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Dialogue

Staff and writers of Dialogue

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Dialogue has had a turbulent year. While studying in York this past spring, I anxiously read texts, emails, and Chimes articles about the future of our publication. Our print budget was on the chopping block, and although our previous issues had been some of our finest, we had to prove that Calvin still needed Dialogue. With strong and timely support from the community, we showed the importance of print as a medium and the importance of Dialogue as a creative forum.

But this fall has been a challenging time for the arts at Calvin in general. Program cuts and declining student numbers have left the creative soul of this school in a state of fear and frustration. As we put up the posters announcing the fall submissions deadline, I felt like we were quietly asking a question I wasn’t sure I wanted to know the answer to: “does art still matter at Calvin?”

Students answered. With 374 submissions from 161 submitters, reviewed by over 40 jurors, we broke every record we’ve got. You are holding the most competitive and thoroughly juried issue of Dialogue ever. And by reading, you support an arts community that desperately needs support.

So, I have a simple request. Read it all. Be challenged. Be awed. There’s a lot here.

Gratefully,

Jack Van Allsburg

I’m so excited for all of you to engage with this semester’s issue of Dialogue. As I finish out my tenure on staff, I keep thinking of how critical a role this journal has played in connecting me to the Calvin arts community. Through Dialogue, I’ve found a whole new world of people that are willing and eager to encourage and challenge me, collaborate with and inspire me. In a troubling time for arts at Calvin, Dialogue finds creativity in all aspects of our world. I hope you enjoy it as much has I have.

Kendra Kamp
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Visit calvin.edu/dialogue for a link to download Dialogue Mixtape 48.1 for free.
Daybreak
Caitlin A. Smits
Transitory
Caitria Jade

Cotton candy drips from my pen, leaving thin chalk marks on washable paper. I shake it briefly and the letters slip off, dissolving into sugary puffs of colored cream that I taste only momentarily before they vanish.

We are transitory. Give me diamond heartbreak and granite love; stone me in bronze and build me a statue in syntactical gems that never die. Speak igneous truths and metamorphic memories; weld me into forever. Leave behind these damned sprinkled promises and sugar-cookie dreams; wash me clean of your wash-away lyrics and white-board words. Frame me in onyx and beat me into steel sharpness with hateful honesty. We are transitory. Stone me forevers.

Rock slides, earth quakes, and eruptions surround us in sedimentary uncertainty. Yet I walk; yet I stand; tomorrow, I will not. We are transitory. Give me lost art forms blossoming from ink into marble walls and stone columns; give me brick-built belief and silver slivers of what comes next until something that stands now will stand forever. Give me Pantheons and Davids that never fall; beat cool cello music into my passing pulse. Break down the winds. Stone me forevers.

My art does not last in its own fading way; teach me a poem that never dies, a story that always speaks, a dream and a wish and a love that punishes perpetually. No; let the sparkling sugared things die young and let me speak them and watch them fade; let me vanish in the mist we never saw in the first place, and then, remember: we are transitory.

No. None of this. Stone me forevers.
Where We Go
Ethan Hohn

You sit back and listen to the modern wave ocean-grunge that is the chaos of our midday city setting and take in the sights of sixteen swans swimming south down the stream. Their wings thrash as they battle against the current, waves crashing upon their heads. You get a beating urge to run to them and help, but the weight of a sedated dream holds you back. Luckily, they see hope and swim to shore, safe and sound.

It's a breezy fall day and you sway from side to side as clouds pass you by. You pass the beaches of Cape Cod and you're reminded of the way your eyes would become asphyxiated upon the dirt that has been gathering beneath your nails as you ground at your sandcastle in the backyard of your subterranean home, guarded by the Earth. Sounds of laughter and melancholy songs of days passed flood your ears with the same unplaceable feeling you once experienced at a time you can't quite recall. Maybe that's hope you're hearing. You met her once in a coffee shop on the southern coast of the Mediterranean and never saw her again. Every once in a while you're reminded of the way that she would bat her eyes when you were suffocating your emotions. Then you would stop and look up to see her dancing with the fate of sixteen innocent swans.
the coffee stains on my mug are as abstract and thought-provoking as i want them to be; and today they're just more work for the girl behind the counter with an inaudible voice who was hired to make no echoes on the dark, wooden floor.

ask me again at the end about the cloud i just showed you—just don't ask with your voice—because we’re all in a rush. second guess it all and seal your lips before explicit conversation can interfere with the mainstream, alternative scene. i’ll give it to you echoless:

the real cloud of thoughts remains on the horizon in-between pale blue and brake-light red. so sink into the purple atmosphere of the tri-tone sea painted by the artists of extemporaneous songs that are written for the purpose of the vibe. for the purpose of your cloud. it’s all for the purpose of your cloud.

i’ll probably end up thinking about this longer; yet, i guess i’ll never know, because your cloud’s under a sheet in a locked, bronze birdcage just like the other seven billion. and the bird-keeper never repeats the songs and wing-flutters he hears behind the sheets. instead, he says, “ask me again at the end.”

it’s never out of nothing, because in this echoless world, all we can do is echo. So curl your toes into something warmer and let the raindrops pour from your cloud. make your one hundred and forty character auto-biography for the day. our echoless non-noises—(ex)changed from one cloud to another.
Auburnt
Rae Gernant

Close your eyes and imagine a new color—
memorize the sound it makes, and envision the bird
singing it afar in an auburnt tree under a waterfall of stars.

Take the shade apart note by note
until you can see through the window what transparency shows
to all who can— their color know.

Watch the stars pour through the threads,
and touch the weaving wishes of the tune you’ve just begun to hum
as you count the wind by its soulful drum.

Glide across the rhythms’ stream
measuring the color’s swing whenever your finger taps the glass,
then promise me this color’s not your last.
I Am Poor
Christina Weinman
Home Trees
Sara Martinie
Bodies Divided no. 3
Sarah Bass
Cholera’s Nymphs
Nicholas J. Alcock

"...pero lo que llega es una reunión de cloacas donde gritan las oscuras ninfas del cólera." — Federico García Lorca

Where cholera’s nymphs scream in the shadows
I lie down equivocally.
Above, teeming magnolias bow to their respective suns
For better or for worse.
Where cholera’s nymphs scream in the shadows
The coveted rose cranes beneath a jalopy
And the Madonna behind a sofa,
Her virginity a mere speculative glance.
Where cholera’s nymph’s scream in the shadows
The sophists beg for their nettled halos and the
Priests and eye doctors are all
Neocolonialists and orators impromptu.
Where cholera’s nymphs scream in the shadows
I dilute my own eucharist with selenites—
The posh isolation of being an American.
an ode to gloom
Rachel J. House

the beam bearing through the boughs has broke
and where it splintered across the floor
dim purple remains
strewn amidst the fibers and the crumbs
heavy vaporous nothingness pervades
sallow to the touch
the pages once illumined now fade
as the words congeal and dribble out
devoid of fervor
rustlings amplify, shouts are silenced
as brick erodes and fabric cements
their textures undone
for gloom uncovers what gleam cannot
and tepid air stagnates and suffocates
languid local lives
The day you left, I went to the park. I went on the swings. And I decided something. Swings suck.

First, you have to wriggle your now-much-larger-than-your-six-year-old butt onto a dirty strip of rubber between two creaky, clanky chains. Once you’re comfortable (or have decided it’s as good as it’s gonna get), you then have to swing your stubby little legs back and forth, exerting yourself like an idiot until you start moving. And then, once you’re more than five feet off the ground, you realize in the midst of your frantic, strenuous pumping that you’ve suddenly got a headache. Oh, and your stomach isn’t feeling too hot either. Lest you lose the battle, though, you suffer through it for a few more minutes as your hair flies in your mouth, but your hands, knuckles white, are too busy grasping the chains to get it out. The minute your legs give in, you see all that hard work slowly and all at once slip to nothing until you’re in that lame I-can’t-stop-yet-but-I’m-not-really-going-anywhere stage. Your feet drag in the dirt, and you perk up for a moment because you made a beautiful smiley face with your sneakers. But one slip and it now looks more like an awkward sad grimace-half-smile thing. And as it stares back at you like a mirror, you realize something. It hates the swings, too.

It hates how one little slip smudges its good run and totally puts a damper on the whole ride. It hates how the throne of blissful childhood ignorance that could once fly you way up into those clouds with the silver lining now just tugs you right back to crummy old earth the minute you get even remotely close to dreams, happiness, you name it. But I think the thing it hates most is the lonely creaking of the chains when there is no one in the next swing over.

The day you left, I went to the park. I went on the swings. And I decided something. The swings miss you, too.
Bones of metal make
limbs that are cold and so
heavy. They don’t break;
they keep me human-shaped
so I can keep on pretending
(and even my skull is grinning,
though it feels so
heavy). Someday I’ll die,
and the bones they’ll
bake and crack and break:
bone-dry. The life I had,
the life they held,
turns to flowers sprouting,
sprouting from the marrow:
petals clothing cartilage.
While playing guitar on my front porch, some family friends, who have become rather distant due to the fact that my mom dislikes the wife of my dad's best friend, walk by. They live right up the street so this wasn't unusual. We talked. I'm charming with adults if I don't say so myself. I can look like the golden girl when I want to. My brother shows up. He's been looking for a job and meanwhile doing random tasks around his neighborhood or volunteering different places. The job hunt is still rather unsuccessful. When these family friends ask what he's been doing this summer, though, he calls his work

“diverse”

Oh, how great we are at making ourselves look okay.

Earlier that day I had gone to my university's library to pick up some of my textbooks that I checked out for the semester. I was intending to swim as well, but the pool opened at 11:30 and my dad needed me back in my mom's office by 12:05. I decided it wasn't worth the trouble to swim for 15 minutes. I should have. But logging onto Facebook on the computers I've typed numerous papers on, I saw... pain. So I sent a quick text not expecting a reply, either because I think less of myself or that's the way these texts tend to go.

“I'm praying for you”

It doesn't really warrant a reply and I'm not really praying because I don't pray, but it's one of those things people like to hear and I don't feel guilty lying about it. The guilt comes later so I do pray that night

just in case

I get a response. More than one. More than expected and suddenly I find myself driving on a freeway all the way across town with red flags springing up in my brain. These decisions are usually silly/stupid and driven by a selfish motive. But I don't stop to analyze the motive.

I just drive.

I think I will probably get in trouble with my parents that night or the next morning. (I do.) And I think perhaps there will be more trouble tonight, but I'm not sure if that is a motivation or an observation.

I drive on.
We walk.

Past a large church, into a fenced off construction site (his idea not mine because I’m not a risk taker), around some catalog houses, all the while catching toads, naming them, and telling silly stories of little kids we love (but I won’t admit that I do). A summer at camp changes you.

“I agree”

I tell about a dumpster fire and he tells about a disaster

and we laugh

It was a different conversation than I had expected, but I should have guessed. No one wants to talk about their dying mother.

We end sitting in the grass on the edge of a parking lot and a field with sprinklers only a few feet forward from an intersection with tall orange traffic cones (one of which he is tempted to steal and bring home— he doesn’t). He makes a bird’s nest on my knee while telling me about the God he loves (and the one I do, too). He says,

“it makes me sad”

me too

When we reach the silence I anticipated, I make an attempt to ask, subtly, all the questions stirring in my mother’s head. He doesn’t understand what I mean (classic). And instead he says,

“I just really want
to kiss you right now”

classic.
honest.
so like him.
But also rather surprising given I was expecting the conversation to turn to hospital rooms and gross casseroles and deflating balloons and too many fucking flowers (why do people send those things).

But the strange thing is
none.

Which is only strengthened when he says,

“don’t let me”

and I say,

“I won’t”

and quieter,

“I learned my lesson”

We pinky promise to be friends (just like kindergarten) and I make sure I leave before we can break that. I love this kid. I always have. He breaks my heart and then gives me hope again and again. I know he will again before we are through.

I get lost on the way home—tired and disoriented. But I make it home. I eat string cheese and chocolate-peanut butter no-bake cookies and then fall asleep reading about why I should believe in God. They almost got me convinced

but not quite

I wake up in the morning realizing that every time he touched me I shook a little. That was the fear.

I get a text from her saying I’m all clear, he’s not coming, which makes me just the least bit disappointed. But glad that the letter, which I stared at for a whole minute before pushing up the little lever thing so that it would fall out of the blue tray onto a whole bunch of other hopes and dreams and love collected at the bottom of the mailbox just outside the campus store, will have time to reach its destination.

I swear he walked by right as I let go

in a crowd of mostly boys and two girls
with his lanyard hanging out of his pocket,
just like always.

“hey hey there”

it’s been a while, hasn’t it?

wanna talk?
hand sketches no. 2 & 3

Morgan Hayden
dear you,  
Taylor Hartson

if i could give you my feelings, i'd give them to you in all the things that make me.

i'd give you my twisted thoughts in the acoustics of my favorite songs, in the melancholy chords of voices filled with angst and helplessness. the tempo keeping time with a heartbeat that isn't sure whether it should be racing or slowing.

i'd give you my introspective mornings in a cup of coffee situated on a countertop, in a lone fingertip spinning circles around its rim. the steam slowly working its way between the cracks in a palm that can't seem to pull itself away from the burn that slowly begins to take hold.

i'd give you my gut-wrenching nights in a hand cramp that ghosts the fingers gripping a slowly dying pen, etching the words of pain and hurt into the lines of a tear-stained scrap of paper. the ink soaking into every pore and coursing through every vein.

i'd give you my blissful dusks in the words that are tucked away between the pages of my favorite books, the ones that, despite being picked up and turned over in my hands over and over again, never get worn out. the shaky lines outlining the presence of memories contained in those words.

i'd give you my empty corners in the stars that house something i've lost but can't quite identify, the something that always seems to be missing but never found. hidden in-between the spiral of galaxies and at the center of black holes and quasars lies some meaning and purpose that on even the best of days eludes me.

but feelings weren't meant to have form. they were meant to stay tucked away, making us long to give them to someone else, just to know that we're not the only ones.
afternoon tea
Taylor Hartson

a neighbor's report of a shaven beard
stammered excuses from a half-conscious state
calloused hands decorated with scars
a gathering place of rich conversation
and shared experience
faces of pity
five trembling pairs of hands
sadistic laughter
a searing, twisted pain
twelve

betrays a failed obligation
struggle to gain any ground that might enable escape
intent on gleaning retribution
told to keep its opinions to itself while business is taken care of
forced to watch
clench at dust that seeps into lungs
accomplishes each lash
extracts soul from flesh
then black

yet somehow, there still exists a concern for mismatched teacups
Bodies Divided no. 2
Sarah Bass
Two monarchs—Queen and King—flutter together, having strayed away from their swarm. Together they hover far above a maze of footpaths, raceways, spires sheathed in glittering crystal. Together, alone in their community, is where We belong.

Far below, the streets are teeming, congested with bags of elastic skin and resilient bone sheltering one-million hearts; souls giddy with enthusiasm. Ours could be an intense intimacy; an all-consuming, trembling fire.

Gliding over these streets, ears assailed by thunderous cries of endearment and the pounding of feet; Ours is a kinetic correspondence. We bear our burdens upon our backs; I'd gladly take yours on—here, let me hold you.

Thirteen pairs of legs dangle by the lakeside. The waters below our feet could kill in a week, though the currents appear as clear as the skies above. Any one of these boats could ferry us home, and it’d take a glorious stretch of time; one eternity and a day.

But eternity passes swiftly. Twenty-thousand sensuous steps, come and gone before the sun has the chance to set, and the world returns to ink. Still, somehow, two monarchs manage to settle their feeble frames upon the culmination of Our crowns.
I stood upon the soapbox yesterday.
I raised my fist.
I raised my voice.
But someone simply spoke back
To me, and I
Used the soap instead to wash my hands.
I let
bubbles of protest slip silently
Away, and Pop!
They were gone, and I
Filled the empty box
With newspapers,
And notebooks, and conviction,
And passions, and flames,
And bars of chocolate,
And a U2 album. And I
Shoved it under my bed
Before the simple someone
Could barbecue it
Around a bonfire,
To the tune of dissentless prose.
From the Elephant Café
Hailey Jansson
Elephant Explorations
Quinn Bugner
Cardboard Cutouts
Ericka Buitenhuis

Usually, most people put burbling fountains, rose trellises, or even the occasional garden gnome in their backyard.

Not here.

Typically, most people try out being God, brightening up the cottage siding by planting lilacs, rhododendron, and peonies hand-picked from the flower beds at Home Depot.

Not them.

Generally, most people picture a forgotten tire swing, listing on the breeze, a rusting set of monkey bars, or the hot metal kiss of a slide when they think about growing up.

Not me.

The monument of my childhood has laid, unmoved, in the palm of a carefully clipped lawn.
for as long as I can remember,
the tips of a thousand summer suns
passing slowly
across its wrinkled and weathered face.

He had companions,
but they've long been captured
and caged away
in some forsaken wooden barn
leaving him to stand alone,

presiding over that distant pond
whose waves lap
at the corner of my memory.

Here, at the lake,
a child
found her sea-legs,
learned how to set a hook,
and catch mayflies
in the fading fever of August.

All while under
the unblinking gaze

of the all-seeing walrus.
waves
Martin Cervantes
Jurors

Alexa Vander Leest
Alexandra Johnson
Andrew Lowe
Anneke Kapteyn
Bekah Inman
Bethany Fennema
Brenna Mahn
Caitlin Smits
Corrie VanderBrug
Cotter Koopman
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Meg Schmidt
Michael Lentz
Morgan Hayden
Patrick Jonker
Quinn Bugner
Sara Martinie
Sophie VanSickle
Tyler VanZanten
Whitney Badge
Zack Smidstra
About dialogue

Founded in 1971, Dialogue is Calvin College's student-run creative journal, showcasing pieces submitted, edited, and curated by undergraduate students.

Dialogue publishes work in five categories: prose, poetry, visual art, photography, and music. Blind student juries for each genre evaluate all submissions and select the finest pieces for publication.

In addition to submissions, the Dialogue editorial staff is always looking for students interested in doing layout, helping with promotions, or serving as a juror.

Visit calvin.edu/dialogue to get more information on joining the staff, joining a jury, or submitting your work.