blackbird

blackbirdartsjournal.com

A biannual collection of poetry, prose, and visual art created by the students of Middlebury College.
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COVER ART AND FINAL PAGE
Cordelia Prouvost
letter from the editors

New letter from the editors to go here in final print.
Blackbird is always accepting prose, poetry, and visual art submissions to be considered for publication in upcoming issues. We set no limit on the number of submissions per student, and we encourage all forms, genres, and media. All submissions are reviewed anonymously.

- Submissions should be sent to blackbird@middlebury.edu.

- All visual art should be submitted sized for print at a minimum resolution of 300 DPI. Lossless image formats such as PNG, RAW, or TIFF are preferred. Please contact us if you need help photographing or formatting your artwork.

- If you are submitting a longer written piece, please mark one or more excerpts (under 15 pages each) that you would like us to consider for publication.

- We do not typically publish anonymous pieces or pieces credited to pseudonyms unless there is a fair reason why you wish to maintain anonymity.
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UNTITLED
EDWARD O’BRIEN

god is roadside
car broken and mangled
bring water and bandages

“god is church”
their silver strings on their ears
their words lipstick red

he is boat-sink
he is falling into hypothermia and water
bring life jackets and blankets

the fur on their coats bristled
and their smiles were tooth and claw

god is refugee
he is wearing nothing but poverty and jeans
bring sleeping bags and tarps

“we cannot”
1972
PETER LINDHOLM

When red blood ran past Vietnamese homes and trickled into American soil, infecting good men with hate.
When children were gunned down on paved streets with their only charge reading “being alive.”
(I know some of them were grown-ups, but we’re all someone’s child.)
All this while God hoarded his secrets and we dissolved

like a pill in water.
I would take us to this horror so we could lie under the stars and you would cling to me and I would cling to you and we would hold each other as the world slowly roasted over fiery coals.
Maybe that would fuse us together.
But the same stars sparkle tonight.
The same blood brings tears to our eyes, A mother’s child was still shot yesterday, and it’s those same secrets that God will never reveal.
So maybe I should just hold you tonight.
OUTSIDE THE KITCHEN LAST NIGHT WAS A WOLF
JORDANA SOLOMON

Two times my size and still growing—
fixed on the moon and wrapped
in silver skin.

It is said that a wolf is in fact two parts of one whole:
The Muscle and The Hollow,
balanced in a body whose feet need only brush against the ground.

The thing about the wolf is she cannot linger,
is touched by the Earth and then instantly freed.
How pure, to only descend from themselves,
eons and eons of giving birth on only backs,
legs too wild to be planted with seed.

I’ve heard of a story where two live inside us:
The Good Wolf and The Bad,

and in the story it is said
that the one who lives is the one we choose to feed.

So yes, I’ve been dropping scraps at the table.
This morning I found my hands in the dumpster.
I took off my shoe and chewed on the leather

but it seems everybody is already full.

If I were a wolf I would feed.
Grow round like the moon and descend and descend,
descend and descend,
touch my spine to the dirt and leave twins, ready to run.

I am no wolf
but I saw one last night
and this is the whisper I found,
echo and echo and slipping
from the fold of my two parted lips:
What’s black not always is black
and the same goes for white, two times over.
My children are ancient and quick, and they have been bred to be silver.
They are royal and moonlit and God
are they hungry.
UNTITLED
CONOR MAXWELL

I turn down the dark hall, dragging myself towards my son’s cries. I promised her that I would take care of him tonight, I just need to deal with the problem and go back to bed. It feels like I’ve been walking towards his doors for minutes. His door’s open. Moonlight pools on the carpet outside of his room, colored by the red fabric. I push open the door, but it isn’t his room. I’m outside.

You didn’t go to him. You went to the kitchen. You sat there, listening to him whimper, but you did nothing. Covered in darkness, you found a refuge and never left.

It’s raining, water pooling on the asphalt forms mirrors. Everyone has black umbrellas, I think I left mine at home. Someone is holding the door open, a sterile smell wafts out. I really don’t want to go in there.

You didn’t go in. You left and watched ducks paddle around in a pond. You looked miserable, your hair tangled and covering your eyes, your cheeks sallow, eyes sunken. The bench you sat on was cold, hard, rigid, but you didn’t notice. You just sat there, watching the ducks, and smiling.

I’m on our overstuffed couch when the door opens and my wife comes in. She’s drenched, soaked from the rain, and I wrap a blanket around her. We sit in front of a fire, the rain still dripping from her face onto my shoulder. The tree is whipping itself into the window. I should probably make dinner.

You looked like dead weight, waiting next to the door for someone who didn’t live there anymore. The characters from TV played along the wall, the light they cast fleeting and changing and dark. You reached toward them, grasping.

The ceiling is pure white, and I hear people clattering. I look over, and our friends smile. They’re having dinner without me. There are no spaces left at the table, so I leave. Walking away, the sun emerged from the clouds, bathing the path in dappled golden light.

The memorial was well kept, but not by you. Watching from afar as the flowers are watered and grass cut back, you wondered if they even noticed you anymore. That would have been better, easier. The burden you placed on her couldn’t be ignored.

She asked me if I wanted to sit down. The chair was upholstered, floral. You looked peaceful. Looking up, the sun was setting over the mountains. They had found you a nice place, a good place. You felt grateful. I saw her nodding, talking to a man with a nametag. That smile slipped back onto your face, settling into the place prepared for it.
DECONSTRUCTED PESTO: AN INTERACTIVE GUIDE
TARIQ MANSOUR

Step 1:
Remove the basil
leaf by leaf
by leaf by leaf
by leaf by
leaf by leaf
(repeat until your harvest is sizeable).

Option 1 (recommended for people with SAD):
Carpet your living room floor with the herb. Lay the leaves carefully on the ground so they barely overlap one another. Tiptoe across. The soles of your feet should radiate warmth through your veins. Flesh, blood, bones all feel weightless. There isn’t a normal way to cope, embrace what works.

Option 2 (when a summer day is blue):
A basil leaf has a natural curve. Stack the leaves so the edges are curving upward. Tuck an edge in and roll tightly. It should look like chubby a green cigar. Quickly—find your sharpest knife. Chiffonade the herb into thin strips. Use them to braid a crown. Adorn yourself. Adore yourself. This herb is royal.

Step 2:
Extract pine nuts, garlic and olive oil from what’s left of your pesto. Don’t deconstruct the garlic all the way, stop at the clove.

Go somewhere open
where the ground is flat and the dirt is dry.

With the oil in your hand
drizzle a circle on the soil
(do not hesitate here, trust yourself or you’ll end up with an oval).

Pine nuts are marbles,
scatter them
within your circle.
Kneel at its edge
with the garlic shooter in hand, aim—fire!
You keep the nuts you knock out.
Leave the rest,
pine trees will grow one day.
Step 3:
Now it’s time to take the cheese out.
Start with the Parmesan, unshred it.
Watch as it reassembles itself into a wheel.
Repeat with Pecorino,
notice how it makes a smaller wheel than Parmesan.
This is important.
Balance them on their sides,
with some tinkering and twigs
fasten a high-wheel bicycle.
Be careful if you’ve never rode this kind of bike before.

Step 4:
All that’s left are salt and pepper.

Breathe,
with your fingers
sift through each grain
and sort accordingly.
Salt with salt,
pepper with pepper.
You’ll be tired at this point,
it’s not an easy feat—
try to avoid the screaming clichés
of yin and yang, light and dark, life and death…
It’s just salt and pepper.
You are free to do with them what you please.
Be quick, the wind is coming
SPEAKING OF ICARUS
LISA MORDKOVICH

1.

granite fists autumn hair melting wings
he stared into the sun the way dad tells me not to
    to stay grounded instead
    to humble myself
    to preach distrust – that which warms us is bound to burn us
    lest we come too close

2.

fallen angel winter breath busted heart
he plunged into the sea backwards
the grace of a wingless bird
the sun yielding to comatose night
the wax dancing with salty serpents
    the beast? dinnerless
    the father? nowhere to be found.
LACE
MATTHEW BLAKE

She gave me her wrist
and revealed the thin sheer lines that laced across.
Carefully I ran my fingers along
the delicate lace she had stitched herself,
an exquisite way to cry.
She said she hadn’t wanted to cut too deep,
just enough to bleed.
I grazed the silver rungs again
and climbed my fingers up the ladder to clasp her hand.
GLASS PRAYERS
ANONYMOUS

When no one is home
before the bathroom mirror
he imagines himself
as he might have been
if he had been she,
if God the Father had slipped
in that sliver of a consonant.
Because Father says he likes she,
and she likes he, one Adam with one Eve,
and one apple to tempt with, to take, to taste.
Before the mirror,
he kneels, his hands folded in prayer,
his voice intoning,
Hail Mary, full of grace, fill me with grace
that before the face of woman
I may have desire,
let my body ache for her
because Father hallowed be His name
says he likes she, not he likes he.
Tempt me Mary with an apple,
like my sisters mold me,
see how their breasts bloom,
come to my chest with seeds and shovels,
bring spring to my nipples,
come Holy Mary, Mother of God,
so that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
may consent to the speech of my body.
For hours he stares,
until Father and Mother come home,
and he leaves the mirror
and hugs Father and Mother
and says I love you I love you
and goes to bed wondering
if Father and Mother
will love him will love him.
He waits for darkness to take him away
from his body, a body that does not
tell the truth, that whispers bad things.
...but the question
Still plagues me...
Have I really
taken advantage
of all this
place has
to offer?

SUNDIAL

BIRDBATH
(with a shark
in it)
There's one in every class...

Nolan Ellsworth

But um...

But um...

But um...

But um...

But um...

But um...

But um...

But um...

But um...

But um...

But um...

But um...

But um...

But um...

But um...

Chomp

Nolan Ellsworth
PURGE
MATTHEW BLAKE

For forty days I have been
burning the rose petals
you left in my pockets
I have been walking
on the dead bees that litter
the attic floor as searing
as coals they are under my soles
but still they do not dull
the sting of your desertion.
For forty days I have been
chewing on tulip bulbss
I rip the tunic with my teeth
crush the white scales
to expunge my memory of you
to abolish the aftertaste
of your tongue.
REPOSE
MATTHEW BLAKE

You forgot your footprints in the snow. I follow them but the tracks lead nowhere and my boots are too big to fit where your shoes once strode.

The TV turns black between commercials I see your eyes flash in that slim second.
I forget to turn off the oven to sweep the leaves from the porch to clean the bed sheet where the lilac aroma you wore like a necklace still lingers. I taste your tongue on forks and spoons your breath stirs my bones.

Sun drags day out of night, moon costumes earth.

I sleep and wake and clean my teeth with the bent bristles of your toothbrush.
CHRISTMAS POEM
MARIA BOBBITT-CHERTOCK

Numbers make other numbers and equations
Conceal still other numbers and sometimes letters and
Always graphs that are lines foreign to
This our three dimensional world just like
The number six or 6 is not literally six as in 1 1 1 1 1 but stands in
Like paper money for gold and the 6 is inflated just so
Daddy can’t lose his job over a 6 until
An equation entails a graph and a line an intangible change
Impossible without that single distant 6 or 6 hundred distant consumers
Exchanging 6 hundred paper dollars for 6 green charts now red

Letters make words and sentences
Conceal ideas that only interpretation can unveil as
Six geese a-laying means nothing to you a non-English-speaker or
To you unfamiliar with Christendom or secularized hymns or geese
But to others means red and green and
These make whole poems and novels and films and
Catastrophes and generational depressive mindsets and
Vacillating consumer desires and catastrophes again.
FLUSH
MATTHEW BLAKE

I swore I’d be sucked down, pulled through the plumbing, digested in the septic tank. My parents and two sisters would walk into the bathroom and discover only underwear

or flip-flops or a last testament I composed on a piece of toilet paper.

Now, age 22, I consider how the white-washed walls and the cool granite tiles

of the upstairs bathroom still evoke the clean claustrophobia of a mausoleum. Even now tremors rattle my spine when I catch the echo of a flush in a distant room.

Cessation still clings to thought, like soft drums in the background, or the pause between two heart beats that warns of the silence that will swallow life: time only invites death into a deeper intimacy. Still the pipes shake behind the walls.
There’s a girl on a beach or what looks like a beach. She’s grateful for her amazing family who has thrown gobs of money at her and generally supported her by bankrolling this European fantasy trip. She is wearing a bikini and she looks very, very good, even though her head is to the side and her mouth is open as if to say “someone just took this, I am not posing, I swear, this is just how my life is, all looking great in bikinis in Europe.” She’s quirky, and you can tell that she’s quirky because now the beach is an underexposed leather couch and she’s holding a piece of pizza up to her mouth and her tongue is kind of out and her eyes look huge and bluer than usual and a wall of disembodied text floats just under her sharpened jawline- “Watching the breakfast club [sic] because boys don’t like me. At least I have my cat.” She is an outcast just like us, this cat-owning girl named Neveah, and we can tell because she obviously connects to a movie that we also connect to. We eat pizza. She also eats pizza!

Now she is wearing athletic clothes, and we can see this because we are looking down at her from the lens of a different camera in a different location. We can see her legs crossed in patterned leggings, and she is holding a bowl of some kind of fruited yogurt mixture with coconut flakes- the disembodied text tells us that she loves these leggings and she loves mornings and she loves working out and she loves living the best life and she loves this fruited yogurt mixture courtesy of @livelifeandthrive she is thankful to god [sic] for all this. She loves everything, our girl, and what a ray of sunshine she is to all those around her, who smile when we see them with her and are all the same height and just as happy. We can look at them too, if we want, but first let’s look at the men!

Oh, the men! They are an eclectic bunch, rigorously un-self-aware and often shirtless. Their disembodied texts are usually pictorial, all heart-eyes and thumb-and-index-finger-pinched-together-to-say-okay and eggplant-with-three-drops-of-liquid-coming-out-of-the-end-of-it-suggestively. The men serenade with hoary words, their disembodied texts following Neveah and affirming her. “Sit on my face!!!” screams one of the texts hopefully and another just says “tits.” We cannot let our sweet Neveah be corrupted by them! She is too pure, far too pure, to be subjected to this kind of harassment.

Out of the shadows we see a man, a different kind of man, perfectly shirtless. We can tell he is a good person because we can see him in Ghana last Summer, holding a black baby and smiling- his teeth almost as white as his social circle. His disembodied text here reads: “Just doing my part to help out. I’m not a hero, but you can be- by becoming a Nestle™ Certified Blood Donor #betterworld #nocreditnecessary.” What a guy! He has tons of disembodied texts from hundreds of girls floating over him but, from the moment he sees her, his eyes are only for our Neveah, and so he begins to follow her, watching her adventures (snorkeling! tennis! nights out with the “squad”!) and representing his feelings towards them.
with the heart symbol. Soon, Neveah begins to take notice of Chad (of course he is named Chad), and follows him in turn. They are walking in a circle, each following the other, so, so in love. Anything for her, thinks Chad, anything for her. And, of course, Neveah would never ask for anything besides his love, which she doesn’t have to ask for anyway.

Their disembodied texts get cuter and cuter- their love has to be getting deeper and deeper. “So happy to spend my forever with my ‘best friend.’” How cute and understated. Maybe lesser people would err on the side of sensationalism but these are our simple people and their simple love is enough for us. BuzzFeed is actually “obsessed” with them and so we get a lot of information that we might otherwise not be privy to. For instance, if Neveah were a character from a 90s police procedural she would “totally” be Elizabeth Olivet from the original Law & Order. Classic Neveah! And we learn that Chad’s number nine top autumn diet tip is to “Let yourself indulge!” How sweet!

II

The wedding is a quiet affair with muted colors and an air of manufactured calm. The honeymoon is Paris. The baby is due a couple years later and his name is Lucky.

Their food is less imminently photographable these days, but life still looks good. She is in the kitchen making gnocchi or something and he walks up behind her, wraps her up, and kisses her neck. She smells vaguely floral.

“Hey.”

“Hey. How was work?”

“Good, I think. I missed you.”

“I missed you.”

Boring, right? Trust me, they think so too.

III

Lucky’s world is electric and awash in the brilliant glory of the modern American almost-celebrity. He is seventeen, prone to frequent onanism, and not only can his life story be told in gossip headlines, but it essentially already has been:

“Chaveah Announce Name Of Child- See The Pics!”

“Lucky Turns Two! Star Studded Birthday Party Ends In Performance By Which Sultry Celeb? See The Sexy Pics!”

“Thirteen Year Old Lucky Devrau Is Not A Little Kid Anymore- You Can Tell Because He Uses The F-Word In This Interview”
“Did Lucky Devrau Lose His Virginity To Kenzie Jindal?! Find Out All The Sexy Dirt On The Fifteen-Year-Old-Couple-To-Be!”

“Lucky Devrau Gets His License! Wish A Happy Sixteenth To Our Favorite Budding Celeb By Purchasing This Magazine!”

“Lucky Devrau Says ‘Sorry’ For Running Over Man With His New Porsche- Check Out The Pics Of The Recent Sixteen Year Old’s Hot New Ride!”

“Lucky Devrau Arrested For Driving Drunk Again- Click Here For Exclusive Pics From His Night In Prison!”

“‘I have found Jesus,’ Says Lucky Devrau After Two Month Stint In Rehab- We Are Proud Of You, Lucky!”

“Lucky Devrau Opens Up To Ellen- ‘I did a bad thing, I mean, yeah, I definitely killed that guy, but it was an accident and I’ve apologized. If Jesus can forgive me I would hope that America can too.”

“Hilarious! Lucky And Ellen Lip Sync ‘F*** Tha Police’ By N.W.A While Both Being White! Click To Watch The Viral Video Sensation!”

It is a Thursday night, and Lucky is at a press conference. The idea is total accountability, new person, etc. He sits in a chair taking pictures of himself as the reporters file in. In the back of the room sits a twenty-something girl with curly brown hair and eyes that have given up. The reporters begin their questioning, and are asking about his favorite kind of pizza and what he will be for halloween and whether he, as a Christian, thinks that the Bible is great or super great. He charms the room with his answers (“all kinds,” “I don’t know yet,” and “super great,” respectively) but as things seem to be winding down the brunette in the back (who’s name is Lennon, by the way) raises her hand and clears her throat.

“You, pretty lady in the back,” Lucky points suavely.

“Hey, Mr. Devrau. My name is Lennon, I write for the Times and I guess I’m just a little bit confused. I mean, you literally killed a man, you ran over him with your car while you were drunk, and we’re supposed to believe that because you say your favorite work of young adult literature is a three-way, totally relatable tie between Harry Potter, The Hunger Games, and The Constitution, somehow you’re a changed person?”

The crowd is silent for a moment, and Lennon takes a few retroactive breaths. Lucky looks at her flatly. “Vibe killer!” he shouts to uproarious applause, and the crowd begins to boo loudly. “Look, I don’t want to be that guy, but this press conference doesn’t accept questions longer than 140 characters, and that was, like… way, way more characters. You’re going to have to leave.”
IV

Soon enough the cameras come in and are broadcasting to TLC or TMZ or E! or some other network that does this kind of thing and all of America is watching the extravagant adventures of this adorable family. National treasures, we think, national treasures. We see Chad overcome his eventual struggles with cocaine addiction (go Chad!) which is good because he is one of the funnier people on the show so it would really be kind of a drag if he went to jail or something. We’re there when Neveah gives birth to her second child, a beautiful young girl named Zola, and we’re able to follow her adventures to lose the baby weight in record time (through a careful mixture of juicing, tantric yoga, and weekend fasting), maintaining her status as a sex symbol and letting new mothers all over America know that they really should think about stepping their game up. We watch as Lucky continues to dance in and out of the headlines, his misogyny endearing and his alcoholism farcical. We come back every day, over and over, and we want what they have. We long after their apparent ease, sitting in our smaller houses and looking at our less attractive friends and feeling that our toes are just about to scrape the ground of this thing we want so bad, this thing that will make us happy. And we never are.