

BOUNDARY STREET

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A CAPA & CMU Collaboration
Volume 17, Spring 2019

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Acknowledgments

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Introduction

This chapbook is the result of a collaboration between students in the Advanced Poetry Workshop at Carnegie Mellon University (CMU) and Literary Artists at Pittsburgh CAPA 6-12. Throughout the 2019 Spring semester, CMU students and CAPA students exchanged assignments and worked together on poems. And ate pizza.

This collection celebrates this collaboration. We all learned from each other and we are all better writers and teachers because of this project. We hope you enjoy reading these poems as much as we enjoyed working together.

Mara Cregan, CAPA
Jim Daniels, CMU
Allison Taverna, CAPA

SOPHIE BERNSTEIN, CMU

From the Swordfish Perspective Uncontained

I. Man
Isolated atop a tall hill,
behind him, grey clouds may
as well be the ocean—
a figure stands
with a spindly crook
for herding, not walking.

I have yet to meet his cane. I am
on a swim.

My habitat: not a bowl.
My habitat: water can fill any container.

II. Crook
Some days, he spends
all his time, a dramatic
silhouette, leaving no
mark beyond his existence,
his sharp eyebrows, sickly
patches of crumpled grass,
his shape, the shape of his crook,
the object of a shepherd's
life. He can only imagine
a crowd of grain eating
animals to prod.

I am an animal.
I am alone, and slimy, contented gulping meat past my
toothless gums. I've started carrying

around a knife.
Of all the fish in
the sea,
creature, traumatized by harpoons of hunters,
doing, I am a hunter. I know myself as a violent
traumatized by my own

III. Domestication
Has he, the shepherd,
ever tried to domesticate a swordfish?
His crook would glide
through the water
much like my pointed
bill, a threat. Hooked staff
that it is, it was made for
keeping herbivores.

I am provocative always provoke and eat,
eat things that eat.
My prey: puckered, scaled.
My prey: very much breathing.
Mackerel for example have gills and octopuses have intelligence,
and I eat both.
Still, there is a comfort in never pursuing what is bigger than me.

IV. Lifestyle Choices
He and I don't normally meet
in close quarters that way: eating.
He does not shepherd carnivores.
The extension of his arm: the human
way, in which he is in control.

I never keep others, am no kidnapper guard no holding cell.
See me, and you may very well die.
My weapon: a long narrow bill, made for few purposes.
My weapon: crashes into ship decks and beings.
and did you know other fish bleed?

V. Shepherd
If he strikes his crook at the top
of the hill, there will be no lightning.
Each time I kill, I am not in control
.

There are days when I nudge many fish out from their lives,
guide them into the underworld,
and there he stands under sunless
days, containing creatures,
feeding them unbloodied grass.

The Government's Bad Hair Day

One strand of hair
doesn't listen to the comb,
or the hairspray, or my prayers.
No matter what I do, no
matter how many times
I brush, it coils like smoke.
I go to work, I pretend
I don't notice the knot
continuing to grow on my head.

A newspaper stand on the corner
is selling headlines that report
my bad hair day. I stare
at cars stuck in the red
molasses of the light,
rather than the stand worker,
waving my shame at my face,
trying to get me to pay for it.

I can see myself in the window
of the car in front of me.
My hairs form catacombs,
twisted snags of legislature
form the Squirrel Hill Synagogue,
form Stoneman Douglas,
form the Route 91
Harvest Music Festival.

Another stand is selling hats.
I jam one on my head,
a bandage on a bullet-wound,
The knots tighten like nooses,

misleading media; nothing
is getting revised underneath.
but I feign detangles.
I refuse to cut my hair.

At the Scene of Crime

The briny adrenaline of the sea
diffuses into my veins as I kneel
into a wave and inhale the crustacean
flecked foam. Insistent wind caresses
my ears, whispering of lives on jeweled
shores away from home. I wonder
if it's this wind that drew you
into the grey. Or perhaps it's the round,
seductive smoothness of the pebbles
underfoot before they sprout fangs.
Lacking evidence for implication,
I take three steps forward,
then ten. No jagged brown razors,
just the grey water separating
my soles from the scents
of the shore. The cries of fishermen
and flamingos recede, aftertastes
of familiar meals.

My arms cut trails of false clarity,
frantic incisions filled with red
herrings, toxic waste and sticky
seaweed. The howl of the sea whips
me into beige oblivion as barnacles
and beads of perspiration cling
to me like dreams without dreamers.
I think I see you near the horizon,
a black speck shrinking the faster
I swim.

Parched, I lap at the ocean
as salt marbles rattle
down my sooty throat,

then fill the pink sacks
of my lungs like bricks.

I beg the wind to whisper
me home but it's silent.

Mother, Mother

The bulbous moon, strewn stars,
clutches onto wet grass, smells
of melting blood orange clouds. I put
my hands out in the sky, realigning
constellations, just like you did. I think
of the memory card as I twirl it around
my crackled fingers. Of tugging onto my
mother's plaid shirt. Of brining sunlight,
and bleary video tapes on the Bolsey
C-22 camera, I only have this keepsake.

Why do you weep as if you've heard
the sweet essence of our home? You aren't
there anymore. Why let it rain when you can
swim? Mother, Mother. All I see are clouds
with stars and sun holding the moon
like Mother holding her daughter.

Remember how the pulse of transparent
waves tackled the walloping winds, serenading
us through black-eyed Susans and waltzing
marigolds? Mother, Mother. The moon cries.
Flowers aren't dancing anymore with only
a keepsake, a commemoration. Who's to say
the moon won't fall asleep without the stars
listening to your usual lullabies or old stories
to me? Or seeing us intertwine our fingers
the way we used to at home on the beach.

10 Shots of a Pig

I.

Chewing slowly
and without much fanfare.
Pan down to the shit beneath the surface.

II.

Pig skin
is the color of wet caulk. On film it turns out pink.

III.

It tapig eat
from the palm of my hand. His tongue was glassy,
his eyes: supple.

IV.

There are only a handful of movies about pigs.
Of those movies, only one is also about the yakuza.

V.

Placing your camera below the subject
creates a sense of visual authority.
But no matter how low the angle,
you can only feel so much respect for the average pig.

VI.

You think it's a front,
the yakuza raising pigs,
but as the film progresses the chemistry between man
and hog becomes undeniable.

VII.

For example:
when he swallowed the food I gave him
I felt overcome with tenderness.

VIII.

Some pigs grow too big to eat.

IX.

At the end of the movie
an ex-yakuza releases all the pigs into the middle of the street.
The pigs are shot from above.

X.

As he stares back up at me,
I'm uncertain if the feeling's mutual.

IAN AIKEN, CAPA

The Abandoned Lot on 18th

4/19

4,238 rocks, still here.
The rain couldn't take anyone today.
Or did the rocks barricade the rain?

4/20

The sound of a weed whacker hitting rock,
rancid chalk squealing on chalkboard
splatters against the wall,
the whirring has rotted away.

4/21

There is an address here,
but what does it house?
The bricks that make the two walls
that make up the lot, maybe.

4/22

A paltry blue bird is hopping around.
It stops and stands on the tip of the fence,
waiting sometimes.
I walk past the fence to it.
It stares at me.
I don't want it here.
It wants it here.

4/23

The sun doesn't touch the rocks for long.
It could hit the rocks
if it simply swung around the concave of the roof.
Not very thoughtful.

4/24

A newly cut foot path,
could tell the story of a rushed morning,
or a fearful night. The treads, and story,
are engraved into the dirt, only spoken of in their whispers.

4/25

Sometimes the wind would,
with the leaves held in its small hands,
dance around the lot,
fling the leaves about.
Lately, I have not seen
the wind's childish hands.

4/26

What is this lot without a building,
what are the buildings around it if not a lot?

4/27

Around here, after it rains,
it still feels like it's raining.
The air lathers water on your skin,
and still smells
as if the rain is only feet away
from falling again.

4/28

Sometimes I wonder how it would feel,
to have never looked into the lot,
counted its stones, or traced my foot
through the decomposed leaves.
To be a passing person, with eyes locked forward.

Trauma Muses

I. Mneme

Fangs nipping, tails whipping, hungry hounds
slash, claws carving into my skin the shape
of a memory: crushing sensation erupting
like blood, the past once captured in sinew
set free to run in rivulets down rent flesh,
unconscious recollection putrid and pulsing
as it pools into a new pond of panic.
Menacing maws of mongrels snap behind me,
deceitful depths of recollection dance before me.
Which way do I fall? I take a breath.

II. Melete

Be mindful.

The pond flows into a stream.
Be mindful.

Fishing line dangles like a heartstring looking for love.
Be mindful.

Every tug at the line like a heartbeat is a reminder.
Be mindful.

Three fish palpitate on the line, hooked.
Be mindful.

Their rigid mouths beg for peace.
Be mindful.

I feed the iron free.
Be mindful.

They bite again.

Be mindful.

III. Aoide

A songbird flutters from the sky
to rest upon my fist, feathers fluffing
gently out, body tense with joy.
Her song begins from one bare note--
a seed amidst the dirt-- and invites in
a piping tune-- a forest springing forth.
Along this wood I wander now, enchanted
by the notes: some short and sharp like bitten
bark. Some curling high like new-born leaves.
Some ending low and strong as roots.

The fish are still, the hounds asleep,
all lulled by rustling boughs to dream.
My fight is done, the struggle won,
with foes that slumber by my feet.
We settle down, the bird and I,
heads pillowed on the hounds--
I blink, I sleep, and then I wake.
I kiss the fish, the hounds, the bird,
for without one, there are but none.

Urban Decay

Humans rot as theme parks do,
dead wood bones, iron slide veins

clotted with ivy climb
funhouse window panes.

I am a scavenger, a moth
captivated by a light bulb's

last breath. One day, pond scum
will smother my stomach lining,

a coaster cart heart rusted still
in my chest. Morbid curiosity

fills me, like larvae feeding on
postmortem park food leftovers.

I stare at static Ferris wheel eyes,
track tibias constricted by vines.

This body farm fair draws me in,
decaying carousels like lost lives,

forsaken by foliage. I can't break
my gaze from those humanly remains.

Portrait of My Father

Strong man, tough man. Man with a voice
louder than a ship's bullhorn. Man who knows all
the rules of football. Man who leaves the cooking
to the women. Man who talks gun control
and SNL at the dinner table. Penny-pinching man.
Man who saves plastic bags, napkins,
ketchup packets. Giving man. Man who fought
his way into America to raise his family.
Man who paid college tuition for eight years.
Rock solid man. Man who insists on joining
any soccer game he sees. Man who makes his daughters
sit up straight. Man who will only ever cry
at his mother's funeral. Man who plays
life like a game of bridge. Young man,
old man. Man who took his daughter
to the park every Sunday. Man who watched
her ride her bike for hours. Man who still
holds her hand crossing the road. Drawn man.
Man who calls every Friday. Man who wants
to be proud. Man who wanted sons.
Man who never showed it.

Starting to End

Wake up.
 Slap snooze, lay back down.
 Wake up, R.E.M's filling
 your skull, singing day's end.
 Wake up, can you not see the red streets
 filling with acid, corroding
 those who didn't wake up to society's
 imminent collapse. Wake up, the truth
 is that you're now late. Escape from bed,
 begin your day. This is all to make it on time.
 Wake up and flee the building's
 imminent fall. Keep on getting ready,
 toothpaste smeared on bristles, work it in.
 Wake up, this place is stumbling
 on its last legs, declining. Its been neglected
 far too long, how are you not prepared yet?
 Wake up, you need to escape, the truth is, you're late.
 The horizon burns, streets erode.
 Wake up, the day starts, leaves you behind.
 Prepare reserves, knot your laces. You are late.
 Wake up again, your head nods off,
 falls down, down. Hurry, you need
 to wake up again. To sirens wailing
 outside, the world falls, wastes away.
 Wake up.

Walking into the Pawn Shop on 7th Ave

Knick-knacks and thingamabobs
 Collaged across tables
 Lining the walls
 Towering lamps and porcelain flamingos
 Forming a maze around me
 And as I traverse this graveyard of sold memories
 My memory of you
 Like a long neglected map
 Guides me back to her

Her diamond face stares up at me from behind a glass case
 A fractal smile
 Still glinting under dim yellow lights
 After years of your fractured promises
 A love you swallowed whole and then spit back out
 Today her corners are still sharp and angular
 Ready to slice through skin
 Or years of love

As she lays sleeping on her midnight-velvet cushion
 I remember how miniscule her golden body felt
 In the palm of my hand
 Emanating the same twinkling brightness she gives off now
 A brightness that might have fooled me if I were a stranger
 If I hadn't left her here
 If I hadn't slipped her neatly onto your fourth finger
 If I hadn't loved you
 And I almost want to ask to hold her one more time
 But I know better than to trust her again

LILY WEATHERFORD BROWN, CAPA

Cicada Shell

I miss the space
where my eyes once were,
pine needle legs,
burr-hook toes,
origami breastplate,
space for halo of sawdust,
when sun lit a warm, red
cushion of air between
the space of our Siamese bodies.

I pressed my skin to Shell,
but Shell never pressed back.
I took our wings and ran.
I abandoned it,
its shallow grave of face,
train-tracked skin,
peekaboo windows
where sunlight burned
parts of my skin it reached.

The ripple of the paper of
its back was drop of
water still in motion.
I throw my voice to Shell
hear rasp of breath,
like smashed paper ball.
Never would it reach out
or hold my pink hand
with its paper fingers.

Shell's ribs could not buckle,
not chirp back to me,

grow glass-shard wings,
cast a mud light in my wake,
rise into oozing tomato sun,
fly, buckling through sky.
But I have abandoned it.
Without voice, heart, breath,
even the buckle of wings.

MADELINE FICCA, CAPA

Open Heart Surgery

I hugged Baby Dee
until her plastic limbs nearly detached.
She loved to sing,
over and over.
Every time I wrapped my arms
around her marshmallow body,
a tune echoed from her chest.

The more I hugged her, the more her song
hopscothched like double Dutch jump-rope.
Some of her song got stuck
in the plush of her heart.
Her voice sounded like cracks
in the sidewalk.

Even my mango-colored walls were tired
of hearing Baby Dee whine her melody.
Dad became a cardiovascular expert.
Baby Dee needed fixing.

I watched the operation from below
the kitchen counter. Even my tippy toes
couldn't lift me to see Baby Dee.
When the X-Acto knife made the first incision,
I waited for a tiny scream, or maybe
the last bits of a song.

Clouds piled on the kitchen counter,
until Dad found the broken voice,
carefully removed it,
and stuffed Baby Dee with her ivory insides,
leaving her chest scarred

with white thread.
No box was inside of her
for puzzle piece sing-alongs.
Baby Dee hopscothched, here
and there, looking for her voice,
but she was quiet.

Therapy for a Witness

We start with heroes far from whence they came.
One man but hark! there also was a dame!
I watch them make their way down Meyran Ave.
To get their bodies altered at Empire.

Yikes! that woman's, super
Short and homeboy also:
Radiating passions
Paired with prideful urges,

inbetween them and I were one million
miles. We shared skin, we shared broke, and yet
still, there were wild magics from infinite,
powerful sources, flowing all through them.

WALK TALK WALK TALK
HUM DRUM...then BANG BOOM!!!
pause, are numb
rest and from

Time to time I still see them walking
wrong place
wrong time.
the silence before car concealed metallic rain
was deafening.

...it holds fast in my mind...and I can still feel their
residual magics: what I lack. Whatever emptiness I
contain: the difference between us that day,
I survived...and my guilt boundless.

How to Unfry an Egg

Start with water, wash
the grease. Handle with ease,
because the egg is oblong crystal,
pristine yet vulnerable to shatter.

The next step is to unprep
its cooking. Turn the temperature frigid
so it uncooks. It's best to leave hard,
this will make it easy to manipulate.

Your egg should stay cold,
stiff like stone, resemble a statue,
a memorial of its premature
condition, and return to potential.

After the egg uncooks, analyze its appearance
and see if it suffices your desire. Look at what it took
to make an opulent egg. There shouldn't be mistakes,
filter the accidents to make it uniform.

The last step is to compress the egg
into its starting shape. This is best
for conservation. It's convenient to protect
possessions for their value, especially eggs.

With wings

It used to seem like magic, metal eagle wings
 lifting above the tarmac without a single flap.
 I watched them glide with my palms pressed
 to the window, my golden plastic pilot wings
 fixed to my shirt. Flying over cotton clouds
 I was invincible, untethered to tiny towns,
 Tiny people, whizzing past those little lives.
 Begging my mother to stay I clung tightly
 to armrests and cushions, they come off
 in emergencies, my emergency was real life.

I know it's science now, aluminum plates
 lifting above the tarmac, the engine screams
 under our seats. I watch them cut the air,
 cut off from tiny towns, waiting, tiny people
 waiting for me to come home in pajamaed
 feet for I am not invincible, I sit at the mercy
 of wind and cloud. Their sways hold sway
 over my future, the inevitability of human
 error a pothole for survival, this is no magic.
 This is an accident, my flying, my terror.

I am tethered to the ground now, bound
 as mother, wife, sister, friend, I whisper pray
 for safe landing. My hand hovers away
 from the window, the hard white plastic
 and pilot's wings standing between me
 and a plummet cutting through clear blue.
 I beg to come down, clinging tightly, alone,
 to armrests and cushions, my panic, my
 emergency. I built a life solidly on the ground,
 my magic lies there, not swiftly flying away.

Palm Reading

Her hands rub together so fast they could start a fire,
 a mother nesting her child's tiny fingers between her own,
 hugged tightly even while slipping her own gloves off,
 oversized, but she gives them to you anyways.
 Your hands mean more to her, captivating warmth,
 she studies your palm lines, each a trail of embers.

Meager hands reach towards your mother's face,
 fingers twirling within her already curled hair.
 Crowds enter the bus in waves, drowning her,
 hands still swirl and swarm your mother's head,
 both gloves fall to the ground, little hands stretch
 down, but she scoops you back upright.

She counts each finger, grazes up and down,
 she could read your palm without even looking, already knows
 that your heart line easily reaches across your hand
 and so does her's. You coddle your head into her chest,
 your hands covered, gloves too far shoved under the seat,
 yet she can still recall each crevice, each kindling spark.

You look to the back of the bus, coffee eyes,
 hands still warmer than the outside of a mug,
 eyes drooping shut over the hum of the bus,
 your mother flips your hood over your sleeping head
 and straps the Velcro upon your cherry-vanilla shoes,
 a frown falls among her face as she must wake you

The glove rests upon the ground like leaves in autumn,
frostbitten air surrounds the bus, snow crystallizes,
no one remembers that it's even cold outside anymore,
especially you, still taking up your mother's lap,
you don't need to worry about the numbing air outside
when there's this kind of warmth sitting in the front of the bus.

Waking Routine

Low resolution mornings
keep everything out
of focus
and dry clouds hang
inside my sticky
eyes. Outside
the world has already
left me behind
and the groaning
of the morning
buses puncture my
bedroom. The air
scratches my lungs
and I gasp
for new atmospheres
while stumbling
onto icy tiles in front
of the somber mirror
where I store
light.
I feel the cold
before I hear
the faucet
and my dreams
drip off
the tip of my nose
carrying
an entire night
down the drain
and into the ocean
for some fish
to drink up.

LIAM WEIXEL, CAPA

Some Nights in August

Arizona iced tea
sweating more than me.

There's a breeze here,
it took me a second to notice.
Cool night air dances
on damp skin.

I don't know when
the sun will set.
I don't look forward to the night,
three teenagers trying to outrun dusk.

Look both ways,
wait three seconds for the Toyota,
okay, go.

Two pairs of new Adidas,
one pair of old
slap across dry concrete.

Reaching the base of Flagstaff,
my friends and I ignore the path
in favor of a climb straight up the side
spent mostly on our hands and knees.

Mud digs up under my fingernails,
invisible pebbles leave hard indentations
all over my palms.

I almost fall twice,

once when my friend above me grabs
at a stinging nettle and recoils,
back down the hill he goes.

The second time, I burn my hand on one,
trying to pull myself up above the ridge.

It smells like grass up here, outside,
summer-smells and cicada-shrieks bounce around
inside my head.

Three teenagers trying to forget
that with darkness comes five by five
fluorescent lights, and with another night
we march steadily onward into another year.

Break-up Photographs

Egg cartons nailed to vending machine s
 Cigarette burns, a recording booth like coffee
 Cars idle spitting out blue clouds of exhaust
 smoking.
 Windows cracked, someone listening
 To the radio.
 Puddles slush. My sneaker tips soaked.
 Her.
 The snow, the gray skies,
 Flakes under my collar.
 Icy ooze in my shoes.
 Heavy
 parking lot glances.
 a cigarette, the flame, the falling snow.
 The sky squinting.
 Her.
 My feet jealous
 Piles of snow, black
 on my eyelashes. My phone in
 the puddle.
 Her voice. Coughing and spitting.
 She's talking
 heavier and faster.
 All of it
 finished. T h e shot. The cover.

June 19, 2019

The iron gates were welded shut, but soon the dead had learned to
 hire lawyers practiced in laws that bound the afterlife to lesser gods. -
 William Logan

Allegheny County (is now known) for the homicide
 trial of a 17-year-old (black child. He) was shot running
 from a stopped car. (He) was not armed, not involved.

Police officer Michael Rosfeld, (only sworn in a few
 hours before the shooting). Michael Rosfeld, (that boy)
 was not involved in the drive-by shooting, Michael
 Rosfeld. (What did you have to fear?)

(No one wants) to deny the defendant his Constitutional
 right to a speedy trial with an impartial jury,
 but (no one can help) that (the) people (of Pittsburgh)
 are aware of the case and have formed opinions.

(Who will be) surprised by the judge's decision?
 Even the defense attorney, who is not involved
 in the case (won't be). "Read his opinion and order,"
 (he says). "I think the case is problematic as a whole."

The trial was scheduled to begin in late February.
 (It is now mid-March; we have only now been informed)
 from which county the jury will be chosen. (Nine months to choose
 a jury, no one knows if there'll even be a conviction).

Nature's Sin

Before there was Satan, Lucifer had an affinity
for the earth he walked. Tangled forests, cerulean

seas, rich deserts, drew him to the warming
tones of nature and the peace it offered.

When God created humans, they reveled
in the wilderness. Discovering new

temptations of the flesh blossoming
brighter than cascading marigolds.

They spent their days intoxicated off
sweet reflecting waters, bringing with

them ruin that burnt tongues and tasted
of sulfur. Lucifer's soul shred to ribbons

upon seeing the extraordinary horrors
of man. He exacted revenge with plagues

that shook the horizon, trumpeting
a tune of death, pain, and despair.

Crestfallen, God banished Lucifer
to a crescendoing inferno beneath

the earth's crust where his rugged
attitude cannot harm the creations.

But God's punishment left a connection
between Lucifer and his beloved world,

Lush countryside dissolved into jagged
wastelands of splitting bark. Now he is

doomed to sit atop a throne of bitter
memories, seething poison into the land

until once perfect nature rots and twists,
violently feasting off the darkness of Satan.

ANIKA WEBER, CAPA

As Easy as Giving Candy to a Dancer

Pirouettes for peppermint patties, caramels
for a performance not even Mariah could pull off.
A scrunched-up nose and tapping your toes lead
to sour lemons that burn your tongue, Kisses

that melt faster than ice. Rich, puffed grammies
eyed me from behind a saran window, leather
smiles, swollen eyes hidden behind dark sunnies.
I stare out that window now and fear the familiar.

There are toddlers outside, swirling around fountains
like soft serve, pretending each shot of mist from the ground
is a marker for a move in dramatic choreography.
I realize now I'd rather leave empty handed

than be so openly joyful. To think as a kid,
I could sway my arms to mariachi, lip-sync
like some mediocre celebrity on New Year's
makes me wonder if I'm still the same shameless girl

who'd do anything for a gummy bear. Maybe the nights
spent swaying in my room make up for the lack of sugar
in my system. I miss the energy to groove, the drive
for taffy has curved and crashed like a nasty sugar rush.

