Tractatus Dialogico-Communicatus

a translation from the German

1 Dialogue is an open publication.

1.1 This proposition is analytic, since dialogic communication is in essence an open process.

1.11 Part of the import of the term *open* is that, within a certain implicitly circumscribed universe of discourse, no idea is excluded from introduction into the dialogue because it is prejudged incorrect.

1.111 The implicit circumscription of the universe of discourse is neither very precise nor too constrictive.

1.112 The universe of discourse is circumscribed with respect to the relevance of an idea—to the attitudes and interests of the participants in the dialogue, and the goals which they want to achieve by engaging in the dialogue. An idea is never placed outside the limits of the universe of discourse on a prejudgement of incorrectness.

1.113 The “implicit” limits of the universe of discourse are a matter of such wide spread and general agreement that they are seldom brought into question.

1.12 Another part of the import of the term *open* is that the number of the participants in the dialogue and the variety of their opinions and interests are both great.

1.121 The participants in Dialogue-dialogue include Calvin College students, faculty, administration, staff, alumni, constituents, and other assorted hangers-on—not a homogenous group.

1.122 The productivity of the dialogue increases in direct proportion to the energy and seriousness of the participants.

2 Dialogue is a closed publication.

2.1 The import of the term *closed* is that the process of Dialogue-dialogue is in an important sense circular, or “introspective,” or “intrapersonal”; ie, the source of contributions is the audience, is the source of contributions, is the audience. . . .

2.11 The chicken-or-the-egg question is not relevant here: both roles, as source of contributions and consumer of contributions, are empirical givens. Neither role-responsibility is prior to or more important than the other.

2.12 The editors of Dialogue are responsible to stimulate and facilitate the dialogic communication. (See figure a.)

\[\text{figure a}\]

2.13 There is no intrinsic value in Calvin College’s talking to itself. It is the spin-off of the circular communicative process which has value.

2.131 The spin-off is the set of decisions, tentative though they may be, about what Calvin College is and what it should be—most emphatically not only to itself.

2.14 The responsibilities of the readership of Dialogue are to read hard and think.

2.15 The contributors to Dialogue respond. They must be not only literate but articulate and thoughtful.

2.151 The Dialogue mailbox in the Student Senate office is the most accessible connective between the contributing function in the dialogic process and the editing function.

2.1511 The editors of Dialogue would be happy to consider for publication any poetry, fiction, drama, non-fiction, or visual art to come through said mailbox or by any other means into the possession of a staff member.

3 Whereof one cannot speak dialogue, thereof must one remain silent.
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UNTITLED FIGURE

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Congratulations on succeeding in the difficult task of compiling a first issue collection of essays, reviews, fiction, poetry, and visual art works which are of a higher quality and integrity than one might expect to find springing forth from the confusion and somnolence of a new academic year. I hope that this letter is but one of many letters of encouragement you will receive, although on the basis of a few rumors which are wafting across the campus, I doubt that this is the case.

I most certainly would hope that the rumor that a number of people from the student body and from the Student Senate have been in some way offended by material published in Dialogue and are consequently formulating a serious attack on Dialogue is false. To abolish or to exert overt or covert editorial control or censorship on a magazine of this nature would be a shocking and dangerous attack on freedom of expression at Calvin and on freedom in general in the area of fine arts. Dialogue is extremely important as a forum for academic discussion and as a medium for the communication of the written and visual fine arts. Hedging on artistic quality in order to satisfy the demands from certain areas of your audience for entertainment would establish a most unfortunate and damaging precedent. The nature of Dialogue would be invariably altered by such a compromise, and creative experimentation in general at Calvin would be stifled.

A magazine dealing with this type of material should not be read as a means of easy entertainment. Critical readers are often quick to emphasize the responsibilities of authors and editors and to overlook the fact that they too bear an important responsibility if they are going to read a magazine intelligently, and, most emphatically, if they are going to proffer criticism of its contents.

I hope that in the future (as I assume has been your policy traditionally) you will not sacrifice artistic integrity and quality in order to pander to certain elements among your audience who haven’t the maturity or self-discipline to read thoroughly and intelligently. I would also suggest that you encourage those who feel that they hold valid criticism of your published material to express their criticisms in letter or essay form or to submit to you the type of material which they feel Dialogue should contain.

Donald Hettinga
The first speeches I heard Jerry Ford deliver were addressed to a congregation of kids on bicycles in an alley adjacent to Franklin Park. Every Fourth of July we would decorate our bicycles with crepe paper, streamers, and American flags. And we would ride our gaily-colored Huffy’s and Monarchs and Schwins and Rollfasts in a grand parade, ending in the alley known as Hollyhock Lane. There Jerry Ford would give us a speech. The speeches—so far as I recall them—were homey, forthright, and insubstantial. Often ungrammatical, but always patriotic.

The speech which President Gerald R. Ford offered to a Republican party rally at the Calvin College Fieldhouse on October 29 was not different in kind. His manner was informal and engaging. The former Congressman was evidently delighted to be speaking to his home district again, and even if one disagreed with most of what he said one could not help but like the man. The contrast with his predecessor in this respect could hardly be more extreme.

Yet Mr. Ford did not say very much. And what his speech lacked in substance, it lacked in syntax. He compared the Democratic party to a commander who gives instructions to his troops and then scatters in all directions. He described the fundamental problem of the modern world as a struggle between freedom on the one hand and liberty on the other, and he fumbled for some seconds to salvage his sentence.

President Ford’s speech was a welcome relief, however, from the foolishness that preceded it. We who attended the rally were insulted and demeaned by the hoopla with which we were assaulted, by the supposition that bands and balloons and cheerleaders bearing pompoms matter to us in choosing a Congressional Representative. Supporting speeches urging the election of Congressional candidate Paul Goebel and arguments for the superiority of his achievements and objectives would have been entirely appropriate. But the first speech at the rally was instead an attempt to deal with Congresswoman Richard VanderVeen as Samson dealt with the Philistines, viz. to slay him with the jawbone of an ass. We were offered not reasons and arguments, but ridicule of a fictitious Congressman called Super VanderVeen.

The Christian community was done an injustice by the attempted identification of Republicanism with Christianity. One of the bands which played was from Calvin, another of the bands and many of the cheerleaders from Grand Rapids Christian High School. With what motives they performed I do not know. But the unspoken message of the master of ceremonies, when he thanked the young people from “Grand Rapids Christian,” was unmistakable.

Before the rally the principal of Christian High went from room to room asking for volunteers to pass out Goebel literature. Would he do the same for a VanderVeen rally? Would the band and the cheerleaders be wheeled out for a Democratic party function? They would not, and they should not. Nor should such institutional support be given to a Republican candidate.

All of these affronts to our rationality and our integrity should be laid to the blame of the local Republican organizations. But what of this man, the President? What did we learn about the local boy now so high exalted?

By the time this appears in print the election will be past. I shall therefore not dwell on the issues which divide the two major Congressional candidates. But I shall look at the reasons which Mr. Ford offered for his support of Paul Goebel, because I believe they reveal important aspects of the President’s character.

Paul Goebel, said President Ford, “will work for you in Congress.” This claim, having been made by everyone who has ever run for Congress, has lost something of its pungency. Mr. Goebel, Mr. Ford pointed out, has a fine family and a record of service to the community. Again, hardly a distinctive or a deciding qualification for the House of Representatives.

More significantly, Mr. Ford argued that Michi-
gan has a number of great Republicans among its leaders. At the rally he singled out Governor William Milliken for warm praise; a few hours earlier he had spoken of the late Senator Arthur Vandenberg. Because of the party's record, argued Mr. Ford, we should elect the Republican candidate to Congress.

President Ford, it is clear, is still a man of his party. He is quite right that the Republican party, in Michigan and outside it, includes many outstanding public servants. So does the Democratic party. Both parties also contain incompetent and unprincipled office-holders. But to urge us to vote for Mr. Goebel because he is a Republican is to reason exactly backward. Rather, we should cast a vote for the Republican candidate, if we do, on the basis of his qualifications and stated objectives. The proper task of Republican leaders is not to lend uncritical support to whoever is nominated but to ensure that candidates of superior abilities and backgrounds are nominated.

Finally, President Ford argued—echoing a frequent theme of his campaign appearances—we should elect Mr. Goebel because we need a balance of powers in government. The Democrats must not be allowed to create a veto-proof Congress.

From long experience in the House, Mr. Ford surely knows that there is no such thing as a veto-proof Congress. Voting seldom follows party lines precisely, and there is enough ideological diversity in the Democratic party so that a Congress with a two-thirds Democratic majority is not at all likely to override every Presidential veto.

More important, Mr. Ford's argument betrays a fundamental misunderstanding of the balance of powers which was created by our Constitution. The constitutional balance is between branches of the federal government, not between parties within one branch. Indeed, the idea of a division between a small number of centralized parties is quite foreign to the Constitution.

What is President Ford telling us when he urges a balance between the two parties in Congress? He is telling us that, even if the overwhelming majority of the people are dissatisfied with the performance of Republican office-holders and favor the general policies of the Democratic party, the people should nevertheless vote for Republicans. In order to safeguard his veto, in the name of a spurious balance of powers, President Ford is telling us to elect an unrepresentative government.

So what Mr. Ford offers is a seriously inaccurate account of the functioning of the government. Is he deliberately distorting the facts in order to gain votes? I do not believe he would so. I am forced to conclude that President Ford does not know better and does not realize his own error.

If the Republicans lose ground in the election, as it appears that they will, Mr. Ford's plea for a false balance of power will prove to be an error not only of understanding but also of strategy. Whenever a President spends much of his time stumping for his party's candidates, the candidates gain little and the President gains nothing. But the country loses something important: a President who stands apart from his party, to whom both major parties can look for leadership.

But Jerry Ford has always stood squarely within his party. When his party has changed its position, he has pulled up his ideological stakes and moved with it. His subservience to the Republican party in the past has led him to commit serious moral as well as strategic errors. He took up the cudgel in a short-lived attempt to defame the character of Justice William O. Douglas. He supported the war in Vietnam wholeheartedly when his party supported it, and when his party claimed opposition to the war he opposed it in the same terms. He defended the integrity of former President Richard Nixon while the evidence of his criminal acts mounted, and he once refused to look at evidence which might incriminate the leader of his party. A similar pattern—a willingness to place party loyalty over both moral and strategic political concerns—is suggested by President Ford's pardoning of Mr. Nixon.

On October 29 the streets of Grand Rapids were draped with signs welcoming "Jerry" home. President Ford's speech shows that in many ways he is still the "Jerry" we knew as a Congressman. No less, no more.
Christianity in the Work of Alexander Solzhenitsyn

Winifred Holkeboer

In 1960 scholars were asking whether Albert Camus was a Christian, wondering if religious conviction affected both the content and quality of his writing. Did works like *The Plague* and *The Fall*, for example, show him to be moving away from existentialism toward an awareness of man’s guilt before God and his need for the restorative of divine grace? If so, did this apparent leaning toward a religious perspective in any way compromise his artistic standards? His accidental death in the Alps in 1960 cut off that inquiry. Today we are asking the same questions about Alexander I. Solzhenitsyn.

I am assuming that by the term “Christian” we mean more than a mere acknowledgement of a divine creator, more than a benevolent disposition to one’s fellowman, more than transcendental optimism. Indeed, we assume more than adherence to the Greek Orthodox faith or a conviction that it and all other religions should enjoy freedom from government interference in Russia.

There is much evidence in Solzhenitsyn’s works to show that he has gradually ceased to share Marxist opposition to the church. There is also solid evidence that he has gradually come to the view that people have a right to practice their religion and to transmit their faith to their children. Furthermore, there is much evidence of his admiration for men and women in prison who stood firm in the face of persecution for their
religious convictions. And finally, there is evidence that he shares the religion of his family forebears, and that the memory of it was a comfort as well as a guide to his own conduct while in prison.

Much of this evidence surfaces in The Gulag Archipelago, his most recent work (1973). This bitterly ironic exposition of Stalin's "sewage disposal system" describes in detail the persecution of religious believers in the Soviet Union. Solzhenitsyn laments the mass arrests in Leningrad on Christmas Eve in 1929, the large-scale closing of churches, and the subsequent arrests of clergy. He deplores too the persecution of sects which, while sympathetic with some principles and goals of Communism, had retained some evangelical and mystical elements of the Baptist beliefs as well as Tolstoyan principles. "Alas," he writes, "they were too well read in religious literature, and atheism was not their philosophy." Solzhenitsyn mourns the fact that the persecution extended even to the children of priests in 1934-1935—for their arrests there was no appeal. He laments the arrests of those who refused to work on Sundays or religious feast days. He has bitter scorn for the NKVD (secret police), who found deplorable use for religion in the information to be learned from the confessional: in their interrogations they wore down the priests and caused them to violate the traditional privacy between priest and confessor.

In a similar vein, Solzhenitsyn laments that religious education of children was considered a crime by the State, and in The Gulag Archipelago he indignantly exclaims, "A person convicted that he possessed spiritual truth was required to conceal it from his children!" He is also angry that prostitutes and "nuns" (women with religious beliefs) were both sent to forced labor camps, but, whereas the former could continue to ply their "merry trade" and return home in three years, the latter never were allowed to return to their children and friends. Solzhenitsyn reacts in a similar fashion to the capitulation of the clergy: in his famous letter to Moscow Patriarch, a letter widely circulated in that city, he reproaches the Father for complying with the ban on worship and the religious instruction of children. "The right to continue the faith
of their fathers is annulled,” he wrote, and “...we have to hand over our defenseless children into the domain of atheist propaganda of the most primitive and dishonest kind.”

In some of the author’s shorter works, too, one sees his regret about the decline of religion in Russia. In his prose poem included in Stories and Prose Poems, “A Journey Along the Oka,” Solzhenitsyn describes the Russian countryside and the sense of peace he once felt at the sight of the village church spires. Communism, however, violated this peace when it not only attacked religious faiths but also the houses of those faiths. Solzhenitsyn describes with sorrow the desecrated churches he observed when traveling through his beloved country soon after his release from prison. The crosses were bent, broken; the faded icons marked with obscene graffiti; the church bells still. But what pained him most was the ultimate desecration—a church become a movie theater, or a mill, or a milk or food storage station. Again lamenting the desecration of religion in a beautifully sensitive piece called “The Easter Procession,” Solzhenitsyn describes a scene fifty years after the Revolution: a handful of pious, mostly elderly believers waiting for the processional into the church to begin is jostled by a crowd of smirking, drinking, cursing youths who keep their caps on, carry transistor radios in their pockets, and enter without crossing themselves. It is a crowd who have never known what Easter is, who enter the church merely out of curiosity, subjecting it to ridicule or looting it of cakes. The author’s sympathies are clearly with the worshippers. He ends the piece thus: “These millions we have bred and reared—what will become of them? Where have the enlightened efforts and inspiring visions of great thinkers lead us? ... The truth is that one day they will turn and trample on us all.”

Somewhat reminiscent of the fugitive David who longed to worship in the tabernacle, the imprisoned Solzhenitsyn longed for the services in the church, where faith and commitment were ritually expressed. He saw that Marxism and Stalinism had robbed Russia of its most precious heritage. In his letter to the Patriarch he complained that the Soviet regime was robbing children of the “pure angelic perception of worship.” The striking scene of the burial service in August 1914 reveals the importance he placed on church ritual as it both expressed and renewed faith. A regiment of retreated Russian soldiers in a German forest are faced with the routine task of burying a comrade. Amidst the resinous odor of the pines they start digging the grave and placing saplings for an improvised coffin. They are weary from three days of fighting and are encircled by the enemy, but for the moment there is the peace of mottled August sunshine in the deepgrove. As they pause to commit the body to earth, they involuntarily succumb to remembered rituals, and one soldier intones, “In peace let us pray to the Lord!”

It was so powerful, so compelling, and so exactly like a church service that no further invitation to join in was necessary. The man from Olonets and two more responded at once, crossing themselves, each man bowing to the east where he stood: “Lord have mercy on us.”

Leading them, his voice rising above the others, Arsenii sang the response, changing the tone from that of deacon to choir leader. Then, after the response, he reverted to his rich, powerful diaconal voice, reproducing with astounding accuracy the rhythm and intonation of ecclesiastical plain-chant. Although he could never have repeated them, Vorotyntsev recognized the verses as entirely correct.

“For the ever-memorable servant of God, Vladimir, for his repose, his peace, and his blessed remembrance, let us pray to the Lord!”

QUESTION: Can fiction justifiably function as the vehicle for propaganda?

All of them, including the officers, had now gathered, bareheaded and facing east, around the body. “Lord have mercy upon us.”

How amazingly many-sided this young peasant from the depths of the Tambov countryside was! Vorotyntsev had been through the death with him for three days and afterward might have lost sight of him without ever discovering, were it not for this incident, that he had sung in a church choir—and obviously sang in it for some time, listening attentively to the services, taking it all in; this was something important in his life which he loved and which he did well. His enunciation of every sound, his observance of every pause was so precise that he unquestionably had a deep understanding of its meaning.

“That he may take his place without blame at the dreadful throne of the Lord of Glory, let us pray to the Lord.”

On rolled the deacon-like voice, undisturbed by the alien surroundings of the Prussian countryside.

“That the Lord our God may take him into the place of light and plenteousness and peace, where all the righteous repose, let us pray to the Lord.”

Such a finely drawn scene clearly delineates just how deeply Solzhenitsyn cherished the church and its faith-renewing rituals of song and chant.
No doubt one factor contributing to this move toward religious affirmation was Solzhenitsyn's exposure to the faith of the people he met while in prison. He admits himself that he was greatly impressed by the testimony of religious philosopher Nikolas Berdyayev, who, during his interrogation, firmly set forth the religious and moral principles which had led him to refuse to accept Russia's political authority. He was also impressed by an old woman who was arrested because she had once sheltered the Metropolitan overnight—a prelate who had since escaped to freedom in Finland. She would tell her interrogators nothing. When they shook their fists in her face, she proclaimed, "There is nothing you can do to me, even if you cut me in pieces. You are afraid of your bosses and of each other. I am not afraid of anything. I would be glad to be judged by God this minute."

More religious insight came to the author with unsettling effect in a casual encounter with a Jewish youth in a hospital prison corridor. Solzhenitsyn had commented on the hypocrisy of a prayer by Franklin Roosevelt printed in Soviet newspapers. "Why?" cried the youth. "Why do you not admit the possibility that a political leader might sincerely believe in God?" The directness of the question and the spirited refusal of his prison inmates to renounce their faith suddenly fused in his mind, and he saw his comment in a new light: "... the principal thing was that some kind of clean, pure feeling does live within us, existing apart from our convictions, and right then it dawned on me that I had not spoken out of conviction but because the idea had been implanted in me from the outside. And because of this I was unable to reply to him."

Solzhenitsyn freely attributes his sensitive religious responses to his pious upbringing and the influence of his family. He was born in the year of the Revolution and was convinced in his youth and early manhood that the brightest of futures lay ahead for his beloved Motherland. He was devoted to Marxist principles, and only long afterwards realized that the religious ideals inherited from his parents had imperceptibly influenced important decisions along the way. In *The Gulag Archipelago* he recalls his refusal to enter the NKVD (Soviet Secret Police, 1934-1943). Triple pay and special rations were offered as incentive for young men who at that time could only hope for a job in rural school at low pay. He felt a strong inner revulsion against spying upon his fellows. He attributes his resistance to a moral inheritance from his pious ancestors, who lived at a time when "morality was not considered relative, and when the distinction between good and evil was very simply perceived by the heart." Yet he frankly admits that as a young Army officer he was relieved to forget some of the subtleties inculcated during childhood. In the very act of writing the book, memories of his own merciless treatment of subordinates returned to shame him. Where, he cries, have all the exhortations of a pious grandmother gone? *The Gulag Archipelago*, then reveals an ambivalent young Solzhenitsyn lamented over by an older, more firmly faith-grounded Solzhenitsyn; it is a book of penance, of...
honest confession and transformed values.

Considering the particularized religious emphasis of *The Gulag Archipelago*, it is not surprising to find a generalized emphasis upon the importance of religious matters in Solzhenitsyn's literary creed: "The task of the writer is to select more universal and eternal questions, the secrets of the human heart and conscience, the confrontation of life with death, the triumph over spiritual sorrow, the laws of the history of mankind that were born in the depths of time immemorial and that will cease to exist only when the sun ceases to shine." Indeed, to Solzhenitsyn, the very ability to write well about universals is a gift from God. Once, as he marveled about a favorite poet's talent and ability to see beauty in his surroundings, he exclaimed, "What a thunderbolt of talent the Creator must have hurled into the heart of that country boy... to have opened his eyes to so much beauty...."

*Ivan Denisovich* also exhibit this fine balance of content and form. These books do infinitely more than just cite statistics or promote a new political experiment; through their fine craftsmanship and artistic handling of the human condition they invoke in the reader the strongest sense of indignation, of remorse, of pity for a people so tortured and ensalved. This is not to say that Solzhenitsyn is lacking in historical methodology, in the tools of fact and the rationale of cause and effect, but that this artistry is so masterful that the bite of the political and religious ax he has to grind is placed within the larger context of the whole human drama, eloquently told. In *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, for example, Solzhenitsyn makes a devastating political statement in depicting 24 hours of a prisoner's tortured life. So effectively portrayed is this character, however, that he becomes primarily not an abstract political symbol but a real man, totally three-dimensional, with whom we ultimately fear, hope, suffer, and rejoice.

We now pose the question that arises so often in assessing literature with social and religious emphasis: Can fiction justifiably function as the vehicle for propaganda—for an author's program of social and political reform, or as a polemic for the Christian faith? Difficult as it is to answer such a question categorically, the fact remains that writers have always joined protest with art in an affirmative answer to this question—writers such as Swift, Voltaire, Shelley, Tolstoy, Shaw, Twain, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Upton Sinclair, Camus, and Brecht.

Solzhenitsyn can certainly be numbered among these writers, since he successfully explores his political and religious views in finely crafted and deeply moving prose. *The Gulag Archipelago*, for example, is not only a cry of political and religious protest in the face of Communism, but also an artistically beautiful, poignantly effective portrait of condemned, hopeless men. Novels like *The First Circle*, *Cancer Ward*, and *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* also exhibit this fine balance of content and form. These books do infinitely more than just cite statistics or promote a new political experiment; through their fine craftsmanship and artistic handling of the human condition they invoke in the reader the strongest sense of indignation, of remorse, of pity for a people so tortured and ensalved. This is not to say that Solzhenitsyn is lacking in historical methodology, in the tools of fact and the rationale of cause and effect, but that this artistry is so masterful that the bite of the political and religious ax he has to grind is placed within the larger context of the whole human drama, eloquently told. In *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, for example, Solzhenitsyn makes a devastating political statement in depicting 24 hours of a prisoner's tortured life. So effectively portrayed is this character, however, that he becomes primarily not an abstract political symbol but a real man, totally three-dimensional, with whom we ultimately fear, hope, suffer, and rejoice.

Hence, although literature as a platform for political or religious ideas has often been suspect, a great writer can combine his personal convictions with true art. The man *engage* need be no less a literary artist because of his strong views. The point is that Solzhenitsyn rises above being a mere propagandist—he is first of all an artist, presenting with fine craftsmanship the inexhaustible manifestations of life as he has lived it—grim, humble, tender, bitter, amusing. One can therefore exempt him from the charge that he is only a social and political critic of Russia, or that he is merely an apologiste for his revitalized personal faith.

That Solzhenitsyn is, then, a writer with valuable political and religious insights is important; that he has successfully integrated these insights into works with artistic integrity and emotional depth is paramount.
Symposium on Sculpture

The Michigan Sculpture Invitational is showing at the Calvin College Center Art Gallery through November 9. The exhibit includes the work of Dewey Blocksma, Wilma Bushewicz, Greg Jaris, Henk Kijger, Vitold Kobisz, Mel Leiserowitz, Ted Ramsay, Ralph Scharf, David Smith-Greenwood, John Stephenson, Max Vander Sluys, Sid Vander Werf, and John Visser. Lee Doezema taped, edited, and contributed to a conversation among Chris Overvoorde, Carl Huisman, and Robin Jensen, Calvin art professors, about the sculpture presently on exhibit.
Doezema: What is the purpose in bringing such a wide variety of sculptural forms to the gallery?

Overvoorde: I look upon sculpture as being somewhat of a weak area in our own department, and the purpose in showing such a variety is to open people's minds to various ideas of sculpture. Also the show was a response to the 'Sculpture off the Pedestal.' People seem to think that sculpture can only work when it is big—the bigger the better. Sculpture is not only something to put in my front yard. I would like to enjoy it in my living room as well.

Doezema: What do you suppose causes a sculptor to choose a specific medium to work with for a length of time?

Overvoorde: I don't think it is so much a matter of choosing as a matter of becoming involved, and sometimes that involvement is really quite accidental. He seems to be intrigued by a material, and therefore he pursues it, and the more he pursues it the more he becomes involved, until he comes to the point where he can really do something with it. There is a time period for every artist where he has to digest the material. Wood ought to remain wood, and steel ought to remain steel. If one tries to imitate, to make plastic look like something else, he becomes very dishonest.

Jensen: That is one of the things about plastic that you have to be careful about. Plastic has entered our vocabulary as being phony. One has to be careful that he doesn't use plastic to imitate some other material.

Huisman: To master something is to recognize its characteristics and to use them to their greatest potential. It all boils down to that word honesty.

Overvoorde: But what do you mean by that? We all know what the common meaning is. You might call it 'mastering it,' I might call it 'digesting the material,' another may say that you've come to the point where you can be 'free with it,' where you no longer respect it, but it can begin to give you input again. You are not conscious any more of its peculiarities, you have gone beyond that point.

Jensen: When you're working with wood, cutting into wood, the wood will tell you how it should be cut. You're kind of loving it, and it's loving you back. That's the trouble with plastic. It's hard to love.

Huisman: It's sticky.

Overvoorde: It's dangerous.

Doezema: It seems to be very difficult for an artist to say exactly what his intent was in reference to a specific work. It is also very difficult to speak about meaning in relation to an artist's work. Dewey Blocksma attributed this difficulty to his being a doctor the majority of his time, and therefore being accustomed to speaking in medical terms and not in the language of aesthetics.

Is it possible, do you think, to say verbally what the meaning of a piece of art is, or is that so-called meaning bound up in the material as it is formed?

Jensen: It bothers me many times that artists just don't relate to laymen—the people whom they are supposedly trying to share things with. We as artists have an obligation to say things to people and to involve them somehow in the whole process. We try to share things visually and tactually with people, but the main way of communicating with the layman is with words. They think they understand words. That is a beginning, a way of helping the layman understand where we are—a sharing of problems.

Overvoorde: I find with my own work—the minute I start talking about my own work—I tend to simplify it, to cheapen it in order to verbally communicate the idea.

I'm willing to do this, but there must be the recognition on the part of the audience that the attempt often falls very short. I'm not saying it's not possible to verbally communicate to the community. It is possible, but it has to be a sharing.

We are not dealing with ordinary life. In many cases we are dealing with something much deeper. And many people are unwilling to go deeper. There
is a discovery going on while the artist is working.

Doezema: The artist's intent can change while the artist is working?

Overvoorde: What I'm saying is that the artist's intent always deepens, and to verbalize that becomes extremely difficult.

Jensen: We have to get past that barrier of "what is it?" to "what does it mean to me?" And it might not mean anything to them, or they might not understand it at all, but at least they've gone through that process of thinking.

Huisman: And it might have meant something to them that they can't verbalize.

Overvoorde: That whole word understanding is so loaded. I'm always reminded, when I hear that word understanding in relation to a work of art, of that quote of Picasso. When he was asked about understanding—people saying "I don't understand that"—he said, "Do you understand the lilies of the field?"

Man has looked into creation, analyzed it, taken it apart, put it back together. Do we really understand it? No, we don't. But somehow we demand that of a work of art.

Jensen: As far as understanding goes, I can understand the lilies of the field as they relate to me. They are made up of energy, and that energy comes from God.

Huisman: But not total comprehension.

Jensen: That's right, Carl. That's a beautiful way of putting it.

Doezema: And to try to describe that understanding verbally would cheapen the lilies of the field as much as it would cheapen a work of art.

Overvoorde: That's right. That's exactly what I was driving at. To try and describe a visual statement in literal terms is always taking something away from it.

BAR WITH NEWSPAPER IMPRESSION

by John Stephenson

Jensen: The traditional idea of sculpture is of something that is carved, or cast, or made from clay. But as soon as people confront things that are put together, glued together, or welded together, then they have problems.
Overvoorde: Actually there are two pieces in this show that you could identify with the traditional, mystical, historical role of most galleries or museums—Dewey Blocksmma's *Figure* and Wilma Bushe­wicz's *Nikolaj Kopernik*. Somehow people expect those to be there. What people have problems with is what all this other stuff is doing here.
UNTITLED

by Greg Jaris

Overvoorde: One of the real reasons for having this show is to destroy some of the preconceived notions that people have about sculpture.

CLOUD RELIEF

by Ted Ramsay

Jensen: You're kind of loving it, and it's loving you back. That's the trouble with plastic. It's hard to love.
Hervoorde: It's beautiful. To choose the kind of coat ... and the fish. You constantly have the smooth playing against the rough. It's interesting in terms of just the textures. And to pull this off in bronze, as successfully as he has. It could easily get out of hand and become nothing more than a textural mess.

Huisman: There is another factor that helps to unify it in terms of line; the psychological use of rope that actually binds it together. It is a bound figure.
GOOD GROCERIES
writing contest winners

FICTION

1st PLACE
The Misanthrope James Leunk

2nd PLACE
Hank's Peanut's David Schafsma

HONORABLE MENTION
Fishing Douglas Brouwer
What I Did on My Summer Vacation, For Lack of Anything Better, James Leunk

POETRY

1st PLACE
There are Visions Comeback Kim Gilmore

2nd PLACE
Elegy for an Uncle Thomas Konyndyk
Sweet Hemlock Reviled T.A. Straayer

HONORABLE MENTION
The Sex Revislson Albert Aasman
Solitaire Linda Biure
Tears in the American Orchard Joanne Dotinga
some hurried words about me Donald Hettinga
On Visiting Some Rocky Mountain Falls David Kroschell
Just For Pretend David Schaafsma
Weaning Becket Wm David Sheldon

DRAMA

2nd PLACE
Funeral David Schafsma
There are Visions Comeback

It is long past dishes
    and children’s prayers
a half cheek
    of melon moon
roosts in bends
    of trees
his swallowed sun
    -slips the birch leg
catches to luted lakes of
    fins downs in coppery drape
snags the stars into melting
    there-
speaks he white
    at windows
stays our feet leaking from a sleeve lamp
We sit close
    resting heads in hands
like shelled peas in their open cradle pods
retracing this Caruso of days -
    - slashing, woody grasses
wide and twining fields
where cidering apples have
    fallen
slumped sogging roses
    mapled and wine-bellied
like swollen brown birds -
The trees were flying
    their last leaves like flags
( See! our young have not yet )
flown
You poked in the garden
    for bulbs and relishes
the green-not-ripes and so-plumbed
fullnesses
I lifting
leaf-laid stacks
bunched and clung, ashed-veined writings
newspapers, greeting cards, invitationals
to strum fire on the branches
    and wing them in riots
outbraiding conservative greens
found the purple-soft
    as sashes in summer
    as ribbons on the wrist
Everyday daisies have staid
    bobbing, duck-bill yellow
    eyes
while back season bloom
    of wrappers, the shucks and
petal pieces
    the fruit rinds
have lost juice and cardinal flame
    and lazy their brows
in hay sleeps
mouth moist mounds
wherever raked or wind shed -
Heavy crows now bumble above
    about
soft the Scottish crickets burr
The sky is alake
    with firefly winkles
trinketing as jeweled waters
The fire-near
    ruptures and fizzes
like popping larvae
    and dying of waxing flies
There are visions
    comeback
like the returning duck in
    the shooting gallery
—of young babes with apricot ears
    and kissable rumps
of lullabies in a twice
    grandmothered rocker
babes to keep company a knee
to “chin up child”
to wisen to -
Love is such a less word
    a word candlish
    and guttering
to thank the God
but when I am strung across
your chest
broken as a jugfull
released into a spilling
    quenching drink
    like Jesus on the wood
there is no other
    and so in breath
in darting in
    - and out
in tongue and all that dresses me
I mean this for you
    in praise to Him

Kim Gilmore
second place (tie)

Elegy for an Uncle

The birds are gathering again
in the arches above the library windows
Observing bird amenities
and a vague order of the peck

For thirty-five heedless years
generation to generation
knowing the arc of their flight
and the arches their destination
Swooping madly towards the windows
but pulling out just on time
and coming to rest

Ignoring the changes
outside in
Eliot to Ginsberg
double breasted suits
coming and going below
the name of my uncle
(a parachute victim
a dangling scarecrow
in a foreign tree)
chiseled in stone
across the street
in Veterans Park

When he left his plane
He might have thought
"This is what the birds feel
This is the air they know"

I've seen him only in a dated picture
in the foyer at grandma's house
fly boy uniform
useless metal wings
on his hat
strange and timeless
birdlike confidence in his eyes

Sweet Hemlock Reviled

It's the springtime of my sorrow
But it's time to call it quits:
Having savored all the rancid fruit
It's time to spit the pits,
For within the tumbled junctures
Of a thousand wasted days
I've fueled the fires of remorse
And have set myself ablaze.
I have measured my existence
In a chain of pained goodbyes
And have striven to surrender
To the woes that I've devised.
But the sun is once more rising
To awaken me from dreams—
In the light of day this mundane life
Won't fit romantic schemes.
Through all life's twisted circumstance
I've refereed the feuds
Between an airy aphoristic sense
And maudlin platitudes;
And now to my surprise,
And, more, embarrassment,
I recognize the scorn of life
For art's embellishment,
This fact I must relinquish
As indubitably right:
There's more to say for homilies
Than for all that isn't trite.
So it's time to resume ambling
Toward an undistinguished state,
And leave the damned romantic
With his monumental fate.
I just can't hack the epic mode's
Anachronistic folly,
So I've traded in burlesqued despair
For modest melancholy.

T.A. Straayen

Thomas Konyndyk
There is a body lying in what appears to be an epoq on a table which is draped with an old blanket. The rest of the set is bare, except a park bench, some feet in front of the table. A series of men and women, perhaps as many as seven or eight, pass by the table as we watch. Men might take off their hats. All is quiet, solemn. The lights are fairly dim at this point, but they brighten to daylight, having begun at almost complete dark. When two men go by the casket and proceed to sit in the bench, it is almost completely light. The two men are John, almost thirty, with dark complexion, and Paul, a little younger, with light hair and complexion.

'John: the first to speak: (seriously) Do you think we could have made a mistake?
Paul: (quickly) What? What do you mean?
'John: Nothing.
Paul: What?
'John: I was going to say that I feel we...
Paul: Nothing.
June: (interrupting) Nothing?
'John: All right. (Turning to other matters, it seems) The sun rose well today, don’t you think? There isn’t a cloud in the sky. Don’t you feel sort of lean and... blameless when the sky is clear? Pause. No reply from John. I mean, when the louds are all gone, when the sun burns free and clear. (Seeing John will not answer, he goes on.) Come on. Surely you don’t think this is a random world. (Preaching) Things happen, of course, interrelated with circumstances, a comment, if you will, from some external Other. Everything has a purpose, everything follows a distinct, immutable plan which reason can decipher. (He is grandiose; the one must be matched by grand gestures, too. He can be pacing, while John sits.) The world is a plurality of metaphor. A blue sky, the screech of a hawk, all these have meaning...

June: (a young lady who gets up from the audience, disgusted) Nonsense.
Paul: (still disturbed) Who are you?
June: (cynically) Don’t you know? Can’t the circumstances dictate to you who I am?
Paul: No. (He begins to walk) But if I give it some thought I can determine why.
June: After the fact.
Paul: No.
June: (Warning) That’s circular.
Paul: No, I would never do...
Needless to say, I have never eaten ham since that day.
(Pause, as two more people go by the body. These people can be the same as those who passed by before, with the change of a hat or coat.)
Paul: I did see a sparrow that day. I did.
John: Ohh. (A groan)
(June is silent, and she returns to the bench. Both John and June turn to glare at Paul, who turns and goes back to his seat, beaten.)
June: What did you mean “mistake”?
John: What?
June: Mistake.
John: I beg your pardon. What did you say?
June: I said, “What did you mean ‘mistake’?”
John: Oh.
June: Well?
John: Oh. Well, what did you mean when you asked me “mistake”?
June: Come on. You’re not a fool. Follow the dialogue. It was in the beginning. You asked him about whether he thought it had been a mistake. He didn’t think so.
John: He never does. We can never agree on anything. If it’s not principles, it’s politics.
June: (A little exasperated) Come on, why did you say that? I’m dying to know. Come on. You’re a sensible enough sort. What have you got against us knowing, huh? Is knowledge too great for us? Do you think feeling is enough? (Pause, for her anger to build) Come on you’re driving us all crazy we want to know what you meant by “mistake” at the beginning! (Pause, as she devises another avenue.) Listen. These people paid a lot of money to hear you. We all paid. (Another glance back to the body on the table) Do you think you can get away with saying a lot of trash and then not explaining it somehow? People want meaning in words—(Louder and faster)—and they don’t want to wait around to the end of the play to find out! What did you mean “mistake”? (John has been sitting throughout this speech with his head lowered. June can be moving around the bench, in front of and behind John.)
(A man and a woman come out, pay their humble respects to the body and then turn abruptly about-face to the body, behind the bench.)
Man: Well, Mrs. Hudd, what do you propose for supper?
Mrs. Hudd: Beef, I suppose, Mr. Hudd, with potatoes and gravy and beans. And pie if you like.
Mr. Hudd: I like, Mrs. Hudd.
(These two must be somewhat alike in appearance. They are expressionless and their speech must be nearly monotone. They very rarely look at each other.)
Mrs. Hudd: Fine.
Mr. Hudd: Fine.
Mrs. Hudd: Well, what about the weather. Does it look like fall to you, Mr. Hudd, or is it just a false fall?
Mr. Hudd: Well, it’s hard to say, if the fall is here sure enough or whether it’s just a false fall and Indian Summer will follow. It doesn’t really matter, I guess.
Mrs. Hudd: No, I don’t suppose it does. Fall’ll be here anyways.
Mr. Hudd: Strange enough, how weather is pretty much the same, like that.
Mrs. Hudd: Predictable, Mr. Hudd.
Mr. Hudd: Yes. (They both pause to look at each other.) Yes, Mrs. Hudd.
Mrs. Hudd: There’s always gonna be precipitation, in a predictable number of forms and wind in a predictable degree of motion. Isn’t that true, Mr. Hudd?
Mr. Hudd: That’s true. Once in a while a bolt of lightning. Maybe a hurricane in a great while, but it never really surprises. It’s always pretty much the same ...
There, that one looks like the mayor! (He ughs, but no one else does.) Use a little imagination. You can all go beyond what your senses provide, can you? You have imagination.

**me:** It's not what you have, but rather, what you check which causes you to talk such nonsense.

**wl:** What's that?

**me:** (After a short pause) Brains.

**wl:** No!

**me:** I doubt it.

**wl:** (Angry) Is it the nature of the race to doubt? Perhaps we've made a mistake," one says, and "I doubt it will ever be different," two more say. (Pointing to the Hudds, who exit) "I doubt this guy is making any sense at all," another says. (Pointing to himself) Meaning isn't just in words, you know. Deeper meanings seep forth from feelings, sometimes. A healed leper, a fish to fishes, read to more bread, these things produce more meaning in feeling than words. When you look at the world, seek meaning in the feeling you get. Words may mislead, but feelings are true. (Largely the audience) Look for signs in creation and correct feelings will follow.

**ohn:** (Who has been listening all the time with his head lowered) But don't you think we have made a mistake? I feel that.

**wl:** Why?

**ohn:** I just do. There aren't any signs, but I can't feel that, can I? I mean, even apart from the morality question.

**me:** What? Be careful. You're losing us all. What are you talking about?

**ohn:** Oh, I see. (To the audience) Let me explain what's going on here if you're lost. There is an airline distinction being discussed here between meaning in words, meaning in overt expression of feeling which produces feeling, and meaning in pure nonsense. You can be sure that they will confuse the issue so much that they will have no meaning at all.

**wl:** Look for signs in creation and correct feelings will follow.

**me:** But a real stickler, nevertheless. In the annals of history man continues—I'm speaking now of both present and past history—to study the question with which we concern ourselves now. All eventually come to the one conclusion they must somehow, someway, but inevitably reach: meaning. (They all nod seriously, as he waits for this to sink in.)

**Paul:** Yes.

**John:** Yes.

**June:** Yes. (This may be done simultaneously)

**Man:** Meaning is the conclusion. “Have we made a mistake?” Is the question, precisely so. Meaning. The relationship between fact and feeling, between right and wrong is a dynamic one, with universal implications. It touches the lives of everyone here. Meaning does take place in feeling, just as it takes place in words. Meaning takes place in the intent of non-meaning, meaning: words take place in the absence of sense. Meaning, therefore, meaning takes place in meaning.

**June:** What? (Man waves off the interruption.)

**Man:** Thought describes the flight of man in feeling to his security in meaning. Mr. and Mrs. Hudd are real people. They live normal lives. They eat vegetables and beef like any normal human beings. They lack feeling, but they don't lack words: they don't lack meaning. He (pointing to Paul) lacks words, but he doesn't lack feeling: he doesn't lack

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**Tears in the American Orchard**

The apples, sour poison,
Are fallen to the ground.
Stop the wailing echo!
Curse the crucified sound!

Cold, grief, assign coffins.
Do not allow them lay.
Oh Lord, I cannot watch!

Explain this harsh decay!

Orchard, where went blossoms?
Your soldiers decked in red?
Who slashed your strong brown arms
And left your green seeds dead?

Was not the wind your friend?
Did he not bring you air?

But then, who stole the fruit
And stripped your branches bare?

I once did cry with love
To see you grow devout;
Now the worms frighten me.
I cannot eat. I doubt.

---

joanne dottinga
meaning. She (pointing to June) too lacks feeling, but she doesn't lack words: she doesn't lack meaning. He (to John, with a definite pause, as John slowly rises) The world sometimes surprises. (It is very important that the Man's previous two speeches receive the undivided attention of all on stage, except John, who remains with head lowered, eyes averted, until he is mentioned by the Man. The lines must be delivered very rapidly. June and Paul are to move from their respective positions to a more attentive one, if possible.)

Paul: Look, in the sky! (Jubilantly) The clouds form a . . . a flaming chariot.

June: Yeah, (cynically) tell me about it.

FICTIO first place

The Misanthrope

James Leunk

It was still dark outside as Ralph shuffled into the classroom, also dark, and settled himself in a seat close to the door. Though he actually preferred a seat high in the back row, one from which he could survey the rest of the class while avoiding involvement as much as possible, he simply didn't have the energy to get there that day. His mind hummed like a radio tuned between stations.

Most of the other students who trudged in seemed to exhibit the same mental numbness, except for a few who fairly ran to their familiar seats in the middle of the second row. These elite sat very stiffly, very quietly, eye-to-eye with an imaginary taskmaster at the chalkboard, though mostly hidden behind imposing stacks of psychology and sociology texts.


The mental effort it had taken to recapitulate such an extensive list of human virtues had roused him out of his buzzing stupor. "Static," he chuckled to himself, appreciating the pun on human virtues that had roused him out of his buzzing stupor. "Hitler's Youth Corps," Ralph thought in disgust. "A Scout is trustworthy-loyal-helpful-friendly-courteous-kindsobedient-cheerful-thrifty-brave-worth-y-loyal-helpful-friendly-courteously in that order," he added as an afterthought.

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Ralph could get along with office at the student union. Ruth found Ralph an hour later in a corner of the coffee shop, smoking Kools between chapters of *Steppenwolf*. She was a member of the Youth Corps, but Ralph could get along with her because they had been fairly close friends in years past, attending basketball games and dances together before he got religion and he got nihilism.

“Well, you did it, you broke your record,” she observed, plunking down rescursively on the floor next to him. “This ne will have to go into the record books with an asterisk.”

“Why did you leave, anyway?” Ruth asked somewhat soothingly, considernecedingly. “Jennings didn’t kick you out. In fact, he was disappointed that you left. Flustered, even. You should have seen him try to lecture after you walked out.”

“Yeah, I should have,” Ralph mumbled. “But if I had stayed around to watch, he wouldn’t have been flustered. A paradox, huh? Besides, I now whom I’m not appreciated.”

“If you’d just not be so arrogant all the time, you might get along with the rest of the human race.”

“Me, arrogant?” he cried incredulously. “Holy shit, sister, what does an idiot like me have to be arrogant about? If people think I’ve got something to be arrogant about, they must ave a better opinion of me than I do.”

Ruth blushed. “Don’t talk like that. You do it just to bother me,” she complained.

“I do not,” he objected, visibly mployed.

Seeing that she had backed him into corner of sorts, that she had gained initiative, Ruth maneuvered to put the conversation back on the track:

“You still haven’t told me why you walked out of class. What’s the matter? Does serious talk make you uncomfortable?”

“You don’t believe in anybody there. We all have our problems. It’s just that yours are a little bit more complicated than the norm. You’ve got no purpose in life, Ralph.”

She was almost pleading with him, but he would have none of it. He was still laughing, partly at her naivete and partly at her mastery of the cliché.

“Don’t give me that ‘God-has-a-wonderful-plan-for-your-life’ garbage. I’ve got one already. It is my avowed purpose to embarrass the human race by claiming to be a member of it,” he announced with a series of grandiose, yet deliberate, gestures.

“You don’t believe in anyone or anything,” Ruth replied quietly, obviously struggling to contain her growing frustration.

“I do too believe in something. I believe in total depravity,” Ralph declared forcefully. He was just getting into things since he had wrested the offensive from her.

“And, of course, he philosophized confidently, ‘I also believe in predestination. After all, what with all the total depravity going around, you’ve got to believe that somebody knows what’s going on, that it all makes sense to somebody.’ The somebodys were delivered with a raised index finger and a reverent upward rolling of the eyeballs.

“Aha! Then you do believe in God!” exulted Ruth.

Ralph. Counseling is nothing to be ashamed of. Or afraid of. We all have our problems. It’s just that yours are a little bit more complicated than the norm. You’ve got no purpose in life, Ralph.”

“Now that behind, we watch the water shoot like the fragile arch, ’tween rock and rim. And like the fragile arch, with that behind, we watch the water shoot through just about anything.”

But closer gaze reveals a cauldron grim. Where water’s twisted, not in craft, but toil. Two limbs entwined are shred of leaf and soil. And part on rocks below; let’s shun such whim. As in mystery of the arch, through just about anything.”

“Aha! Then you do believe in God!” exulted Ruth.

David Krosschell
“Well, I guess so, sort of. I don’t know.”

Ralph was baiting her, but Ruth didn’t realize it. He enjoyed having people try to convert him to something; sparring with them, challenging them, then delivering the crusher, the knock-out punch. Or sometimes he could derive his perverse pleasure just playing it without the final flourish—carefully, cautiously outscoring his opponent.

“I used to pray, you know? But not asking God to put the fix on for anything specific because I didn’t want anyone to be able to pinpoint instances where He had failed to produce. I mean, He has a reputation to protect, and I couldn’t blame Him for not having anything to do with us humans, but someone else might not have understood. Anyway, I got tired of praying after a while. What’s the use?”

“A deist! You’re a deist!” she exclaimed knowingly.

“Is it terminal?” he queried, toying with his cigarette lighter.

“For your soul, yes,” Ruth countered, desperately trying not to let him slip through her fingers.

“Look, you’re not going to break me, so why don’t you just cut with this third degree stuff, huh? You’re harping like this is enough to make a misogynist out of anyone.”

Ruth was taken aback, at last ready to give up. “When you’re done toying with someone you can be very blunt, can’t you? Brutally frank, shall we say? Is that really what you think, that I’m trying to break you? You talk like this is an inquisition or something,” she said, resigning, genuinely hurt.

“Well?”

“Well what?”

“Well, isn’t it?” he asked coolly.

She just stared at him for a few seconds. He could see that he had pushed her through long-suffering to the beginnings of anger. Then:

“Arrgh! You’re impossible, Ralph Smithson! You just have no kindness have you?” she fairly screamed in his face.

“Yeah? Well you believe in God!” he taunted.

Ruth was tremendously insulted until she realized, a split-second too late, what he had said. She swung at him weakly out of sheer frustration.

“Tsk, tsk. Now, would Jesus do that?” Ralph goaded.

He had won. Ruth was thoroughly beaten and the tears were really beginning to flow.

“Just sit there and gloat!” she wailed. “You think you’re so smart You’re merciless!”

She hurried off, sobbing uncontrollably. Ralph relaxed and lit up another Kool, ignoring the scattered stares he was getting from the few others in the coffee shop. He watched the smoke from the cigarette in his hand ascend to the ceiling in a thin stream and dissipate.
It was quite dark outside now. The full moon cast a weirdish, yellow glow. The river was lined with trees and shadows of trees and in each shadow lurked a mysterious question. One asked: am I hiding someone here? And as the moon played games with the shadows, another asked: is there something I know which is deeper than that which appears? In single file they lined themselves along the river, at attention.

The first man was large and slow: his laconical movements reminded me of an ox carrying a yoke. His arms swung loosely, straight down from his shoulders as he shuffled so that you could almost envision the yoke, burdening his massive shoulders. The man who followed him was taller, but thin, and his red cigarette end glowed. He puffed without removing his stick from his mouth. When he did this, the smoke scattered in the breeze. He was relaxed enough, but his movements were quicker than the first man’s: his eyes darted to the trees and the shadows that were everywhere around him. As he walked, he kept his hands tucked neatly into his pockets.

Noticing the fire at some distance breaking the night’s blanket of darkness, the big man prodded the thin man in the back with his finger, pointed ahead and remarked, “Hey.” The thin man did not reply, and neither lost a step in their insistent, steady pace.

Approaching the fire, they were cautious. Others were there and they got up from their places to greet and be cordial to the new arrivals, pat them on the back and shake their hands. Most of the attention centered on the thin man, however. “Glad you could make it, Hank,” a balding man said. “We’ve been looking forward to it,” another said, one face in a crowd of twenty. Their faces were shining, excited, filled with breathless anticipation for an event they had waited a long time for. “Hey, get some coffee for the man. Get Hank some coffee,” a man with deep-cut lines in his face encouraged. Hank had not yet spoken, although he had nodded around to everyone and had shaken a few hands. Those who were not busy greeting him watched his face intently, with round eyes, waiting for a sign that he was ready to begin. Once a month they came to hear him speak, going home in silence afterward.

“I got something to tell you fellas,” Hank said, suddenly, and all eyes and ears were on him. “I know a guy,” he began, “Who opens the crackerjack box on the peanut end every single time.” Anyone who was not seated hustled to do so. “He can buy six boxes and every single time he opens that box he hits peanuts. Every damn time. You ever think about that for a minute? How many times can you remember you even hit the peanut end?”” He paused to let the might of his words sink in and a man with droopy bags under his eyes interjected. “That’s somethin’, you know, that’s really somethin’.”

Hank replied quickly, “Now I’ll just bet you’d like that, wouldn’t you?” His tone did not warrant a reply. “Let’s see, now,” he turned to another man. “Tell me, Jesse, when you open up a crackerjack box do you like to find the peanuts first or last?”

A tall, lean man in his forties, Jesse was a farmer and rather quiet by nature, he rubbed his fingers nervously and blurted, “Why I don’t know. How do you mean, Hank?”

“Do you like to find the peanuts right away, or do you like to let it last, save ‘em kind of like for dessert? Save the best for last.”

“Well, I don’t know,” Jesse said, “Kind of sounds to me like the difference between callin’ a glass of water half full or half empty. Six a’ one, half a’ the other. I guess I’d say peanuts first like most folks.” He was unused to speaking very much and when it came to large discussions he liked to be agreeable. Hank spat cynically as he turned to the rest of the group and sneered. “Utter nonsense. You people are wallowing like pigs in your own slop. What do you know about goodness. You wouldn’t know a rose if somebody stuck it up your nose.” He paused, in disgust. Everyone hung their heads low, with shame.

“There’s gonna be peanuts waitin’ there inside that box no matter whether you eat ‘em first or last or scattered all through, it’s all the same. You people are just like a sign I read every time I go home on a billboard along side the road. Billboard’s been up for seventeen years now and every year come March they paint over the letters of this sign: Jesus Christ Is Coming Soon. Like some bearded weirdo in New York City with a death-wish standin’ on some corner with a sign in his hand.” Thin Hank was shuffling back and forth amidst the seated men now, starting to get inspired. Occasionally he would glance at his companion, the big man, and once he whispered, “What time you
Weaning Beckett

Six poets died last night so we didn’t get past the first act.

Our master was in hysterics and couldn’t control his bowels. Now we’ve all forgotten our lines and begotten more bastards; and no one knows or wants to remember act two.

Wm. David Sheldon

got, Hal?” and Hal whispered back the answer.

“Yeah,” Hank continued, “Just like some bearded weirdo. The end’s gonna come at twelve-oh-one a.m., June 27, 1975. It’s a trick, that’s all. A trick to make you wait and see. You do that sometime. I done it. You just wait and see. ‘Made you look, made you look,’ they will say, and you have no excuse. Well not me,” he said, putting on his bandwagon voice. “All things change, but that sign don’t change. And you know what else don’t change?” he asked fervently, almost screaming, “Jesus Christ don’t change!”

“Yeah, but one things different,” a bald man piped up, a little disturbed. “We’ve got to have our Jesus Christ now. We got to have it now!”

“Oh no you don’t,” Hank bit back, “Bullshit,” Hank said. “Just almost drooling in his fury. “Jesus Christ don’t always come on the peanut end, he was thinking. He suddenly stood up and told them all slowly, “You can’t do anything’ else.” He smiled as Hal got up and went on this way for some time. He weighted his words evenly now, important.”

“OK, Shoot, but we got to get goin’ pretty soon.”

“Hank, what does Jesus Christ got to do with peanuts?”

Hank turned to him, “Well, that’s easy.”

“Is it that Jesus and peanuts both are good?”


The big man said, “Well I ain’t simple.”

“I never said you . . .”

“Yeah, you did,” Hal interrupted. He wanted credit for his discovery. “Yeah, you did. You maybe didn’t say it straight out, but you said it.”

“No, Hal. You got it all wrong. I . . .”

Hank was astonished, and his mouth had dropped open in listening. This was some speech for the big man. “Yeah, well, I know what you mean, Hal . . .”

“No you don’t,” Hal replied.

The day was short and there were many clouds. The two men packed seventeen miles to another station with their steady, insistent pacing. They knew the steps. Words were scarce as usual. The flies buzzed around them as they walked.

The evening darkened the sunset reds and turned them to black as they approached their destination. No stars flashed them light off the pines this night, and no moon reflected on the earth. A similar crowd awaited them; a similar ritual of coffee and hellos. As they rushed to sit down Hank pulled a wooden match from his pocket and lit it on his zipper. Taking the lit match in his hand, he raised it high before the men’s eyes. There was complete and utter silence.

“See this match?” he said, some-what needlessly, breaking the quiet powerfully. He then proceeded to squeeze the flame out between his thumb and forefinger. “There!” he said, “That can happen to you! All you have to do is not breathe and the light goes out, easy as that. No breath, no life, that’s all there is to it. And you, just you do the breathing.” He was commanding, powerful, and he went on this way for some time.

“What can we do to stop it?” a big, fat mechanic-type with tattoos scarring his arms pondered aloud.

“What can we do to stop it?” Hank echoed incredulously. “What can we do?” he repeated, even louder. “Why, any fool can tell you that. It’s simple.” He weighted his words evenly now, at least long enough to put his hand on the big man’s shoulder. “O.K.,” he said, and the others, as if on cue, picked themselves off the ground, the tree stumps, and the occasional chairs and quickly sped off into the night, back to their homes. Hank and Hal laid down by the fire and fell fast asleep. They awoke the next day, shivering, the fire long ago gone out.

The two ate breakfast by a new morning fire and gobbled down eggs and coffee. It was easy to see that they had had breakfast together many times before. Hank made the fire, as Hal readied the dinner. Hank cooked the meal and Hal served. Hank washed, Hal dried. Unspoken treatises made to survive disputes, carefully knitted boundaries giving a measure of importance to the axiom of equal responsibility, shared duties. They spoke rarely. They didn’t have to. But this morning, Hal made ready to speak. He was troubled. Slow, even dense, his mind lumbered through thoughts, breaking them like eggshells. In speech he fumbled to give the broken pieces back together.

“You have help. We need Jesus Christ.”

“Jesus Christ don’t have to come first. We need Jesus Christ to do the breathin’.” He

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"Is it that Jesus and peanuts both are good?”

"Well, sort of,” Hank said. “Its simple. Anybody could’ figured it out.”

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y became conscious of his own thing. No,” the mechanic-type replied, as began to rise to stand up with the man. “We got to have our Jesus at now.”

I say bullshit. Jesus Christ’ll come is own sweet time. You don’t need help breathin’ ‘cuz you can do it all yourself. You just keep breathin’ your light’ll keep burnin’. You’ll all right,” Hank said, ending the ion. The others got up to leave and slowly moved away, back to their ses.

Hal was gleeful. For once he had sight ahead. He had gotten the. He could hardly wait for theers to move away. “Hank,” he said, rose guys were just lookin’ for the nut end too soon. Right?”

Hank said nothing.

’Right?” Hal asked again, but there no answer. “Hank, I asked you a stion. I got to know.”

“Jesus Christ,” Hank said. “Je-zus Christ!” he repeated. “Jesus Christ’ll come in his own sweet time. There isn’t anybody can do nothin’ about it. Not speeches, not peanuts, not you, not me. Jesus Christ,” he said quietly, “Jesus Christ. You don’t know it, but he does.”

Hal was silent.

At the next meeting stop the light of the campfire flickered wildly on the trees. The shadows of the trees were elusive as the light played its chasing game. The fire was hot.

Hank talked about peanuts to the eager, listening crowd, those gathered there in the woods. Faces were intent, glowing with enthusiasm. He went through much the same routine as the first night, and as usual one man spoke up and cried, “We got to have our Jesus Christ now!” but as Hank began to reply, something like a comet loomed large in the sky, getting brighter and larger by the second.

“Jesus Christ! Jesus Christ!” Hank began to scream, “Jesus Christ right now! Right now! He began to jump up and down, waving his arms and shaking his head in frenzy. “Je-zus Christ! Je-zus Christ!” the men began to chant hysterically as rushing, rushing closer came the comet. “Je-zus Christ! Je-zus Christ!” they screamed insanely, louder and louder as the comet passed nearer and finally, overhead. They watched it until it passed far away and they continued to stare in that direction for a stunned three or four minutes of shock. All finally turned to watch solemnly the fallen and motionless body of Hank, who had slumped to the ground just moments ago. Hal stepped to the center of the campfire as the men, not moving, continued to stare. “Jesus Christ’s gonna come,” Hal said confidently, “Don’t you worry, Jesus Christ’ll be here in his own sweet time and be just as good as Hank’s peanuts.”
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