10-1-1975

Dialogue

Staff and writers of Dialogue

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.calvin.edu/dialogue

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.calvin.edu/dialogue/40

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the University Publications at Calvin Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dialogue by an authorized administrator of Calvin Digital Commons. For more information, please contact dbm9@calvin.edu.
* Symposium on the American Dream
* Love and Death * A Day in a Life
* Snapshot of the Artist as a Young Man
* Walter in Wanderland * Equal Space
* DeVries Does Detente
* * *
* Plus Poems and Pictures
As we looked over the opening editorials of previous Dialogue editors, we began to recognize a rather foreboding pattern. These introductory words began to take on the appearance of prophecies—self-fulfilling prophecies. This phenomenon may owe more to our excellent perspective of hindsight than it owes to the power of their words, but, at any rate, such coincidences led us to ponder the future rather seriously before we began to write. We were tempted either to say nothing and let the year proceed per providence or to make fantastic claims, later writing off any successes to editorial direction and making our admissions of failure in lame duck confessionals.

What needs to be said, we decided, is this: Dialogue is like the phoenix. We may not purposefully climb on the pyre to be consumed, but we are renewed every year. Dialogue certainly cannot make any claims to phoenix-like immortality, but we have lived for seven years and are going to do everything in our power to stick around for a while.

Dialogue has a new staff this year. We have a lot of ideas that we’re, frankly, quite excited about. We hope you’ve noticed some of them already, and, also, that you will get as excited about Dialogue as we are. None of us want to be concerned with externals, yet we can’t ignore them. We want to treat the magazine as an art form—to experiment with graphics, with layout, and with typography. Many of our changes are cosmetic, but we hope that they will become metaphors for a larger renewal.

With this issue, Dialogue as phoenix is reborn.

The rest is up to you. Dialogue as monologue is soon to be a dull bird—and likely to be cast into the fire. We will try to create a skeletal framework for Christian expression and discussion with our features and our editorials, but it’s going to be up to you to flesh out the fowl.

If you feed us letters, informal essays, scholarly essays, satires and cartoons, poems, stories, visual art works, photographs, reviews, or just about any crazy idea that pops into your head, we promise to feather this phoenix like a peacock.
equal space

Essential to any dialogue is the opportunity for each participant in the exchange to express his or her opinion. Lest Dialogue become a monologue, we are here introducing this regular feature so that all of our readers may participate in an exchange of views. Equal Space is an opportunity for you to participate in Dialogue by sending your opinion to us in letter or short, informal essay form.

It is quite infrequently that I write letters to the editor, but I suppose this time I asked for it. It seems that I expressed some sort of opinion about Dialogue in the company of a staff member. This person accosted me at a later date, requesting that I write a letter wherein I should say what my feelings were regarding the nature and purpose of that inimicable mag. My opinion evidently had sounded like it had more thought back of it than was actually the case. At any rate, rather than renege on the issue—which would have proved the aforementioned opinion just so much verbiage—I consented, albeit reluctantly. For what they are worth, some thoughts on Dialogue follow.

In at least two periodicals supported and read by members of the Christian Reformed community it has recently been observed by more than one prominent leader of the Christian Reformed Church that its constituency can be broadly seen as tripartite. The three main attitudes or minds have been variously labeled as: (1) Kuyperian (or Neo-Kuyperian), (2) doctrinalist, and (3) pietest. I would like for discussion purposes to propose a model of the Calvin student body, similar to that in forms but by no means analogous. The three main minds here are recognizable to most: I'm sure: (1) the Heads, including Thespians, FAG, Logan and Worden St. communities; (2) the Jocks, more or less self-explanatory but also containing beeries and your run-of-the-mill rednecks; and (3) what I'll call Middle Americans, for lack of a more original, less nebulous term. Probably accounting for the majority of students, the epitome of your Middle American can be found on most resident hall staffs and in great abundance in the dorm lobbies after the Knollcrest evening worship service. These categories are of course very broad and are intended only as tools for discussion. They are intentional generalizations. There is much mutual exchange and overlapping between the groups and much diversity within. Yet I think most would concur with me in saying that these groups (cliques, coteries, etc.) do exist, and the majority of students could probably identify with one or another of them.

Now I see nothing inherently wrong with any one of these minds except perhaps for a marked propensity of what I have called the Jock mind to excessive tippling. After all, everyone wants to belong, to associate with people sharing common interests. What does bother me is the tension I sense between them. The Heads cut up the Jocks, the Middle Americans don't understand the Heads, and the Jocks understand neither and cut up both. You very well may be wondering what in the world I think Dialogue has to do with this. It seems to me that Dialogue has catered to and styled itself after the Head image, consciously or otherwise. Upon several occasions I have heard sentiments expressed by Jock and Middle American students to this effect: "10,000 clams a year for that rag! I've read better poetry by Richard Brautigan—funnier too! What are those pseudos trying to prove?" By writing this I don't mean to support either side, although I do think that Dialogue last year tended toward esoteria and a certain cliqueishness, typified in that fiasco of late spring when the Calvin culturatti was informed of the repressive stultifying yoke they bore under the tyranny of a censorious administration.

In spite of my bombastic diatribe, I still think Calvin needs a literary magazine. Dialogue should continue as a periodical of literary aspiration, as opposed to a journalistic enterprise. One topic enjoying much attention currently is that of Christian community, so I might as well talk about that here. As I see it, Dialogue would be neither a junior version of the Atlantic Monthly nor a sophisticated Weekly Reader. Rather it should act as a medium or forum for members of this community to display and develop their literary interests and abilities and have them available for appreciation and positive critical appraisal by others. Necessarily this means that standards should be demanding and rigorous. Also important to achieving this end is an openness on the part of that staff to constructive criticism from the community, which in turn entails a responsibility on the part of that community to voice its thoughts, to be responsive. In the end it must be admitted that some, perhaps many, will continue to neglect to read Dialogue through indifference or scorn. Unfortunately, this is to be expected due to a general torpor regnant in the majority of students as far as interest in the fine arts and belles-lettres, but that is another matter entirely.

Jonathan Rockey
### contents

**comment**

From Ashes ........................................ 2

**equal space**

Jonathan Rockey ........................................ 3

**features**

Detente, SALT, & Solzhenitsyn .......................... 6
Robert De Vries

Symposium: The American Dream ...................... 12

Call Us Refugees ....................................... 20
Donald Hettinga

A Snapshot of the Artist as a Young Man ............ 10
Al Aasman

New Critics, New Questions, New Dreams ............ 24
Clarence Walhout

**fiction**

The Love Song of Allen Stewart Konigsberg .......... 28
Irvin Kroeze

---

**credits**

**Drawings**
- Alba DeBee ........................................ 23, 30
- Deb Ellens ........................................... 6

**Photographs**
- Robert Eskes ........................................ 31
- William F. Reus III ................................. 4, 5, 19

**Poems**
- Kim Gilmore ......................................... 19
- Lawrence Olsen ...................................... 11
- David Westendorp ................................... 31

**Covers** by Amy Harper
As the United States prepares to celebrate its bicentennial it finds itself occupying a position of leadership in a world whose foundations are coming unstuck. Beset by the combined problems of rapid population growth, resource depletion, pollution, poverty, and nuclear proliferation; the economic, social and political order of the world is in a tremendous state of flux. The complexity of the problems, themselves, and the double trauma of Viet Nam and Watergate, have left the United States with uncertainties regarding its proper role in world affairs. At this time of turmoil and testing, it is especially important for the United States to re-examine the nature of its relationship with the Soviet Union and the implications of this relationship for global problems.

For most of the post World War II period, United States-Soviet relations have been characterized by bitter rivalry in what has been called the Cold War. This era appears to be giving way to a period of cautious détente, but the exact shape and meaning of this new relationship is not very clear.

The formal meaning of détente is a lessening of tensions between parties. In a recent interview with Bill Moyers, Secretary of State Henry Kissenger defined détente as a systematic attempt "to improve political relations, to increase trade relations in order to produce a maximum number of links between us and the Soviet Union, and to create a cooperative environment to reduce [the prospect of] war." The goal of détente and even some specific elements of it, as explained here, have drawn broad support across the American political spectrum. Recently, however, various aspects of détente have come under attack by a number of prominent leaders who claim that its benefits have been one-sided. Not only do these leaders include stout anti-communists such as AFL-CIO President George Meany and Senators Barry Goldwater and Henry Jackson, but also liberal, internationalists such as Senators Jacob Javits and Abraham Ribicoff and a former State department official, George Ball. The critics...
of détente have now also been joined by the eloquent voice of Alexander Solzhenitsyn.

In two moving speeches before the AFL-CIO this past summer, Solzhenitsyn did much to rekindle the fire in the hearts of old and latent cold warriors. One can only have the deepest respect for the scope of his genius, his humanity and for his authentic voice of suffering and oppression, but some of his interpretations of Soviet-American relations and policy prescriptions must be challenged. Since Solzhenitsyn is most emphatic in his condemnation of détente and touches on most of its aspects, his views can be used as a basis for analyzing the charges made against détente. However, not all of the critics of détente mentioned above would share his position on all points.

The heart of Solzhenitsyn's opposition to détente rests on the assumption that most forms of contact with the Soviet Union are immoral because they lend strength and legitimacy to a regime that suppresses human rights and maintains an implacable hostility towards the West. The Soviet Union, therefore, is not sincerely pursuing a policy of accommodation with the West, and it has used various contacts and agreements with the West to its own exclusive advantage. These would include trade agreements, the European Security Conference accord, and the SALT agreements. These aspects of what is loosely called détente policy, along with a consideration of the status of human rights in the Soviet Union, will each be discussed separately in order to determine the validity of the arguments made against détente.

Trade

Solzhenitsyn contends that trade between the Soviet Union and the West has done nothing but prop up a hopelessly inferior and inefficient Soviet economic system. Without importing Western technology and capital the Soviet Union could not begin to compete economically and militarily with the West.

This contention, however, seems highly doubtful when one considers that the volume of trade between Russia and the West has always been at a very low level compared with trade between other industrial states. The record of Russia's remarkable growth as a major industrial power in a few short decades must be largely attributed to its own efforts. This rapid economic development, however, came at a tremendous cost in human suffering.

The last point raises the possibility of another interpretation of the influence that economic ties might have on the Soviet system. Solzhenitsyn, George Meany and others have argued that it has had the effect of aiding oppression and supporting a strong military machine. It could also be argued, however, that economic ties alleviate economic hardship and encourage the use of consumer goods. Once the Soviet public's appetite has been whetted with more goods, it will be difficult to satisfy it without a further shift in priorities from heavy industry and military hardware to light industry and consumer products. Greater involvement in the world economy, therefore, may require the Soviet leaders to pay greater attention to the economic welfare of its citizens and have a liberalizing effect on the Soviet economic system.

An illustration of the link between trade and consumerism is the sale of United States grain to the Soviet Union. In this case the Soviet Union has been forced to buy grain from the United States in order to satisfy the public's demand for a higher level of meat consumption. Despite the fact that the Russians drove a shrewd bargain (with the collusion of grain exporting corporations) and disrupted American markets in massive grain purchase of 1972, the continued purchase of grain also illustrates that Soviet-American trade can be mutually advantageous. The recent large-scale exportation of grain and other agricultural products, now totalling over $19 billion a year, is the most important single factor in the favorable balance of trade and payments that the United States now enjoys. Furthermore, American agriculture, which has been cut loose from the protection of high price supports and soil bank programs, would be in deep trouble if the Russians had not come to its rescue with big purchases of grain. The recent agreements that commit the Soviets to buy, and the United States to supply, fixed minimum quantities of grain should help end market uncertainties and make the Soviet Union a valuable steady customer.

Two other points need to be made about United States grain sales to the Soviet Union. First, it seems to me that the moral issue which casts some doubt on these sales is not whether we should sell food to a communist regime, but rather, whether we should give away more food to needier countries which cannot pay. We also need to examine the ethics of a system that enables the United States to consume meat and petroleum in large quantities by the export of our extravagant habits.

The point is that Americans may be indulging in too much self-congratulation over the efficiency of their agriculture as compared to Soviet agriculture. While American agriculture is indeed efficient, Soviet shortages may have more to do with a short growing season and a lack of rainfall. Only one percent of the arable land in the Soviet Union gets more than thirty inches of rainfall per year as compared to sixty percent of United States arable land.

In summary, I contend that trade between the United States and the Soviet Union is mutually advantageous and may help to promote consumerism in the Soviet Union which may begin to open the way for a more humane society.

Human Rights

In contrast to his position on trade, Solzhenitsyn calls for the United States and its allies to "interfere more and more" in the protection of human rights in the Soviet Union. One might agree in principle that interference on behalf of human rights is desirable, but how is this to be done? If this is a call for direct intervention it is a self-defeating and reckless call. We do well to remember that the last direct Allied intervention in the Soviet Union during its civil war did more to strengthen than hinder the Bolshevik cause. Furthermore, the suggestion of intervention is dangerous given the propensity of some elements in our society for excessive zealotry and holy causes.

It would seem that the less drastic measure of direct public pressure on the Soviet Union to respect the basic rights of its citizens is also ill-advised and ineffective. A case in point is the fate of the Soviet-American reciprocal trade agreement. When the two countries were negotiating a renewal of the 1972 trade agreement, the United States Senate attached an amendment to the agreement which required the Soviet government to permit the free emigration of Jews. In the same month that this action was taken—January,
1975—the Soviet government rejected the trade bill and soon thereafter, a major trade agreement with Great Britain was concluded. Although other considerations may have been involved in the Soviet rejection, such as a restriction of export-import credits by Congress and the prospect of other trading partners, it is obvious that the American demand that free emigration be a part of a formal agreement was too humiliating for the Soviets to accept. Quiet diplomacy prior to January, 1975, on the other hand, was effective in securing the emigration of Soviet Jews which has now slowed to a trickle. Although the violation of rights in America is not of comparable severity, the reaction of Soviet leaders is more understandable if we put ourselves in their position. Would the American government accept an agreement that formally required it to achieve school integration in northern cities or an equalization of unemployment rates for blacks and whites?

None of this is to say that we can be indifferent to what is happening to human rights in the Soviet Union. But we must consider what is feasible and effective and we must also be even-handed in our judgments of ourselves, our rivals, and other states. What appears to be most feasible and effective at this time is a greater number of contacts and ties of all kinds with the Soviet Union. It is the exchange of goods, people, and information that will make it more difficult for the Soviet government to quiet its dissidents and hide its violation of human rights. Yet, it is these links with the West—the very things that have helped to expose the plight of Solzhenitsyn and his colleagues—that Solzhenitsyn has criticized.

The European Security Conference

The proposed agreement is the funeral of eastern Europe. It means that western Europe would finally . . . sign away eastern Europe, stating that it is perfectly willing to see eastern Europe be crushed and overwhelmed once and for all . . . These are the harsh words with which Solzhenitsyn condemned the European Security Conference accord recently signed at Helsinki by the United States, the Soviet Union, and thirty-three other countries. In a similar vein, a respected analyst of foreign affairs, George Ball, says the accord means that the "...West solemnly concedes . . . that the Soviets' Eastern European empire is never to be challenged."2

The part of the agreement that provoked these dire interpretations, in particular, was the section that calls for the "inviolability" of existing borders in Europe, a goal that the Soviets have long sought as part of a general settlement of World War II. It seems to me, however, that this interpretation is unwarranted. To say that the boundaries of Europe are "inviolable" is not to say that "the Soviets' Eastern European empire is never to be challenged" nor that the use of force and suppression of rights used to establish it are now sanctioned. It is to say that there is nothing in the foresee-

...Solzhenitsyn’s opposition to detente rests on the assumption that most forms of contact with the Soviet Union are immoral because they lend strength and legitimacy to a regime that suppresses human rights and maintains an implacable hostility toward the West.

SALT

One important aspect of Soviet-American détente on which Solzhenitsyn has remained silent is that of nuclear arms control. There are many important American critics, however, who charge that the Soviet Union has gained significant advantages here, too. When the first Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty agreement of 1972 permitted the Soviet Union to have more missiles than the United States, Senator Henry Jackson was successful in attaching an amendment to the agreement requiring that all future SALT accords achieve quantitative equality. In keeping with this stipulation, the Vladivostok agreement of November, 1974 permitted both sides to have an upper limit of 2,400 strategic offensive weapons, including
mishles and bombers. The Soviet Union, however, has been charged by some observers with violating the spirit of the agreement by replacing more of its light missiles with heavy missiles than the United States had anticipated in its “unilateral statements” appended to the treaty. It is now clear that Soviet missiles in fact have a decided advantage over those of the United States in the size of the bomb that they can carry.

How serious is this unexpected development and alleged “bad faith” of the Soviets? It seems to me that it is regrettable, but not very significant for a number of reasons. First of all, the treaty does not prohibit this change in missile size and the United States is free to do the same if it feels this to be necessary. Second, the United States is generally recognized as having a significant qualitative edge in strategic weapons—that is, in accuracy, reliability, and in multiple warhead development. This last factor gives the United States a decided advantage in the total number of warheads as opposed to total warhead weight. Third and most important, the whole debate over relative strategic strength becomes meaningless after a certain point. That is to say, once both the United States and Soviet Union have achieved an assured capacity to destroy each other a number of times over it simply doesn’t matter whether one side or the other has a few more or bigger missiles. This was apparently recognized by Secretary of State Kissinger when he concluded a July, 1974 press conference concerning nuclear arms agreements with the following questions:

What in the name of God is strategic superiority? What is the significance of it politically, militarily, operationally at these levels? What do you do with it?

The most important conclusion to be drawn from an analysis of the existing SALT agreements is that the permissible nuclear force levels for both sides are much too high for any rational purpose. The results of détente in the area of nuclear arms have been rather meager, but this should furnish an added incentive for the United States to assume a greater leadership role in arms limitations than it has in the past. Having been the leader in new arms developments from the inception of the Cold War, the United States is in a better psychological position and bears greater responsibility for taking initiatives in reducing arms levels than the Soviet Union, which has been in the position of playing catch-up. (At the present time, for example, the United States could offer to keep the deployment of its new Trident submarines at a certain level if the Soviets would limit the deployment of its new SS18 missiles. There is, however, no evidence that we are using our new weapons systems as “bargaining chips” in this manner. Instead they become stimuli for a new round in a technological arms race.)

Arms control and disarmament has some obvious advantages in improving the climate of relations and reducing the risks of war between the United States and the Soviet Union. It also has direct significance for coping with at least two other world problems. First, it is unrealistic to expect other states to indefinitely forego nuclear weapons if the nuclear weapons states continue to develop more sophisticated nuclear arsenals. The prospects of nuclear proliferation, therefore, are at least partially linked to the progress of arms control agreements between nuclear powers. Second, a reduction in expenditures for arms would free resources for meeting the pressing economic and social needs of the world. If the United States were to reduce its military budget by ten percent, this would mean that about another ten billion dollars would be available for economic aid, compared with current annual expenditure of about 2.5 billion dollars for this purpose. Clearly a change in priorities could do much to alleviate the desperate plight of many poor nations. Until there is such a reordering of priorities, it cannot rest easily on our consciences that all forms of aid by rich nations to poor nations are dwarfed by their expenditures on arms.

Conclusions

Although a case can be made for the positive aspects of détente, as I have tried to do, we must not expect it to work miracles. None of the aspects of détente discussed above are the keys to peace and harmony in themselves. They are only small, limited steps. These steps, however, do at least offer the promise of reducing the cycle of fear, suspicion, and hostility that has surrounded so much of Soviet-American relations and the beginning of greater trust and cooperation.

Furthermore, we cannot expect that détente will remake Soviet society and politics. The tides of time and events, however, do bring changes in the lives of nations. It seems reasonable to anticipate that prolonged and diverse contacts and an easing of tensions with the West would begin to undermine the Soviet image of its implacable, imperialist foe and perhaps lead them to re-examine their rationale for a system of rigid control and security.

The United States, therefore, should continue to build its foreign policy on the foundation of détente, the heart of which is a mutual Soviet-American interest in avoiding war. Détente is not without risks since the United States and the Soviet Union still have different objectives, but a resurgent nationalism and fearful, militant anti-communism incur worse risks—confrontations around the world and a garrison state at home. Only if the United States and the Soviet Union expand areas of cooperation within a framework of détente can they bring their full resources to bear on the urgent economic, demographic, and ecological problems that threaten to engulf the world.

Footnotes

3. Assured destructive capacity could be undermined if one side had the ability to destroy the other side’s missiles before they could be used. This ability is called a first strike capacity. Land based ICBM’s are most vulnerable to a first strike, whereas submarines are virtually invulnerable. On the question of vulnerability, Secretary of Defense, James Schlesinger, assurred: “There is just no possibility that a high confidence disarming first strike is attainable for either side even against the ICBM components of the strategic forces on both sides.” The statement was made before the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Arms Control of the Committee on Foreign Relations, 93rd Congress, 2nd Session, March 4, 1974.
Ever since high school I've wanted to be a writer. I won a poetry contest there, and I had a sudden, instinctive, intuitive feeling, as the judge handed me the envelope containing the ten dollar first prize, that I would someday make a living with the written word. That year, my English teacher filled up half of the empty page at the back of my yearbook with stuff like "... you've shown your ability to work with the English language—don't waste it." I figured that he ought to know what he's talking about, so I started reassessing myself from a writer's viewpoint.

First of all, I don't spell too good, but then again, a lot of big name writer's are atrocious spellers (I read a lot of playboy interviews with writers). My sentence construction is pretty good, and I have a natural knack for putting commas in the right place. Even more important than that stuff, I am quite emotional; I feel things more than most people—know what I mean? I'm not much of a partaker of life, but I do sit back and observe things, and listen to people's conversations and that sort of thing. I figured that I had what it takes to be a writer, the essential ingredients you might say. I am also pretty cool, in a way, and I don't just follow the crowd. If someone were to describe me in a word, he'd probably say that I am enigmatic (Aloof might be good, too).

For a couple of years I just sat back, basking in pleasant thoughts of writing novels that invariably reached the best sellers list, of doing the lecture circuit, of dickering over movie rights, of Pulitzer prizes, Nobels, honorary doctorates, and all that sort of stuff. Of course, I realized that it might take three or four years to make a name for myself (after all, I'm not naive), but this was good, in that it would leave people with the picture of a struggling-young-author—from-the-small-town-who-makes-it-big sort of thing.

My dreams were half-way shattered, however, when I read what some famous author (Faulkner, I think) had said to someone who wanted to be a writer. He asked him, "Do you want to be a writer or do you want to write?" It seemed to me that I was dwelling too much on the former, and doing nothing in the way of the latter. So I started writing.

I bought myself a few of those big legal pads of yellow paper, a half-dozen pencils, and a few pens. I sharpened all my pencils and lay them out in a row above my paper. I figured that if I broke a point, I wouldn't want to stop writing to sharpen it—I might be in the middle of an inspiration or something.

My first piece of literature was to be a witty little story about a young woman with rather dubious morals (none). Her name was Judy, but her friends called her Jude. I chose this particular name because I could make a pun with it in the title: "Jude the oft-screwed," get it? Anyway, I proudly wrote the title down and then started doodling while I got my thoughts straightened out. I doodled through fifteen sheets of paper and then went to bed.

Next day, it took only one doodle to realize that I was getting nowhere. I went to the library and started reading a book on creative writing. Rule one: "choose a subject you are familiar with." Rule out Judy—I had never been familiar with her, let alone gone out with a girl before. "Draw from your personal experiences." I considered that one to be sort of a joke. Me, small-town boy: normal childhood, no traumatic experiences, father and mother still fond of each other, none of my friends homosexuals, my old dog hasn't even died yet. Shucks, I didn't even consider life to be much of a mystery; it was just sort of there, waiting to be recorded. I came to a decision which, at the time, seemed to hold far-reaching portents for my life. I would move to Toronto during the summer. There, I thought, where Canadian fortunes are won and lost (incredible as it may seem), I would mingle with the rich and poor, black and white, good and bad, Wops and Chinks, whores and prostitutes and Yonge street and lusts of the flesh, and (I was beginning to sweat), then I got up from my carrel and went to the bathroom.
While I was in Toronto, I went all over the place looking at Wops and Chinks and the rich and the poor and the winoes and blacks, but it didn't do anything for me. I couldn't quite make things relevant enough. And when I saw two old winoes beating each other up with wine bottles on the Lakeshore Rd. streetcar, I couldn't squeeze more than a paragraph out of this obviously ironic situation. By the time I had been there for two weeks, I decided that maybe I hadn't really gotten deep enough into the muck of human life. So, one night around nine, I took the subway to the corner of Yonge and Bloor, and held up the lamppost in front of a massage parlor and watched the night people. I was getting a bit bored when, finally, a particular lady who I'd been watching for fifteen minutes, turned and looked at me. She slowly swung her way over to me, and, holding her cigarette in just that such a way, she said, “Got a light, bud?” I whipped out my lighter and, taking this to be the moment, I said with emphasis, “You bet I got a light!” She flicked her ash at me and said, “Beat it kid.” Not too subtle, but effective. Next day, I tried writing a story about a lady of the night, but the only half-way good part about it was the title, “Who're are you trying to kid?” I soon gave it up.

Shortly thereafter, I got a job as a garbage man and decided to forget about the vagaries of big-city life, and write a simple story, utilizing my job experience. I tried to write a story about a garbage man who got fed up with his work; one afternoon, when his truck is full, he goes around dumping garbage on all of his customer's lawns. When his truck is empty, he crawls into the compacter and pushes the button. This story fizzed out pretty soon. Awhile later, I started writing a story about a landscaper (which job I had next) who got sick of cutting the lawns of people who never used them, so he took his lawn mower through the flower-beds, peed on the cedar trees, and finally planted himself in the potato patch. This story fizzed out when I realized that the plot was essentially the same as the garbage one. I was getting desperate for a good plot. At that time I happened to be working for Canada Packers, cutting meat. When my mind started toying with the idea of a butcher, sick of his job, who cuts off his fingers, etc. etc., I knew I was in a rut, creatively speaking.

I was obsessed with the idea of writing a story, any story, so long as I could make it real—at least for myself. My life didn't seem to contain anything worthwhile to record. What was worse, summer was nearing an end, and I wanted to establish my credentials as a writer by submitting a story for the September issue of a magazine.

As I packed my bags for school, I looked back at my Toronto summer in retrospect. Living there hadn't done anything for my career. I came to the realization that if life on the outside, that is human relations, place and setting, didn't prod my creative spark into writing a short story, then the story (if there is one at all) must have had to exist within me all along. At first, I passed this realization off as a playful application of philosophy 151, but then, something inside me clicked. In a hurry, for fear that the click might leave, I got my pad of paper and read through all the stuff that I had written that summer (about 2 minutes). The clicking got a little more persistent, so I grabbed my pen and started writing. This story was about a writer who got sick of writing stories about commonplace events in his life that would turn out to be relevant and significant and so he wrote his last story about a writer who took commonplace events in his life and made them commonplace by writing a story about a writer who wrote a story about the life of a commonplace person who wanted to be a writer ever since he was in high school, where he relevently won a commonplace poetry contest, and . . .

(please refer to page 10)
Symposium:
The American Dream

The United States of America will be two hundred years old next year. Landmark dates are always times for celebration, but they should also serve as times of reassessment. America was once an attractive land—a continental magnet for the disillusioned peoples of Europe. As the United States draws close to its bicentennial year, we wondered what Americans are thinking about America. Is there any philosophical meat behind all of the ballyhoo of red, white, and blue? What do Americans in this post-Vietnam era think about the American Dream? Or, just what do Americans dream about these days?

Dialogue laid these questions before the Calvin community, and the following symposium presents some of the answers with which several members of the community responded. We defined the American dream as F. Scott Fitzgerald does in the last section of The Great Gatsby.

And as the moon rose higher the inessential houses began to melt away until gradually I became aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailor’s eyes—a fresh, green breast of the new world. Its vanished trees, the trees had made way for Gatsby’s house, had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams; for a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder.

And as I sat there brooding on the old, unknown world, I thought of Gatsby’s wonder when he first picked out the green light at the end of Daisy’s dock. He had come a long way to this blue lawn, and his dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it. He did not know that it was already behind him somewhere back in that vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night.

Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that’s no matter—tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms further . . . . And one fine morning . . .

So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.”
There have been few times in United States history when our ability to deliver on the American Dream of freedom and plenty for all has been so seriously called into question. We have seldom been asked to absorb so many defeats and to face so many apparently insoluble political and social problems. Our large cities are rapidly becoming almost uninhabitable. There are real doubts about the ability of our economic system to meet the combined threats of massive unemployment and inflation. Never has there been such pervasive skepticism about the trustworthiness of our public officials and their ability to lead us to solutions. While we are still floundering in the aftermath of the Vietnam debacle and the national humiliation imposed by Nixon, there are daily revelations of the lawlessness of government agencies and officials. Our national propensity for violence grows unchecked while we seem helpless to even agree on a solution.

Can we honestly take refuge in the consolation that these problems are temporary, or do they represent flaws running deep in the national character which will eventually make a mockery of the American Dream? The briefest glance at our history is not reassuring. It reveals several needless wars, nearly mass genocide of native Americans, gross injustice toward Blacks and other minorities, profligate consumption of our own natural resources, and exploitation and manipulation of underdeveloped nations to insure raw materials for our industrial machine so that we could go on wasting and consuming at a heedless pace.

At the very least we have to confess that the American Dream was flawed in its original conception. It was based on a naive view of human nature, and the conviction that a fresh start on a new continent would lead to almost automatic progress. At the root of this conception lay the sin of pride. We believed that because America had been blessed with great natural advantages, we could escape the failures of the past. We were somehow better than the peoples of the rest of the world; therefore we were entitled to build an economic system that encourages greed and waste and requires the exploitation of the resources of the rest of the planet.

It might be worth considering whether our bicentennial would not be better spent in doing penance for our sins than in celebrating the glories of our past. An honest recognition of our limitations and failings, an admission that we have not achieved liberty and justice for all, and a realistic and humble set of goals for the future might be better weapons with which to fight increasing disillusionment than a fresh program or a political horizon.

During our year of national stock-taking we might discover that we are still a nation with exceptional gifts and blessings, but given as a gift from God rather than earned ourselves, and therefore entitled to no special rights and prerogatives. We might discover that what resources we have left will have to be used much more sparingly than we have imagined possible, with great concern for their impact on the environment and their effect on the economies of other nations. We might be more grateful for the opportunity to be the world’s breadbasket, and more willing to share our abundance. We might even discover that we still do have a combination of religious, political, and economic freedom, while no longer necessarily the best in the world, nevertheless as good as many others, and still grounds for eternal gratitude.

Mary Sklarski works as a bottle stamper at the Permanent Label Factory. The fourth finger of her left hand is severed at the knuckle, where it got caught in the machine. Her husband left her twenty years ago, her daughter ran away at seventeen to get married, and her thirty-year-old unemployed son lives at home and dully eats up a big chunk of her factory pay. She is over fifty and very tired. When loading bottles on the hot stamper, she likes to talk to her working partner, or the quality control inspector, or the boys who bring her the boxes of unstamped bottles. She never talks about her husband, her daughter, or her son. Instead she tells about how she had fun during the Depression with her friends when they were young.

They went to the movies three times a week. Tuesday night was Dish Night; every woman who went to the movies on Dish Night got a free piece of china. Friday Night was Talent Night; on Talent Night, before the movie started, anyone could get up on stage in front of the audience and dance or sing a little, to the accompaniment of the cheers of friends and the boos of those who wanted the show to roll. And when the stage had cleared, the space inside the theatre, crowned by the high, ornate pressed iron ceiling, grew dark. The news serial came on, followed by a cartoon which preceded the B movie, and finally the feature appeared. Mary Sklarski went to the movies and let them absorb her into a huge and friendly embrace. Her friends sat next to her in fat plush seats, and her friends moved about up on the screen—friends bigger than life and perhaps more real.

When Mary Sklarski entered a movie theatre, she left behind the ugly industrial town of Garfield, New Jersey, where Polish immigrants were trying hard to reconcile their dreams of America, the land of opportunity, with a reality of a depression which stole their jobs and hopes. But three times a week, Mary walked into a world of Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers, Bette Davis, Leslie Howard, Charles Boyer—those who had the magical quality of being able to play out a dream on screen. Good acting or good directing really
didn’t matter. Stars didn’t have to act to be stars. Stars were fantastic combinations of familiarity and perfection; all movie-goers knew Clark Gable, and yet this familiarity bred adoration.

The hard times were reflected conversely on the movie screen; people escaped from scenes of breadlines into movie scenes where all was as it should be. Mary Sklarski saw herself as she wanted to be in the movies of Jean Harlow, an enchantress whose marvelous satin dresses were too tight to allow her to sit down between takes. America saw itself as it wanted to be in Mr. Smith Goes to Washington, a movie in which Jimmy Stewart proved with his courageous and goony manner that the American system, which to eyes outside of the movie theatre appeared to be falling apart, would hold strong through all trials.

Mary Sklarski’s life is still as tough as it was during the Depression, but she rarely goes to the movies. Television and rising prices are two reasons why she stays home, but the main reason is that the movies aren’t what they used to be. With the decline of the studios and the star system, came the growth of films which bore the mark of a director’s personal vision. Mary Sklarski would be baffled by the choppiness and intentional confusion of Altman’s Nashville. How can you live out your dreams in a movie which doesn’t even have a main character or plot? And actors now are an entirely different breed; they consciously separate their roles and their own personalities instead of trying to live out an image demanded of them by millions.

Yet some American movies still provide a place for the realization of American dreams and have succeeded in attracting multitudes of eager moviegoers. These movies are the disaster movies. Earthquake, Airport, The Towering Inferno were all box-office successes, and their success was not due to the pulling power of their stars. The real stars of these films are the disasters themselves; the actors are there only to respond to whatever incredible crisis the movie deals with. Moviegoers now see their nightmares on the screen instead of their dreams. Unlike the movies of the thirties, where the audience escaped the world through identification with the star, the disaster movies draw the audience into their own world by manipulating them first into terror and then into almost cathartic relief when salvation arrives. A sense of community, is wafting into the scenes where all was—as it should be. Mary Sklarski saw herself as she wanted to be in the movies of Jean Harlow, and yet this familiarity bred adoration.

Inferno was directed by the practiced beliefs of the people.

This has long been held that America as a nation has as part of its cultural baggage something called the American Dream. Such a dream can only be ambiguous and ethereal. It is hard to put into words a dream that is a composite of the dreams of hundreds of millions of people. The Dream we speak of seems to have had something to do with the promise of potentials that drew so many to this new land. It also has had to do with the continuing optimism and faithful nationalism that fills the people of America. And the Dream has taken various manifestations at various times. I think the American Dream can be defined only in these very general terms: the Dream that appears throughout American history is the vision and the hope and the firm belief that better times were to come and that America was the place where better times could happen.

Dreams have been the motivation of Americans since its beginning. The men of Jamestown dreamt of riches. The Puritans dreamt of religious freedom and of a better society. These two examples show fairly well the pattern of the next three centuries. The new world was symbolic of freedom and wealth to the huddled masses of the old world. Meanwhile, at one point in those centuries, a government was formed and the promise of the new world was endowed upon a new nation.

The men who formed that nation, our founding philosophers, were creative dreamers; they were infected by the unlimited potential of the new world. But they were realists as well. True to their enlightened ideals, they set up a nation with a bold declaration of promise and purpose. Their system of government, though balanced against the baser nature of man, was founded on an optimistic faith in the people of the nation. They set up a practical nation energized by a heritage of ideals.

The heritage expressed by those philosophers was not the beginning of the American Dream—the Dream had been part of the spirit of the new land for almost a century already—but this heritage was to serve as the focal point of the Dream. Held in reverent awe by the people, those ideals were to become the support for the Dream, though never the practiced beliefs of the people.

Through the next century, the Dream slowly evolved an increasingly pragmatic form until it was possible for the power gluttons of the Industrial Revolution to rape the land and their fellow human beings in a mad scramble for money in the name of that ideal vision, freedom. The Dream was riches for the few. Freedom—democratic capitalism, they called it—allowed the few to sweat the dollars out of the many.

Then the great shift came. The Dream was to become riches for the many rather than for the few. In the second decade of twentieth-century America, the Dream was spread around, and during this period F. Scott Fitzgerald had Gatsby personify the plight of Americans. Middle class businessmen and lower class workers just returning from war saw what the few at the top had been keeping from...
them during the Gilded Age at the turn of the century. They, therefore, began to demand their share of the Dream. Fitzgerald was aware of two things: one, that the Dream could not and would not be shared willingly, and, two, that the Dream itself was utterly foul. Gatsby loved the Dream desperately. He believed in it, only to be killed by it and by the upper class that already owned it.

Fitzgerald foresaw that the lower classes would not be long satisfied with their illusion of a dream and that something had to happen. The disaster did not take the form of the upper class finally winning out over the lower, as Fitzgerald anticipated, but came through the inherent evil of the Dream itself. Industrial America developed its Babbitt businessmen and an awesomely powerful working class who would not be kept from their share of the Dream. The Depression then materialized the fears of the people, and the Dream was crystallized in the vows we still hear today: "I don't want my family to go through hell like that; I'm gonna make me some money." The Dream, the goal of the materialistically defined "better life," was our new and lasting heritage.

America on her two hundredth birthday will suffer because of the inadequacies of that Dream. The problem is that America is as close to achieving her Dream as ever will be possible. There are too many chickens in every pot already and nothing to look forward to. When its Dream no longer offers a future and a purpose, America is lost.

In general, Americans can be divided into two groups: those who already have it—the prosperity—and who are uneasy because they don't know where else to go and those who don't have it, and who realize they are not next in line to get it. A society can support only so many seventeen thousand dollar per year garbagemen. Both groups realize this, and everyone is uneasy. Members of the second group feel that violence is their only possible means to get what they want. Need I say much about violence, about the riots of the last decade, or about the continuing guerilla warfare of mugging and robbing, of murder and extortion of today? And do you need to hear about the first group, the overstuffed ones with nowhere to go? Think of the crusades of the last decade; think of the hundreds of thousands who looked desperately for somewhere to go. Masses of people were against the war because it was something to be against. Masses of people were for ecology because it was something to be for. Think of the masses of people in hopeless hedonistic playgrounds of music and alcohol and drugs, because it was a way to be. Emotional exhaustion has cut down the clamor, but those same people are still around. They live in suburbia and don't care about veterans or refugees. They drive big cars and use drugs and alcohol in their country clubs and in their dining rooms and are, generally, a hopeless sort. The Dream has ceased to hold out to them a future because they have been to the top and have nowhere else to go.

America is in trouble. For the many within America to whom the Dream is a farce and to whom violence is the only answer, and for the many who have nothing to live for but cults and chemicals, American society needs some purpose once again. It needs something to live up to and something to live for.

I submit that America needs to return to the less tangible dreams with which it was originally endowed, those vague and impossible ideals like justice and brotherhood. And, perhaps, we might also be so bold as to try to include some good old-fashioned Judeo-Christian morality or, better still, some Christian belief. God in his wisdom gave us an impossible dream to shoot for. This nation should at least follow this example and take as its Dream a most lasting, a more impossible, and therefore a more valuable goal to give it purpose through the next centuries.

---

Dave Vis

The American Dream has been interpreted in a variety of ways by the American people. To immigrants from Europe it has meant life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, as promised by the founding fathers. To native-born Americans, it has meant the freedom to exercise rights of individuality and freedom. In America each person had the opportunity to follow his own ideals and felt able to achieve his goals. Americans were, or at least thought themselves to be, invincible.

Henry Kissinger has said of this utopian dream that Americans were traveling in a time tunnel, at the end of which they envisioned a utopia. However, when they reached the end of the tunnel, they did not encounter the utopia; they found only themselves.

Americans have had great expectations. No one believed that the American way which guaranteed such inalienable rights as the pursuit of happiness could not continue indefinitely. The poverty of the world had no place in the dream, for America was a land of abundance. They felt that the wars of the world would never engulf them, for they had convinced themselves that they possessed an inner peace. They exported Americanism in the hope that the American Dream would be lauded and mimicked throughout the world.

But as we approached the tunnel's end, we began to see that the utopia of which we dreamed was non-existent. The elements of life to which Americans thought they were immune—war, poverty, crime, pollution, shortages, political upheaval, economic slumps—became distressingly evident. What America was and what it had been thought to be were not the same. The two were not even similar. We suddenly discovered that America was not, nor had ever been, invincible.

Can Americans realize their ideals? Can we touch reality and then learn not to idealize and not to dream but to realize and to do? As we approach a new century in the life of our country, we must recognize the realities of our existence, transforming the end of the tunnel into a beginning of new hope and vision for America.
the technological society that demand success at any price. These valuable traditions, however, are not identical with the dominant spirit that runs contemporary America, and the two should be kept quite distinct in formulating our attitudes toward our country. Christians, for whom commitments to a very definite faith are primary, should be especially careful not to allow that faith to become an instrument for public relations while in fact they pursue one or another form of an American dream of efficient organization and success.

Tom De Vries

It makes good sense for America to celebrate its traditions in a bicentennial year if that celebration is analytical and retrospective. However, I believe that what most Americans will choose to remember in 1976 about their past will be the typical myths and legends (plus probably some new ones we've never heard before) that had best not be taken with the seriousness that the situation deserves. It will be difficult to awaken those who rally 'round the flag and spout the sayings that will be on their lapel buttons and bumper stickers, for they are surely in a dream. But there are more dangerous advocates of the American Dream to whom the phrase means reckless ambition and who take literally today what St. Jean de Crèvecoeur said about America in 1792 in his essay "What is an American?"

Here the rewards of his [every man's] industry follows with equal steps the progress of his labor; his labor is founded on the basis of nature, self-interest; can it want a stronger allurement? A serious look at the past will show that this dream has put America in a lot of trouble, as many Americans find out when they attend their first college history classes, or, hopefully, before.

Somehow, America got ahead of itself in its blind enthusiasm, neglecting to create a morally structured future. Hemingway, Stein, Fitzgerald, and Pound realized this in the 1920's and brooded over it. The idea that an individual's ambition determines his own economic wellbeing was shocked by the Great Depression; no one really understood what went wrong. In the 1940's, the dream lay dormant. The overwhelming question was how many wars we would have to fight to end all wars and to make the world safe for democracy.

The amazing economic growth of the 1950's and early 1960's was ample food to enable the dream to attain full growth, but America, during this period, was possessed with the paranoia of Senator Joseph McCarthy and with the lack of focal points of a society made ill by materialism, selfishness, and civil religion. America was sick from the fulfillment of its dream. Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and Arthur Miller are a few examples of people who saw the dream as a nightmare and tried to do something about it.

In his song, "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall," Bob Dylan sung of the disease, pollution, injustice, evil, and misery which he saw and to which evils he pledged to respond in this way:

And I'll tell it and think it, and speak it and breathe it, and reflect it from the mountain, so all souls can see it, Then I'll stand on the ocean until I start sinking, But I'll know my song well before I start singin...

Perhaps it is not fair to ask what Dylan did with this attitude (besides his participation in the Concert for Bangladesh), for although radical idealism was a potent force in the late 1960's, Watergate made it clear that idealism's foundations were shaky, to say the least. A common attitude resulting from Watergate is that, in spite of the corruption of the system and the misery it brings to so many, we will just do the best we can. Thus, in the 1970's, nostalgia is the craze of college campuses, as evidenced by the return of sororities and fraternities, the appearance of streakers, the increase in beer drinking and general partying which indicate a lightly existential point of view, similar to that of the twenties.

Two hundred years ago, America was a child with the ambition and energy of a man. Maybe today we have come to realize our adolescence. Adolescents are often idealistic, but could it be that our idealism has become introverted? Jackson Browne, an excellent modern song-writer who seems to speak for many young Americans today, says in his song "Farther On" that his dreams have been "to catch the love that I heard of in books, and films, and songs." This is a much healthier state of mind that the patriotic ballyhoo or the sharp pessimism of Edward Albee's characterization of the American Dream as impotence. The fact remains, however, that a sizable faction of national idealism is gone.

In America today government is bureaucratic, and politics is a game of musical chairs into which very little idealism or radical action can be injected. Cities have consumed more than their bellies can stand and now let off foul odors. The agrarian ideal that Crèvecoeur and Jefferson had put so much faith in has long ago been plowed under. Our imperialism abroad, our extermination of the Indians, and our persecution of the Blacks all resulted from the semi-conscious ideal of Manifest Destiny and are quite sickening facts.

Perhaps there will soon appear other ideals. But let us not avoid the truth and base these new ideals on myths and legends, but rather let us base them on a serious analysis of what has and what has not worked in the past and on why certain ideals have or have not worked. This is the first step towards thinking of the future in intelligent terms, which thinking should serve as a goal of the upmost importance for our nation.
A schoolboy growing up out of the lean thirties, I remember well that never a morning passed without the kids in the class lifting their right hands in concert toward the Stars and Stripes in the "pledge of allegiance to America," and then in a continuous and uninterrupted motion dropping their right hands and clasping their left hands in a prayer fold to recite again in unison "our Father who art in heaven." And all that in almost a single breath. For we were being led to believe that piety and patriotism were like the two sides of an Indian-head nickel. Be good Americans—go to church on Sunday. Be good Christians—vote on Tuesday. With Jack Armstrong as our model we were cut out to be All-American kids with the All-American Dream.

Only, no one ever called it by its real name, civil religion. Its shrine was the local public school. There, out of the melting pot of the New World, set free from the antiquated ways of the Old Country and inspired by the New Deal's promise of "a car in every garage and a chicken in every pot," we were given a starry-eyed rags-to-riches vision of the coming of the Kingdom of God in America within this generation. Like honest Abe, every good civic-minded youngster had a crack at becoming President (or First Lady) of these United States.

All the while down the street the unenlightened Dutch (Christian) school was trying to live down its reputation as divisive, unpatriotic, undemocratic, perhaps even subversive, and worst of all un-American enterprise. Its presence represented the disloyal opposition, the troublers of twentieth-century Israel, the disturbers of an emerging reign of peace on earth and good-will toward men. At times I can still feel the jeering choruses of the highpriests of this cult of universal brotherhood falling upon my ears, directed by their cheerleaders at game time: "We don't smoke, and we don't chew, and we don't go with the girls that do—our class won the Bible!"

The Dream was persistent and contagious, almost irresistible. At last it struck home, seducing me into an ill-fated attempt at the American Legion prize with an oration on "America—Land of the Free and Home of the Brave."

Youth was taught to dream this Dream without a hint that it might be just an illusion. For dreams, you see, stand a chance of coming true. But this was a mirage, which, with the march of time, receded ever deeper into the never-never land of nostalgic imageries. It took some Will Herbergs to expose the Dream for what it was: a sublimated religion of communal neutrality which obligates people to lay aside their professed faith in the name of an overarching operative faith in the messianic Dream of national destiny. At bottom it was really an impossible possibility—possible in that some people fervently tried it, but impossible in that no one could make it come off. For every majoritarian dream which suppresses the honest religio-cultural plurality present in society is doomed to end in an awful nightmare. It is deaf to minorities crying out for a place in the sun. And I belong to one: the evangelical Christian community. In the long run a democracy is best judged by how it deals with its minority peoples. Blind to that fundamental rule of the game of life, little is now left to these utopian dreamers but to rent an obituary column, pronounce their Dream dead aborning, and bury it.

The American Dream is alive and well and living in San Clemente. To the best of my knowledge the oil companies (who have purchased much of the bicentennial for public relations purposes) have not as yet sponsored a two-minute canonization of R. M. Nixon as embodying the "Spirit of '76." And, mercifully, we have been preserved from what had the Presidency survived, would have been a two-year self-congratulation on this theme. Yet it is too bad in a way because Mr. Nixon is probably the best living example of what the American Dream is about. It is no accident that he was very nearly our most popular president. His was the American success story, twentieth-century style. He was the one hundred percent organization man who on the way up never deviated from loyalty to the party and at the top expected the same from others with regard to the Presidency. He always used ideological rhetoric to his best advantage (eventually hiring an advertising executive to be his chief adviser) and never let his actions be bound by commitment to any particular ideal other than that of success itself.

Mr. Nixon understood the spirit that has made America "great." It is the formula articulated by Thurmond Arnold, a political analyst and adviser during the New Deal, who said that organizations, whether business or government, should operate with efficiency as their major goal and with ideologies and creeds functioning only as advertising to satisfy the public. We have produced a superbly technological society where ideas function primarily as plans to produce action, and in many cases to obscure what is really going on. The bicentennial celebration, at least to the extent that it is employed for public relations by the oil companies and the government itself, is a case in point. While much of what goes on is either harmless or benign, the fact remains that what is said in bicentennial advertising has remarkably little to do with the forces that actually operate the country.

Of course America is not all bad. Mr. Nixon is out of power even if the oil companies are not. We have inherited a very decent political system and a tradition of personal freedoms that we should value. There is also a tradition of civic morality that has often arisen to retrain the forces of

Gordon Spykman

George Marsden
Many dreams over 200 years. But action, too, that has resulted in the most remarkable communication technology ever known on our planet. The question is, what messages are sent?

Some dreamed of electric current and wires and poles. The telegraph spanned the country. Cyrus Field laid a thick cable along the floor of the Atlantic Ocean, and continents were joined.

Highspeed presses printed both sides of a continuous roll of paper. People could talk to people over the telephone. Music and voice were reproduced on cylinders that could be played on a phonograph. Halftone photoengraving led to advances in newspaper photography.

The incandescent bulb led to the publishing of evening newspapers. Linotype machines speeded up newspaper production. Wire services poured in ever-increasing volume news/via teletype. Inventors perfected systems for projecting motion pictures on a screen.

Marconi leaped the Atlantic with wireless signals. Lee De Forest perfected the vacuum tube and “radio” was born. The basis for television transmission and reception, the iconoscope and the kinescope, were invented. FM radio was perfected. Magazines multiplied.

Color TV and life-like film effects became staples of the American video diet. Cable TV opened up dozens of channels on the home receiver.

But here’s the rub: this marvelous technology, which brings us both information and entertainment, has not helped people to communicate to each other in caring, upbuilding ways. Despite the technology, we often fail to communicate effectively.

Here’s another rub: what effects on attitude and behavior are being produced by the technology? What messages are sent? What view of human existence is portrayed? The messages—explicitly and implicitly—often tell of an American Dream in which money and sex rule as twin gods of the age; in which people find satisfaction in things; in which alcohol is comfort in stress; in which this life is all there is.

Mass communication is an important dimension of society. I also have a dream: Calvin College deepening and extending the Christian study of communication in order to produce both discerning critics and discerning practitioners.
Dear Max,

how messy we've become
passing each other blind
like two insipid moles
    under ramshackle carpet.
what would you do
    if I shouted in floodlight
    booed in your eyes?
would you ravel and weep to the bib of your chin
    thrust fingers, stones, and lies
in the gapes and mouths of your pain
    and thus plugged walk away?

when you left I didn't hiss, die
    or lie slain
as a crayon summered on tar
    I expected it,
    you playing sentry
    with a charisma come-on
    though badged eyes flashing
    would slow me to shy
I was tantalized at the stop signs
    waiting

altho I cannot follow the tune of your body
    anymore
somehow you still should know
    I hold words for you
    some to rub on your tongue and
    flick back for storage with remembrances
    of plums and Autumn-mothers with blooms in their breasts
    of Bibled hands and wicker swings
the tools you use are good and silver
    any lady would stop twice
    and purr for favor.

Kim Gilmore
Morning steals upon Indian-town Gap like a gentle surprise. There is no noticeable sunrise. The sky is a low but comfortable grey. Mist sneaks up the valleys into the ancient bosom of the mountains. The enigmatic vapor crawls over the moss green tree trunks, slides through the green furred cover of the trees. Above all the grey, the sun burns viciously, but in the Gap, below the clouds, the darkness is smoothed into light.

There is a white ribbon. Inside the white ribbon are white buildings ordered in a precise dance. There are black tar roads and square patches of green grass between the white buildings. From a hilltop on which stands a white church with a red steeple a half a mile from the white ribbon, the white buildings with their green windows and green roofs look like a page filled with punctuation marks without any words.

The light coaxes people out of the white houses. Reds and blues and yellows spill out into the greyness. All is alive as another day begins. White buildings spin with people, colors, shouts of greeting. The morning air is tickled with children and breaks into laughter. Life begins another day.

As the light seeps through the clouds, a buzzer breaks my night. I reach to slam off my alarm. Outside, the birds are buoyant voices in the mist. Blackbirds calling for the sun. Outside the white tape, my day begins. I walk from my white barracks into the greyness of the early morning. Inside the white ribbon, a people are rewriting the story of buildings. Colors of people flow from large white barracks to regroup at small white mess halls. People walk in groups to talk; they greet their neighbors; they stroll to make up lines alongside mess halls. A flapping of sandals arranges people, and whispers of silk provide background music for their talking. The white buildings become punctuation marks in a living story. Paragraphs of people move along the streets.

I am going inside the white ribbon. I work inside the white ribbon. America is outside of the white ribbon; inside the ribbon is a country without a name. A people without a country. A life that is in suspension between two lives. Within is the land of the unknowing. Oceans and continents lie between the whispers of silk and the earth the people were born to.

Before I enter the white tape, I walk into a building filled with officers. Breakfast brings sausage and eggs and potatoes together with volunteers and hundreds of lieutenants. The lieutenants have straight backs and mustaches at attention on their upper lips. They come up behind the female volunteers with a pinch and a "gotta-chaa!" Volunteers are speaking quietly but intensely, bending forward over coffee. There are many people yet to place-15,000 here; tens of thousands more in Chaffee, Elgin, Pendleton; with more on Guam. Waiting. In tents. To work here is to walk step by step into a quagmire of public apathy—antipathy.

Breakfasts are sometimes sobering. Today the chaplain sits with us, bringing reality with his coffee like a slap in the face. God's helper warns us that "they" will use us to get out or to get supplies (contraband: paper, pencils, chalk, books to read). We are informed that "they" are an infantile but crafty people. "Some" are good. For "them" to leave their country was bad, but now that "they're" here, we must do whatever we can. But we must be cautious. The volunteer eyes come together to ask if the chaplain would speak in such careful quotation marks if "they" were white. European? Irish? Dutch? How cautious was God the Father about his Son's associates?

All military police in green stand watch beside the white ribbon. There are MP's slouching in guard boxes listening to rock and roll music, frowning MP's thoughtfully tapping night sticks from hand to hand, MP's who hand out gum or who swing giggling children around their heads. Everywhere there are MP's. Reinforcing the white tape.

To pass into the white-taped country, I must flash my clearance passes. Numbers, labels, dog-tags—I know now why dogs paw at their collars—hang around my neck. Pink: security has cleared me. Yellow: I am a teacher—clearance hours 0730-2200. Colored passes have become status. In this world a red pass is a superior; a light blue tag is a sovereign.
Colors are everywhere within this country. Carnivals of people glide between the buildings. Young men and old men walk singly or with their arms around each other. Tan faces, sometimes scarred with memories of a life of war, shatter into smiles. "Hello, teacher!" Old men's and old women's teeth, glazed black as a mark of beauty and to prevent cavities, give nighttime smiles with a nod. Women blossom in ao dai—their long traditional dresses. And to prevent cavities, give nighttime smiles. "Hello, teacher!" Old men's and old women's er. "Between my legs, swinging on my ao dai-their long traditional dresses.

The sun quite early dissolves the morning haze. The greyness becomes a yellow heat, becomes the energy of all the colors moving in the camp. By nine o'clock, the kinetics of moving below the sun becomes an exercise in sweating. It is hot. The heat is not that of friction. It is soft, making my body feel spongy, fecund. Blacks bloom. As do reds, deep blues, patterned colors. Sun umbrellas blossom. Punctuate the story with color.

Beside a white building named T-6-37 by the army there is a pile of black coal that has been waiting in the sun for years for the winter it will be used. Waiting since the Second World War, after which the army camp was closed. A small city condemned to decompose. I stand in the sun talking in a low voice to my fellow teachers—planning our day. As we sweat beside the coal waiting for a person with a key to arrive to unlock the wooden frame building, the coal glistens in the brightness. Perhaps this winter its energy will be released to synthesize a tropical heat in the mountains of Pennsylvania.

This morning we will test the refugees on their ability to speak English. The area coordinator arrives from the education office to unlock the testing building. It is barren except for fourteen or fifteen olive drab army issue folding chairs. There is a blanket of 1940's dust on the window sills. A quarter of an inch of dust has settled on the floor. We leave moon prints behind as we enter.

Outside the building, histories of people are forming lines. The lines curve around the buildings, move past the coal, and flow out into the gravel of the street. Through the open door comes a musical hubbub of language. A lady with high-waisted New York slacks, tinted Gloria Steinem glasses, and a forty year bulge around her middle shouts at the people. "Will those... with... numbers A22 323 05... to... A22 825 75... please... stay to... the... left." An energy of pathos presses against the building. The stories of refugee camps are written in lines.

One at a time, the refugees pad through the dust to sit beside a volunteer teacher to be tested. There are three levels of aptitude: a beginning speaker may be illiterate in English; an intermediate speaker can transform a positive statement into a negative statement; and an advanced speaker can change a sentence from case to case and can also supply the missing word in a given sentence. It is a neat trichotomy. A young lady flip-flops tentatively toward me through the dust. Smiling, I use an open hand, palm downward to ask her to sit down—in Vietnamese tradition only amin 'al~ are called by the bending of one finger.

"Good morning. Please sit down. Please... sit... down." "ello."

"May I... see... your... ID... card... please? Ah, Mai Thi Tran. Is Mai... your... family... name? No? Then... your... name... has... been... printed... backwards... here. Is... your... whole... name Tran Thi Mai? Yes? Good. How old are you, Mai?

"I am twenty-seven years old." "Are... you... a... woman?"

"No."

"How... old... are... you? Is your... family... here... with... you?"

"I do not understand."

"OK. Thank you. You may go."

People move through the room like unsolved mysteries. The dust on the floor is soon relocated. It is settling on the rafters and hanging in the sunlight in the air. I go on testing, rasping out my lungs and throat. Behind me there is an elderly gentleman—a retired schoolteacher in crepe soled shoes, dark cotton pants worn shiny on the seat perhaps from years against a chalk tray or desk chair, and a navy cardigan sweater on top of a light blue sport shirt, tieless but fastened at the neck. I can hear him testing a young man in his twenties.

"What... is... your... name?"

"My name is Nguyen Van Nghia."

"OK, Nghia... I... will... ask... you... some... questions... and... I... would... like... you... to... answer... in... complete... sentences... Can... you... understand... me?"

"Yes."

"How... old... are... you?"

"I am twenty-seven years old."

"Are... you... a... woman?"

"No."

"Of course... not... What... are... you?"

"I am a man. I am a Vietnamese refugee. In Vietnam I was a doctor. I have studied English for eight years and I worked in a clinic with American doctors in the Dai Lat province."
stories are one story, but have no ending. The story is still being written.

Reality becomes itself again for me with the screaming of an air-raid siren. Inside the white tape, it is twelve o'clock. The tragedies diffuse from the room to recollect beside the white mess-halls. The quietness of the testing room is stunning, as is the whiteness of the other teachers' faces. On the floor, the definitions of moonprints have disappeared. The dust has been rearanged.

IV

Inside the white tape is the land of uncertainty. Where will these stories—this story—be finished? Who is the author? Questions lose their answers. Answers become lost in faces.

Volunteer teachers talk between mouthfuls of Stewart sandwiches. Once it was so simple to say, "Given the general literacy level of the Vietnamese people, given the agrarian based social system, given the underlying desire of the Vietnamese people for national unity, it may well be that a Communist government which unifies the country is better for Vietnam than a republican form of government." Now such phrases are textbook jargon. Dead words from xeroxed termpapers. When there are faces to plug into the theories, when we are immersed in 15,000 people—people with names, people with visible tears, people who have left families and every material possession because they felt an immediate threat of Communism—the situation is confusing. We know about the bloodbath rumors planted by the American government and press. Yet the situation is so complex. There must have been some basis for the people's fear. If not, the tragedy is multiplied by factors in the thousands. There has got to be a reason.

Tragedy is spliced into what was once comfortable reality

who is probably in her thirties, one of my better students.

"Excuse me."
"Yes."
"Can you tell me how to get to the bank?"
"No, no, no. Three blocks. You must get your tongue between your teeth for the th sound. Everyone please repeat: thra, thra, thra, three. Let's go this Thursday. Th. Ok, go on please."
"Go straight three blocks, turn right, and the bank is left."
"The bank is on your left."
"The bank is on your left."
"Good, thank you. Now Mr. Nhu, can you give me directions to..."

The afternoon burns on. I feel as if I'm coated with a white mud. The heat pulls the sweat from my skin to mix with the chalk dust which clouds the air around the chalkboard. The whiteness of the heat comes through the roof, sucks any energy I have left out through my pores.

Tiredness cannot last long here, though. The loss is renewed by the people. I can see people standing at the door miming my words. The ego sends energy to my limbs. Perhaps I can teach these people at least a little—lend a few words of my language to them to insert into their well-locked future. I erase the board with a rag. Chalk dust dances in a pale confusion in the sunlight. A boy darts from his chair, grabs my rag, sprinnts out the door, leaving me open mouthed. In a moment he is back with a cup of water. Without hesitation he washes the board and returns to his chair. Class continues; after such, I cannot begin to tire.

Formal teaching ends for the afternoon after two such classes. I walk a short way with two of my students—rather, two friends, but the real teaching never ends. "What is that?" "What is the word for..." "How do you say this when..." The teaching is two way, however. I can answer each of these questions with "What is the Vietnamese word for that?" We move off into the maze of buildings.

In the late afternoon the heat subsides into evening. The white buildings do not glare their existence any longer. The sounds of people talking are more pleasant at this time than in the harshness of the sun. A sensuality of life softens, a bit, the hard rhythm of white buildings. The concentration camp order of asphalt and rooftops is broken again by colors of people: moving, talking, lining up against white mess halls. My friends walk me to the white tape. I can duck under, am free to leave. The tape tears the smiles from their faces.

Behind me in the dusk are the barriers shouting, "No Loitering!" "Off Limits!" "Dung Vo Van" "Khu Vuc Cam" in red letters. Behind me is the white tape. Behind me are the people of uncertainty. Behind is the land of the unknowing.

Ahead of me lie the mountains. A wilderness breathes on the horizon. What is this world we are born to? What are our names? Where is our place?

Another time, another place, and we are the faces behind the white ribbon. Or, perhaps we are there already.

Call us refugees.
In the dream he had been having for some time now, Walter found himself walking endlessly in a barren and unexplored land that wasn't really there. That is to say, as he was walking he couldn't see anything ahead of him or to the side, and yet everytime he took a step the ground came firmly into contact with his foot. It was as if the land was a scroll unrolling from beneath him at the same speed at which he was walking. As he stepped forward, the scroll and his foot would reach the same point in space at the same time. He had been walking so long now that he stepped forward with confidence, but he couldn't fully escape the feeling that at any time the scroll could get stuck or unravel to its end and send him catapulting into empty space. Because of the tragedies his imagination set before him, he didn't dare change his pace, but after several weeks of the dream it wasn't the pace that bothered him; it was the walking itself.

Two months passed and he got very sick of the dream. He used to enjoy walking, but now he decided he had enjoyed it long enough. He was beginning to feel like a jogger who gets a second wind and falls into a pace at which he can neither rest nor exhaust himself. If he can jog one more lap, why quit? Testing one's endurance seems to be the thing to do even though a track is not the prettiest thing around and running in circles is a dubious way of spending one's time. In his dream however, Walter was given no choice. As soon as he fell asleep, he started to walk and could do nothing to stop.

Eventually he tried taking tranquilizers. Later he did strenuous exercises to tire himself out. One night he went down to his garage determined to fall asleep sitting on his bicycle. But nothing did any good. He slept with his head at the foot of the bed and his feet resting on the pillow; he slept with barbells on his ankles; he locked his bicycle chain around his legs; he slept in his swimming pool with his life jacket on. But he couldn't stop walking.

Finally things began to happen in the daytime, too. He met people named Walker and Runner; he got stuck in revolving doors; he joined clubs that decided to organize protest marches; he volunteered for the Big Brother program and at the annual outing was asked to be leader of the all-day hike; he got a job moonlighting at a rest home and found himself helping old people get around in their walkers. The last straw came on a hot Saturday afternoon while he was riding his new lawn-mover tractor: it broke down the first time he had it out. He knew then he would have to get help, and the next Monday he called a psychiatric clinic to ask for an appointment.

"Dr. Sprinter is not in," the receptionist replied.
"Thank goodness," Walter muttered to himself.
"But I'll see if Dr. Stroller will take a new patient." After a pause the voice continued, "Dr. Stroller can see you tomorrow at 3:30."
"Fine," Walter said. He hung up feeling so relieved he ran in place for three minutes out of spite.

Next day, however, when he walked into Dr. Stroller's office he was wary and sceptical though willing to try anything. He was unable to bring himself to say, "Doc, I've been walking on scrolls lately and I want you to help me get off them," and so he said, "I've been feeling tired lately, Doc, and I'm here to find out if it could be psychosomatic." He thought Stroller would like the big word, and he hoped the casual tone would assure Stroller that after all he was sane and normal. "If you can only put your finger on the problem, I'll get out of your hair shortly," he said. "You see, I've been having these dreams that I'm walking in. I can't stop walking and that's why I think I'm always so tired. If you can tell me how to keep these go-getting legs of mine quiet for at least six or seven hours out of twenty-four, I'll be alright."

"Yes," said Stroller, pointing toward the chair across from his desk. "Have a seat and we'll see. Your name
again?"

"Walter VanLopen."

"Address?"

"949-4000," Walter said, wondering what Stroller wanted his address for.

"Once again?" Stroller said.

"Oh," Walter laughed, "I mean 3863 Rambler Road."

"I see. Suburban type. Nationality?"

"Dutch," Walter said, again wondering why that mattered.

"Job?"

"I'm a teacher of English. Johns College."

"Fine. Now about this walking. Where do you walk?"

"Well, I don't know really," Walter hedged, "it's somewhere but I can't place it."

"Childhood playground?"

"No."

"Highschool track?"

"No. You see, it's someplace where I'm walking on land but it's like I'm walking in space, too. I know there are things around but I can't really see them."

"You follow our space flights and the astronauts?"

"No."

"When you walk, do you have a life-line like the astronauts?"

"No," Walter answered emphatically, sensing where the conversation was going. "In fact, you see—well, I hate astronauts. Did you see them day before yesterday on TV jumping sideways from one wall to another in the skylab? How silly can you get? A billion dollar ticket to see guys jump on a trampoline that's sitting on its side."

"Yes..." Stroller said. "Now when you walk, what does it feel like?"

"It feels like hell," Walter said.

"Yes... but what does it feel like you're walking on? Grass? Stones? Water?"

"No, no" Walter answered, "it feels like I'm walking on a scroll." He had been walking on the scroll so long that he thought it a perfectly normal answer, and he gave it without thinking.

Stroller got up after this answer, and helping Walter remove his coat motioned him over to the couch. One hour later Walter made another appointment and went home.

That night he couldn't sleep and so he didn't wear his suit to the doctor's office.

"The scroll clearly resembles the roads along the dikes of Holland, and your feeling that you are in hell is a fear that the world is breaking down the walls you have built around yourself—just as Hitler did the dikes a generation ago—and is destroying the world as you know it. And what else could your reference to my putting a finger on the problem be but a subconscious obsession with the little Dutch boy who put his finger in the dike?"

"Give me strength," Walter groaned as the voice went on.

---

**Where and how do we all study to become non-artists, he thought. How do we grow up to be such artistic dwarfs?**

"Now, Mr. VanLopen, what you need to do is to try to see that the world is not an evil threatening thing but that it is waiting for you to come out of your ethnic shell into the larger community of mankind. The world is not a hell, Mr. VanLopen, and when you come to see that you will stop walking the dikes in your dream."

"Good grief," Walter thought as he said, "Yeah, Doc. That makes sense. I didn't know I was that ethnic and I never thought of dikes just rolling out in front of the Dutch into the North Sea, but, yeah, that's good. I'll try it." He paid the receptionist, went home, and that night he took the longest and loneliest walk of his nighttime career.

Next day he went to see his friend and colleague in the Math department and told him the whole story.

"Mike. What am I going to do? We've been teaching here together for four years now, and before that there were those three years in grad school. I've never had any hang-ups that I know of. What's happening to me? I've got to get rid of this dream."

Mike drew heavily on his pipe. "Look, old buddy. I've been watching you lately. You're working too hard, assigning papers and slaving over them almost every night. You've got to be realistic, Walt. You can't kill yourself over these kids."

"But you know that they've got to write, Walter said. "They're not getting anything if they just do bluebooks and mickey-mouse quizzes. That's the trouble with these students. They're gung-ho for the latest social fad and all of them want to shake up the country, but they haven't learned how to tell an idea from a statistic. They've got to write or we'll end up with a whole country full of statistics mongers."

Mike chuckled through his pipe, sending up a column of
smoke. "You’re going to save the world, yet, aren’t you? Sure, they’ve got to write. I agree. But there’s a limit to what one man has to do about it."

"Yeah, you’re right. But I don’t think that’s my trouble anyway. I don’t mind the work. What I mind is that these kids take it all so casually. Remember how it used to be in grad school?"

Walter’s thoughts went back to what seemed an age ago and rested in the privacy of his cubicle on the 8th level of Ambler Library at IU. He remembered the assignment Prof. Saunter had given him in his first seminar. "Van Loppen," he said, "I want you to take a look at the French symbolists for next time and report to us on the influence of the symbolists on the early poems of Yeats and Eliot."

"My word! Who are the French symbolists? Mallarmé sounds familiar and Verlaine I’ve heard of. Symbolism is O.K., but what the French did with it is something else. And Yeats and Eliot into the bargain? And all in one week?"

He remembered how he went to the library that night, and the next day and the next night and spent every hour he had working on his assignment. He recalled how his suppressed anger and frustration gradually dissipated as he began to get a grasp of his topic. Groping turned to grasping; nervousness turned to excitement; ignorance gave way to discovery. In the end he resented the fact that the library closed at midnight and didn’t open again until eight.

"But it’s not the same anymore," Walt said, dousing his cigarette in his coffee cup.

"True," Mike agreed. "It isn’t the same anymore. Even in math the old excitement is gone."

When Walter went to his class in English Lit, his worry over his dream was compounded by the strain of his conversation with Mike. But he pushed aside his worries and began the morning’s lecture. "The great thing about the early Yeats," he said, "is his ability to assimilate various traditions. We see in his early poems not only the influence of English Romanticism, the poets of the 1890’s, the revival of Irish myth and folklore, but also the more abstruse influence of the French symbolists. When Yeats first read Baudelaire . . . ." Walter read on to relive for an hour those exciting hours in grad school. And for a moment Walter was again enchanted by the music and romance of the early Yeats:

Red Rose, proud Rose, sad Rose of all my days!
Come near me, while I sing the ancient ways:
Cuchulain battling with the bitter tide;
The Druid, grey, wood-nurtured, quiet-eyed,
Who cast round Fergus dreams, and ruin untold;
And thine own sadness, whereof stars, grown old
In dancing silver-sandalled on the sea,
Sing in their high and lonely melody.

Come near, that no more blinded by man’s fate,
I find under the boughs of love and hate,
In all poor foolish things that live a day,
Eternal beauty wandering on her way.

"Ah, the magic of the Yeatsian line!" Walter said. He lost consciousness of the dream that had been so preoccupying him, and he looked forward to exploring in future sessions the later growth of Yeats into the mature poet.

Unfortunately his euphoria did not last long. After class one of the young English majors came up to him and asked if they would have to remember the names of those French poets for the final exam.

"No, no," he said. "No. You won’t have to remember them."

As he walked back to his office, he looked vacantly toward the end of the hall as students cleared a way for him like a red sea of faces parting for a man with a special calling. Feeling numb, he prepared for his afternoon allotment of freshman themes, mechanically got out his correction chart and set to work. 8e-3—dangling modifier. 35—spelling. The symbols cut grooves into his brain as the dreary sentences passed through his mind. Six themes and three hours later he went home, prepared his meal, and sat down for four more papers and a couple of hours of reading on Yeats. At 11:30 he went to bed and began his nightly walk.

This time the walk was long and strenuous. He was determined to find out where he was. He leaned forward, trying to see how much was left on the scroll, but he could see nothing. He made sudden stops, hoping the scroll would hurtle forward; he tried walking backward. But the scroll was always precisely adjusted to his every move. He ran and made a tremendous leap forward, risking utter annihilation, but always he landed squarely on the unrolling edge of the scroll. The emptiness of the space in front of him and the uncertainty of the nature of the scroll was slowly driving him crazy.

He dragged himself to class the following day, unable to regain the previous day’s excitement about Yeats. He droned on about Yeats’ poetic theories and their relationship to and diversion from symbolist theory, but he was too tired to put himself into it. Finally after twenty minutes a hand caught his eye and he gratefully paused for a question. Mentally he noted his regret that the hand belonged to an average and almost anonymous student—he recalled only that he had given him a C on the first test—but anything at this point was welcome.

"Yes, Mr. Krauler," Walter said. "Question?"

"Ya," the student began. "I think I get this stuff about the symbolists, but I still have a problem with the poem you were talking about." He referred to his text and read the last lines:

I am haunted by numberless islands, and many a Danaan shore,
Where Time would surely forget us, and Sorrow come near us no more;
Soon far from the rose and the lily and fret of the flames would we be,
We only white birds, my beloved, buoyed out on the foam of the sea!

"Now that seems a bit far-fetched to me. Seems to me that’s all poets ever do—mope about gloomy and sad things and try to get away from it all. Why can’t they face up to the real world for once?"

"Well, Mr. Krauler," Walter began, "you’ve got to understand . . . . Yeats is a poet first, not a philosopher or a sociologist. You might not like all of his ideas, but that’s
not the point. You see, Yeats is using images which were very rich ones for him in his early years as a poet. For example, when you see how the image of the rose appears again and again in new contexts and transformations, you begin to see the intricacy and sensitivity of Yeats' imagination. You have here something comparable to... to... well, let's say to Picasso's rose period. You see, Yeats is an artist—more like Picasso than say Bertrand Russell or John Dewey or Ralph Nader."

"Yeah, I guess so," Krauler said, "but I still think it's for the birds."

"Well," Walter said, bent on doing what he could to counter the non-artistic prejudices of the likes of Krauler. "It doesn't really matter what you think or I think or even what Yeats thinks for that matter. It's the poetry that counts."

Krauler's question did not really disturb Walter. He was used to that kind of challenge both in and out of class. He could understand why people ask such questions. But he was not going to abandon his part in the struggle to eliminate the artistic poverty of students. Where and how do we all study to become non-artists, he thought. How do we grow up to be such artistic dwarfs?

Meanwhile, Walter's dream was still plaguing him. He found it hard to think about his lesson plans; he went to bed tired and woke up exhausted. The monotony of his dream as well as the phantom exercise was depressing. He couldn't get enough energy to carry him through the day, and he wasn't alert enough even to find much enjoyment in Yeats. Finally in desperation he stumbled on the crackpot notion that maybe he'd beat his dream at its own game if he imitated consciously and literally in the daytime what he was doing in dreams at night. Maybe if he could satisfy his irascible subconscious through some daytime actions, the dreams would go away.

He hit upon a technique which he decided to try immediately. He went out to Treader Park, found a roughly circular field about 300 yards across, and picked out a prominent tree on the other side from where he stood. He then deliberately closed his eyes and walked toward it. All of us are of course accustomed to looking about us as we walk, stepping around obstacles, avoiding irregularities in the pavement, maintaining a sense of direction. But now, instead of checking on himself at every step, Walter walked blindly toward where he thought the tree would be. On the way he kicked his foot twice against stones, turned his ankle slightly (no damage, thank God) in one depression in the ground, and had terrible fears of some catastrophic and limb-crushing fall, but he counted 300 swift and confident paces, stopped abruptly, and opened his eyes. Lo and behold! There was the tree directly in front of him. How was it that he had not veered radically to the right or left or for that matter followed a circular path back toward his starting point? He couldn't believe it. He tried it again. The same thing. A third time. The same. He came back the next day. Same thing. The next week. Always the same.

Gradually he started to sleep better, and the better he slept the more confidently he seemed to perform his therapeutic experiment.

He is now at the point that if you would go out to Treader Park at the circular field, you would find him every day at 7:30 a.m., before his first class, walking with his eyes closed toward a huge oak tree on the south end of the park. You may think it strange, but don't ask him why he does it. He does it because he sleeps better. "And somehow," Walter said last week, "since I've been sleeping better, these students seem to be asking better questions. And I must admit, as I said to Bob Krauler the other day, 'Yeats after all does have some rather strange ideas. I guess he just found it hard at times to face up to the real world.'"
Irvin Kroese

The Love Song of Allen Stewart Konigsberg

W

Woody Allen's latest piece of wily madness, Love and Death, is a grab bag of literary, cinematic, and philosophical allusions stitched together with skeins of existential inquiry and the music of Prokofiev. Boris Dmitrovich Ghreshenko, the son of a small landowner (or rather, owner of a small piece of land—which is kept under his coat), is a sort of unbelieving mystic who keeps running into Death (as in The Seventh Seal, though here dressed in white rather than black). He loves and pursues his distant cousin Sonja, a beautiful, abstracted screwball who finally does marry Boris, after exhausting all other possibilities, and then only after she is assured that Boris will not survive the duel he is to fight the next morning. But he survives, as he has already survived the battles against Napoleon's invading armies. Incapable of killing, he is nevertheless captured and executed (though he returns to tell the tale).

The stuff of the plot, and stuff it is, is drawn (with all comic possibilities intact) mainly from Dostoevsky and Tolstoy. The film's moral position too reflects the great Russian novelists of the nineteenth century. But twentieth-century Russians are also tapped, particularly Eisenstein, whose films are parodied for occasional sight gags, and Prokofiev, whose Lieutenant Kije Suite is used not only for background and transitions but also to remind us of Yury Tynyanov's satirical, comically absurd short story "Second Lieutenant Kije," upon which the 1930 Russian film of the same title, scored by Prokofiev, was based. It is the story of two army officers, one of whom, nonexistent, is brought into being by the scribal error of an over-worked army clerk, while the other, a real lieutenant, is reduced, by the same slip of the quill, to a ghost. No one dares to expose the purely paper existence of Kije, since the Mad Czar, Paul I, has begun to assign him duties and repeatedly promotes him for his self-effacing and flawless service. The "late" Sinyukhayev, on the other hand, who accepts implicitly his own demise, is a wandering scandal whose existence can find no verification. Woody's Boris is somewhere among these shifty identities—both misfit and mad.

Yet the proper gloss to Allen's serio-comic approach to love and death is finally not any of the many Russian works to which the film alludes. Rather it is T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." Scrape the fussy self-importance from Prufrock and you have something like Woody's Boris facing all the overwhelming questions. The gloss, to be sure, is largely an ironical one. While no less harried and helpless, Boris speaks without the least touch of Prufrock's morbidity or pathological self-consciousness—and he speaks not just to himself but to an audience whom he takes to be kindred spirits. Like Prufrock, Woody-Boris reveals himself through relationships with women, but what Woody reveals is that with a little spunky cheerfulness these relationships need not be failures. There is the tardy Sonja who eventually becomes his whacky loving wife, but there is also the ravenous countess with whom Boris has a one-night stand. Whereas Prufrock, even before his enervated liaison somewhere upstairs, imagines the spectacle he will make when he must descend the stair, Boris, not the least worried about the bald spot in the middle of his own hair, makes energetic connection with the countess and patiently outstays the thick pall of Sonja's romantic palaver to touch the good heart beneath. Yet Sonja's dizzy chatter, together with a vast web of either fashionable or conventional ideas in philosophy, theology, and art, continues to constitute the totality of her conscious life. On the other hand, there is often refreshing method in her madness:

To love is to suffer. To avoid suffering, one must not love. But then one suffers from not loving. Therefore, to love is to suffer, not to love is to suffer, to suffer is to suffer. To be happy is to love. To be happy, then, is to suffer, but suffering makes one unhappy. Therefore, to be unhappy one must love or love to suffer or suffer from too much happiness. I hope you're getting this down.

Though Boris finds fulfillment in conjugal love, there is angst in his life as well. Only, Boris' angst, while no less funny than Prufrock's, is a lot less stuffy. When Boris describes the void he feels at the center of his being ("An empty void. I felt a full void about a month ago, but it was just something I ate"), his case is labeled a "sickness of the soul." In despair, Boris twice attempts suicide—once with a rope and once by inhaling next to an Armenian. But he is suddenly seized with an urge to live—to live and become a great poet. Sitting next to a fireplace in a
long, bulky-knit sweater, he scribbles two lines:
I should have been a pair of ragged claws
Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.
In disgust he throws them into the fire: “Too sentimental.”
Boris is Woody’s Prufrock without the sentiment. Indeed, Boris is
maker save Stanley Kubrick or Eric Rohmer. Even Kubrick and Rohmer,
moralists though they are, have been misunderstood thoroughly enough to
bring films like A Clock-Work Orange and My Night at Maude’s under attack
for immorality. Of the French New Wave directors only Truffaut is accessi-
able to the average popcorn chomper. Of the Italians it is only De Sica,
Antonioni and Fellini, whose principal

Scrape the self importance from Prufrock
and you have something like Woody’s
Boris facing all the overwhelming questions.

Woody’s answer to all of High Culture’s serious but too often pompous and safely evasive skirmishes with ultimate questions. It has been left to low-brow comedy—this seems to be Woody’s premise in Love and Death—to address life’s great issues directly, plainly, and without embarrassment.

In the arts it was probably the fiction of the nineteenth century, particularly the great Russian novels, which last succeeded in confronting directly and on a popular level the big questions of God and morality. It is true that the movies, notwithstanding the disfavor in which they have been held by boards of moralists, have from the start been relentlessly concerned with issues of personal morality. Not until the last twenty years, however, have they ventured seriously into theology as well. Yet, ironically, now that the movies have grown capable of touching the mind, much less the soul.

And then here comes plain, blunt Woody, wearing his mind, heart, and soul on his sleeve. He makes us all, yokels and high-brows alike, consider the claims of morality and the grounds of religious belief. True, Woody has his own mask—a comic one—and for this reason some viewers will giggle past the point, while others, outraged at what they consider sacrilege, will be disgusted even with the jokes. Granted, Love and Death, though rated PG, has its share of crude gags. But those who give Woody a chance will be flexible enough to catch on to the deadly serious aim of what is probably his funniest film.

Here it is not any tedious arguments of insidious intent that lead to overwhelming questions. It is goofy events—and little love-banters between Boris and Sonja, carried on in the most charming jargon of philosophy-major ontology and phenomenology. Sample:

Sonja: Boris, let me show you how absurd your position is. All right, let’s say that there is no God and each man is free to do exactly as he chooses. Well, what prevents you from murdering somebody?
Boris: Murder is immoral.
Sonja: Immorality is subjective.
Boris: Yes, but subjectivity is objective.
Sonja: Not in any rational scheme of perception.
Boris: Perception is irrational. It implies immanence.
Sonja: But judgment of any system or a priori relation or

Some will say there is no problem here: let audiences find their own level. But surely it is lamentable that most movie-goers must find a level that rarely touches the mind, much less the soul.

Nor is there ever a question what the point, while others, outraged at the claims of morality and the grounds of religious belief, True, Woody has his own mask—a comic one—and for this reason some viewers will giggle past the point, while others, outraged at what they consider sacrilege, will be disgusted even with the jokes. Granted, Love and Death, though rated PG, has its share of crude gags. But those who give Woody a chance will be flexible enough to catch on to the deadly serious aim of what is probably his funniest film.

Here it is not any tedious arguments of insidious intent that lead to overwhelming questions. It is goofy events—and little love-banters between Boris and Sonja, carried on in the most charming jargon of philosophy-major ontology and phenomenology. Sample:

Sonja: Boris, let me show you how absurd your position is. All right, let’s say that there is no God and each man is free to do exactly as he chooses. Well, what prevents you from murdering somebody?
Boris: Murder is immoral.
Sonja: Immorality is subjective.
Boris: Yes, but subjectivity is objective.
Sonja: Not in any rational scheme of perception.
Boris: Perception is irrational. It implies immanence.
Sonja: But judgment of any system or a priori relation or

Some will say there is no problem here: let audiences find their own level. But surely it is lamentable that most movie-goers must find a level that rarely touches the mind, much less the soul.

Nor is there ever a question what the point, while others, outraged at the claims of morality and the grounds of religious belief, True, Woody has his own mask—a comic one—and for this reason some viewers will giggle past the point, while others, outraged at what they consider sacrilege, will be disgusted even with the jokes. Granted, Love and Death, though rated PG, has its share of crude gags. But those who give Woody a chance will be flexible enough to catch on to the deadly serious aim of what is probably his funniest film.

Here it is not any tedious arguments of insidious intent that lead to overwhelming questions. It is goofy events—and little love-banters between Boris and Sonja, carried on in the most charming jargon of philosophy-major ontology and phenomenology. Sample:

Sonja: Boris, let me show you how absurd your position is. All right, let’s say that there is no God and each man is free to do exactly as he chooses. Well, what prevents you from murdering somebody?
Boris: Murder is immoral.
Sonja: Immorality is subjective.
Boris: Yes, but subjectivity is objective.
Sonja: Not in any rational scheme of perception.
Boris: Perception is irrational. It implies immanence.
Sonja: But judgment of any system or a priori relation or

Some will say there is no problem here: let audiences find their own level. But surely it is lamentable that most movie-goers must find a level that rarely touches the mind, much less the soul.

Nor is there ever a question what the point, while others, outraged at the claims of morality and the grounds of religious belief, True, Woody has his own mask—a comic one—and for this reason some viewers will giggle past the point, while others, outraged at what they consider sacrilege, will be disgusted even with the jokes. Granted, Love and Death, though rated PG, has its share of crude gags. But those who give Woody a chance will be flexible enough to catch on to the deadly serious aim of what is probably his funniest film.

Here it is not any tedious arguments of insidious intent that lead to overwhelming questions. It is goofy events—and little love-banters between Boris and Sonja, carried on in the most charming jargon of philosophy-major ontology and phenomenology. Sample:

Sonja: Boris, let me show you how absurd your position is. All right, let’s say that there is no God and each man is free to do exactly as he chooses. Well, what prevents you from murdering somebody?
Boris: Murder is immoral.
Sonja: Immorality is subjective.
Boris: Yes, but subjectivity is objective.
Sonja: Not in any rational scheme of perception.
Boris: Perception is irrational. It implies immanence.
Sonja: But judgment of any system or a priori relation or

Some will say there is no problem here: let audiences find their own level. But surely it is lamentable that most movie-goers must find a level that rarely touches the mind, much less the soul.

Nor is there ever a question what the point, while others, outraged at the claims of morality and the grounds of religious belief, True, Woody has his own mask—a comic one—and for this reason some viewers will giggle past the point, while others, outraged at what they consider sacrilege, will be disgusted even with the jokes. Granted, Love and Death, though rated PG, has its share of crude gags. But those who give Woody a chance will be flexible enough to catch on to the deadly serious aim of what is probably his funniest film.

Here it is not any tedious arguments of insidious intent that lead to overwhelming questions. It is goofy events—and little love-banters between Boris and Sonja, carried on in the most charming jargon of philosophy-major ontology and phenomenology. Sample:

Sonja: Boris, let me show you how absurd your position is. All right, let’s say that there is no God and each man is free to do exactly as he chooses. Well, what prevents you from murdering somebody?
Boris: Murder is immoral.
Sonja: Immorality is subjective.
Boris: Yes, but subjectivity is objective.
Sonja: Not in any rational scheme of perception.
Boris: Perception is irrational. It implies immanence.
Sonja: But judgment of any system or a priori relation or
but think of it more as a very effective way of cutting down on your expenses.

In one way or another Woody-Boris runs through and dismantles almost every conventional "proof" of God’s existence: the arguments from design and cause; the longing for perfection, ultimate good, or justice; the categorical imperative; the ontological argument; even heavenly signs and visions.

"He's a famous human being... a successful one... one who earns more than I do. My God, you figure Napoleon—what? he's got to be worth 10,000 francs a week. That's minimum. That's minimum. That's without tips or extras—nothing like that. And me—what am I?" But when the opportunity actually presents itself to kill the man he thinks is Napoleon, he balks at the man's simple humanity:

The loosely Christian ethics that Woody puts forward seem to take shape under the influence of writers who are more or less Christian. Besides those of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, there are also echoes of Kierkegaard. Specifically, there are strong hints that Woody sees Boris as a kind of klutzy Knight of Faith—a schlemiel to all appearances but one really in a state of blessedness by virtue of the Absurd.

But those who give Woody a chance will be flexible enough to catch on to the deadly serious aim of what is probably his funniest film.

Most of these proofs are rendered ludicrous merely by the way they are put, for Woody sees to it that any verbal construction put forward as serious assertion is comically hollow. Sample: "Boris, look at this leaf. Isn't it perfect? And this one? Ah yeah. Yes, I definitely think that this is the best of all possible worlds." Other proofs are demolished by experience. For example, on the eve of Boris' execution for a crime he did not commit—the assassination of Napoleon's double—he is told by an angelic visitor that at the last moment Napoleon will make a show of generosity and pardon him. "Then there is a God," Boris hastily concludes. At his execution he is the picture of cocky confidence, but as he says later, "I got screwed."

What the film does affirm but does not try to explain is the presence of some kind of saving decency and capacity for loving fellowship in anyone who accepts his own humanity and acknowledges that he shares it with others. Even the distracted Sonja, who exists in a haze of self-interest and superficiality ("Oh, I love you all right. It's just that I'm not in love with you"), is capable of genuine love for the man forbearing enough to cut through the haze.

Sometimes this underlying decency is uncovered progressively. At first Sonja’s plot to kill Napoleon violates an abstract ethical formula that comes to Boris almost automatically and shows him least in touch with anything human: "Don’t you know that murder carries with it a moral imperative that transcends any notion of inherent universal free will?" Next it strikes him as a social presumption:

"He's a human being. He'll bleed on the carpet." Sonja too, though it was her plan, is unable to pull the trigger. She neither knows nor attempts to understand why.

Nothing abstract, rational, learned, or even consciously thought makes for virtue in Love and Death. When these are put into play, they actually delay right choices. In themselves they are ludicrously ineffectual. Here is Woody's spoof of problem solving by logical reasoning:

"If I don't kill him, he'll make war all through Europe. But murder! What would Socrates say?

A. Socrates is a man.
B. All men are mortal.
C. All men are Socrates. That means that all men are homosexuals.

Right choices, in Woody's view, come irrepressibly from some forgotten prior commitment to things human.

Less problematic is the parallel with Platon Karataev, the cheerfully illiterate soldier in War and Peace whose instinctive goodness is a lesson in Christian love to others, but who, like Boris, is executed by his captors.

But despite what a Christian sees as Christian in the film, it would be silly to suggest that Love and Death manifests any part of Christian belief. There is nothing to indicate that Woody finds validity in any religious creed. But though it is always a laughing matter, he takes with utmost seriousness the religious instinct in human beings. Woody is fascinated by all religions, but he customarily (as here) ridicules the human forms they take. The most that he seems willing to give assent to is the exhortation to love thy neighbor—provided the idea is put unpretentiously enough.
Two Days in the Factory

I
If the sun sinks
fast enough and far enough
it stays cool in here
for a few hours in the morning

I set a can on two rollers
As the label slides around it
I feel the glue
steam under the paper
By afternoon I am in love
with the machine
and we begin to quarrel

Over coffee
my prayers fly up
and my tongue turns to
crystal
—I try to reconstruct
Coleridge's still-born dream of Kubla Kahn
the machine screams
shooting
splinters of aluminum into my fingers

II
All day the ceiling is primed
with tubes of white light
I roll a cigarette
in a torn piece of paper towel
Lunch:

Cecil speaks of Grandma
who wears galoshes
to shovel horse manure into the
basement
She has a dirt floor
and grows mushrooms there
Once her son ate some of the fertilizer
and died of lockjaw

A pheasant walks down
out of the weeds to watch
as I wheel my bicycle
through the litter on 40th street
—rabbit entrails
and strips of skin and meat
from oranges

David Westendorp