

# Boundary Street

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*This chapbook is the result of a collaboration between students of the Advanced Poetry Workshop at Carnegie Mellon University and literary artists at Pittsburgh CAPA.*

*Throughout the spring of 2016, they crossed Boundary Street to exchange assignments and poems.*

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## **Trees**

**Qui Ante Anderson, CAPA**

*“Waiting Between the Trees” (The name of the 2nd chapter of the fourth section, of The Joy Luck Club, a novel by Amy Tan) is the idea upon which this poem is FOUND.*

There are symbols that center this forest of trees. One: a complex interest of various novels. Two: a myriad, but diverse set of metals. Three: ancient antiques some, being created before our fore ancestors, some by our fore ancestor, and the others by their seeds. These are ideas, but they deeply were born as symbols. There is truth, behind their expression being vague. The feedings, and milking are the symbols of this forest. The symbols have woven it's way into a undefined core, feeding on our barren land, milking the foundation, allowing various tree roots of a forest to blossom. I express our home, and these symbols so vague, because your home is an abstract garden. Only we can experience, and then express the question of ... what our home is?

# Bullet In My Lunch

Ryan Andrews, CAPA

Some might say he is crazy,  
some might say he has just lost his mind.  
What are kids these days thinking?  
Is it those cell phones?

Picture this.  
James Austin Hancock reaches in his bag.  
He grabs out a gun, not a pencil or a lunch.

Some of these young men are mentally ill.  
Don't you have to be to murder someone?  
Or is that just a common belief in civilized society?

Violence is spreading across America.  
Gun violence is spreading across America.  
Adolescent Caucasian boys shooting up the school are spreading across  
America.

Before these adolescents pull the trigger  
they should think about what they're doing.  
Pulling a string of families apart.

An apple on the lunch tray is oxidizing.  
As it turns brown, it feels left out.  
It wants to be like the others but can't be any longer.

A slice of turkey is shot down on your tray.  
You look gloomy, just staring at it with no intent to eat.  
You plead not guilty to ordering the turkey because there was nothing else.

School cafeteria, filled with kids.  
Young pieces of grass to sunflowers.  
Just grazing their lunches with their innocent fingers.

## **August**

**Maisha Baton, CAPA**

That summer, I spent up in a red & black room. And while the sun gushed in from the windows at dawn, we slept to the sound of ice cream melting under her bed. Sometimes, when daybreak was untouched, I would watch the fan cut through sunlight & dust for hours. Her face was new on the pillows each morning. Cheeks flushed with summer, she chuckled in her sleep to prelude to the laughing in & out of the days to come.

On a summer day just like any other, we had a lemonade stand in the hot downpour. When the torrential rain flooded our feet & ran down our sleeves. I believe that is when I realized that those were the days I would never get back.

## **August**

**Maisha Baton, CAPA**

That summer we met  
in raw heat, under a shrill ceiling fan  
and in her I found  
soapy bubbles, sleek with sunshine  
in the middle of torrential rain.

## **Strawberries**

**Serena Zets, CAPA**

Your winters were blueberries and broken bone,  
summers constructed of strawberries and burnt skin.

The rays of darkness and thick petals that swayed your elbows.  
Monotone days morphed into freckles and seeds.

Thorny lips bursting with poppy juice from the branch.  
Clear skin blended into fruit, a dark dribble gleams in the snow.

Your nose always looked like it was whole.  
Now it is roughly sore with memories of humid winters.

Your mother left her crimson dress,  
paired nicely with stained sweet pouted lips.

Bleeding patches and pricks remind you of dusty summers.

That dress hangs in the closet where she abandoned it – and left you.

## What If?

Isabella Victoria, CAPA

My parents laugh when I say the first thing that comes to my mind. In the car yesterday I wondered out loud and their chuckles tickled my ears. I joined in, the laughs bounced off each other to the tunes of “90s on 9” radio. But, as songs started and ended, one after another, thoughts continued to itch my brain.

“What ifs?” always pile up inside my head and my mouth moves slowly. It is weighed down by all my questions. They are simple, but they matter to me. I don’t know why I wonder about things like this, things that don’t truly matter. They crawl through my head and squirm out of my mouth. I’m glad they’re there, but what if they weren’t?

## Death by the Bedside Table

Olivia Benning, CAPA

1.

Miles wide and thin  
I can see through and into your veiny skin,  
all the pretty blues  
associated with the pink skies you  
once knew and you breathed  
healthy, when you drank healthy, when you  
lived healthy you were  
well and you were full of that life  
that I loved that I wanted and even though  
we were both there I know I felt  
elsewhere

2.

Elsewhere with a pear in hand,  
smile on face and my mind at ease when  
you smiled  
and we all talked and I wondered  
how you got to where you were since I  
thought that I hated pears when you loved them  
The texture, the shape,  
but I pulled it off the tree and gave it my  
all and I loved it  
Things change, I know  
but I cried  
when the tree was cut down

3.

I no longer loved it  
and the garden that used to be  
abundant with vegetables were gone and so was your  
garden and after you  
were your cars  
Then the bed and your clothes  
and my Aunt  
No understanding...  
there was none and I couldn't,  
I couldn't cry, I couldn't  
believe  
how something could do that to you  
and if you then anyone  
and this  
is how I've come to learn  
even the most indifferent can feel

## **Thoraxes**

**Will Thayer, CAPA**

Ceaselessly swallowed  
turned to doubly ghosts in their stomach.  
It wasn't the lottery of  
maps & leaves & bugs  
that started boiling up their throat,  
or the way there was nothing but  
lying as they hopped into their car,  
their crude smile like a silverfish.  
It was the insects  
that made them wish that somewhere,  
they were standing there just like that.

**9.**

I always have to bite my tongue  
when talking to certain people.

**10.**

Sometimes I'm ashamed of being black,  
I would never tell my dad that.

**11.**

Sometimes I'm ashamed of being white,  
I would never tell my mom that.

**12.**

Sometimes I don't practice what I preach,  
I wish I'm always someone else.

**13.**

I like when I get reminded that I'm not good enough,  
that there's someone better for you.

## **Psalm Trees**

**Joshua Brown, CMU**

Suburbia has never known power-shortage  
She cobbles stone walls out of sugar cubes,  
watches you dissolve them with envy-drool,  
then it's all luncheon warlord & pie-smile conquest

White-picket-fencers waltz in single-malt stupors,  
dance the salsa onto their chips, tango with tang  
go to where the elephants are, take snapshots  
of the ivory tower farmland

Your ancestors didn't know Jesus  
until we carved psalms into our palms,  
until we took their cheeks in our hands  
and let the erasure sink in, let it trickle  
down their necks & puddle by their toes

How about we restring your vocal cords and tie the tongue,  
scrawl illegible silence in the school books,  
force the photographs to forget  
the terror, scribbled in goosebump-Braille,  
force-forget the origin of the dust speckling your bones.



## Two-channels: a sort of Parentage

Kevin Brophy, CMU

Some aged memory. The smell of tobacco in a pig's snout.  
A mask. Smoke. Sensation. Our hair in braids. Choose tails.  
Too much person without saying a word. Good old people  
music. A slight angle, a Smith's song. Some sweetness too.

The most with dads.  
Sing.  
Too much attention.

Ten years again, almost different, also dads, we guess. At 8:06, contacted the happiest person in the room.

Timely sucks in bands.  
Look.  
Twenty-something by.

Now, some sort of attention-seeking personality disorder. For heat.  
Just mix it with our hair. We beat too busy with self. Create a scene.  
That atmospheric pressure. To hold our tongue. Suck on it. Draw up  
softest voice ever. Hold tongue with no smirks and notice attention.

## Cigar Box Secrets

Ciara Sing, CAPA

1.  
I didn't ask my mom  
the first time I shaved.
2.  
I learned the books of the bible  
before I learned how to be grammatically correct.
3.  
My dad taught me the social structure of a home  
before I even learned the word authority.
4.  
He taught me to keep things inside,  
to never let people know what I'm thinking.
5.  
I can't ever accept a compliment,  
but sometimes I wish you'd say more sweet things to me.
6.  
I feel like some days I receive more affection  
from a man on a bus than you.
7.  
Sometimes I feel that I shouldn't speak  
on black issues.
8.  
I feel bad for loving black beans and rice,  
it only causes more pain.

**7.**

At nineteen,  
I learned to code.  
I wrote my first program  
to say I love you.  
It was full of bugs.

At eighteen,  
I fell in love.  
He was full of them, too.

**8.**

I am never on time.  
There is a whole world  
of unpunctual places  
calling my name.

There is always dirt  
under my fingernails.  
The manicurist always winces.  
I don't even know how it happens.

I am inky skinned,  
dirt bred, and my whole  
world hums.

**9.**

I think my grandfather  
was a burying beetle.  
He laid his eggs  
before he died.

We hatched underground.

That is how we learned to be dirty.  
That is how we became brown.  
That is how we befriended slimy places.

That is how we learned to hide  
from what might hurt us.

## **BIGFEET**

**Weston Custer, CAPA**

I've been retreating  
back into a forest  
of my own design.  
I've been avoiding  
people's eyes.  
When I said I was giving up,  
you asked me what I wanted.  
I guess I just want to be ignored.  
I'm not real.

## Soak

Noor El-Dehaibi, CAPA

Water drips out of the spicket,  
thick with rust and dirt  
and impurities, fills  
bathtubs with carved ivory  
tanned from age and candlelight.  
Dried millipedes intertwine  
on its clawed feet, sentries  
laying siege to an oasis  
they will never reach.  
Dip in a toe,  
a foot,  
both arms and face  
submerged under  
the clouded surface of luxury.  
In the future,  
wars will not be fought for oil,  
but for water.  
A full bath is enough wealth  
to drown in.

4.

I was born  
in a white brick  
war zone. My mother jokes  
when the doctor hit me  
on the back in the hospital  
I didn't even cry.

I was born silent  
to a family  
of howling wolves.

5.

When my sister  
ate candy, chocolate  
covered strawberries,  
90's craze jawbreakers,  
food that sweetened  
her tongue for life,

I was sucking lemons.  
I was already turning sour.

6.

I was raised  
by women. Brown women.  
Gossipy women. Cooked  
by taste women. Held whole  
homes on their backs with  
shopping bags in tow  
women. They told me this:

It's not the end of the world  
until the world ends.

## **Histories**

**Charu Sharma, CMU**

**1.**

My grandfather was an entomologist.  
That means he studied bugs.  
He died in a motorcycle accident  
before I was even born.

I wish he had been a cockroach.  
Those things live forever.

**2.**

Since I was young,  
I sucked lemons.  
My dentist hated me  
for it. Why would you  
chip the veneer?  
he's ask. Why would you  
ruin a perfectly good smile?

He didn't know it was  
the only way I could  
get my lips pursed.

**3.**

I tried very hard once  
to become a ballerina  
and a gymnast.

Since age 6,  
I have been a walking  
barely talking  
balancing act,  
on my tip toes  
so no one can hear me  
except  
when I mean for them to.

## **Pittsburgh**

**Maya Frizzell, CAPA**

You don't like the way  
graffiti marks her  
dark skin.  
Gold against flesh,  
she's alive and thriving.  
From her scalp flow  
dirt-brown rivers.

She is a woman.  
She walks cool and talks cool,  
a gown of black and gold  
swings around her hips,  
but it's torn at the hem,  
left ragged and rough.

She's a liar  
and a thief  
and a murderess,  
please  
don't tell her you love her,  
love is for fools  
who stand in the cold for hours,  
who scream rash battle cries to their foes.

She's beautiful,  
but only to a certain eye. She's  
prouder than anyone else would  
like her to be.  
She speaks in tongues,  
asking you questions you don't

## Why I Worship the Rain

Hope Schall, CAPA

I worship the rain  
because the rain doesn't pretend to love you.  
Apathetic, it trudges down filthy sidewalks at dawn,  
the lonely worker,  
not because it expects praise for its menial work  
but because someone has to do it.

After the gray numbness of winter  
It melts away the soggy blanket of the last snow  
and revives the tenderness of the world  
under its tentative footstep.

It is content to be ignored or trod upon  
when it is tired by other exhausted souls  
who either flinch  
or (like myself)  
are jerked back into sensation by its caress

But it forces its existence upon you  
at the height of its fury.  
In yellow rubber-bullet drops  
it collides, crashes,  
comically sprawls on the ground.

It does not ask to be worshipped,  
but anyone who stands in its presence  
can feel the air thick like molasses with power.

## **Inside the Butterfly Drawer**

**Taylor Poulos, CMU**

Being pinned like this  
is humiliating — but only  
in the way it is humiliating  
to be beautiful. Maybe  
starlets have it worse —  
or maybe on Mount Calvary  
we're all sisters.

Today, I will sun myself until  
I disintegrate — ingratiate  
myself for your viewing  
pleasure — even take pleasure  
in my trip down — passed out  
on a bed of cotton balls — killing  
fluid raking my lungs

understand.  
Who are you?  
Why do you find yourself with me?  
Where is your home?  
You are home,  
Pittsburgh.

You are home  
and you are unwanted.  
You are left abandoned by the  
children you raised,  
by the kids with no pride left  
in this dusty city.

## **When we dance in thunderstorms**

**Alexandra George, CMU**

We are walking away  
from a landmark eating  
chocolate, feeling shy  
at the sounds of our heels  
on the sidewalk. a lugubrious  
trumpet. a pattern of falling  
seashells. a note coming  
from the back of a Tupperware  
container. drinking  
coffee, staining our lips, watching  
oceans in our ears. watching  
sandstorms from yellowed  
teeth, which crack. every  
night we feel them. quilting  
stitches into the pavement. wearing  
a quilt because it's all we know  
how to sing. laughing because goats  
eyes are upon us. a spirit makes  
me want to sing. open sourcing  
for a cumulous cloud. waiting  
for the sky a stone's throw  
away. throwing away  
a song, bleeding pennies, scraping  
our knees like toddlers  
when we look at the ground.

## **Nathan**

**William Middleton, CMU**

Here is a black boy.  
Whatever you do, don't hang on to this black boy.

This black boy goes to a public school  
where the city taxes do not attend.

This black boy walks home from school  
after he takes the bus  
where there are no security guards  
and his bookbag isn't safe.

This black boy lives on Bishop Street  
but he takes Ashland until he gets to his block  
to avoid the memorial on the corner  
that has lasted years.

This black boy read a story on Facebook  
about a black couple killed by police while asleep in a car  
and the woman has the same name as his sister  
and the woman has the same skin as his sister  
and the woman has three children, like his sister.

This black boy closes his eyes to sleep  
and dreams about a black heaven.

# Black Top Pavement

Chyna McClendon, CAPA

I lay on the black top pavement spread out  
with my wild curly hair fanned around me.  
I roll up my pant and shirtsleeves  
so I can feel the sun burn my skin.  
My eyes wander  
and squint when I reach the sky.  
I turn my head and place my ear on the burning pavement.

I can hear the black top sizzle and crack in the blistering heat.

Steam rises from the ground and I can almost imagine  
my shoes melting into a puddle by my feet.  
A wave of satisfaction runs through me.

It is 8:30pm and the sun  
has gone down.  
The neighborhood kids and their dripping popsicles have long  
trudged inside.  
The wind picks up and I inhale.  
It smells of gasoline, oak, and cicadas coming out of the ground.  
The winds hands crawl against my skin cooling and smoothing.  
My mom tells to me come inside.  
I reply "just five more minutes".  
The screen door slowly creaks shut  
and I groan,  
throwing my hands up in defeat.

The black top is now cold and hard under  
my calves and its uncomfortable.  
A deep frown creases my forehead.  
The longing of the warm blacktop pavement  
fills me.  
I run my hands over the coarse ground.  
Enjoying the way the rough pebbles  
feel on my hands.  
I sit up on my elbows and slowly rise.  
I drag my feet up,  
connecting with my brain to make them walk.  
My mother opens the screen door,  
placing her hands on her hips.  
I drift in with the smell of food tempting,  
my nose.  
I place one foot un front of the other,  
walking into the alluring warmth of  
home.

# New Orleans, 1874

Suhail Gharaibeh, CAPA

In midsummer, Marie Laveaux tucks peacock feathers  
in the folds of her skin.

Her eyes become round  
with the waxing moon.

In the folds of her skin  
are the tattooed veves like wrought-iron.  
With the waxing of the moon,  
the boa she drapes over her back moults its scales.

The tattooed veves, like wrought-iron,  
mirror the ceremonial patterns on the mahogany floor,  
the boa she drapes across her back moulting its scales  
as she rises into the air.

Mirroring ceremonial patterns on the mahogany floor  
are the foreign whispers pouring from her mouth,  
and as she rises into the air,  
the Bayou St. John floods and spills over.

The foreign whispers pouring from her mouth  
reach the pricked ears of those flocked at the lip of the water.  
The Bayou St. John floods and spills over.  
Thousands fly away                      like doves in their summer cottons.



## Redemption

Veronika Gillespie, CAPA

That's the way it is here.  
You have the grains of truth,        lies, and  
wish-it-had-beens.

You may also have  
someone who's more than man,  
an element of fantasy  
almost        magic.  
I saw one thing:    neglect,  
a cotton I didn't dare touch.  
      pretty things—  
      men don't even seem to miss them.  
          Carefully polished

little sparkles of iron pyrites

      flecks of gold.  
      So heavy,        fine.

      Hours and hours of  
      chipping and    endless polishing

brute persistence.

## Previous Abandonment

Pilar Lojacono, CAPA

You...are ragged. Ragged and stretched out, and way too tall, with large doe-eyes and sneakers now held together with tape. The shoes are fragile, but you have spent your whole life holding things together. When you meet him, you remember that your throat is dry. Your bangs stick to your forehead; beads of sweat run down the nervous muscles of your neck. You've never stopped to think too much of yourself. Why should you, what have you ever done? And yes, that's as defensive as it sounds. If you're honest, you don't like the attention. So when you meet him, the golden boy with the tired eyes and a grin as wide as the arms he opens up to you, you wait for your fears to be real. Teeth on chapped lips, you expect this boy to be *disappointing*. You feel hollow. And you tell yourself you don't care what he says, what he thinks, if he smiles at you or not. But when he wraps strong arms around your flimsy neck and laughs, you let yourself crack.

## The Cleanse

Dominique Green, CAPA

The party boy stopped dancing,  
frazzled by the same tune. Removing  
himself from the club of promise.

Her saddened bones  
threatened to slow  
down but they never did.

2004 is still relevant.  
Daddy had to go on a  
permanent business venture.

She was sent into an  
never ending whirlwind of blue  
and black crabs snapping at her inner sun.

Until she started to move her feet.  
There is purpose in it, slowly  
plucking the crabs off of her dimmed light.

He was never innocent.  
He had a condescending sneer  
On his face since the age of two.  
He was neither a son.  
Nor a bother.  
Not a friend.  
He was target practice.

Pinned his heart to his sleeve.  
He knows what it's like to be used  
So he wears his armor everyday.  
Breastplate first, to shoulders, to arms, to his hands  
On his head, is the position that has been beaten into his mind.

That makes sense.  
He was never a son.  
The only role model he probably ever had was a gun.  
That's almost sad enough to cry about!

If that wasn't the story every urban black kid  
Is told about.  
Maybe Uncle Sam will pity us.  
If we fall to our knees and reach out, beg loud enough.  
Maybe he'll shed a tear.  
Cleanse us of our dirty skin and move us off the streets.  
You teach our children that white is neat.  
White is perfection.

Well then black is bold,  
Sturdy as the post you whipped my ancestors on.  
So when you look at us think about where we came from.  
The child slave was more worried about  
his mama's face being a vague image in his head,  
His last memory is of her  
being sold to the highest bidder.

My ancestors never had money to pass down  
For their successors.  
Barely a penny to their name.  
Work three jobs so you can  
Just  
Get  
By.  
Sense we are separate but equal.

So we made our own ways to get money.  
We wanted the path to equality.  
You wanted the path to the jail cells.  
To the ak-47, to the glock.  
You're teaching us to hate you as much as you hate us.  
So maybe white isn't perfection.  
Maybe white is human, black is human.  
Maybe we all just need to be cleansed.

## Climbing Out of Darkness

Chelsea Lewis, CAPA

Her feet pounding  
pavement with every  
push of the leg.

A crimson blob catches  
her blurred attention as  
she is brought back to old days.

The trio used to dash  
around the house,  
draped in firefighter gear.

Her hands wrapped up by her  
party boy and her book junkie,  
both ye high causing her chin to tilt.

Her eyes focused back  
and in front of her sits  
a brown stained bench.

She was resting until  
a blaring group of hyenas  
ceased her peace.

The book junkie was no longer  
a member of this Earth, victim  
to unhappiness and she couldn't handle it.

Dark shame seeping in, her  
legs are machines, speeding  
so you could barely see them.

In her haste, she spotted  
a water fountain and it  
dripped memories into her head.

## **Down Open Drive**

**Jessica Kunkel, CAPA**

Wind is flinging hair into my eyes and mouth  
and I neglect to stop it.

He is strong next to me. One hand  
on the wheel, his smile is infectious.

We are juicy. Driving down open roads to nowhere,  
stop wherever on the way. There was a diner

in Chicago and a ball of twine in Kansas, a bridge  
in San Francisco and a bowling alley in New Orleans.

I don't care where we go, just that I'm with him.

I am holding his free hand  
and the music is so loud I can't hear it.

It beats through my anatomy, every cell  
pulsating with the beat of the drum and guitar strum.

I can see his mouth moving  
and I can tell he is melodic

off-key, too monotone to leave on sheet music.  
His hair is sticking up in the back unclipped,

he complains that it's too long as I idle  
my fingers through and show him it looks fine.

He is vast.

He's telling me I'm beautiful  
and I weary my head.

He asks me to trust him  
and I don't.

## **Undertow**

**Michael Hitchcock, CMU**

Everything's going

She says and cups my cheeks

With cold fingers, too small and

Quaking dreamscapes

Close to the vest,

A millstone in gold,

My darkest moments, and I

Would hope to hear

Her voice like the sea

Pulling me home

## I've been meaning to ask:

Jennifer Huang, CMU

He wants me to hose off his dog. *In the middle of winter?* He ignores me. Earlier today, my therapist nodded off during our session, his eyes and neck dipped to the ground. Am I just boring or manic? Later, I put on my pepper knitted socks and slipped on ice. I shouldn't have been running. But I've been meaning to. The door to my apartment is stuck, old wood displaced from old construction. And he wants me to hose off his dog. In the middle of winter and my voice echoes in the long hall topped with a chandelier. The Labrador sits by my side and my fingers are frigid. The man finally looks at me. I'm not sure what it means. Then he asks *What do you mean?*

## self-portrait

Pay Kish, CAPA

spending another year tearing shreds of my paper body.  
I am glittery. my sister is the craft box.  
Searching for more glitter. talk to me while she  
glues my face.

a few months pass & I am standing in front of the bathroom mirror.  
*here.* scratching it all off.  
the specks are falling snowflakes  
they coagulate around. *trying*  
to think about the critters. one day of funds  
are drugs. slice across my cheek.

next week I'll be in Titusville.  
tying the stolen lace  
around my neck.