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Dialogue

Staff and writers of Dialogue

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dialogue
To submit to Dialogue is a strange thing. It's a risk.

While our policy of anonymity protects the identity of rejected submitters, it's the submitters we publish, rather than those we reject, that face the real danger.

Because in giving your work to others you face the possibility of criticism and distaste. Sharing creativity is an inherently vulnerable action. In doing so, you put your voice on display for anyone to consider.

As editor of Dialogue, I have witnessed firsthand the creativity of students at Calvin College. For five issues now, I have read, listened to, and carefully looked at every single submitted piece. In doing so, I have seen a beauty that exceeds description.

Because to submit to Dialogue is to enter into a community of vulnerability. A conversation where students share themselves with one another. How strange and beautiful a thing that is. How precious.

This is my last issue. I leave Dialogue in good hands and with an exciting future, but I will miss it fiercely. I hope that by reading it, you see what I have seen, and you too are awed by what you find.

Thanks for the beauty. Thanks for the conversation. Thanks for letting me be part of it.

Signing off,

Jack Van Allsburg
Editor-in-Chief
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Download Mixtape 48.2 at calvin.edu/dialogue.

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Flippant remarks scarred the insides of her fingers
and when you shook her hand
you felt them—
tiny ridges of the letter U for
unapproachable and
unkempt.

She would tug the ugly
scabs on each finger
until they propagated to her wrist.

(When word got out, she started
wearing gloves and pleather sleeves
tucked up in her sweatshirt.)

They spread to the back of her knees,
earlobes, and armpits
and metamorphosed into new letters
F, V, P, and R.

(We didn’t know what these letters stood for,
and we didn’t want to ask.)
To Rise
Anna Delph
nothing seems more permanent than stars
born out of cataclysmic explosions and creeping
processes in a great spherical cavity
constantly carried through black expanse by way
of ever-changing cosmological constants
but then you learn that its life ends as it begins
that a star’s life is as transitory and volatile
as the processes out of which it is born
and that in its death the atoms contained within
its core are crushed so thoroughly that
they lose their old identities
and you remember that the light you
see is merely a ghost of what has been
and at the end of its life a star will be nothing
more than a cold black cinder
destined to wander endlessly through the
galaxy
Mulch

Erin Koster

The gloves I should have asked for do not cover my naked hands, poised to clothe themselves in fistfuls of shredded California tree skin.

My own dries under its new coat, dirt crawling into the cracks of knuckles, burrowing beneath cuticles, tracing lines like some earthy fortune teller.
Rebirth
Nathania Wijaya
Deprived Spirit
Eunlee Cho
Gypsophila

Valerie J. Oresko

I’ve wrapped her in membraned tissue paper, as thin as skin, and placed her in a shoebox I’ve been holding on to. The shoes were an impulse buy and remain generally untouched in a corner of the closet. But I’ve always thought the box was the perfect size for a gift. Glancing out the window, I notice the light layer of snow peppering the ground. I put on coat, boots, hat, and gloves; pick up spade and shoebox; walk outside. The ground is cold and hard, and it’s a chore to pull up the soil. I’m sweating from the effort, and soon I’ve stripped off coat, boots, hat, gloves; abandoned the spade to claw at the earth with bare fingers; planted the shoebox under dirt and stones; and found myself crouched naked, mere inches above, whispering, “I’m sorry, I’m so sorry. I’ve never been much good at growing things.”
The Spaghetti Squash Girl

Evanne Zainea

You are contentment.
Your eyes shut in the sun.
Important
intellectual
neglected
things open on your lap.
Remember that day I came up to you
discontented?
It was a little cloudy.
And your face was too as you stared
into some tupperware of something
the something being
undercooked spaghetti squash
and I asked you what I should write about.
Remember you said that the best kind of writing
is writing about the small.
That I should write
about some girl and her undone spaghetti squash.
And was that
a reflection on her successfulness?
And was that tupperware actually a synthetic crystal ball
predicting that you would never be
a good wife
a good mom
and apparently not a good feminist either
which is what you were normally.
Your feminism coming undone
in this tangle of a plant
that you felt was a scourge on your womanly identity.
And I said
I didn’t know about writing about you
because I wanted to write
about the deep
ponderous
questions
of life.
But when I sat down to write those
deep
ponderous
questions
of life
I wrote about you.
Senecio Scaposus
Courtney Hill
Echeveria Leucotricha
Courtney Hill
Kite
Kendra Larsen
small series 1.1–3

Jay De Man

you have given
(to me)
only cardboard things

yet of them i
will build
a raft to your thoughts

you’ve willed to shred
what i
slow-paddle forward

cannot contrive
travel
there’s no map to you

or craftily
devise
reaching such secrets

it somehow may
happen
unexpectedly

having paddled
not to
succeed but to try

for receiving
what’s sought
as by some freak slip

this wavering
is love
tearing at all health
Mr. Rogers Was Wrong

Gregory Manni

labyrinthine corridors of cookie cutters
houses like records with repeats and stutters

I’m not sure when, but probably around the time the neighborhood kids stopped coming outside to play, I realized I don’t like the manicured lawns or the silent echo of concrete streets. To me, it’s an in-between. Not social enough, as everyone closes their front doors, back doors, blinds, and garage doors, and not natural enough, with tall white fences that tower over neatly sheared trees.

Heaven forbid I see your child playing in the yard beyond that alabaster barricade. Heaven forbid I get a glimpse of my own childhood, when the plastic sandbox was still as open as the seashore, and the patio brick anthills were giant like mountains. Heaven forbid he get a glimpse of me.

“When those kids stop walking on the black path, we can plant grass seed over it, post a sign, and call it a park. There will be birds and bees and no one will know. Yeah, the housing development down the street is going up fine. We’re telling people it’s the perfect haven after a long drive from work, where you can sit, and watch the sun fall, and you don’t have to say a word to anyone. You don’t have to wave to them. You don’t have to look at them.”

The trees that found their way without a blueprint, the ones that grew on their own, stick out of fresh asphalt like innocent splinters; you can drive by and “Observe what nature might have looked like!”

In the next room, there is an exhibit on picnic blankets, where humans would sit and laugh and eat together.
Oil Spill
Corrie VanderBrug
Promises to Keep
Jonathan Manni
Winter, Clouds

Erin Koster

She talks about her depression like it’s a bad knee: it comes and goes from day to day, and it acts up, but only sometimes, when the weather turns dour. In the winter, I find her among the clouds, dropping snowflakes she saved from last year. She lifts one at a time between forefinger and thumb. They were so beautiful, she says, it would be a pity not to use them again. She paints our reflections in watercolor on frozen ponds and lets them solidify overnight. I watch ice skaters salchow along the curve of her chin. One of them has a knee like hers, she observes from behind my shoulder. She can tell from the landing.
small miracles

Jenna Griffin
Jet Black Heart
Jamie Whitten
re(fracture)
Bekah Waalkes

Forget the city—steel in rivulets,
bright in siblinghood;
Ever-lively, matchless hills:
stale in their grit, their tunnels.

Personify your way home:
let bitterness be a bright
constellation, your only guide,
a winter-dry crack in your palm.

And then at the end, yours and now mine,
you will stagger down and
watch me stall upwards and
we will join and
we might sing an elegy to some
Juliet, all three thousand two hundred and twenty nine of her.
Melting Mosaic

Randy Foreman

Dubois, how do we connect?
My day is a hop and skip further than yours
But white men can’t jump.

This double-takin’ mind of mine won’t quit.
Until I was 18 I was so much more me,
I’ve been wondering where to collect myself

I’m too dark to be truly American, too light
to be truly black.
My attempts at compiling myself are second
To a 3rd grader’s magazine collage.

I vainly shower my brown body with Wes Montgomery’s star dust, Nina Simone’s flames and Sam Cooke’s blood.
They fall, fan out and bead off me without leaving a stain.

I collect them in a jar and try to consume the mixture.
It won’t stay down. I melt it and inject it.
The mixture runs one lap of my blood circuit,
Creates a clot in my heart and sublimates through my brown skin.

Someone show me black life and black life lived to the full.
Give me a history I can live with. Give me a history I can live for.
Give me something I can wear beneath this mask, behind this veil.

What is held behind this veil?
A 3rd grader’s magazine collage.
Reverse Landscape

Rebekah Inman
Limbs
Jesús Delgado
Amethyst + Flowers

Michael Lentz

I keep having this vision: as I’m walking down the path, I get a call that someone in my immediate family has died—either the mother who is my whole world, or the brother that I love but rarely agree with, or the sister who is pregnant, or the sister with whom I shared a womb, or the brother that I pray for every day at 10:00am. My sight doesn’t go blurry—it goes black; my breathing isn’t staggered, it’s stopped. I collapse in the grass, or in the leaves, or in the snow, or in the mud depending on the season. All these strangers from the path surround me. None of them know who I am. All of my friends are either in class or another state. I hear a voice I don’t recognize trying to get my attention because I’m still on the phone. Why is a stranger calling? Maybe because it wasn’t just one of my family members—maybe it was all of them at once and I’m the only one left with this blood and these bones.

I keep my phone on silent all the time because I’m afraid of getting that call, but I still check it every couple feet because I don’t want to miss that call if it comes. I’m afraid that my vision could come true, but I’m more afraid that I won’t be able to remember the last words I shared with the one who has gone.

When my mother was twenty-four, her mother died. Fifty-three. She died five days after Mother’s Day. She died while my mother was angry with her, but not because my mother was angry with her. She died of heart failure. I think because she had smoked at least one carton of cigarettes a day for more than thirty years. I don’t know the last thing my mother ever said to her mother. This year, my mother turns fifty-three and I turn twenty-four. Even though she’s never smoked, I’m afraid that there are other ways the heart can fail.

I’m walking into the kitchen from the garage, my hands dripping because I didn’t get a vase for the flowers. I’m not surprised by how quiet the house is. On my way, I walk past the bay window that looks out from the dining room. I see Mom on the porch swing. She doesn’t see me because she’s looking up at the trees. I place the flowers on the counter, and open a cabinet in search of a vase. Timmy walks into the kitchen.
“Oh, hi, Mike. Wow, nice flowers. Mommy’s?”
“Yeah, do you think they look nice?”
“Nice.”

He walks outside. I watch him move toward Mom’s swing. Pausing, he indicates that he wants to sit next to her. She moves her book to make space. He adjusts himself on the seat, sliding up next to Mom, wrapping his arm around her shoulder as best he can. He rests his head on her shoulder and she, in turn, rests her head on his. This is their routine.

I remove the plastic wrapper, clip the stems, add water to the vase, then spread and arrange the flowers, humming as my grandmother would. It’s late morning, the perfect time for fresh flowers. My twin enters, wordlessly, from behind. Stray rays from the skylight make her squint and stretch. Her eyes adjusting, she yawns and smiles. I shake my hands dry. Arm-in-arm, my sister and I walk through the back door to be with Mom.

I’ve been moving through that doorway my whole life. I was carried through as an infant, I tore through as a child, but with age I have learned to walk through. I take a seat on the deck with my mother, my two brothers, and my two sisters. We’re catching up. We haven’t made any plans. Mom wants, most of all, to be surrounded by her children, so we have come. I’m not really paying attention to the conversation, but we’re laughing, and we aren’t arguing as much as we could be. And today, that is enough. Sometimes that’s what celebrating looks like.

I wonder what I’ll say to Mom as I leave today.

....

I’m walking on the path and I pull out my phone. Scrolling through my recent calls, I’m trying to find Mom. I find her name, finally, attached to a missed call from three weeks ago. As I raise the phone to my ear, listening to the ringing, I breathe fresh and deep.

“Hey Mike, can I call you right back?”
The POINT

Rachel J. House

Once upon a time, there lived a circle.

This circle desired knowledge of all things angular, for it was but an infinite array of vertices. The vertex, oh, what joy: the connection of two lines. Greater for its construction from the great.

This circle declared few more interesting than the line, for the line was the foundation of the angle, the angle the foundation of life. Line was love. Line was beauty. Line was breath. The connection between two points was a journey worth the taking, worth its weight in ink. To pace between was to dance. To go as the crow flies, to remain on track, heading towards the sunrise, nose to the grindstone, face to the fodder, to traverse amongst the gods.

The circle knew of angles and worshiped lines, but the Point, the POINT was something beyond anything. The origin of all energy, from whence all originated. god. God! GOD! Now that, that was something else. The ink need only brush the page, and lo, a point appears. Denser than all else. Wicked in its simplicity. POINT, oh, POINT thou art my god.

The circle was dumbfounded when it considered the point. The POINT—so much more than the circle. So pristine in its clarity. So magnificent in its complexity. So desirous in its many facets. If angle was joy and line was life, POINT was so much more. POINT was the form to which all aspire. The circle loathed its POINT-like facade, knowing its core lacked substance. The circle loathed its perimeter. Oh, why? Why need it be more than infinitesimal?

So The POINT became god, and god became too great to worship, too magnanimous to hazard praise lest it fall short.

The circle was distraught, for its god, though minute, weighed heavily.

Once upon a time, there lived a circle.

This circle was constituted of others more minute and from these others, the circle did emerge, and the circle loved—loved that from whence it emerged—and worshipped the infinitesimal but knew not the infinite.
Carrion
Caitlin Anne Smits
Plain Jane on the Wishy-Washy

Erin Tanis

Indistinct patterns of predisposed pitter-patter
Twist and turn in the pastoral pumpkin patch
Three paces from the hatch-back.
There’s more than one way to skin a cat.
Free-falling and over-flowing,
The lost letters of the lone crow
Flit idly in and out of stone.
Treacherous as it is in all its seditious destiny—
Standoffish, if you ask me.
Little did you know, I’ve got another you back home.
We pick pockets and ride rockets,
Knives in all the electrical sockets.
And we’re both wary of each other’s tongues,
Arbitrary as words seem;
Moreevennowwhennooneeverreads.
Buddha Gets Breakfast
Daniel Alderink

“Too hot,” the Buddha muttered as he quickly set down the cup of coffee. It was 10:30, and he was sitting in a booth at a local diner. He had been wanting to get out of the apartment. Granted, Buddhists are supposed to live life in seclusion, but how are you going to spread enlightenment if you never go outside?

The waitress came up to the Buddha’s booth. He looked at her name tag—“Tina.”

“How are we doing? Ready to order?” she asked.

“I’m doing great, Tina,” the Buddha replied, “but how are youuuuuuuu doing?” The waitress looked at him a bit startled.

“Oh, just fine and dandy.” she replied, her voice and eyebrows raising into a question. “It’s probably going to be another busy day!” She reverted to her normal waitress tone and hoped he would just order something.

“Hmm.” The Buddha squinted at the waitress, lifting his folded hands to his mouth. She waited for him to say something. Anything.

“I’d definitely recommend our grits!” she said. I can’t remember the last time anyone ordered grits, she wondered. And the only people who order them are old people. This guy’s like 30.

The Buddha glanced down at his menu, trying to find the grits. “There they are. . . . ‘Grits, served with your choice of gravy, cheese, or eggs. Biscuits on the side. $5.99.’”

“What exactly are grits?” the Buddha asked.

The waitress froze. What are grits? Isn’t it like oatmeal? But a little different, right? Is it made out of eggs? No, you serve eggs with it.
Maybe corn? That sounds about right? What’s the word? Pudding—no—porridge! That’s it! It’s not like this guy is a food critic or something, right? If so, why would he be here at 10:30 on a Thursday?

“It’s a corn-based porridge,” she said with confidence.

“Well, let’s go with the grits then.” He didn’t usually try new foods on a whim, but how bad could it be? Sometimes it’s okay to stray from the path. “And I’ll get bowl of fruit on the side.”

“Alrighty then,” the waitress replied with her previous politeness. She rushed back to the kitchen. The Buddha didn’t notice.

He was too busy thinking about the grits. He had originally meant to just leave the apartment and get some fresh air. But now, grits! Granted they have been around for centuries. But this was completely uncharted territory.

The Buddha’s lifestyle was deep-seated in tradition, routine, and ritual—whether he wanted it to be or not. Based both on his religious practices and current economic position, he didn’t have opportunities to branch out or break from his way of living. He wouldn’t call it a rut; he was very content, which was one of the most important practices for achieving enlightenment; he was happy with his position in life.

But for the moment the grits consumed his being. Grits! He had made a confident, decision for the first time in a long time—the universe wasn’t dictating his every move. And it felt great.

He sat there for the next five minutes or so, reflecting on his newfound independence, fantasizing about what turn his life might take next.

The waitress approached again slowly, thankful for every second she didn’t have to spend with the weird bald dude in the booth.
“Sir, I’m terribly sorry, but we’re all out of grits. A large group of gentlemen came in early this morning for breakfast. I love moneylips. Apparently they ate through our supply for the week. Would you like to order something else?” She reported this information in the most delicate, waitress-like way she could.

The Buddha said nothing and shifted his gaze to look out the window. Across the street, he saw a single shopping cart slowly blowing across the Costco lot. After a few seconds, it hit a pothole and stopped.

The waitress was holding a menu out to him. Somewhere in the restaurant something started beeping loudly. He suddenly lost his appetite and wanted to leave.

“I’ll just take the bill,” he said, solemnly staring out the window. The waitress was dumbfounded. She returned to find him with his eyes closed, his hands folded in his lap. She didn’t really want to know what he was doing. She quietly set the receipt on his table.

The Buddha remained sitting with his eyes closed. Did he fall asleep? she thought, Is he praying or something? He isn’t disturbing anyone.

Thirty minutes later, the Buddha slowly opened his eyes and let out a long, deep breath. He glanced at the bill.

“Two dollars,” he said to himself, “for coffee.” He placed a five dollar bill on the table, got out of his booth and put on his jacket.

As he walked to the door, he glanced at the menu on the wall above the bar: “Grits, served with your choice of gravy, cheese, or eggs. Biscuits on the side. $5.99.”

He smiled sadly, waved to the waitress, and left.
Magazine Figure Series
Jaclyn Kuyers
Observing

Courtney Zonnefeld

From my corner on the other side of the coffee shop, I notice that the girl has never once glanced up at the rack of magazines above her. She types away, occasionally watching the drawing in-progress in her friend's sketchbook, but for the most part focusing on whatever essay or poem is developing on her laptop. She bit her lip for a moment there—I thought that only happened in stories. But there she is, unconsciously staining her teeth with red lipstick as her fingers click-clack across the keys.

I sat in that exact spot not exactly two months ago, trying to write the cover story for the magazine stacked directly above her unknowing head. I don't bite my lip when I write—at least I think I don't—but I tapped my fingers against that table plenty of times, checking the rhythm of my words.

A woman, sitting where that couple is now, leaned over to me and whispered, “Can you stop? I've got work to do.” I stared at the screen for ten minutes after that, just trying to force the conclusion to throb through my fingers again.

But this couple appears far too interested in wedding planning to notice that their neighbor has switched to adjusting and re-adjusting her cup into its saucer. She clinks it into place, slides it back up the side, writes a sentence, and then repeats the process.

Her friend has finished her drawing—a quite excellent portrait of the writer-girl, actually—and has decided to browse the magazines. Bon Appetit, Click, Cook's Illustrated, Mental Floss, The Great Discontent, and Modern Culture—Modern Culture, mine—I stop pretending to drink my latte and simply stare. She chose my magazine, the one with my article, the one I wrote, the one I wrote here.

She tucks it under her arm, carries it back to the table, and opens it. The writer-girl glances up for a moment, nods at the cover—with familiarity? Approval? Disinterest?—and returns to work. The friend places its thin form on the table—how well I know its weight, the feel of its page, its layout—and begins to read, a finger tracing each line.

My coffee grows more and more forgotten with each page she flips. Finally I see a flash of red: the two-page spread that opens my article. There it sits, at home and a stranger in its birthplace.

And yet—across the table—the cycle begins again.
# Credits

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About dialogue

Founded in 1968, 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 learn how to join the staff, join a jury, or submit your work.