



BOUNDARY ST

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Boundary Street

Volume Seven

Carnegie Mellon University Creative Writing

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and Performing Arts Literary Arts Department

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Introduction

This chapbook celebrates the seventh year of a collaborative project between students in the Advanced Poetry Workshop at Carnegie Mellon University (CMU) and Literary Arts majors at The Pittsburgh High School for the Creative and Performing Arts (CAPA). Throughout the Spring 2008 semester, CMU students and CAPA students exchanged assignments and worked together on poems, meeting both at CMU and CAPA for workshop sessions and discussion. Because of this project, we all learned from each other, and we're all better writers and teachers. We hope you enjoy reading these poems as much as we enjoyed working together.

Mara Cregan, CAPA
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Daydream in a Playground

The stars were clearer than usual tonight
at that park we sometimes hang out in
and we were pretending to drive
the metal car in the middle
but it stayed immobile.

It was too warm for winter, but I just grinned
and threw my hoodie to the side
and you laughed, shaking the car from the back.
“Turbulence!” you shouted.

“Oh no! Eject! Where’s the red button?”

I searched the dashboard, turning the wheel wildly,
and I grabbed my hoodie and used it like a parachute
to jump out the side
hitting my head on the way
on the car’s frame that was made for
a much younger child.

When I Was Four, My Father Gave Me His Father's Sword. I Showed No Fear When I Followed Him To War.

In the afternoon, we make camp
overlooking a dusty valley.
My father looks east, waiting
for the fire of dawn
to boil the blood of his men
and beat the drums to sound the march.

At sundown, I cannot help but turn
and face west,
not toward home.
not toward the battle ahead.

I see an old man, blind in one eye
struggle to hold his eight-legged horse,
hooves stamping, sparking on rocks.
A bloody head nestled in his lap,
smeared with herbs,
opens its cracking lips.
I stretch and strain
to hear it whisper its dusty auspices.

A raven cackles, wheeling about the sun,
praying for a feast to follow the slaughter.
Another perches on the old man's shoulder,
reading the soldiers' lives
from the weary curves of their spines.

In the morning, we oil the leather of our armor,
but still it creaks, our bodies betraying
our trembling fear, our stormy hearts.
My father blows the signal horn, face flushed,
eyes dark and clouded.

His soldiers bound down the mountain,
lightning jumping from cloud to cloud
before touching the earth below.
I cannot help but follow.

Ripping a spear from his chest
like a splinter lodged in his sword hand,
my father screams my mother's name.
I hear the thunder of his death,
his battlecry torn from my lungs,
shouting my father's soul on
to fight another war.

Caution: Children at Play

These signs still linger
from when children
spilled across the street
playing. Mothers watching from windows.
Now each of those yellow signs
is still fighting on a barren

battleground. Alone on the barren
sidewalk, the smells of chalk, sweat, and laughter linger.
They are the only signs
that a child
ever breathed this place. Windows
shut and glazed can no longer peer on to the street.

The signs on street
corners are the National Historical monuments of this neighborhood, bare
and no longer serving a purpose except to remind us of the past. Wind, oh
wind sweep up the lingering
children
and bring them outside to play with the sign.

Show me a sign
that one day in the street
there will be a child's
laugh once more. Because a barren
world will linger
half dead until someone opens a window.

We look through the window of a decaying house on the corner
and see the signs
huddled around a table and clinging
to their cards out on the street
that tries to lull them back to their bearings.
But they are children

obsessed with their game. There are children
looking out the window
and the signs play poker and smoke cigars. A bear
could not rip the signs
from the street.
We linger

and wait not baring in mind the signs
that watch the children at the windows
and rot away like road kill thrown to the side of the street, like discarded limbs.

Leaving the Pennsylvania Countryside

Something about this stark winter Tuesday made Sweet
Joe pack his pockets with matches and dress in drag.
He pointed at the turnpike east towards civilization and walked
his patent leather high heels to the only traffic
light we ever knew intimately, looking for a car
and a driver with a radio. He said:
you and me is going any place where the sky is blue.

Where we come from, it's night time
more often than you'd think.
Sweet, sunny afternoons can't roost in the thin air
between our Jesus radio programs. Each day,
from the heavens, the long, fat clouds drag
themselves down and rain in every direction.
There's already a light layer of snow
on our noses and we'll stay awake and walk all night
if that's what it takes to jailbreak.

He said we'll walk the highway into tight ribbons, evaporate
into the fog. We'll sleep where tiny Christmas towns
sit in tiers on the hills, hitch rides from strangers,
light cigarette after cigarette and waste all our matches
taking every sweet, slow, loving drag
as though we never breathed cleaner.

On a clear day, we'd lose radio reception
an hour from now, but maybe there won't be any radio
left on the other side of this tunnel. Not even shadows
walk reliably between these Appalachians. They drag
their feet under ours, through hollow valleys where
Joe has fled before. But he and I still make each other

sweet pledges. He says we'll both be proper ladies
when sunlight takes off its coat of evening and lights
rosebuds in our lips. We'll watch the radio dance the watusi
and we'll learn to sing even sweeter than Clarence Ashley.
We'll wear our Sunday shoes to walk through muddy grass, and stand high
on pyramids of turf above where the cow fields once hugged
our ankles and dragged the balls of our feet into the soil.

He saw his footprints and took off his soles.

Now Joe's got this itch to drag someone new
out of himself, claw into the cave in his heart and pull light
from his eyes.

I promise him
we'll buy a shovel, plant a brick in the ground somewhere
new and if it grows, we'll stay there and make a country out of it.
Radio towers and telephone poles will bloom taller
than mountains and walk next to us on the interstates.
And then we'll thank the sweet Lord for dropping us down
where the radio plays even along the flat-dragged land
of light and stars, where we can finally walk sweet as freedom.

For When I'm Gone

Life is the longest, single thing you will ever live through.

And every second you are alive, you will earn.

I promise you that.

Fear of death is the absence of life.

Denial of fear of death is the absence of qualities that I like in human beings.

I will hold you close, when the fear becomes too much.

And it will.

It's okay to be afraid.

Everybody's afraid.

Because one day your heart will just stop beating.

Mine will, too, hopefully before yours.

One day we'll be just as dead as Carine Desir.

You'll be riding coach on your way home from Haiti.

And suddenly it will become very difficult for you to breathe.

There are no accidents.

This one day, fate is just doing its job.

This is the day that you will have complications,
and the medical equipment will malfunction.

This is the day that a bottle of water just won't be enough
and even the doctors on the plane won't be able to save you.

This is the day that someone will go home,

telling their family about how you died on their plane ride home.

How you begged your cousin, "Don't let me die."

How they heard your last breath.

How your last words were, "I cannot breathe."
How when you stopped, they stuck you on the floor of the first class cabin,
covered you with a blanket.
How that's the only time you ever rode first class, and the only time you ever
would.

I just want you know that you always have choices.
Every breath is a choice.
Every time you don't throw yourself off of a bridge,
you are choosing to live.
If you never love me and even
if you don't care who I am,
just promise me you'll live, for as long as you need to,
and feel infinite, even if only for a moment.

Woman Put On Life Support [Due To Pepper Spray Attack]

She will not die.
She has lost too much
and
it is not her time.
Man cannot choose
when they want man to die.
Though at times they do,
but
it is not her time.
We all loved this woman,
and fear for her life.
She does not.
Should not.
And will not.
Deserve to die.

The fall of East McClellan

When I was a girl dreaming I was a girl,
I listened to the bends of willows, watched the violent whirl
of juniper and anemone, against the vast patches of black land.
The bewilderment of her eyes struck me:

I was in love with a ghost sitting on my bed,
we sat there, crying on a torn bedspread,

listening to the voice of my father
inescapable, demanding. The face of my mother,

sullen, pleading for escape. Within a flash of flying dishes,
I became a girl with the wishes of a woman,

holding the stare of the man responsible for the fall
of East McClellan. There was comfort in the coolness of the wall,

the wall that knew of death, that spoke of the troubles my
ghost had caused. The wall once spotted red, my eye

searched for the faded color, to keep my sister's memory alive.
When I was a girl dreaming I was dead, my mother became a shell.

Within her silence
I learned to kill the child's voice that spoke of pain.

My savior, my ghost, found me, crumbling against the wall. We danced
with lead feet and short breaths, whirled past my parent's stage.

We escaped to the bends of the willows, filled our lungs with rain.
We ran to the ends of my earth, took off our shoes

to let our bodies float: I along the waters cool edge,
my ghost, above my reach, she floated between heaven and earth's ledge.

I longed to join my sister. Lost between worlds
and words, I became a girl with the wishes of a man.

Submerged in water, God's liquid dream,
I kissed the eyes of death,

gnarled my teeth against its rotting flesh.

Express Aisle #2

Before your fingers turned a bloody color
in the white light of short wages, long shifts,
back then you were simply Harris,
without signs of inside strife –
no shallow grimace or fluttering glance.
There was only the machine's wail
as you scanned us, read us:
wonderbread, soap, menthol lights, cap'n crunch, candy fixes,
lucky shamrock lottery tickets.
A click of buttons, clink of coin, no words;
only us fleeing
the everyday streets.

Expecting scandalized stares
from the Moscow Ladies, pushing pennies,
you strode as straightly as you could with all the ache,
as if nothing had changed (no price no brand),
just your new name – Martha.
Your pain was like the scalpel's glancing caress,
endless bright midnights when shoppers looked away,
hiding guilty laughter;
your face an inside joke.

You could not speak.
There was no raising of chemical voices
like towers of glass and smoke.
Unable to pour the spirit (lying
chained in a sunken false body)
into their jittery eyes, you croaked
"24.99"

Your hair is squash yellow,
lips and cheeks red from hours
of work at mirrors and registers.
You are not beautiful, but no less charming
than the other lost souls
who make and spend their money here.
Davey, with Downs' syndrome, he's your friend;
and so is Tom, he's clean now – off the bottle, off everything.
But you are the one who sponges
up the nervous sweat of your impatient jury.

Now the tag says Martha – Harris.
Perhaps you thought that for a while this might hide
you from the masses, but not the old-timers,
the ones who know this aisle's past –
like my father who, angry at some crashing checkout machine
failing to do your job for you, called for help.
And in response to your eager rescue, he said "Thank you
Sir," and stormed away.

For the second I stayed behind, blinking
in the dust of his footsteps,
I looked at your undaunted, dilating
face and saw for the first time your
dying blue eyes. But then I remembered
who we were and sprinted
through the automatic doors.

Beijing Zoo Hullabaloo

Dear Z,

Gu Gu the panda was not amused
when you climbed down the fence
in a funk-laced ecstasy
the other day, the beers & fish guts
you ate for lunch all warm
inside your belly.

You didn't know your love
was unrequited. When you tried to hug
her, she tackled you, ribboned
the scars on your shins, moaned
like a crazed typhoon.

When you wrenched back
in pain, did you remember boyhood moments
at the Re-education camp, when the girls
bared their teeth at you, how their lips from afar
were silkworms
that wove labyrinths in your ribs?

Gu Gu bit both your legs, so you bit
back, her thick panda fur chafing
your face, teeth, tongue. Your pea-sized incisors
never reached her flesh, never drew
any blood, and there is no animal to pity—

not you, not Gu Gu, not the doctors
who applied tourniquets on your bleeding ankles,

not the zookeeper shaking her head,
not me, a stranger, who writes admiring
your brave inquiry into the vicissitudes of love.

At the hospital, the smile you bared was true—
your drunk spirit simmered still
despite how Gu Gu rejected you.

Summer

“It’s been a long time since I’ve seen you smile.”
-Nantes, Beirut

It’s been a long time since I’ve seen you smile
while we lay on your mother’s
Kentucky blue lawn,
our fingers and bodies intertwined
like the roots of the willow tree
in my back yard.
We used to watch the stars,
stars you mirrored on my bedroom ceiling
with glow-in-the-dark finger paint that
ran down your sun-kissed arm
and dripped from your elbow
onto my hardwood floor,
leaving a permanent spot,
heart shaped and lonely.
I wish you’d left more splatters
to keep it company,
like the freckles on your back
that resemble the stars on my bedroom ceiling.
when you smiled, I used to count the wrinkles on your cheeks
like the eyelashes
I wish on every day that I
ran my pale fingers through your black hair
and across your skin
that made countless wrinkles
when you smiled.

Manitoba

The pond is a January rearview mirror
Reflecting astral candles and third-degree tree branches.
A boy skates as if guided by a protractor,
Frozen water lacerated by parabolic Swedish steel.
A deer watches through the candlesticks of timber,
Rime covering every limb in a coat of feathers.

He wears his father's Steamfitters' snowcap.
Far off plumes of chimney smoke steam
Over the bald heads of conifers.
Snowglobe flakes flit amongst one another
Like protons. The boy's skates carve hieroglyphics
into the ice. He looks down, tear ducts stinging,
And reads his first and only novel.

When the weather turns, he'll haul sacks of grain
Heavy as sleeping children,
Or build the houses the hold the chimneys and the fires
That send the ash over the tops of the softwood trees.

Love Affair

I fall to wake and reach
to hold onto our light wrapping
around my fingertips.
Warm lassos cut short
by dawn cracking slivers of sun.

Reality drops like
pawns on a chessboard.
Forward has no other options.
Constraining in boxes of
black and white,
walls pierce and
scar to recycle weathered.

I rise to sleep and feel
your words soak up as promise
in each kiss, each grain
of my skin.
There is no doubt
and there is no
real heart—

Two-dimensional rhythm
of a one sided dream.
Contrived but lived,
seeps in circles of thought,
lingering to absorb awaited.

I pause to see and find
that my irises' have forgotten
dreams depart. Only

crystal wet petals,
neither black nor white remain
falling as ashes, smear dark,
stream to lower lip.

Tasted by consequence,
noticed in detail—
heart falls,
martyred to detach discarded.

I rise to sleep and feel
your words soak up as promise
in each kiss, each grain
of my skin.
There is no doubt
and there is no
real heart—

I wake to sleep
I wake to sleep
I wake
to sleep.

Little Traverse

My eyes squint as I look ahead
at the churning bay. In almost seconds
the bright clear blue water
morphed into a tunnel of black,
deep blue caverns whipping the hull like rockets
scratching their way up and over the deck,
plunging into the cockpit and soaking everything in sight.

The water is lifted by the wind
combining into a lethal mixture
lashing out against my neck,
gusts of knives clawing against me.
I sit silently, frozen to the spot,
almost singing in fear.

My hand, rigidly stiff,
as if prematurely jolted into rigor mortis,
pushes the tiller back and forth
the traveler scraping against my finger,
shards drifting away with the ripples.

A wave hooks itself over the boom,
grabbing tight and yanking it sideways
lurching the boat into a deadly heel,
the wind filling the sail
pushing the mast closer and closer
to submersion.

The water constantly shows its strength
rippling to its full potential.
It soaked my shirt long ago,

its bright red color now a dark maroon
trying to push me into hypothermia.
But the fleece grasps my arms tightly,
warming my frigid arms.

The boat refuses to wait for the sea to open its gates
to swallow us up,
to let us plummet to the bottom of the lake
to rest silently on the bed,
bubbles drifting up, yearning for sunshine.

I close my eyes and let the mainsheet slip through my fingers,
the rope burning my hands which have grown numb,
a symphony of shattered raindrops dissolving behind me.
The rigging rests and my eyes open,
a soft nudge beneath my feet
I lift the daggerboard and coast home.

I encounter death on my way to the kitchen

I glimpse through the green film
sticking against the tank's walls:
our last goldfish,
dead.

I stick my hand into the slimy water
and cup the body in a small pool.
The orange scales shimmer
under the ceiling light. He almost
twitches.

The plush carpet muffles his fall
and I'm still waiting for the fins
to start flapping when my mother
arrives, concerned about
stains.

I'm prepared for the solemn
moment over the toilet,
watching the orange swirl down
and the evidence
disappear.

But she drops him in the trash.
Orange splashes on a panel
of brown paper towels. I walk
to the basket and peer
into the eye.

I'm Just Rushed.

Clocks,
you got something on your face.

Clocks, it's come to my attention
that you've been slacking off.
It always turns out that you either have too much time on your hands
or no hands at all.

How is any work
Supposed to get done with you around?
Your lack of support
leaves the rest of us to run around playing
cops and robbers or angels and demons,
depending on how badly our police system has failed us this time.

Clocks, stay off the radio.

Clocks, you have the guts to go down the gullet of a crock,
and star in a dull Disney movie
but not to admit that your acne is as bad as mine.

Here's an idea,
replace your quartz with kryptonite,
and then see if you can still fly.
Maybe you'll finally learn to quit rushing in circles.

Clocks,
will you please show some patriotism,
for God's sake?
Time is running out, the election's near,
and thank God, they're finally putting minorities in the White House.
One less thing to worry about
along with graduation, Y2K, the next killer flu,
the robot uprising, the zombie massacre, and the end of the world
that will happen either on December 21, 2012 or April 13, 2029.

Will you make up your mind?
You're so two-faced ...
Yes, all the puns were intended.
No, I can be cheesy if I want.
Listen, let's just shake hands and part ways.
I can't take your mouth,
and you obviously can't take my venom.
Let's just pretend that you're not all twisted up inside,
that you don't slap me around at four o'clock in the morning
just to let off some steam and get me out of bed.
Let's forget that I dream
of clogging your meshing cogs with sand,
or maybe some of my brain matter.

Clocks, I give up. Just leave me alone.
I'm sick of your tune,
I don't want to see your face.
Yes, that was another ridiculous face pun.

Whiteout

influenced by Walt Whitman's "A Noiseless Patient Spider"

I stand in an open field watching, flake by flake swirl aimlessly
among ominous clouds painting the world's blue screen grey.
Like angels with tattered wings slowly tumbling back
down onto the brittle frost-bitten earth.
Piece by piece the flurries lay a perfect white on icy blades of grass,
as if God just showed me the completion of my unsolved puzzles.
In the distance the frigid condensation compounds,
fragment by fragment till it blankets dead grounds in a valley sitting
between mountains built of God's sparkling white Legos.
Each piece so ironically fragile, melting at the warmth of my delicate skin.

And my soul soars through this life
searching crevice upon crevice –
tangling itself in nothing
but desires spun in
spiders' webs of deceptions.
My soul ripens a full red, swelling
till the webs give, falling –
grabbing for heavenly branches till,
my body rests six feet deep.

Honey And Fire

You skate swiftly, your mind
concentrating on the goal
set out before you. The long sheet of
ice seems daunting, but it doesn't
faze you. You continue to
race towards the red and white
net, Sarge passing the heavy black puck,
without another thought.
You skate past the opposing defense,
your tongue hanging out of the side
of your mouth. Your eyes,
normally the color of honey, burn
like fire. You spin around the
last defenseman and shoot at the net,
bringing your arm back with force.
It bounces off of Emery's chest,
but you're there for the rebound.
You shoot. You score. I cheer.

I sit at home, watching you
on channel twenty-nine, FSN
Pittsburgh. I wear your
jersey, number 87,
my dresser decorated
with your paraphernalia,
my own personal shrine to you.
Your Art Ross puck I bought
at the last game I attended,
the captains C passed out
at the first game this season. Even
your bobblehead, given as a

handout on my birthday last year.
I've even plastered your pictures to
my wall. I wish never to forget your face.

After the game I watch the news,
in hopes of seeing your post-game
interview. When your face finally
does fill the screen, I melt into the couch.
You make me ecstatic every time
I see or hear you, your voice shadowed
with your Nova Scotian accent.
My dad sends weird looks my way, but
he just doesn't understand how you
make me feel. If only I could
visit you at Mario's house,
don't worry, I already know the
address, I would bow to your
feet, praising you for all that you
are and all that you will be.
Sadly, no one will drive me.
That's okay, in August,
maybe even in time for your birthday,
I can bring myself to you, a little
birthday present if you will.

I retreat up the stairs to my
room that's festooned
with your face, and prepare
for bed. I can't seem to let
go of you, your flawless
face plastered to the back
of my mind. I smile as I drift into
sleep, dreaming of the day when
I can have you for myself.
An addition to my personal shrine.

I am Jim Brown,

(Jim Brown is a retired football legend. He is regarded by many to be the greatest football player to ever play the game.)

not of the Cleveland Browns,
not the fullback jesus
juggernaut with chocobo hamstrings
not he who rebounds like manigault
crumpling pads
not he who turns on the sideline
like a tinguely piston
to demolish defender nine
leaving shaggy and scoob
to die with second string,

(Jim Brown is a friend from high school. He currently studies at University of North Carolina. He did not make the football team.)

but of the Basel Gladiators,
but the quarterback veggietales
pirate with preserved juice
but he who fires at the sky
only twice a game
but he who spends 59 minutes
touching the center's cup
to relay the ball
to the team's
Turkish ringer version
Jim Brown.

The World

The world is not
one of those things
that wakes up in the morning,
brushes its teeth,
catches the nine o' clock train
every day
works until five.

The world does not wait
with the rest of us.

The world does not understand
colonialism,
the Industrial Revolution,
the works of Austen and
Faulkner,
and it didn't even take
English 101.

The world is not refined,
it knows nothing of politics
until the headlines run
WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR US
AND THE WORLD?

The world doesn't even know
what happened.

The world does not flaunt
its scars
like trophies, nor
does it join
empowerment groups,
eat fat-free yogurt
or cry.

Jell-O

Jell-O is not good.
Just to put that out there.
Jell-O is not hard,
but disgustingly floppy like a dead fish.
Jell-O is not happy,
but instead rather depressing.
Jell-O is not supposed to be made in flavors like peach.
Jell-O is not and never will be your friend.
Jell-O is not and should not be the state snack of any state.
(Except Utah. But they don't really count.)
Jell-O is not cheerful, enlightening, amazing or brilliant.
You should not praise it else it thinks it is.
Whoever invented Jell-O should be cursed.
Jell-O is not supposed to be mixed with
marshmallow, fruit and a bunch of other disturbing ingredients.
You should also know what it is made of.
Jell-O is not to be eaten unless you are about to die of starvation.
It is recommended you live off locust and honey first.
Jell-O is not supposed to be fed to the ill, and needn't be the
primary food of a hospital.
They should just serve pudding.
Jell-O has no good intentions and is
secretly plotting to take over the world.
Jell-O is not worthy enough to even exist and should be condemned.

Happiness (Is Not)

Happiness is not a surgically steady box,
latex gloves, prying apart
loose ends, first left
off the elevator.

It does not roam corridors,
four legs, a monogrammed
drinking bowl, a vaccination
for rabies.

Mr. Lennon, happiness is not a warm gun,
though you make the idea
seem tempting.

It is not,
not, not the opposite
of sadness.

For those who will not, not forget;
it is not a trend, transient,
time-ticking, a loaf of fresh bread
measured in a week.

It is not digital,
nor analog.

Happiness, friends,
is not friends.

It is not a frozen bridge,
perfectly placed
on a depressed night.

It is not a nine-mile driveway,
a 900-mile drive.

It does not hibernate
when leaves
leave lives behind.

Is This Too Many?

When you ask too many questions people roll their eyes.

When you ask too many questions the saliva that glides your friend's tongue spits out the word "Stop."

When you ask too many questions people often stop taking you seriously.

When you ask too many questions your mind starts to blend real and fake.

When you ask too many questions people put their hands on their hips, slant to one side and shake their heads at you.

When you ask too many questions you're learning less, thinking less, occupying your mind more.

When you ask too many questions you start to feel your voice go.

When you ask too many questions nobody wants to talk to you.

When you ask too many questions the "how" and the "why" get your mind confused.

When you ask too many questions no answers satisfy your desire to know more.

When you ask too many questions, you blame it on the Chinese proverb which says "One who asks a question is a fool for five minutes; one who does not ask a question remains a fool forever."

When you ask too many questions you start talking in circles.

When you ask too many questions you start talking in circles.

When you ask too many questions you start random conversations.

When you ask too many questions everyone starts to give the same answer: "Look on Google."

When you ask too many questions you can't tell when you should stop.

When you ask too many questions you stop getting answers.

An Apple Doesn't Fall Far

An apple doesn't fall

far from the tree
denting the grass where it lands
eaten by yellow jackets and earth

I hope my destiny is not to plummet
onto a lawn
and await fate,
but to fly
a tangible cloud up
over my cotton tree sire
leaves as shiny on one side
as they are green on the other
sequins winking at me
goodbye and godspeed

