Boundary Street
Volume IV
Spring 2005

Carnegie Mellon University Creative Writing Program
&
The Pittsburgh High School for the Creative & Performing Arts
Literary Arts Department
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Preface

This chapbook is the result of a collaboration between students in the Advanced Poetry Workshop at Carnegie Mellon University (CMU) and Literary Artists at the Pittsburgh High School for the Creative and Performing Arts (CAPA). Throughout the Spring 2005 semester, CMU students and CAPA students exchanged assignments and worked together on poems, meeting both at CMU and CAPA for workshop sessions and discussions. This collection of poetry celebrates that collaboration. We all learned from each other and are better writers, and teachers, because of this project. We hope you enjoy reading these poems as much as we enjoyed working together.

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Jim Daniels, CMU
Kristin Kovacic, CAPA
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Strike

There was talk—there were whispers. Furtive movements in the cafeteria and little slips of paper. Who has the power? We do. Walk out. There were whispers on Friday. On Monday the parking lot was a zoo of brake lights and commotion. Gossips buzzed like shrill feedback, like dropping a bass guitar off the roof into the courtyard. Mrs. Whitaker had shattered someone's brand new fog lamps; they were worth more than the salary change she'd clamored for. Dr. Ernie Barnes draped himself in a cardboard sign like a hot dog man, he may have gotten it during yesterday's tailgating and Italian sausage sandwiches outside Cleveland Municipal Stadium. It might've said "Join or Die." Adam and Pat swore they saw the gorilla Hufmasters in the black boots (cheaply hired to calm the masses) smoking lye in the back gym while their walkie-talkies crackled static. Snarls and bellows and beating their chests at the boys and girls. Droning came over the loudspeaker: emergency assembly of the people, to the bleachers at once. Little Principal Joseph spoke with the microphone in his mouth—things shall proceed as normal—do not be concerned. But the drums. The drumming started. Sneakers and Doc Martens and loafers and platform heels...OUT...WALK OUT...WALK OUT...no-no-everyone stay calm WALK OUT WALK OUT WALK OUT. And so the levee broke and the rains poured down the umbrellas of the news crews in khaki as a stream of white boys and girls got their seven or eight minutes of revolution; it was all televised.

Dana Horton, CAPA

His Guitar

15/12
His brown braid dangled from his scalp and sat on his broad shoulders. They reminded me of snakes, filled with venom, ready to attack.
He was the first white boy I knew who wore braid so casually, without looking as if he woke up and adapted to urban culture after watching BET.
The sound of him playing his guitar kept me up at night. I sat on my cold windowsill with my night light on and listened; it was smooth, like a blanket washed with fabric softener three times.
16/13
His guitar was the color of quicksand, the same color of his eyes.
He sat on the bench playing his guitar on a warm afternoon as I played in the playground on the jungle gym; he hummed so loud that the sound was carried throughout the playground, corresponding with the basketballs hitting the concrete.
"What do you want to be when you grow up?" I asked, the silver bars of the jungle gym cold against my skin.
He stopped humming. "Famous."
17/14
Mr. Turner, our choir director, did not allow him to play guitar in church. We sang along to the sounds of the organ, low and soggy.
His lips moved but no sound was coming out; the bass section of the choir sounded weak.
His eyes suffered from nostalgia, playing air guitar with every bone in his body when Mr. Turner turned his back, face scrunched with dedication.
Mr. Turner had a long talk with him after practice was over.
18/15
My dress was white, long and shiny, like a Greek Goddess.
I was the only sophomore to get asked to the prom by a senior, feeling the green eyes as I walked into the gymnasium.
He wore a white tuxedo with white tennis shoes but still looked uncomfortable.
His hand was playing at prom, girls asking him to dance in between breaks. The lights were dim, starry setting. He said no to all, except one, the girl with the blonde hair, the minister’s daughter. They danced to three slow songs before he seized my hand. His eyes were the color of coffee, black in the center, darker than usual. He said that we should get married when I turn eighteen. “You’re going to wait for me?” I asked.

He nodded. “Yeah.” His lips felt cold against my cheek as the minister’s daughter looked on, smile on her face.

Then he told me about getting baptized, about the water that went up his nose and came out through his mouth as he threw up all of his breakfast directly in the water. About the thin wafer, tasteless but divine. Saved. He needed saved. Only a demon child wants to play guitar in church, the minister said. The devil don’t live in church.

He took his braids out one day, for the first time, a brown afro resembling a giant round potato would not stay under the black church hat that he bought.

No more guitar woke me up at night; the sound was silent, nothing to listen to. I checked off the days until my eighteenth birthday with a red pen, until he slipped the ring on my finger, the day we would become one. Time moved like a drunken turtle and staggered along. He showed up every Sunday at church with a tuxedo and the minister’s daughter by his side. He walked past me and sat up front. He rejoined the choir and sang with his heart and soul, face scrubbed but confused.

The day arrived like an asthma attack, slow but anticipated, the day we were supposed to become one. My party was small with close friends; I waited for him to show with his guitar by his side. Time passed as my ice cream cake melted, three hours late; he showed up when it was over, minister’s daughter on his arm, long hair gone. There was a ring, shiny and big, silver and divine. It sat on her tiny finger as she looked at him with lust. “I thought you were going to wait for me?” I asked.

He shook his head, his eyes not meeting mine. “I couldn’t. I’m married. We’re moving away tomorrow. Happy Birthday.” He handed me his guitar, a red bow wrapped around it.
Darrah Bird, CAPA

America's First Love

I. New York
She curls her toes around the rotting couch
in the back alley. She’s salt and light frappe and
she’s cut off all her hair.
Blue-black wisps curl around her ankles
loosening what’s left of Brazil.

II. Brazil
Mad men in Brazil unlock their cages
and send doves to land on her doorstep beside the homeless man
with a plastic cup between the soles of his feet.
Some still land on the statue, digging their
talons into her
green skin, making green blood fall on their feathers and they
forget
how to fly.

III. Nesting
She wanted to suffer under white sugar cane,
and blue clouds, and red skies.
Here it’s a megaphone of snow and blue babies and men
missing love because women are left behind.
A block from her apartment there’s a white house peeling away on
a hill.
Sometimes she goes there
when the wind is too strong or New York grass
has burned through too many layers of skin.

Dylan Goings, CMU

Unfolding Trajectories

I remember so little. I’m forced awake
By silences broken: pillow squeak, sighs
Of floorboards contracting without pressure
From cold, memories clumped and expunged,
Waxed in their passing. Subtle pauses

Within larger, quieter pauses: a scoop
Of warmth, feverish touch, the pain
And ringing we invent in the absence of
Enclosure, or just closure.
An orbit is an endless plummet.

Reaching aphelion has gravity –
multiplication – already fingering my heels,
Letting sheets lump on the floor: shed wings
Preparing for the fall. Meanwhile I reconstruct
An image of your tears: an hourglass gingerly

Displacing each grain, forcing discrete revelations
From a fluid passage. I solicited the truth
Without the lyric music of truth, the push
And pull. I wait for you to recover me, obsessively
Straightening something designed to

Enfold. Or just
Like a bird unfolding wings to reveal
Nothing but feathers, the sound of falling
Without descent, when each morning your hands
Would deliver the bed newborn-smooth and fragile...

The bed is still here, full of vacancy – an orbit
Charting the longest path to nowhere. The sun
Ascends a gem, faceted and spinning, a thousand
Feathers in turbulence crafting an unfamiliar
Form of flight.
Ryan Lewis, CAPA

*Obsession*

I hate what you do to me.
I hate the delusional truth your eyes speak.
The way you twist my clarity.
The way you secrete my lucidity.
I hate the way you rape me of my sagacity.

You have taken so much from me.
You have my wisdom,
and you have reinstated it with infatuation.
I am fatigued by your presence,
and enthralled in your allure.

I told you what I wanted.
I want my thoughts to be free of you.
I want to be free of the desire for you.
I want you to release me.
Release me please.
Release me from this exploitation.
I need to be apart from you.

Good-bye, good-bye.
I almost said good-bye,
but in the pinnacle of our passion,
I surrendered to you.
I submitted to your tenderness.
And I became immersed in you.

It is my aspiration to cleanse myself of you,
to be free from your clutch,
to expunge your taste from my lips.

I hope that in time,
I will see your face, and not remember a thing.

Kathleen Mandeville, CMU

*Vernacular*

Too much
like breaking
in
the spine
of a new book
borrowed she shouldn’t
be here
taking off
her clothes
flaunting
the dedication
page *For*
*Anyone*
*But You*
Each body
part an inter
view
unedited
she line breaks
here
ellipsis
there
translation
unavailable
The afternoon
is dropping
pages
of snow
no one will come
the pauses
To speak
reading
for days
This cottage
buried
in the weight
of our story
that will not
begin
She has only
to allow
something
legible
To punctuate
the pauses
To speak
my name

Lakiesha Thomas, CAPA

I'm In Love

Look,
I've toured through Greenfield
followed by Squirrel Hill
and introduced myself to Jews.
Walked to Lawrenceville
into Bloomfield
and kissed a lot of Italian dudes.
Skipped through Shadyside
and made conversation with a few Koreans.
took a trip through a Point
of Breeze
into Homewood,
and saw girls with hair weave like Europeans.
I'm in love with you Pittsburgh,
and I'm not done seeing the rest of you yet.
If you were in a battle with another city,
You would have all of my money on the bet.
I need you Pittsburgh,
I would never leave your fully diverse side,
I take pride in my hometown,
at every second, minute, hour...
any period of time!
People seem to come
and some seem to go.
But I would never leave Pittsburgh
to go to a place
like Ohio.
Well known as the steel city,
with the best football teams.
But most football players from here,
rather play for NYC!
Pittsburgh is where I grew up,
where I live,
where I shall stay.
For the rest of my life I'll be here in Pittsburgh
until I'm not getting any younger,
and slowly my hair begins to turn grey 'cause
this is how much Pittsburgh means to me,
I love every angle in view of its scenery.
This is how much Pittsburgh means to me,
I love every beautiful part of my city.
Cleopatra Nacopoulos, CMU

What loves me

Stings like salt
On my cut

Sweet poisoned
Fragrance
Trapped in my air

Pure and curious
Like silk
Between my fingers

Kiss me now
Satin sunlight
Veiled by fog

Love sneaks in
Like wet snow
On an autumn night

Ashley Wise, CAPA

Newspaper Headlines

Father
Walks Through Child at Night
Child Lost
Mother Survives

Death Dying
Abstractions
Taking Life

Obituary
Lightning Killed Four
House Not Recognizable

Marriage Proposals
When She Sings It Is Morning

People Cry
Daughters return
Sons Sent Away

War Terror
BUSH
Life
Knowledge

Birds Missing
World Deaf

Leave Balcony Open
Vijay Palaparty, CMU

*Remembering Boundaries*

I took the maid’s photo as she ground white lentils.

Sitting on the cold floor - heavy granite mortar and pestle - she churned out lentil paste.

When I took the photo, the lentils weren’t paste – yet.

The 4x6 rectangle is evidence.

I took her, her world, and even her time onto the shiny film - yielding a glossy photo, A borderland where she is trapped.

The space around the confines is vacuumed, cleaned up into something I can’t even remember.

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Alex Sweterlitsch, CAPA

*Thin Cigarettes*

*After “Girl in a coat lying on her bed,” photographed by Diane Arbus*

It’s 3 a.m. and she’s tired and has to get up early tomorrow, not for work but to go shopping.

She’s the type of person they open nightclubs for, the type of girl who gets all dolled up just to stay in and drink cocktails and smoke thin cigarettes that last longer than any cigarettes should.

The type of girl that considers getting up at noon to be early.

I know she’s happy, not happy enough to smile, but happy enough to sit in her fur coat and pantyhose and take this picture. Happy enough to rest her head on her knee and stare, fixate herself on a thing in the distance, like a mirror or something not as narcissistic as we think.

She’s going to sleep in her makeup, she’s too fabulous not to, too brilliant not to, too insecure not to.

And, when she gets up tomorrow morning smelling of her thin cigarettes, she won’t remember taking this picture, but she’ll remember sleeping in her make-up and fur coat because she always does, it’s easier.

And after shopping, she’ll get all dolled up again, just like the night before, and burn more cigarettes, and let her friend take another picture.

She won’t remember these pictures, not until she finds copies jammed underneath the bottoms of the drawers in her vanity, not until she draws in the wrinkles, until she finds what she’s looking for, something better than thin cigarettes, fur coats, and sleeping till noon. Something that will keep her from getting lost in that fur coat because she knows it’s too big not to get lost in, and people lose her all the time.
Michael O'Brien, CAPA

Humid

Lucky pineapple sprouting deftly from its tree.

Tastes so foreign, godly, like sweet fire.

Those yellow juices skim the hands, burn

the lips so the air reeks of salt.

I rub the skin until my fingers bleed,

brush my nose through its prickly hairs and smell

passion and roast pig, young women gyrating

thick hips in that undulating big-island heat.

Benjamin Pelham, CMU

Relieve Yourself Yourself

"The way to a man's heart is through his stomach growling for more lies to feed on better to have loved and lost than never experienced the thrill of the hunt and the truth of the joust lance and shield make nights better 'til they're stripped away by a Shakespearean sonnet claiming temperance is cruel master this cupid with poison tipped and peacock fletchings disguising deadly missiles launched all in green went my love riding on for heaven's sake what better horse than heart break, heart ache then how shall celibacy be missed?"

The youth shook, flushed, zipped up, washed up, fed up, and left.
**Stephanie Fisher, CAPA**

*Means Nothing*

"I won't say the Lord's Prayer
you're down on your knees
like it means something
and I used to believe in Saints
but you took that away from
me with your insane demands
telling me that religion means
something and a marriage can
only be between a man and a woman
not a man and man and wo is only
a prefix and genitalia means nothing when
did this become a dictatorship
we can't even protest our wars anymore
and there must be some other
way to settle this argument but only
if you'll tip over and take it all in
like a deep breath and God Bless America
God Bless you God Bless me God Bless
us all go f*** yourself with your atomic
bombs and nuclear weapons and search
for weapons of mass destruction
and small pox threats and while you do
that I'm going to sit in my house for days
on end and stare at the roses in the closet
and listen to mothers and wives and babies
cry because that's what America has become
land of the traumatized."

She signed the letter in ink. She lit a match
and held it to the edge of the letter, watching
it burn and turn to ashes slowly.

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**Jenny Rae Rappaport, CMU**

*Fibromyalgia*

My body knows tired
Muscles contorted into knots that are twisted
Like broken springs protruding from my back
My windup key has been lost
And the clockwork creaks with unasked for age
Coils needing oil, gears with missing teeth—
The aches that reverberate with motion
Oozing out of my head in waves of pain
Unalleviated by the red-yellow pills
I am the creaking queen of a warped watchmaker's dream
Gretchen Gally, CAPA

The Longhair

Her hands were like doves as they flew across the keys. She was playing the gospel, the messiah, the dirty man blues. The keys panged and they rumbled as she stroked them. Her body shook in ripples. From her shoulders hung the sheet music. Written across her collar was the bass line. Folded into her hair was the melody. The flutter of her fingers made the audience whisper as she plucked out the notes and smiled. She landed her last bass note, letting it reverberate in the walls and the bones of her hands. An uproar charged through the hall in a wave from the audience, as she closed the key cover with an affectionate flap.

Anne Marie Rooney, CMU

white lies

when my sister was ten, she saw spiders where her skin used to be. white lies begin like this: yesterday, everything was fine.

at first, it was hard to tell the nightmares from their source. they watched her sleep the fever away, slipping thorazine under her young pink tongue. they watched her not eating the prozac in her food, "bring in the paxil," they mouthed, "we've got a live one!"

mostly, though, she slept. it was summer, & the bees were back. under this slow drug cover, she scratched & scratched. zoloft raised red thorns across her arm.

(freckles were not freckles. august closed in with questionable intent. the doctors noted all of this with their black black pens.)

& risperdal was for september, screaming for her brushes. the colours were brighter than god. suddenly, my sister knew the world for what it was: parasitic shrill. her eyes boiled with the knowledge. every other cough shone like a curse; we were all unclean.

my sister was ten when we gave her up to the DSM. white lies begin like this: then, one morning, she woke up, & it was gone.
Devra Schor, CAPA

*Ce n’est pas un poème d’amour*

The day we learn how to say “Castles in the sky” is the day I learn how to be let down gracefully. I write *Tu es trop cher* on my colored construction paper cutout & convince my teacher that I’m not talking about the price of hookers. We hang our hearts in the hall for everyone to see, written in French, so no one but us knows what they say.

(While Gabe of no particular gender makes poetry out of wax & tries to teach me binary while we write incorrect ballads & run down the street after his sweatshirt, which was blown away in the wind, I conjugate irregular French verbs in my head. *Étre* - I am. *Je suis, tu es, il est, elle est, on est, nous sommes, vous êtes, ils sont, elles sont*. I learned to conjugate by memorization, mechanics, or some force of the God from the machine, which may or may not be Gabe depending on how he’s feeling on any given day. Deus ex machina sometimes gets stuck in my head.)

Boy waxes his body with tape & I help him stick it down & pull it off while we sit in the hall & tape our hearts to the windows. His eyes sparkle in the way that does not involve actual sparks, when I hand him a heart that says *Huis Clos/No Exit*. “How’s that for romance?” French words mix with English as he pulls the tape off his legs & I laugh, curling my tongue in my mouth hard harder hardest. *Conjugate that, mademoiselle, en Français, s’il te plait!* My conjugations of French verbs are written on the hearts that I give to Boy & the ones on the glass, watching as he winces in pain as the tape is ripped from his body, expression clear as the window, transparent as his smile.

Elle Rosen, CMU

*instinct*

it took two days for my Burmese kitten
to learn how to balance on the rod
that runs across the bottom of the coffee table –
there are some things we can learn from animals
in Texas, the cockroaches run towards the light
instead of running away, even though
they are half the size of the ones you find up North
tiny dogs bark as if they’re much larger
and seventy-five pound retrievers jump onto laps
as if they weigh much less
there’s a system built into every species
things they know so well they don’t write them down;
maybe someday they’ll even learn to outlive us
but today nothing’s changed
and my full-grown cat strides
on the top shelf of the bookcase
because he knows
he will always land on his feet
Catharina Lanius, CAPA

Bob

I spotted the coon cat kitten
on the veranda of the abandoned
house across the street.
The grey and black fur
helped her camouflage
on the cement floor
but for me it was easy
to spot her turtle green eyes.
I walked over to the house
to meet the kitten,
and she ran over to me,
so excited the little squeaks
coming from her mouth were non-stop.
Her ears were shaped as mountain peaks,
and her tail stood straight up in the air
as if an invisible string held it up.
I ran my fingers down her back
and I could feel every little bone
on her spine. The thick fur
that covered her made her look bigger than
she really was. The kitten was starving.
I was relieved she was so furry.
If I had seen her ribs or spine,
I would have collapsed crying.
I rushed the kitten to my mother
who was sitting on the front porch.
My cat Mow Mow lay beside her
basking in a wooden lawn chair.
She looked so much bigger
than this little kitten. I wanted
to borrow her fat and muscle,
give it to the baby, just so she could
feel what it was like not to be boney, hungry.

We gave her some cat food
and a plastic bowl of water.
As she swallowed the dry food whole,
I felt like crying again.
Why was this kitten so starved?
Where did she live?
Didn’t anybody love her?
Yet I was happy and I wanted to laugh
at the same time, because
she was eating now, no longer hungry.
It was warm enough for the kitten
to stay outside, and during the night
we sat with the kitten on our porch,
petting her and talking to her.
We told her if she lived with us
she would become fat like our other cats.
I couldn’t stop telling her how pretty she was,
that we were like sisters
who had the same color eyes.
She was my Bag Of Bones, My BOB.
We gave her a little cardboard box
with towels to sleep in,
and before I went to bed,
I peeked out the front window,
witnessed clumps of fur sticking out of the box.
Tyson Schrader, CMU

My Pet Sloth

My pet sloth stirs and rubs his eyes
   When I barge in and out of the bedroom in a
   morning rush,
Then falls back into his pillow.

He stirs and rubs again when I go out.

   Evening fails and I’m home from work
   To do more work,
But the sloth is collapsed on the couch of ennui
   Flipping through channel after channel of movie stars
   hawking
Products that make being lazy less of a challenge.
   (So many man-hours go into inventions
   That make man-hours unnecessary
And too tiring anyway.)

   I try to tip-toe past, back to my computer
   and books
   (Those powerhouses of productivity),
   But my pet sloth seduces me,
   Trapping me in a sticky web of fatigue,
   And I find myself hemming and hawing
Like the dishwasher we forgot to turn on
Or the laundry machine we forgot to load.

The other day my pet sloth pressed the “sleep” button so many times
The alarm clock has become a metaphor for his entire life.

Sloth loves company
Of Internet friends.

He can reach out and
   Touch someone
From the convenience of his own living room!

   I fear for the human race because of people like him:
   I mean, how are we supposed to get it on
If our pet sloths never leave the room?

   But on the plus side,
   Our pet sloths won’t be around much longer;
They’re just too lazy to reproduce.

   And don’t nobody go trying to breed sloths
   With us working-class citizens.
Can you just imagine the disaster wrought
From the sloth being on top?
Emily Nagin, CAPA

what we call it

You sing like morphine, like if sedatives had voices they would sing like you.
Like if every lazy molecule in the universe twisted itself around a string quartet and slid into my living room and under my eyelids they would sing like you.
You remind me of the electric flower room and a half moon face glowing through a window and the TV's spastic midnight flicker and the way pots sound when you bang them together in January and the way smoke oozes through his lips in February when everything is slippery including—but not limited to—the inside of my head.
This is dense abstraction I'm talking about.
This is life or death in moving color.
This is everything caught up and twisted into a scarf I can wear around my neck or condensed into a pendant for my wrist or folded, maybe, into a poem, maybe. For keeps.
This is my prideful, greedy, curious, commercial, popular, envious, glutinous, angry, compassionate, shy, hopeful, lustful, slothful, just chain of beauty.
Yes my chain of beauty in all its squalor and mess, can you believe it? My morphine singer tangos with Joe Jackson across gluttony or sloth I can't remember which but they both fit so perfectly his voice like anything slow and deep like a river singing or the giant catfish that lived in Huck Finn's river and later in mine.
Sing, O Muse of all your voice holds.
Sing me twisted trees, rotten berries piling by my feet growing warm on the rotting wood steps.
Sing me glass shattered and melted into the playground asphalt.
Sing me the rusted car squatting under the vent.
Sing me the gun, sing me the garage, sing me the cigarettes, sing me the line you cross to get here.
Sing me the missing syllables.
The word of the day is beauty so sing me Sid in all his glory.
And while you're at it, busy bee sing me political pins and plaid.
Sleep-flushed cheeks, eyes geometry bright, faces geometry slack, fingers geometry quick
and beads beads beads sing me tiger-eye prayer beads and church dusty incense.
Sing me the New York Dolls Ramones The Vacancy (and isn't it lovely?)
and clanking pop-tops all in the vest that Jack made.
Sing something I've never heard before.
Sing till you drop 'cause this is a running hallucination.
This is creativity poured into concrete.
This is fire and life and leaves and frogs.
This is me blowing bubbles.
Caleb Stright, CMU

The Moon

When my wife and I got to the moon
we were disappointed. We had purchased
a moon plot just off the shore of the Sea of Tranquility
and hoped to build a moon porch overlooking the moon coast.
But we could not build. The moon ground was too craggy
and hard. Contractors couldn’t crack the moon skin
to dig moon holes for the moon posts. It broke their moon tools
and they left us. We asked local moon farmers
to disc plow our moon ground. They said they
didn’t like what we did to the moon contractors.
They said that we, moon city people, city moon people,
didn’t understand what our moon porch
would do to the moon birds, how are moon cars
would scare all the moon fish from the moon sea.
But, we couldn’t abandon our moon house
so far away from the moon city,
from its city moon noises.
Our moon porch would be so beautiful
next to the moon sea. So we built our moon porch
on the craggy moon ground, and it collapsed
onto a whole breed of moon moose. So we built
another moon porch. And we complained
to the moon farmers about their moon manure.
The moon is no place for that. We invited
our relatives and friends out to the moon sea
and they loved the moon country so much
that they built their own moon houses
and moon porches. “It’s not like the moon city,”
they said. “It’s so beautiful on the moon sea.”
And they brought their relatives and their friends.
They built their moon houses on rabbit moon holes
and they built their porches on moon beaver dams.
And soon the moon coast was nothing but a wall
of moon houses.

Jade Washington, CAPA

Uncle Lou

The room was dark with musty scented candles lit
all around. There were cheap wooden folding chairs
stacked against the cement walls. Uncle Lou’s casket
was homemade-looking, the nails were rusty
and the wood looked freshly cut and un-sanded.
His wrinkled prune fingers crossed one another
like grandma’s toes. His aged face laid peacefully
and his motorcycle man mustache drooped
like Quasimodo.
All of Uncle Lou’s family and friends came
to visit him at the wake. His death was unknown,
but it’s speculated that he was scared to death
by his own shadow; it wouldn’t be the first time
he scared himself; it was bound to catch up to him
sooner or later. Uncle Lou always has been
a tad bit smile and eerie. Everyone cried at his funeral.
I didn’t. Aunt Martha cried herself into a frenzy; she
jumped up and down, for a minute we thought
she was tap dancing; I never thought that a sinister
old woman with varicose veins that seemed to run from
her head to her feet could exhibit such emotion.
My sister thought she was a retard;
I thought she was a pothead.
I went over to look at Uncle Lou, his half-glued toupee
resembled the crust from ashy skin. His chapped lips
were having a celebration, the extra skin that hung
like chandelier crystals tugged at one another;
it grossed me out; I turned around to look at everyone else.
When I turned back to Uncle Lou, his eyes were open.
“What the f-,” I said. His over-ripened hand covered my mouth;
I couldn’t scream, I couldn’t think.
Dead Uncle Lou had touched me. I slowly backed away,
I turned around, “Uncle Lou’s alive,” I yelled.
I was ignored. I looked back at him, his lips were parted like
webbed feet.
“Boo,” he whispered.
Ram Subramanian, CMU

The Secret Dark Heart of Saturday Night
"I hate to advocate drugs, alcohol, violence, or insanity to anyone but they have always worked for me"-Hunter S. Thompson

My mother said to me that art can never come out of hedonism. So, to prove she was wrong, I launched myself upon a squalid odyssey to seek the secret dark heart of Saturday Night.

I sought some revelation down the street
At the house of a guy I knew, who threw
A brilliant, brash, loud, shindig, where I drank
Punch in irresponsible amounts.

Each party was just like the last,
but brighter, more metallic, filled
with cooler, more impressive people,
grinning like a box of razors.

Every drink was stronger,
every stereo louder
than the last. I looked
for souvenirs and wisdom

but I had no
way to keep the
music and friends
I’d met. I crawled

into
the street
and hailed
a cab

and
rode
my
own
tail
back
home.

Abby Gordon, CAPA

More Than Expected at the Clinic

I will feel equality has arrived when we can elect to office women who are as incompetent as some of the men who are already there.
-Maureen Reagan

So I was sitting in the doctor’s office and waiting for an exam when I spotted something on the carpet.
As I looked in shock at this little buck I realized I’d come across a mini man, so I picked him up off the floor.
At that moment I wished I was small, so my mother couldn’t see me and my smile would be tall.
Walking to work would be a breeze with no worries of someone hitting.

He spoke the same as many men and wore the average suit.
But something struck me strange about this mini man named Luke.
As I looked closer at this strange little person, I noticed his red lips, long eyelashes, and hips.
Then I realized it wasn’t a man but a woman in disguise.
I wondered why she hid inside this big suit with swollen eyes.
Then she explained to me her situation, and let her troubled mind loose. 
You see, she said I am ignored and can’t find a job I like.
I questioned her interests
and she said she got turned down
for president of the mini world twice.
We talked her problem through
and spoke many a word.
When it turned dusk she said
that she needed to hurry out the door
at once. She told me she had a curfew
and must wear a bracelet with a computer
chip. She said if she didn’t return
to her home by 6:00, exiled she would be.
I said I must tell her something
before she ran home, and whispered
in her ear, you are not alone.

Jill Wetzler, CMU

Aerosol on Brick, 1994
after Charles Bukowski

Last night someone tagged the elementary school.
My father, who never even liked Van Gogh,
told me he saw it, blazing
like a wet boil on a leper’s yellow
brick skin.
He wrote a letter to the paper
about the sale of spray
paint to minors,
about how parents today
don’t have a hold on their kids,
about gangs and drug use.
And he read it at dinner,
his voice cracking
in unfamiliar anger.

I didn’t tell my father
I knew the boy who did it:
a quiet classmate who
had spent the last semester creating
a mural on his world history desk
with a Bic.
His steady hand crafted a portrait
of Jesus that could have turned
me to religion, displaying
an attention to lighting and shadows
as precise as a Mount Olive sunset.
Still, his masterpieces would never be appreciated
by the elderly high school janitor,
the elementary school principal,
or people’s fathers.
Though this never mattered
to the boy who insists that one day,
the Louvre will display his art,
whether they want to or not.
Jessica Ramski, CAPA

Neurotic Symphony

The house smells like chemicals and the thunderous drone of the vacuum cleaner can be heard constantly ringing in my ears. My grandmother says that she will not live in a dirty house. If your mother brings home anymore junk down here, I'll kill her, she says to me as she throws the pieces of paper hidden under my mattress across my room.
My words down on paper, my poetry, my soul, means nothing more to her than garbage. She yells at him, he yells at his lazy daughters, they yell at me. Out of order comes chaos, the yin and the yang. The smell of Orange Glo makes me sick. At night I can smell it on my pillow creeping up my nostril while I sleep turning my dreams into artificially scented nightmares. I take it as an omen for the things to come.

The girl at school has bright blue hair once orange now green. She reminds me of a sno-cone with each syrup more delicious than the flavor before it. She broke up with her boyfriend February 15 insisted that March 17 was Halloween and carries a picture of Billy Idol around with her in her duct tape wallet. She wears one yellow shoe with one orange shoe and as she searches for her pack of generic cigarettes in her purse I catch a glimpse of her inhaler buried next to a E.T. action figure. She told me months ago that she would quit. Freshman year she came to school one morning carrying a thermos full of vodka and Minute Maid. It smelled like real oranges.
Sarah Wilson, CMU

Machu Picchu

1
The five girls ascending the inlaid stone steps
lost count at around fourteen hundred.
Their breath formed white mist in the predawn Peruvian
air. It was the Fourth of July.
The dew sliding off the crowded foliage
ticked their rain slicks and clung to their faces.
The undersides of thousands of leaves
quietly exhaled five billion oxygen sighs.

2
The town where they awoke at the base
of the long ascent had greeted them with greedy
crow’s feet. Every fifth face spoke Quetzal.
The other four-fifths spoke tourist.
Ponchos and flashlights were bought the evening
of arrival. On the street, from the solid meld of bodies
sprouted merchandise in hot pinks and aquas. Morning
came first for the five climbing alone.

3
The break in the trees yawned and presented
the city gates atop the eight-thousand foot peak.
The packs they carried slid off, a quarter of the weight
of each stone used to build the one-hundred fifty buildings.
The flashlights clicked off and the girls stepped
out on the first of the terraces.
It was six. The clouds rolled back on themselves
as first light fell on the stones.

Ashley Smith, CAPA

Maloney Gardens

I arrived at Building #5;
this would be my second year seeing it.
I put my things down in my cousin’s room,
grabbed my CD player, and stepped out the steel-1A door.
The palm trees.
I loved it.
The ground was hot, but I loved walking barefooted.
Down below was a grassy area. Indian, Asian, African
children playing cricket. I wanted to play, but paid
no attention.
A Yankee girl, with an American accent, was never going
to be invited to
play cricket.
It reminded me a lot of when my friends would go up to
the field and play
kick ball,
every evening, when the day was orange.
I walked to a corner of the building where the breeze
was cool, very cool.
I sat down and looked over at the streets of Maloney
Gardens.
I put my head phones on, and started listening, not to music,
but to the Trinidadian people.
Reggae, salsa, dancehall, and soca music.
It felt as if I was at my own private Carnival. Just me,
no one else, but the Caribbean breeze.