly ahead,
waiting for the storm,
while the world rages on behind their backs.
When winter comes to Paris and the Seine freezes over, the streets grow dark in the late afternoon. The snow piles high on the rooftops, and as Jiāng walked along the quiet bricked lane of the Rue Lagrange he couldn’t help but think that, in the snow, even the spires of Notre Dame resembled nothing quite so much as little huts in the paintings of Tang Yin. It wasn’t the quickest path back to the ramshackle boarding house that he shared with thirteen other Sorbonne students, but taking the roundabout route helped to clear his mind. and Rue Lagrange led to the Boulevard Saint Germaine and to the little square where they were building the new Metro stop.

Jiāng liked walking past the Metro, there was something about the possibilities of travel and the people coming and going that touched the small warmth in the center of his chest. He wished desperately that the stop were open tonight, that he could pay the half franc fare and disappear into the underground of the city, taking the rattling cars anywhere except back to 21 Rue Saint-Médard and to Jūn and Hong Feng and the others, back to the oil pastels and the cheap cigarettes extinguished on the plywood table in the kitchen and left there for days. He never expected Paris to be anything like what he had imagined it would be back in Hangzhou, but somehow the grey stones and winding streets were at once more than he could have ever imagined and less than he had hoped.

There really wasn’t much to say about the past sixteen months. He had come to Paris in the summer, excited to be in the land of revolution and culture and far away from his parents. Since then he had drawn hundreds of still lifes and drank countless glasses of wine and read poems by Lorca and Hughes and Yeats, and yet he still felt like a child playing at being the hero of the story. Sometimes, when he’d had a drink too many, or when he went for walks in the cold alone, he thought he saw things in the shadows. Nothing to scare him, but things that simply couldn’t be: a painting of Mount Tai in the rouged mouth of a dancer, Lou Ping’s brushwork in the puddles spilling out of a Montmartre gutter, Tang Yin’s huts in the spires of Notre Dame. Jiāng hated these reminders of home. He had come to Paris to escape a life of landscape painting and government service, not to see them on every city street.

He paused to light a cigarette, letting the smoke slink its way out between his lips as he leaned up against a thick iron grate. He wondered if it was even worth going home if all he’d do was smoke more and draw yet another pastel of Hong Feng playing his violin, just to get drunk after that and crumple it up thinking of how he was never able to capture the heart of a scene in the way he wanted. Jiāng let the cigarette fall to sidewalk, mindlessly grinding it out under his heel as he shivered within his too-thin coat; even thinking about it now made his heart constrict and curl into itself. He didn’t want to go home, not back to having to face the knowledge that there were people in the world who could make someone cry with a few words or a handful of brush strokes — and that he wasn’t one of them. Whatever Jiāng saw in the way Hong Feng’s eyes lit up in the space between his notes, or heard in the multitude of boarding house sounds that rose and swelled around the crying violin, never made it to paper. They died somewhere between Jiāng’s heart and the page, no matter how many times he tried to coax feelings out of his oils and got only colors instead.

Sighing, his mouth still gritty from the smoke, Jiāng turned back towards his path home. As he walked, his eye followed the path of his breath in the cold air back up over his shoulder, and as he watched the vapor disappear he was struck once again by the sight of the snow-covered spires of Notre Dame. This far from the Seine it was visible only through gaps between buildings, but it was beautiful. Sixteen months in Paris and Jiāng had never been. Honestly he had no intention of ever stepping foot inside a church, but there was something in the way the snow clung to the spires that wormed its
way into his heart. Something like home. For a moment Jiäng stood immobile, his heart torn between his desire to escape what he’d always known and his disappointment in the realities of escaping; beneath his feet the cracked bricks spread out under the snow like oracle bones.

It was late by the time Jiäng finally went back to the boarding house. Jün was in the little kitchen, his tongue firmly between his teeth as he concentrated on the saucepan on the stove. Hong Feng was sprawled on the couch, a cheap paperback in his hands. Like every night, Shi Ren and Carlos were playing chess on the little table in the corner, talking politics in their stilted French, their dreams for the working class seeming infinitely achievable from their places in the dim, smoky lamplight. None of them looked up when Jiäng came through the door, shaking the snow from his coat and stamping his feet on the doormat. He hung his coat on the hook behind the door and walked up the half-collapsing wood stairs to the room he shared with Jün. The floorboards creaked even as Jiäng moved around the room in silence, collecting items from shelves and from under the bed and from anywhere else that he had thrown them in his haste to get ready that morning. Once he had everything he needed, he made his way back down the cracked and paint-peeled stairs, a dull buzz running through his head now that the plan he had come up with on the long walk to 21 Rue Saint-Médard was actually at hand. He came back into the main room and stood in the doorway.

"Hong Feng?"
"Mmm?" Hong Feng turned another page in his novel, his eyes still glued to the pages.
"Do you think you’d play your violin for us tonight? I need to draw another oil pastel for my studies."
"Don’t listen to him," came a shout from the kitchen, where Jün was frantically chopping carrots on a cutting board too small to be of any real use, “he’s just going to draw you and crumple it up again.” Jün motioned towards the chess players in the corner. "Just like how Carlos can’t paint clouds."
"Hong Feng, please?" Jiäng screwed up his face in what he hoped was a convincing look. "You know you’ve been dying to play, it’s been weeks."

Hong Feng looked up from his book, turning his head first towards Jün and then back towards Jiäng. He placed his novel on the couch next to him and stood up, his face in both hands as he massaged his temples. Shaking his head, he strode across the room to the corner where he kept his battered leather violin case. One by one he undid the burnished brass locks on the side of the case, each giving off a quiet click that filled the silence between the sounds of the stove and the moving of the chess pieces. All the locks undone, Hong Feng opened the case and took out his violin. For the first month he had lived in Paris, before he had found the boarding house, when he was still sleeping in a new apartment each week and when French had been a whirlwind he felt unprepared to face, his violin had been his only friend. The air stilled as Hong Feng rosined the bow; even the saucepan in the kitchen seemed to quiet itself to hear. Jiäng sat down on the couch, his pastels and sketchpad on his lap.

Hong Feng began to play. The music started soft and low, the bow limping across the strings in imitation of the snow swirling outside the window. And this time, when Jiäng saw Hangzhou in the tripping rhythms and lilies in the curve of the bow, he didn’t shy away. He looked at what he saw in his own heart and put it in the shape of a violin, and he looked into the hearts of his friends and put theirs into the shape of a man. And in the dark along the river bank, the snow came down and coated the rooftops of Paris, and the notes reached out through the window to touch what could never be touched.
Eleven Things I Wasn't Taught in School
Zoe Peritz

1. How To Grieve For Someone You Love
2. How to Grieve For Someone You Don't
3. Basic Car Maintenance
4. When To Give In And When To Give Up
5. How To Say The Alphabet Backwards
6. Heartbreak Is Not Linear
7. Neither Is The Truth
8. We Don't Grow With Our Shadows When The Sun Sets
9. Taxes
10. Lying Is A Skill Like Any Other
11. How To Say Goodbye
Blush rises faster than thought
when I slip on your countenance.
People walk as if they have places to go
because it’s hard spending time in you.

You whet their laughter
with heat’s absence,
Exposed skin impaled to me
like a candy cane licked to weapon.

You remind me
warmth is seasonal.
Summertime
Megan Stills

Summertime. Heat spills into the town of Salida, Colorado. The grass dries, a high fire advisory indicated by the tilt of Smokey Bear’s paw. The inevitable cancellation of fireworks displays on the Fourth of July. Expanses of state park land going up in flames from the careless flick of a cigarette butt. Clouds pass by overhead and time stretches with the acrobatics of the white matter in the sky. She lays in the steep part of the driveway, soaking up the warmth of the blacktop. A strange sensation of stillness against the hard surface of the pavement beneath her. In reality there are graduation parties to attend, where there will be intoxicated parents and cheese plates that have become waxy and damp from the lack of air conditioning characteristic of mountain homes. But if she closes her eyes, focuses on the warmth of the sun-soaked cement beneath her, the sensation of the sky passing above her, summer stretches out past its calendar marks and fills up her mind.

Her friend hangs too low from the rope swing that dangles above the small, murky pond behind a private neighborhood that none of them belong to. She remembers the way he leapt, the instant realization that he had misjudged the distance to the ground. The sound of his skin scraping against the rocks beneath him overshadowed by shouts of dismay and elation from the boys watching. They observe from above as he surfaces, pain etched across his face, the presence of blood in the water invisible under the murk. She thinks of pulling the first aid kit out of the back of her car, of him sitting shirtless and bloody in the passenger seat, her bare feet fumbling with the gas pedal as she drives him home. She sits in the kitchen as he goes upstairs to shower, wrapped in a damp towel, smelling like algae and pond water. She imagines the sting of heat against his skin.

They drive until the road turns to dirt and no trespassing signs
appear on barbwire fences. The sky turns pitch black, then blinding white as lightning breaks the night in half. The sound of the world cracking. They leave the windows down, and rain spills along the insides of the doors. After long hours in the sun she sticks her feet in the river until they hurt, the water perpetually cold from winter runoff. Rocks become sharp underneath her numb soles. The electrical lines crackle in the heat, sweat beading in the bends of her knees, the curve of her lip.

His thumb tracks back and forth across her thigh. She knows she smells of Prime Time cigarettes and the expensive perfume she has wasted trying to cover up the odor that reminds her of used coffee filters. All of her friends are in the room, a movie plays in the background. Her best friend is asleep in one of the sofas, mouth slack, all of her makeup still on. On the couch his thumb continues its path across her thigh. They pretend to watch the movie, florescent blues and whites flashing over their features. She feels invisible, camouflaged by the flicker of the television screen and the impaired perception of her drunk friends. She thinks about the guest bedroom, about when they will leave the basement and their friends and casually ascend the stairs. The movie ends, and he takes his hand away. Her legs feel cold. He says, 'I'm going to bed, you guys are lame.'

In the morning she and her friends will clean up the empty bottles and complain of imaginary hangovers. She rolls her eyes and says, 'Boys are so confusing.' She thinks of his hand against her thigh. Her friends will tell her they didn't see anything, she knows they think she is making things up. Maybe she is making things up. They will look at each other and say nothing.

She has measured her summers in sunburns. Each one an accumulation of freckles across the tip of her nose, of her mother's anger at her lack of attention to sunscreen. She thinks of an epic 5th grade birthday party, the center of her back turning a belligerent red under the gaze of concerned mothers, pain setting in before she even got home. A boy in her grade thinks it's funny to hi-five her back, bringing tears of pain and embarrassment to her eyes. The teacher will scold him, will tell him to be nice to girls. This a small consolation for the vulnerability she feels emanating from her sensitive skin. Later she lays on the worn, sun-warmed fabric of her parents' quilt as her mother peels sheets of dead cells from between her shoulder blades, revealing the softness of new skin. She wears this sunburn like a badge of honor. A scab forms over what turns out to be a second-degree burn.

They go to the movies. He buys her ticket, he tells her to hold his hand. She isn't big on hand holding, it's uncomfortable, it's sweaty. This is her way of saying that she doesn't need attention, of denying the panic she feels from the press of his palm against hers. In the theater he puts his arm around her and the elderly couple behind them get up and move further down the row. He snickers, 'They totally think we're going to make out.' She rolls her eyes. Only when the lights dim does she allow herself to smile.

She and her friends go driving on Lookout Mountain. He takes the winding turns too hard, making the girls in the back squeal from the thrill. They pass cars with fogged up windows, pulled over onto the side of the road. The city spills out before them in the thin, clear air. They scream into the darkness, they talk about orientation, about which couples have already broken up. His feet dangle over the edge of the rocks, unperturbed by the drop below him, pleased with his proximity to the end.

They are so very far away from the dust of the city beneath them. They have grown up surrounded by the mountains, they have no fear of the dark. Someone suggests taking a picture. He stands behind them as they take off their shirts, unclasp their bras. They put their hands up, strike a pose, and bare themselves to the night. The camera flashes and she can feel him standing behind her. The air is sharp against her skin.

A box of condoms sits on the dashboard of his car as he and a friend pull into her driveway, where her father is chopping wood. He
waves to the familiar boyish faces as she gets inside. She sits alone in the middle, straining against the seatbelt as she leans forward. She looks at the box and at the boy in the passenger seat, her heart beating a little faster from the proximity between them. She looks out the window as they drive, notes the places where she will be saying goodbye. They pass the rec center where she learned how to rock climb, where she used to swim until her fingertips had pruned and her lips turned blue. They pass the Park N' Ride, where her friend's mom rollerblades on the weekends, where one night the boys pranked them by wrapping their cars in cellophane. They arrive at the party, they go inside.

The sun rises, and she dresses in the light coming in through the floral curtains of the guest bedroom. Out the window is the steep drop down the mountain, where she finds mourning doves enjoying the first moments of sunrise. In the kitchen discarded solo cups abound, frozen pizza in the microwave. People are still asleep on the couch, and her best friend is nowhere to be found. In this moment she is alone, her mind as still as the morning she finds when she opens the front door, when she leaves. Upstairs, a small blue box sits open on the floor.

The pavement cools as the cloud cover rolls in above her, a telltale sign of an evening storm. She shivers as she sits up, clinging to the last bit of warmth left from where her skin has been pressed to the ground. A hint of August on the breeze. She makes herself small in an attempt to conserve the warmth, to keep the monotonous summer months alive inside her. If she turns around, she will find her house filled with an eternity of falls and winters and springs and summers. She will think of the other times she has been in this very spot and looked at this very sky. She will find a bedroom bereft of her things, packed neatly into cardboard boxes like her memories, ready to be shipped off to her new beginning.
my self
Sam Kaplan

maybe one day I’ll meet the person I think I am
at a gas station outside Sacramento
and I’ll watch them disappear into Nevada
with my wallet and my name
and a black eye for good measure.

I was my first home and will be my last
but sometimes my mind drifts away
on its tether like an astronaut spiraling
away from their ship—
I’d sooner chew through that cord than
let myself be drawn back in.

I’ve had a hard time seeing
through my eyes, the eyes I cannot see
without a mirror, although most days
I cannot see myself in the mirror anyway;
maybe one day I’ll see my heart
for what it is, a candle I cannot put out
no matter how hard I try.
Sulamith and Stendhal Syndrome
Evan Welsh

Sabbath. San Francisco
Two paintings hang on opposite walls, companions reluctantly linked by history. I am dwarfed, paralyzed by their scope. My eyes dry and sting but I cannot close them. I feel them wholly, their hearts and stories—

those of men, women, children in lightless brick chambers. represented on these canvases with paint and dried hay, tarred and coated in ash.

Those impenetrable rectangles that held the final thoughts of shrunken, dark bodies— their shallow breaths stolen.

I look East and see the artist standing before me. Hands quivering, he considers his eulogies for all those last seen in smoke over Polish villages, and the poet who told him everything.

I look West to find the poet fallen to his knees under the weight of language—his mother’s, his own.

The artist makes finishing touches. The poet utters a final couplet.

Two lines, seven syllables: holiness, creation, hope
dein goldenes Haar Margarete
dein aschenes Haar Sulamith

1 Celan, Paul. “Death Fugue.”
Family Tree
Marleen Pan

After school, you
burst into the living room
calling my name,
dragging me from the couch to see your
elementary school masterpiece,
fit for Open House. You smile wide and I can see
gaps in your teeth.

However, you don’t realize that
I’m not your sister,
just your parasitic cousin,
keeping to myself but
leeching off free wifi and dinners.

Maybe you’re right, though;
neat labels never described us well.
Only we hold the memories:
playing endless rounds of Monopoly,
quacking at geese in the park,
rummaging for hidden snacks,
summer-sticky fingers
threading through mine,
uncontrollable laughter
vibrating in the humid air.

So, that day,
when you proudly show me your
xeroxed copy of a family tree worksheet and
you say I’m your sister, I find
zero reason to disagree.
It's started to rain again.
Finn barely notices. He is already soaked through, his sweater sopping and heavy, his curls plastered to his face, forced straight by the sheer weight of the downpour. It's only when the thunder comes, cracking and booming in his ears like the voice of God, that Finn realizes the storm has begun to rage once more.

He rubs his hands up and down his arms and hums under his breath, his teeth chattering. "Awful," he mumbles. "Awful, awful." He stares out through the cloudy woods, blinded by raindrops and exhaustion. He walks with the loping, stuttering steps of a zombie. "Just awful. Why do you have to hide in the worst places, Mara? Some friend you are." There is no answer, and Finn hums, pushing back a branch and heading in deeper into the woods.

Not my fault. Mara would say. As if she is not the reigning champion of hide-and-seek. As if Finn could find her, if he only tried hard enough.

"The worst places," Finn mutters, rubbing at his arms. "Not on the playground, not in town, not even rafters." He's late and he knows it, and she will be insufferable when he finally finds her. This game is the longest it's ever been, and every second is another mark against his name. He can almost see her now: her black hair frizzing about her face, Mara herself standing in plain view, making a show of the whole thing. Checking her wrist like it's a watch and picking at her nail polish, her dark eyes bright with mocking laughter.

Soooo slow! Mara will say, when he finds her. C'mon, Finn, can't you look any faster?

Another burst of thunder has him shaking, and Finn rubs at his arms, breathing wetly through a stuffy nose. His skin feels feverish, his pulse jumping. "Mara," he calls. His voice is weak and trembling, "Mara, you suck!"

Found me at last, have you? Yes, Finn is certain. This is exactly what Mara will say when he finally finds her. And Finn is going to find her. He just has to look harder. as all. he's got to "think outside the box." He can almost hear her laughing and his steps pick up in response, his heartbeat so loud it almost drowns out the drumming of the rain.

She's gotten so good at hiding, Finn thinks, and stumbles on through the brush. She's gotten so good. He hasn't found her for ages now. And Finn has to find Mara; he absolutely must. It's just them two left in the game, which means it's up to Finn. He won't let Mara win this time.

"I'm looking," says Finn, to the air. His fingers are twisting in the hem of his shirt and his pulse is wild. He feels sick. The rain lashes his back and the storm roils overhead. His feet sink in the mud. The branches have torn his sleeves to shreds, and the path is gone now, but Finn keeps walking. He is so deep in the woods he no longer knows the way back.

"Mara," he calls. "Mara, I'm looking. I'm still looking, okay? I'll find you soon. Don't be mean!" He tries to imagine what she'll say when he finally catches her. Good job, Finn! So slow, Finn! A bright smile and snickering laughter. I know you'll get me next time. All the things she always says, a lisp from her broken tooth and laughter in her eyes. No insults, or at least not any true ones. It's the best thing about Mara. All the other kids who chose their teams, and then Mara, who only ever chose Finn.

Found you! Why do you keep eating lunch under here, anyway?

He keeps on walking, lost in a daydream. The forest clusters around him. The mud sticks to his feet. He can't see her anywhere, but after all this time, she probably looks a little different. Maybe she's older. Maybe not. Maybe she's joined with the flowers—blue flowers, he thinks, and giggles. She always did like blue.

Case closed, the file had said. But Finn will never stop looking. The adults don't know Mara like he does. She isn't lost. She's just hiding, and now it is Finn's turn to find her. the way she always
managed to find him.

Another clap of thunder startles him from his daze: his feet disconnect from his mind. Finn falls flat and hard, tripped by the tree roots, untied shoelaces catching on the bark. His elbow gets trapped somewhere between body and tree: his foot is still caught on the branch. He hits the ground face-first and something shatters in his ankle.

Finn spits out dirt and shakes water from his hair. There’s blood running from his nose and bile burning in his throat. His ankle is burning, a painful jab. little jolts up his leg like lightning. Finn tries to stand up and his leg gives out at once, sending him toppling back into the dirt. His breath rattles in his chest. He doesn’t try to stand again.

Three quick breaths, and then Finn pushes his upper body up from the ground with one arm, trembling, his eyes hot. There is mud in his mouth and blood running down his face, and he watches dully as the blood vanishes in the dirt, thinned by the rain. Blood vanishes easily, in a forest. Blood and bones and little girls who are too good at hiding.

“Mara,” Finn says, and his voice breaks on her name, cracks right down the middle. “Mara, are you there?” He breathes in and chokes on it. His cough is sputtering, wet and weak.

“Mara,” Finn says. “I... I give up, Mara. I can’t find you. I’m sorry. It’s... it’s your turn. Haha.” He giggles and it breaks into a cough, then into tears, then into nothing.

The wind rustles through the woods like an audience. The branches pop like gunshots above his head. The rain runs rivers down his face. He cannot tell the trees from the ground, the leaves from the sky. Everything has gone dizzy, hot and sickly like a fever.

Finn closes his eyes and lies his head down in his arms, the ghost of someone else’s laughter in his ears. Dark hair and dark eyes, and a smile that dared the world. She grabs his hand and jumps for joy, and laughs so hard she cries.
as having always already been a place of vanishing, things don’t look promising. But as is true of all good fairytales, this story isn’t so much about the darkness of the woods as it is about the fiction of the safety that the village can offer.

Watch your back
Adreanna Thompson-Paschetto
To my therapist
Sofia Latitt

It's because my tail's a mile from my head
That I feel a sense of nervous dread
When my head turns left while my tail stays straight
Cuz it's VERY hard to concentrate!
And I'm desperately tired of strangling myself
Every morning before untangling myself
And where do I pay my taxes, I ask ya'
When my head's in Missouri and my tail's in Nebraska?
My front-end gets sleepy while my back-end's awake
When I'm hungry I've a mile-long belly-ache
And don't get me started on automatic doors
My tail gets crushed when I enter the drugstore
Mr. Therapist, sir, I just need a break
It's very exhausting bein' a snake

Sincerely,
Rudy Rattler

Untitled
Luca Lotruglio
how to become tammi terrell at 6 years old
Kate Threat

I read your letters

the paper over the record
is cracked, dusty, thirsting,
aged almost to rust
but the record sounds brand new
and we play it anyway

When you’re not here

a young girl’s voice fills the room
she is home alone
but nobody was asking
and she sounds lovely, anyway

But they don’t move me

try not to fall like tammie, darling
she never saw it coming

They don’t move me like when I hear

try to ignore it when they say
at least she was still pretty
and in her prime

Your sweet voice, whispering in my ear

it’s an old song, anyway

Poem 92
Micah Ackerman Hirsch

I want to write something –
something about watching the sunset with
her from the roof, her feet small and dark against the
mismatched shingles.
Her feet small and dark, small and dark and the
cuffs of her jeans turned up against her skin –
The cuffs of her jean turned against her
skin, and her bare arms caught in the yellow-orange light.
Her bare arms caught in the yellow-orange light
and the city calling to us from afar like a mourning dove,
soft and low.
Like a mourning dove,
soft and low.

I want to write something –
something about cactus blossoms
and jacaranda trees and golf courses going brown. I
want to write something for her,
but I’m tired.
I am tired, no more than anyone else is.

And suddenly it’s May, and I
can’t stop writing poems about girls in blue dresses.
And all I think I’ve ever really loved is waking up each morning
and feeling how fresh
the air is.
Guest Contributor
Kellie Richardson
Poet Laureate of Tacoma, 2017-2019

What Us Is

We tight knit like fish scales
Segmented with intention
Bruised by devotion,
Happy to be hurt joined by
soft taupe hooks
And fleshy pearls.

We are earth on foot
Pretty clay angels
Wings tucked away in our
pocketbooks, along with
Doublemint and perfume.

You damn skippy
we still powder after we lotion,
wear slips on Sunday,
eat fish with spaghetti
and keep bacon grease in a jar
next to the stove.

We let it ride to the pit of
low and hustle back
before the hot water
runs out.
and trepidation
leave us high and dry.

Twenty-Four

I can only make out 24.
24 steps, but I know
there's more.

Can't see how high but I
know I want to go. So
cold down here, can
barely feel my toes.

If I stretch to the sunlight
I'll recall I'm alive my
tremble could settle, my
angel would arrive.

Wanna be a little bee on a
pink hydrangea feast.
Wings light as a puff, mind
free from the beast.

Praying for a wind to sweep me
up from this floor, carry me
'round the corner past the first
24.
CCR: So what does being poet laureate of Tacoma actually mean? More importantly, what does it mean to you?
To me, being the Poet Laureate is a position first and foremost of service. More specifically, the role is to support individuals and groups in our city by holding space for the celebration of literary arts. My term has really been about access and finding ways to lift up the power of words in our citizenry. I absolutely bring my own biases and perspective to the role in that racial justice and inclusion has been a driving force in the events and workshops to which I have been a part. As a lifelong resident of Tacoma, I have seen the violence and damage erasure has done in communities of color. When I say erasure I mean that those trusted with leadership do not center the voices and experiences of community in visible, influential places. Tacoma is a city of so many deep and beautiful human beings. However, the assumption is that experiences of Black and Brown, Indigenous, immigrant, LGBTQ, and youth experiences are OUTSIDE of those deemed central, universal, and valid to our city’s legacy. This is an unfortunate and persistent by-product of white supremacist culture – centering White heteronormative art, stories, worldviews as those deserving of recognition. I wanted my time as Poet Laureate to be focused on dismantling this dominant culture framework that silences the narratives of so many of our neighbors, communities, friends. I also aspired to finding ways to use words to cultivate release and healing from oppressive systems and just the overall pain we must navigate as human being.

CCR: What has your time in this position taught you? How has your life changed, if at all?
It’s not so much a new lesson but serving as Poet Laureate has reinforced the power that words and storytelling have in our lives. They connect folks that otherwise assume they have nothing in common. They create narratives that becomes legacy, for better or for worse. Whether folks were incarcerated, sick, young, elders, or my favorite extra resistant to writing, each individual has a unique and special experience to share. I have had the blessing of supporting individuals in finding the language to bring meaning to very personal stories. That has been such a gift. It feels somewhat dramatic to say the role has changed my life, but when I look back at the last two years, the role has deepened my relationship to Tacoma and my relationship to myself as an artist. I continue to refine and practice my craft, but with a more assured and confident intention. I’m less resistant to risk and more aware of what matters to me as an artist. I have connected with some amazing artists, made new friends, and learned more about the business and development side of writing. The role helped me speak intention to the vision for my work, and do the work of uncovering critical tools in collaborating with other writers and artists.

CCR: How and when did you start writing poetry?
I wrote my first story in second grade about my dog, Bert, getting into a fight with my godfather’s dog, Dill. Mind-blowing, I know. But as a young black girl in a very White elementary school, words helped me make sense of the world around me. Stories, and eventually poetry, gave me a space of agency and liberation that was lacking in my life. Being Black and young in the nineties meant that hip hop became a core influence of my writing. The electric creativity and magic of A Tribe Called Quest and Public Enemy, coupled with the timeless provocation of Amiri Baraka, Lucille Clifton and Sonia Sanchez… it was a mind/spirit explosion! For me there was no way you could listen to Native Tongues, KRS-One, Stetsasonic, or Nas, The Roots, and Wu-Tang and not see, hear and feel poetry. That was a revelation for me because the poetry I was presented with at school was that of the so-called canon – Dickinson, Keats, Whitman, etc. I’m not saying this isn’t valid and wonderful work. But there was no entry point for me to really see myself and my people in that work; at least not in a way that prompted me to step into poetry and explore it myself.
I was fortunate to be encouraged by my English teacher to write about texts that inspired me, and she pushed me to explore my own literary voice. I believe poetry called to me because of its brevity and precision. The process of bending and tending to the text, editing and shaving the piece in service of the message – I just adore it.

CCR: What inspires you and drives your writing?
I find inspiration everywhere. Inspiration is all around us. I am particularly inspired by women and youth acting as unapologetic truth tellers. I’m inspired by my ancestors; most of whom I never knew but feel moving around me all the time. As someone whose people were brought to this country by force, I find myself pulled to work and experiences that push me to uncover layer after layer of my identity.

My current work has me learning more and more about conservation and threats to the natural world. The leaders doing this work are inspiring me to continue to examine my relationship to the earth, and what role I need to play to protect and sustain safe and inclusive spaces in parks and wildlife. I’m a city girl for real! But engaging more with land and water is moving me to explore these themes in my work. For instance, am I thoughtful in honoring indigenous communities when I enter and benefit from spaces, whether professionally or personally? What can we learn for our elders’ connection to the earth, particularly those impacted by chattel slavery and genocide?

CCR: How do you stay motivated in the face of heavy subject matter?
I’m impulsive and disciplining myself to sit down and write has always been a struggle. I think that’s common to so many creative folks, not just writers. I continue to learn that the more restless I get about a topic or story, the more I need to steady myself to get a first draft done. Being preoccupied with the outcome is a trap for me because I’m jumping ahead to editing rather than just letting the words do what they want to do. When I attended Vortext, a women’s writing retreat, last spring, that was a key lesson and practice I brought home with me. The writer must write. Get it out of you! Don’t be deterred by mystical or hypothetical critiques by folks you haven’t even met yet. I am a visual person, so I often find images help me shake creative blockages. Taking a walk, flipping through magazines or images, even going through old photo albums I find helps me get going. I also can’t say enough about noise cancelling headphones! Investing in a good pair has helped my motivation and process so much. I have writing playlists that include songs that spark memories, as well as instrumentals that help me stay focused. Specific to heavy subject matter, it is easy for me to become overwhelmed or paralyzed by the weight of a topic. Complexity and depth of content is a blessing in that there is no shortage of angles and nuances to explore as a writer. For me the key to producing work is allowing myself the space and time to focus on one layer of those complexities at a time. Of course, it doesn’t take much time for issues to overlap and intersect but that’s totally ok. In fact, it can be what makes a piece feel true and organic to the reader. As a writer though I use one angle as an entry point and let it unfold. It may not even look like text initially. I’m all about outlines, mind maps, doodles, any tool to capture the possibilities that will eventually come together and make the magic.

CCR: What do you hope people come away with after reading your poetry?
Oh geez. that’s tough. I think I want them to have a sensory experience. I hope when people read my work, they see something and feel something. Even though the piece might be called “The Facts of a Black Girl’s Life,” I hope that I can ground the text in a way that the reader can relate to core themes in the piece. We have all felt lost and unsure, betrayed by our bodies and minds, right? I want to use my poetry to lift up universal messages that transcend context.
This is not to say that I will discount or downplay the very real role that being a Black, queer, Christian woman plays in my work. My goal though is to tell you all about those influences that captures the beauty and sacredness of them in my journey. I’d love to say that a reader could find some joy or a sense of curiosity and wonder in my work - I know that’s what my favorite authors do for me.

CCR: Is there any creative project you have always wanted to try, but haven’t?

I really want to do a live recording of poetry and music. I would love to meet up with my favorite musicians in a studio and have us just jam together. Just vibe off of each other's energy, capture it and share it. I’d also love to buy a house and host collective space for artists to create and collaborate. I don’t want a nonprofit to run though. I just want the capital and disposable income to host gatherings where the Black imagination can thrive, and really support Black artists in self-sufficiency. If I get my stuff together, I’d love to be able to offer a residency to Black artists; one that cares for the mind, body and souls of emerging. Can you even imagine?!

CCR: What can you tell aspiring poets about the publishing industry?

I’m very much still learning the industry. The hardest lesson for me so far is navigating the tension between want to be what is marketable or worthy and staying true to who and what I want to do. The best advice that I can give is to increase your visibility while doing the hard work of honing your craft. I still struggle with this as a hardcore introvert that dreads small talk and pitching my work. But if you want your work out there, increase your comfortability with articulating who you are as a writer, as well as the projects you are developing.

CCR: What advice may you have for young writers and women of color finding their voice and place in the creative world?

Claim yourself as a writer by naming it. Say it and do it. Write every day. I know that’s not earth shattering but it’s true. I believe young people are not socialized or rewarded to follow careers that are deemed hard fought dreams. But writing is indeed a career. You must treat it as such. I regret not sharing my work earlier in my life. I had resigned myself to a different, safer path. But writing continued you to tug at my soul and find its way back to me with every career change, every degree. Lean in to your desire to create. Learn about and address the saboteurs that stifle you. Fear is real but it’s rarely based in your incompetency or inability to be “good.” Connect with other writers, exchange ideas, and establish a community of support and accountability. The work is in you. There is a whole universe of gifts in you. Hell, we are all special. It’s not about special though. It’s about a resolve to claim, re-claim, capture, and mine your gifts. As women of color we are often so attuned to external voices we lose our own. So much so, that when our internal voice is awakened, we distrust it. I have found this to be the biggest hurdle for me as an artist. Resist that urge to doubt your legitimacy or compare your writing journey to another. Only you walk your path. So get going.

The poetry featured above are from Richardson’s collection of poems, “What Us Is,” Made in the USA and published in Columbia, SC on January 11, 2019.
This cover was brought to you by Yuki Morgan, an amorphous combination of the following: Japanese and Welsh descent, Welch’s fruit snacks, sophomore English major and Geology minor, former East-coaster, crushing anxiety, and the lyrics to every song Fall Out Boy has ever penned. When she isn’t chatting with her succulents or coming up with kick-ass paper titles, you can find Yuki experimenting away with her watercolor kit. Though her loyalties lie with, of course, the best coast, she travels home as often as she can to visit her lovely parents and tuxedo-wearing kitty, Joey.