BORDER CROSSING
2020 zine

collision literary
magazine
WHAT IS COLLISION?

Founded in 2001, Collision Literary Magazine is a student-run literary magazine that features the work of undergraduate students not just from the University of Pittsburgh, but from all over the world. Our publication is made possible by the funding of the University Honors College.

We accept POETRY, NONFICTION, FICTION, and VISUAL ART.
Dear reader,

Our world is divided — both literally and figuratively — by rigid, oppositional borders; however, in this zine, you will find a togetherness. In the poetry, nonfiction, and visual art that follows, writers and artists are crossing lines, breaking down barriers, and exploring new territories.

Since its inception in 2017, our zine has been morphing, each year emerging as something altogether different. It all began with a silly in-staff April Fools’ Day zine themed around mangoes. Then, last year saw the Student Worker Zine, a collaboration with the Community and Students for Academic Workers, that was created to increase publishing opportunities for student workers. In late 2019, my fellow editors and I developed the Border Crossing zine in response to the escalating global refugee crisis as well as the United States-Mexico border crisis. We wanted to create a platform for underrepresented creators to share work specifically inspired by international and intercultural experiences in an effort to encourage visibility, empathy, and a sense of unity.

From individual grains of rice to symbolic mixing pots, the pieces included in Border Crossing explore a myriad of identities, stretch seas and continents, and span generational his-
tories. They offer fresh perspectives, presenting new and reclaimed narratives that speak out with raw, lyrical honesty. In this issue, our staff is especially pleased to present “Prison Haiku,” a poetry collection spread throughout the zine, which features work written by both “Inside” and “Outside” students involved with the Pitt Prison Education Project. This is the first time that the Collision Literary Magazine has published work from an Inside-Out prison exchange program, and we hope to continue providing a home for the excellent undergraduate writing and art generated in those spaces.

As always, many thanks are in order. First of all, thank you to the students who submitted to the magazine; we wish you the best of luck in your future publishing endeavors. To our featured contributors, thank you for trusting us with your work and allowing us the honor of first publication. Furthermore, thank you to Shalini Puri for helping us compile submissions. Thank you to our steadfast advisor Jennifer Lee for your guidance and enthusiasm, and thank you to Shea Higgins and the University of Pittsburgh Honors College for your continued support. Lastly, we want to extend our gratitude to you, reader. We hope that you will enjoy reading this year’s zine.

All the best,
Hannah Woodruff
Editor in Chief
MASTHEAD

Editor in Chief
Hannah Woodruff

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Espinas
Gabriel Silva, Jr., New Mexico State University
First Place Writing Prize

The seed pod of the yucca,
hollowed and fragile,
bulbous and horrifying.
Needles stick to the skin;
a bearable pain.

The stem splits in two, each half
arching upward to
meet the canopy of thorns,
guarding the mouth
of a carnivore,

a flytrap, a child,
the part that was once the whole
being, like cracked remains
of a puddle, scraped
sounds, annoying, bothersome

child of spines.
Not ugly, refined
with serrated teeth which gape wide
into faded brown,
a wisp of yellow
that is weightless, ancient,
and crushed, easily, within the hand.

The terrifying head of a mutant,
the absentminded castoff
of the father.
Prison Haiku
Various Authors: Inside-Out Program

**Solitary Confinement**
watching seasons change
as winters fall, summers spring
calendars pile up

—Jon B.

subdued evenfall—
perhaps the absence of trees
confuses the wind

—Caroline

Double jeopardy
Punished in being punishment
Never-ending days

—Jeff

Prison doors sealed shut
Midlife crisis juvenile
Pine box splintered bones

—Jeff

They say their goal is
Rehabilitation, but
how can this be true?

—Sam
COUNT TIME! We must stand.

Hot pink kitchen soap
Ants marching under cell door
Twerk and floss and die

—Craig

Nature’s working class
Invaded my cell tonight
Ants or officers?

—Craig

Major, lieutenant
Captain, cadet, warden, cop
America’s court

—Jeff

Long nights, long days, dawn
Awakened by official:
“Stand for count.” Locked up.

—Richard

**Barbed Wire**

Stretched-out silver piles
Razor blades hide in icy night
Sparkling under gold light.

Look out the window
Coil turns to torus, Taurus
Bull of star-lit night,
White bull-form of Zeus
Steals bodies away from home.
Steels bodies away.

—Alissa

Steel ringlets above
Slabs of cement underfoot
Eyes gazing through bars

—Catalina

The bus ride was long
An hour seemed like forever
Suddenly it was too soon

—Tyrique

Instant friends with first-timers
Now home not much different from my
Last, back with my dad

—Tyrique

Bright searchlights, full moon
Quiet, eerie, unsettling
Clang! Class in session

—Kyle

Electric doors clank
COs corral students in
Time for class to start

—Bella
Upon my waking, dread,
Inside prepared for more oppression
Anger and sadness all day

—Mike W.

Crimes harden in place
boys on the block grow to be inmates
inmates remember, remembered

—Maya

Stand, feet on the floor
Concrete walls and cold steel doors
Groundhog day begins.

—Dorian

Locked away hope lost
Prison dreams of being free
Knowledge will free minds

—Dorian

Clanking of guard keys
Bleak walls guide the walk to chow
Just another day

—Stefano

Like brown-clothed lemmings
We pile into the chow hall
And we leave hungry.

—Mikey
The baby boy cries
As he reaches for the phone
When he hears my voice.

—Mikey
alien
Johanna Leo, University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa

I.
My voice wavers as it echoes
In the ballroom
That showcases the dances
I have failed at performing,
The movements that you ask me to draw,
The patterns I must create
For you to believe I am who I say
I am

II.
“Mexican? You are too pretty for a that,”
“Mexican? But you are tall and
Green-eyed,”
“Mexican? But you are not a criminal
And you speak English
And you defy my expectations
Of what you are supposed
To be”

III.
What a privilege to question
My culture and my origins and my ability
To roll my r’s
And have your voice stand tall
At the intolerance
Of your sentence
Cause my voice caves in
After hearing you say it
So I have nothing to answer
(And I don’t want to,
Anyway)
IV.
Failure to fill out proper paperwork and
Be born in a powerful country and
Have enough money to eat and
Be white instead of brown and
Be tall stead of short and
Be unrealistic and
Unempathetic instead of afraid
And running
And craving the freedom
We were promised
Will make you a criminal but
Compliance to these terms
Will make others skeptical, thinking maybe
You still managed to be one,
As well

V.
As I sit on my privilege
I gag in disgust
Of how my eyes and my height have taken me
places
While those with golden hearts
That just happened to be born in cases a little
different
Than mine
Are looked down upon
When they are exactly
The same
As I am
VI.
If this is the world we live in then
I can’t care for the headline
And even less about
The story
It is biased
And unsensitive
And blind
And blind
And blind
Adn bildn
Meddle and Mix. There, written on the pitch-black board of the classroom, are our words of the day. Words we’re meant to memorize, to spell, to define: there they sag loosely around their edges, the dust of tortured chalk still clinging to their letters. Meddle and Mix.

My teacher slowly brushes her hands off and stares out into the class. She looks tired, as if these monotonous vocabulary lessons bore her just as it does us. Meddle and Mix. They’re immobile, those words, teetering between permanence and not, seared into my eyelids. “Who would like to discuss what each of these means?”

I do not raise my hand.

1. Meddle. The sun beats down on my neck as I attempt to clean my hands, sticky from the ice cream that drowns in front of me. An older lady, white with glasses that point up at the rim, glances at me from a distance. She clutches a cane in her left hand, her back arching downwards as if she’s praying to the busy road beside her. My grandfather used to have a hunch like that, a leg that didn’t always work the way it was supposed to. He often joked that it was important to be humble, to bow in respect like him, so that way people could never guess how tall you really were. The old lady looks back at me again, and then at the street. I quickly dump my by-then-melted ice cream in the trash.
and wipe my hands against my jeans. Their powdered blue color turns an artificial pink with the stain. Running up to her, I stretch out my hand with a smile. Do you need help crossing the street? She looks at my palm - still covered with a few rainbow sprinkles - and sneers.

“Not from you.”

*****************************************************************

Since I was a little girl, my father had always told me to constantly improve myself. Whenever I made a mistake, my only task should be how to not make it in the future. I still remember the loud, booming voice that echoed in my ear as I sat doodling on our kitchen table, nodding intermittently to his long lectures. “Every mistake can be made better.”

When I was in the first grade, I made my first mistake. It was recess, and a few of us kids were hanging out at the edge of the playground, making shadow animals on the gatehouse wall. I was assigned the most important task of shaping the elephant, which would lead all the animals on a little parade around the fence. After careful consideration, I molded my hand into a configuration I was sure would not only impress the rest of the group but give me notoriety as the class’ best shadow animal maker.

“Look! She stuck up her middle finger!”

I quickly closed my hand and stared at my accuser confusedly. “So what?”
I’d never been to the principal’s office before. But as I sat there later that day, tears streaming down my cheeks as I faced my punishment for “making an obscene gesture and ‘tackling’ another student,” I realized this was the exact thing my father had been drilling into my head. This was my chance to “improve myself.”

The first thing I did when I got home was ask my dad what was so wrong with holding up your middle finger. He was sitting on the couch, his eyes glancing back and forth between his black coffee and the reruns of Seinfeld that inhabited our TV 24/7. Kramer had just burned himself from a hot cup of joe, and he spit out the liquid so fast it looked like a sprinkler set on high.

My dad’s reaction was similar. “The m-middle finger?” His pupils seemed to bulge to the size of frogs. “It’s, uh, just a bad word.”

I nodded, though I was still confused. “So how do I make the mistake better?”

He glanced at me warily.

“Just don’t do it ever again.”

************************************************

Just don’t do it ever again.

Maybe it was my smile. I saw on a TV program once that people could tell whether a smile was fake or real based on how much the skin around your eyes crinkled. Maybe my eyes didn’t crinkle
enough. Or perhaps it was the ice cream that was stuck to my jeans, the leftover sprinkles that I bet nobody would want to have touched.

The first thing I do when I get home is ask my dad what was so wrong about what I did. What social faux pas did I commit this time?

The volume on the TV is set all the way up and Jerry Seinfeld’s voice echoes loudly in my inner ear. Seems like Jerry has somehow managed to offend his date-again.

“It’s not the ice cream. It’s not the smile.” My dad begins slowly.

“Alright.” I nod, though I’m still confused. Was it my clothes? My nonchalant attitude? The informality of my proposition?

“There are some people in this country that don’t like having us here.” Us? “They don’t like our differences, our…” He coughs quietly. “Our skin.”

“Why?” I ask. “Well, it could be argued that we came into this country that wasn’t ours, where we are different. These things are bound to happen. You could say that we, uh…” This is where it becomes apparent that my dad’s first language isn’t English. “Meddled.”

Meddled. To meddle. Meddling. We are meddling. You are meddling. I am meddling.

I nod, though I am still confused.
"So how do I make the mistake better?"

I’m told that the first thing my dad noticed when he landed in America back in 1991 was the car phone. Apparently, the person that had come to pick him up from the airport had had one of those things built into their backseat. “I didn’t even know you could put phones in cars,” he likes to tell us.

I’ve heard a variety of rather fanciful tales about where my parents come from. My dad weaves stories about dusty gullies where he used to play cricket on the street; my mom sighs as she talks about climbing up trees to pick mangoes. The only thing I know for sure is that India is very different than America.

“Certain Indian institutions are corrupted,” my dad says. “America is a land of opportunity, where hard work is rewarded.” He is and will forever be grateful for his opportunity.

Is his opportunity my opportunity? Should I also be grateful to be in this country, the product of the American Dream? Am I, like him, in a nebulous cloud, not fully belonging to one country or another?

“No, where are you really from?”

I thought I was from Virginia. I know Virginia. I know the rolling hills that make your belly flip every time you cross over them. I know
the smell of oxygen, as clean and as fresh as
the green trees that surround you on all sides.
I know this county. I know the way that the
road winds lopsidedly on the way to the grocery
store. I know the large electrical pole that
government workers attempted to cover with plas-
tic leaves to make it look more “authentic.” I
know this place, these places.

Is home something you know or something you’re
assigned to?

2. Mix. “Your English is really good.”

I stare up in surprise at my checkout lady. She
hasn’t said anything at all during our interac-
tion, not even stopping to laugh at my off-hand-
ed joke about the questionable quality of the
ice cream they keep all the way in the back of
the frozen section. I don’t know how to respond.
It’s suddenly as if I’ve lost my ability to
speak “really good” English, and instead I find
myself giving her a quick smile as I hurry along
to the exit. My eyes don’t crinkle.

In the county where I’m from, everyone’s got a
bit of a twang, a Southern undertone that match-
es well with their Southern “hospitality” and
Southern “values.” Despite my having spent a
good 18 years amongst its residents, despite
sitting in a classroom with its children upwards
of 7 hours a day, I—for some odd reason—lack
‘the drawl.’ The first day of high school one of
my teachers assumed I’d moved from “New York” or
“Boston” and asked me to tell the class about how different it was there.

“Pretty much the same.” I’d answered.

It was on the last day of the annual county festival that I made another mistake. I was standing in line for a pretzel, the soft yet crunchy kind that I’d spent the last few hours salivating for. The air was humid, filled with the stench of hot dogs, rusting carnival rides, and the sickly scent of sweat. All around me I could hear the chatter of my fellow patrons. Some spoke about the weather, about how the popcorn wasn’t as buttery as it was last year. Others seemed to be in more intense conversations—whispering in hushed tones and glancing back occasionally to spot any potential eavesdroppers. I could only make out a few words. “Please” and “great,” which, with ‘the drawl,’ turned into “puh-leeze” and “grrr-aaate.” I tried sounding out the words, sputtering out p’s and growling out “grr’s.” A few people behind me gave me concerned looks when I attempted the “great” for the sixth time, my face scrunched up in concentration. I made it to the end of the line right when I’d felt sure I’d mastered ‘the drawl.’ Who could ever think me something any different than a Virginian? As someone from somewhere other than Fredrick County?

I went up to the man behind the counter with confidence and placed my order. “Could I have an original pretzel with a side of yellow mustard, please? That’d be great.”
He looked up at me confusedly as he wrote down what I said. His eyes don’t crinkle as he smiled out of pity, leaning forward to whisper, “You know, you’re really going to have to work on your English if you want to mix well here in America. It can be a little rough-going at first as I understand it.”

Mix. To Mix. Mixing. Mixed. We’re mixed in. You’re mixed in. I’m mixed in.

America is a melting pot. “It’s one of the greatest things about this country.” My dad says. “We all get thrown in together to form one identity.” I nod, though I am still confused.

But what if you’re water and the pot’s filled with oil? Wouldn’t we sink to the bottom, never to reach the surface? What are we cooking? Will it taste good? Are we really melting?

Won’t we get burned?

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“Correct.”

My teacher smiles down warmly on the student next to me. Her eyes don’t crinkle, but I suppose the student knew what those two words meant, and I suppose that’s enough for her. She writes his stated definitions on the board.

1. Meddle: to interfere in or busy oneself unduly with something that is not one’s concern
2. Mix: to combine or put together to form one
substance or mass

*Meddle and Mix. Meddle and Mix. Meddle and Mix.*
I repeat the phrase under my breath, in my mind.

I need to remember this for the test.
Somewhere I
Fanxi Sun, University of Missouri, Columbia
Somewhere III
Fanxi Sun, University of Missouri, Columbia
Cover Art Prize
Prison Haiku
Various Authors: Inside-Out Program

J-Block
Their fingers will tap
Tap tap tap on the window
“Just keep your head low”

—Becca

Here there be Monsters
Do not look them in their eyes
Lest men do you see

—Mike A.

24 Men to a Dorm
Just waiting on the time to end
One at a time Freedom comes!

—Jihad

My lungs are closing
As the walls keep squishing me
I can’t even brea—

—Lydia

Penitentiary
Slavery in a bottle
That never opens

—Curtis
Voices bounce off four walls
One shadow follows everywhere I go
So am I truly alone?

—Taj

How can summer come?
The breeze trapped, the sun hidden.
Warmth has no home here.

—JP

I love my children
They force me to remember
I’m not in prison

—Curtis

Memories are lost
Who has committed the crime
When names become numbers

—Maya

COUNT TIME! We must stand
Guards walk by, clipboard in hand.
This is everyday.

—Keith

The scent of metal
Only making cents an hour
For some license plates

—Sam
They know I can paint
Never-ending commissions
Never see a dime

—Sarah

Metal detectors
Beep at knives made out of fear
Of becoming prey

—Wayne

Keep this to yourself.
It musn’t be repeated!
Who will guard the guards?

—Steve

I hear the tapping
The fists against the windows
Yearning for freedom

—Uma

I kill me daily
Then I am alive again
Craving new vices

—Wayne

**RHU/The Hole**

Ice, bricks, suffocate,
Then warm urine, finds its place
While souls dissipate.

—Kenny
Maroon sea whispers  
Hands tap windows screaming, help!  
Concrete suffocates  

—Alyssa

Feet stomp, keys clank; fear.  
Metal doors close, shut and lock  
Time ticks by -- slowly.  

—Alyssa

Pawns push for ower  
Until Kings are brought to naught.  
Board games pass years by  

—Wayne

Lady Liberty  
My Freedom you guard so well  
With your lock and key  

—Zap

Presumed innocent  
Until I’m proven guilty  
Through plea bargaining  

—Zap

Those eyes. I wonder  
What’s going on, how long can  
One be fixed in place  

—Nektarios
Blue
Jazmin Herrada, Arizona State University
A Pinoy Story
Sienna Bucu, Brandeis University

Please choose one:

___ Asian

___ Pacific Islander
The Việt Nam War is why I never met my dad’s uncle not because he died there, although perhaps not all of him made it back. I’m told it’s because war changes people, and sometimes they begin to mistake allies for enemies.

I never met my dad’s uncle. Neither has my mom—he wants nothing to do with us not for our merit, but he had his fill of our kind “back in ‘nam”

The Việt Nam War isn’t about America. But now people don’t really acknowledge, maybe because they don’t know, the war didn’t begin when Americans stepped foot in Đà Nẵng and the war wasn’t over when they left.

The Việt Nam War is why ông ngoại is so strong at least, from what he tells me. Because when the Americans were gone, so were his chances of winning. He was held in a re-education camp for (nothing)

7 years Of one rice bowl every 5 days and some vegetables in between as if that makes 36
up for anything.
Of my mom raising her younger siblings, though not all of them made it to his homecoming.
Not the baby.
Thu Trang only made it a year, my mom was barely five when she held her dead sister in her arms.

Post-war, they put a limit on family.
Offer salvation, in the form of a great nation, but only for “immediate” family as if anyone needed the reminder that the man who raised Chị Diem, wasn’t her real father, that she wasn’t a real sister.
She was left behind with her baby girl.

We left a lot behind, on those grainy beaches running barefoot through hot sand as if her little feet could do anything to outrun the Chinooks she could hear always hovering just behind her shoulder.

Maybe she never did, because from the pieces of herself she left behind I inherited the emptiness.

The Việt Nam War is a lot of things. Though the labeled dates precede me, its presence does not.
I feel it on the days, when bà ngoại still prays
for the safety of her family.
I feel it when ông ngoại says—
I want you to be strong. Like me.

Our history
is hidden like my second name
only known to those
close enough to care.
But ông ngoại didn’t fight
to uproot my family and make a new home
on unfamiliar shores
for their voices to be silenced.

The Việt Nam War is about a lot of things.
It turned kind people cruel,
it bred angry children,
ruined our homeland and in the process,
stripped my family of the ability to see it
reborn again.

Names changed.
Our identity,
changed in order to fit in better—
to sound better
in the language of another.

I’ve never been to Hồ Chí Minh City,
I’ve only been to Sài Gòn.
Family memory lives beyond regime changes and
2nd generation immigrants are just that—
Immigrants
with a strong cultural connection
to a land where we weren’t born
but still feels like home.
The Việt Nam War is
the catalyst which introduced my family
to a second home,
split our identity between
17 time zones—
physical land borders
and international liquid ones.

It is why sometimes my mom still wakes up
Screaming—
or a chorus of whispered pleas
(I’m not sure which is worse)
but she needs to see me after
so I can tell her I’m okay.

And war is why we just celebrated
the 25th anniversary of Cậu Chinh’s death,
and it’s the third time I’ve ever met his
Gravestone.
Prison Haiku
Various Authors: Inside-Out Program

Eyes
They said not to look.
It’s about humanity —
Haunting connection

—Anaïs

Dignity for pris—
Civil Rights provided?
Access— informed care

—Grace

I work for big house
And am headed for the top
Slave’s song on my lips

—Zap

We go inside and
Then we go back outside but
They just stay inside

—Young

Outside outside out
Inside inside inside in
Outside outside out

—Young
An abrupt bell rings
so I stand to be counted
and sway half-asleep.

Counted sheep scatter,
The bell jars me to my feet.
I am now the sheep!

—Mikey
Motocyclistes
Molly Flanagan, Southern Connecticut State University
god is dying down the street
Nico Léger, Brandeis University

golden shovel poem after Ai’s “The Priest’s Confession”

on an american sunday in a fragile world above hell,
a world that does not know the first syllable of the word 한국 is
baking in its own spotlight, encased by a single layer of only stained glass. our safety is supported by a metal frame as loose as rosary beads on a chain, spread far apart to indicate a separation. like how, as i sit in the backroom and count ceiling tiles, your father’s congregation sings and weeps. their next plea to god is for him to study bible harder and give breath out of the goodness of his decaying heart to your brothers, and take pity on how they bleed red and blue down the street. heaven, they argue, should not receive them yet. “it’s unimaginably complicated,” father tells his children, and i agree. if god wasn’t distant, what kind would he be? still, my country keeps him that way, a gate indicating our separation. i’m still in the back after services. my mother was hired to guard the gate like it’s her owner’s and she’s some biblical slave. she stands in a still time slot, a jester performing in between
services and time to leave, sacrificing her life
and serving you
your bitter coffee that tastes like colonialism
and the sweat of slaves that Korea and
America know too well. Perhaps we both understand
this kind of working-class sacrifice. God
is no magician, though he lets you study science
in America. Even so
you come back home and exchange medicine for
weapons. And why
does he insist on such a paradox? All you can
think to do here is indulge, not
worry but worry as you get drunk on the blood of
Christ and listen to the news. God has to
meet
the world halfway, but a soldier died last month.
And as you confess, you neglect how the
walls are thinner than your tolerance. While you
openly refuse to wasting your youth, the
devil
listens with a stethoscope. God is dying down the
street, instead.

한국 - hanguk - Korea. “Gook” has been historically used as a
slur by Americans (미국 - miguk -
America) to refer to Koreans.
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