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Dialogue

Vol. 17 No. 6

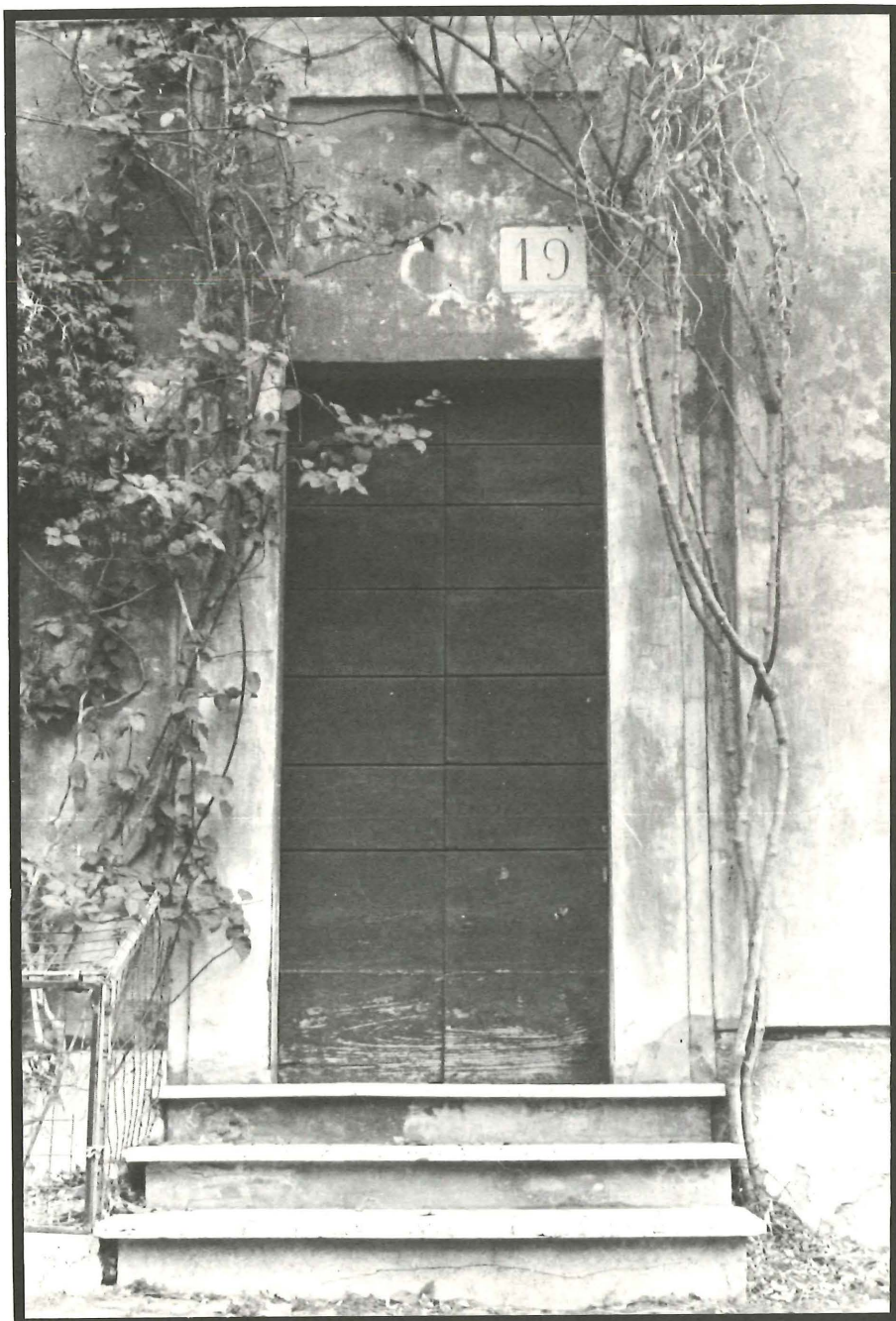
1985



Stage Design
What Dialogue Was
The Decline of Western Culture?
Three Stories

Dialogue

Vol. 17 No. 6 1985



Obvious Function
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Cover—David P. Schaap

Editorial

4 **Rob Schreur**

Feature

20 **What Dialogue Was**
Lori Walburg

Roundtable

12 **The Decline of Western Culture?**

Poetry

17 **I have reality like this**
Dave Shaw

17 **There she sits, alone in the middle**
Dave Shaw

Art

2 **Obvious Function**
Nadine Haven

5 **Balk Goddess UJ84 J:5,6**
Joy Erlich

11 **David**
Billie Hadley

18 **In the Rain**
Tracy Van Rys

19 **Wendy**
Tracy Van Rys

35 **Countryside**
Deborah Ebbers

Short Stories

6 **The Beginning of Our Twilight**
Dan Scheeres

8 **Lessons**
Mike Hancock

9 **Fragile Winged Creature**
Jay Guikema

Words & Works

26 **James Korf**

Portfolio

31 **Dwight van Tol**

Meditation

34 **Glenn Weaver**

Editorial

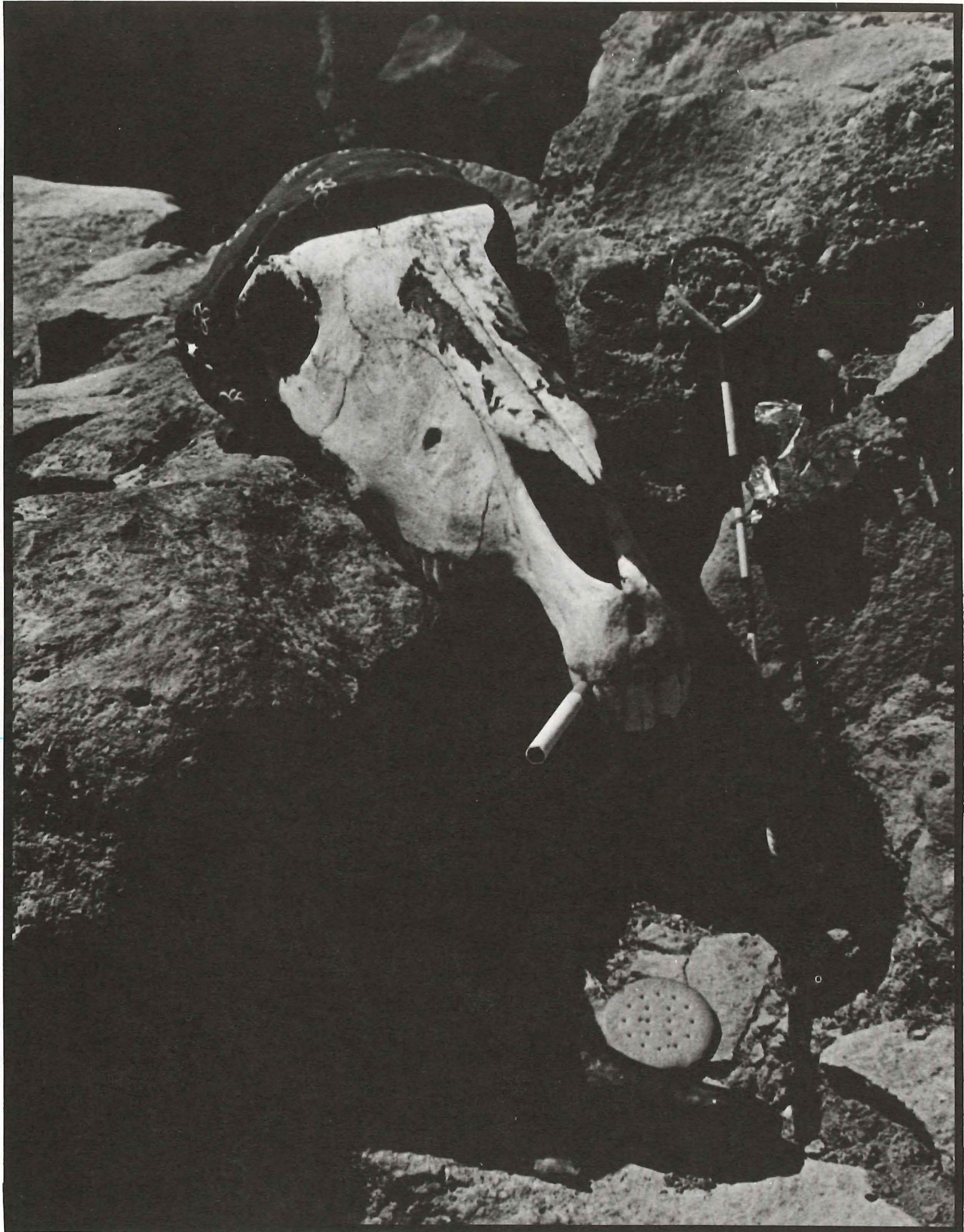
I had a high school teacher once who told me that being educated meant knowing how much one did not know. Viewed that way, it seems I've been well-educated at Calvin. I don't know a thing about Galois theory or sixteenth-century French poetry or Tunisia. The quark still has me baffled, but I'm sure that how much I know about life is no bigger than one.

The problem with knowing how much one does not know is that one is obligated to hold a lot of beliefs in suspense. One thing I have learned at Calvin is how to criticize nearly anything. I can give you a Marxist critique of Protestantism, a capitalist critique of Marxism, and a Christian critique of capitalism. I can assume a cynical attitude toward handicraft and toward high art, laugh at ignorant store clerks and burst the pretense of academics. I can attack or defend any article in *Dialogue*. And I suppose I could do the same for *Chimes*.

This is a wonderful gift if one wants to be a cynic till death (and then probably beyond). If not, there comes a point when one must decide what to believe and what to disbelieve. The problem of deciding to believe or disbelieve entails nasty philosophical questions. But it also entails even nastier practical questions. How do you decide? What criteria do you use? How do you know your beliefs are true?

I'm educated enough to know I cannot answer those questions. But there comes a point, and that is probably now, when one must begin to answer them. The answers must be sought with infinite energy and care and humility. It is a privilege to be able to ask them. But it is also an enormous responsibility.

RS



Balk Goddess UJ84 J:5,6
Joy Erlich

The Beginning of Our

Along with the loud bellowing of the sky and earth came the compelling command of an aunt, blotting out half the sky with her two palm tree legs firmly sunk into the ground, her mighty left arm directing attention to a hole, never quite seen before, which punctured the earth and loosed forth a dusty darkness. Her strong right arm circled viciously, grasping the younger children's attention and action with a power no more resistible than an adult's push on the shoulder, and directed their captured wills towards the dark hole presented to them. Charged with her great power, the children ran to snuggle beneath the ground, considering more the consequence of disobedience than the natural reluctance to run into the darkness of a situation. Being pulled by the wake of children disappearing into the dirt, I still gave sufficient resistance to turn my head and observe the stalwart figure of our present saviour, still not wavering amidst her great surge of power, attracting and directing all who would be subject to her force. Still she did not move, did not heed the strength of her own gestures, though it seemed certain that the impending doom of the great noise would soon consume even her. Unable to stop as the weight of all the others drew me inevitably towards the pit, I craned my head for any further vision and noted, to great relief, that she too began to succumb to the force of her direction as the stillness of her legs began to break when suddenly all the world became a small bright window of colors surrounded by an impenetrable darkness. The window became more colorful as the mother of our salvation approached the hole till all was dark with her bright colors and she suddenly appeared amongst us, and then it seemed not to matter that the pit was dark and crowded all around, but only that she was here with us, spreading calm and peace with her heavy, gentle hands. She drifted through the children, visible only as a vague movement within the dusty night of our earthen womb, spreading comfort through her sour breath, her damp palms, and the protective texture and warmth of her body.

Children hugged her tightly to secure their safety, crowding closer than they would feel comfortable with in but a few hours again. For now were we all safe and saved by this source of all goodness, huddled close to the breast of life and living itself. And, thus soothed and eased of any other current fears, a stillness like that of slumber ensued, with all the other small bodies unaware of the marked frown upon our holy mother's face.

All interrupted by a crashing sound and blinding light striking us simultaneously and thus seeming larger than they were. Frozen for a moment in fright, the cloudy air was tense with potential wails of defense, to be drained in another instant by a smiling face beckoning us to escape this womb, freeing us from the hours of tense and assumed complacency which, looking back, seemed intolerable but for the fact that we were now released to dance and play in the yellow sunlight of afternoon. Older brothers and sisters along with fathers and mothers were strolling toward our earthen womb with dirt on their hands and knees and smiles or grins on their faces. Now relegated again to some obscure aunt, the heavy woman, also being reborn with the children, was dismissed from our current speculation, yet she did not seem to mind as other matters began to crowd her attention. I ran toward my father, and he easily propelled me to his breast, providing me with both a vantage point and a ready ear for inquiry.

"Papa, is it all safe now?"

"Quite, quite so my son. The silver bird flew low and hard, yet chose not to defecate upon us. Yes, it is safe, now, my little one."

Happily pushing this too into the jumble of the last hour, I began to fidget within the close confines of parental love and was soon released to seek out fellow comrades for play, all the time assuming that there was a smile on my father's face. Yet now, much later, I would think that my father must have worn a frown.

Lessons

Mike Hancock

When I was about eight, someone decided that I needed piano lessons. There was only one teacher: Miss Sarah Feltwell, graduate of Peabody Conservatory.

She had light blue hair that disobeyed her hair net. Below the wayward hair were dual hearing aids, and perched on a shrunken nose were trifocals that strengthened yellow eyes. Her cheeks sported too much rouge for her age, and her breath smelled like sour milk. She wore black orthopedic shoes and a cameo fastened at her throat. Her voice sounded like cancer, and she preferred to call me Mich-ee-al. When she spoke, she managed to spit on me. I was too polite to wipe it off.

Miss Feltwell had lived with her brother Herbie for the past forty years in a small white house with green shutters. I saw only the living room where she turned on a single light, although there were others which she didn't have plugged in. An obese piano left little room for other furniture. On a small neat table were copies of *Reader's Digest* and *Highlights*, a magazine for children. The house was very cold. Once, my mother, who sat behind me during lessons, asked if she would turn up the heat. Without saying a word she stood up and walked into another room. She returned with one of her own sweaters and handed it to my mother.

Every Tuesday at 3:45 I had my lesson. When it snowed she made me shovel her walks first. On the piano's dashboard were six sharp pencils and a ruler. She used the pencils to slash the music when I made mistakes and the ruler to crack my untrainable fingers into proper form. Once she even slapped my face because I hadn't practiced enough.

The only time I was allowed to stop playing was when she had to leave the room to ask Herbie, just home from work, to turn down his blasting radio or when she would wind the metronome that ticked forever.

I never learned "Chopsticks" or "Heart and Soul"—she wouldn't let me—but I managed to make some progress and for several years made it through the annual audition and recital, which she held in the back room of Ford's Music Store on 11th Avenue.

When I reached junior high it became very embarrassing for me to ask the wrestling coach if I could be excused from practice on Tuesdays for my piano lesson. He never understood.

I often asked my team-mates to hurt my fingers. They would line up in the locker-room and each would take his turn yanking or pulling the finger I offered. Sometimes they would practice their bone-crushing handshakes on my fingers. One merciless guy broke my little finger. Other times I would smash my fingers against walls, close doors on them, or do anything to make them swell enough to be called "stoved." Afterward, I would wrap them with tape. This eliminated the painful practicing and lessons for awhile.

One Tuesday the telephone rang as we were going out the door. It was Miss Feltwell. She said, "Herbie is lying dead in front of me on the floor. While I'm waiting for Bigelow's Funeral Home to pick him up I thought I would call the students and cancel lessons."

My piano lessons never resumed. I became interested in the trombone and thought it would be a fun instrument to play. Unfortunately, I didn't take into account things like lugging it to and from school every day or endless rehearsals with tyrannical band directors and hours of left-right-left marching and pinwheel turns while trying to position the slide as I stomped into pot-holes and stumbled over cracked concrete. Instead of walking around, checking out girls with my friends, I viewed football games from the bandstand in an over-sized, archaic uniform.

And I had braces, which, because of the pressure from the metal mouth piece, kept my lips bloody and raw. Also, there was the inevitable, traditional razzing from upper classmen who once stuffed and locked me in the bass drum case and rolled it down a flight of stairs.

Nevertheless, I progressed. My church asked me to play for the well-attended Sunday morning worship service. This was a very big deal, and I practiced "Shepherd of Love" for months. Some time before, the church had purchased a new organ, and I found out that it had arrived and was being shown and heard on the morning of my debut. They had quickly invited Harold DeCou, a well-known sacred music composer and arranger, to demonstrate his virtuosity on the new organ.

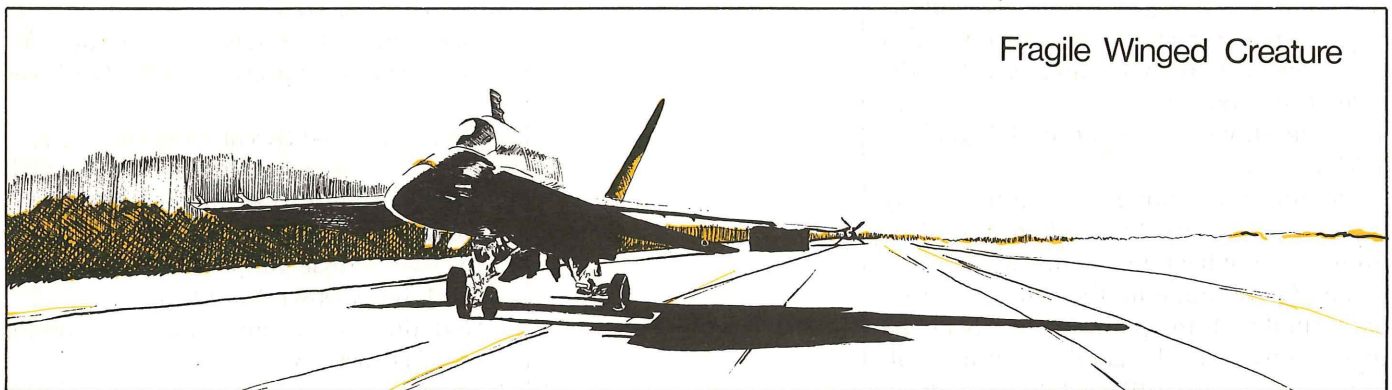
They told me they were lucky to get him. Since I had practiced so long and hard, they would still let me play.

The service started. After a hymn or two and the announcements Harold began his show. I grew more nervous with every run he made up and down the keyboard. He played and played and I jiggled and squirmed and began to think they had forgotten about me and the “Shepherd of Love.” Finally, just before the sermon, the announcer said I was going to bless the heart of every listener with a special number on the “slide” trombone.

I walked weak-kneed to my music stand and emptied my spit valve; the pianist started her introduction. I began to play. The months of practice paid off—for the first five bars. Then my tone cracked, my mouth dried up, and all that came out was something that sounded like the noises that boys make at night in their cabins at summer camp.

In agony I grabbed the music stand and rushed off stage. I hid in a Sunday school classroom and kicked the music across the floor as I cried and cried. After about twenty minutes I gathered the music and saw for the first time printed in the upper right-hand corner: “Solo arranged by Harold DeCou, Accompaniment written by Harold DeCou.”

Church was over. I crawled through the window, jumped down to the parking lot and ran to my car. ■



Fragile Winged Creature

Jay Guikema

With adrenaline pumped-anticipation I step out of the squadron into the early West Texas morning air. Laden with a variety of pilot gear, I stride confidently onto the ramp. For me this is a once-in-a-lifetime good deal. One of the fortunate few that ever get a chance to take a jet like the T-38 “Talon” into the sky—alone!

Thank you, God. I’m going to have a good time, but Lord, and this “but Lord” is so important, please don’t let me get carried away and kill myself.

How I know that is all too possible.

You realize, Jay, that this supersonic beast takes off at 180mph and slams back into the runway at roughly 150mph. One wrong move at either of those phases and—Poof. Just a big ball of flame.

That’s all she wrote, babe.

He kissed it goodbye on takeoff.

Failed to punchout when he had the chance.

Augered in.

Poor sucker!

And surely don’t forget the 600mph loops (that’s right, six hundred screaming miles per hour). Those cheating-death

loops where you’re battling five times the force of gravity (how does it feel to weigh 1,000 pounds?). The backside of the loop looking at the world upside down, why that maneuver alone can lead to a lovely white marker in Arlington National Cemetery. If things go bad on the backside and you eject it probably won’t do a bit of good. Your little pink body will plough into some farmer’s field long before you separate from the rocket seat, long before your chute decides to dribble out the green laundry bag on your back.

What absolutely crazy thoughts at a time like this.

That 7am sky looks glorious. I soak up every sensation I can possibly grab as I walk to my jet. Off to the side of the ramp a couple of birds chirp. I guess they figure to get a few words in before the roar of afterburners drowns them out. An orange monarch flits gracefully alongside of me for a brief moment. He too lives a precarious life—this fragile-winged creature floating along on the morning breeze.

Body and soul strapped in. All preflight checks complete. I nod to the crew chief.

His green-clad arms come up and signal me out of the chocks. My left hand itches slightly as I advance the dual throttles. My right hand grasps the stick gently, and my feet rest firmly on the rudder pedals. Out of the chocks and rolling. Crew chief gives a last look over my jet then throws me the thumbs-up. My thumbs-up. He comes to attention and executes the most beautiful, sharp salute I have ever been granted. I return his salute with 100% all-American male pride. From here on out it's just me and my fire-breathing baby.

Fire-breathing baby look up at the sky. See what I see. That's where we're going—you and me, baby.

Puffy cotton-ball clouds scurry across our sky. A brother bird roars 1500 feet overhead. Early morning heat waves rise off the grey-white cement. A Texas jackrabbit pokes his head up in the tall grass off to the side of the taxiway.

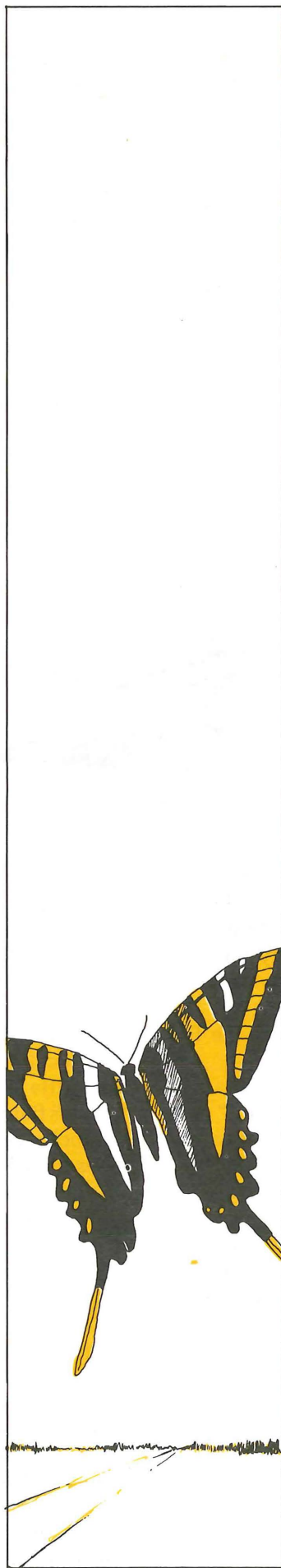
"Dade 51, you're cleared for takeoff."

That's our number.

Canopy comes down as I squirm in my seat. My thighs sweat more than usual. The middle of my back itches in a spot I can't reach. We roll out onto the runway. Set up on the brakes. Run up the engines. Scan the instruments. Checks good. Maximum afterburners—Now! The 8,000 pounds of thrust slam me back into my seat as we pick up speed. A hawk blurs past, inches from the canopy, too high to threaten the starboard engine. The next few minutes go by at a blinding Chuck Yeager rate—Speed is everything.

At 25,000 feet altitude and at the front of our area, we punch in with a half-roll that puts me upside down, hanging in my straps, wondering: Does any normal person do this for a living? I continue the roll to rightside up, never answering my question. The next several minutes continue with one gut wrenching loop, beautiful barrel-roll and superb split-S after another. A full repertoire of yanking and banking to my hearts delight. Sheer hog heaven. Before this brief hour of glory ends there is one more maneuver I will, nay, in order to call myself a man, I must perform—the climbing vertical aileron roll, a brutal, exhilarating, (would one dare say?) pants-wetting experience.

I nudge the throttles to max burners and pull back on the stick just at the moment my bird wants to break the sound barrier. This streamlined stead sets me on my back as we climb a steady rate of 20,000 feet per minute. The dial on my altimeter is rolling



past thousands of feet like a second hand. Straining my neck back, I look to see the earth falling away like a runaway elevator at the Empire State Building. My craft climbs skyward like a shuttle launch, begging to push through the top of the atmosphere. I push the stick left and my jet spirals, upward, like a perfectly thrown football, like a long white tube rolling. Three slow aileron rolls and thinking: Oh God, this is fabulous. What a way to live. What incredible freedom. What a lucky man. Chuck, I truly understand. Ineffable.

The airspeed starts to bleed off rapidly. A quick look in at the instruments then a look back out at the ground counter rotating far below. Then a look—WHAAAAAMMM!! Like a mugger's punch in the face, intense vertigo hits. Hard.

Great, Jay, just great. Now you've done it.

Airspeed is dropping rapidly. Can't see straight.

Don't get slow! Sweat stings my eyes.

Don't flame out! My neck aches. Still climbing—barely. Breathing too fast.

Hang on to it, man. I'm scared. Hang on.

No time to lose your cool.

Lord, help. Down to 120.

God, do you hear me? Don't compressor stall this beast, Jay.

Hang on, baby—hang on just a little bit more.

Did I mail out that last premium? OK. This is it.

Dropped it in the mail yesterday. Hold onto the stick with both hands. At 100 kick hard left rudder.

There it is—100.

Now, Now, Nowwww! The action of the rudder slams my jet hard over from a blue vertical climb to a green, brown vertical dive.

Fight the urge to move your head, you idiot. Hold out just a little bit longer. The view is coming back, gradually. Larger portions now. All of it.

HALLELUJAH!

Ease back on the stick and pull out of the dive. Leveling off now.

"Fort Worth Center, Dade 51. Ready to clear area."

Thank you, God. Outside of the envelope and back.

Back at the base a couple of birds chirp. No one hears them over the roar of afterburners. An orange monarch flits gracefully over the cement ramp outside the squadron. He lives a precarious life—this fragile-winged creature of the morning breeze ■



David
Billie Hadley

Roundtable

The following is a transcript of a discussion on the state of Western civilization and culture. Professors David Diephouse, George Harper, Philip Holtrop, and Dale Van Kley participated.

Dialogue

There have been many and various voices since the beginning of the century proclaiming the failure and fall of Western culture. I am wondering what your response is to them. Oswald Spengler, writing in 1917, gives a provocative, if not fully representative, statement of this proclaimed decline. He says,

To the world-city belong not a folk but a mob. Its uncomprehending hostility to all the traditions representative of Culture (nobility, church, privileges, dynasties, conventions in art, and the limits of knowledge in science), . . . the new-fashioned naturalism that in relation to all matters of sex and society goes back to quite primitive instincts and conditions, . . . all these things betoken the definite closing down of Culture and the opening of a quite new phase of human existence, anti-provincial, late, futureless, but quite inevitable.

Van Kley

I haven't read Spengler, but I get the impression that he is convinced that with the decline of particular communities necessarily comes the decline of the culture of nations and of world culture and world civilization. In this there is a suspiciously proto-national, socialist ring.

Holtrop

And it is important to bear in mind that when Spengler wrote his *Decline of the West* it was in the first years of the first world war. He was talking about a civilization in turmoil. The culture he refers to mainly is what might be called "high culture" in contrast to the culture which necessarily goes on by virtue of its being a necessary human product. That raises immediately the question, if there is a viable difference between high culture and other culture. I think that there is. I would say that from a Reformed, biblical perspective we

must say that culture is always done. Culture is the work of persons as they respond either obediently or disobediently to God's command to have dominion over all creation.

Dialogue

So if we are to speak of the decline of culture, we must really speak about the decline in the quality of high culture?

Harper

And we must note that what Spengler does is use the German word *Kultur*. If nothing else, the quotation illustrates the problem of translation. *Culture* in English is one thing; *Kultur* is another. Spengler is talking about a mystic German synthesis of high art, high this, high that.

Diephouse

And he is also talking about a peculiarly German middle-class, academic nostalgia for a glowing aristocratic world coupled in an odd sort of way with a popular organic community. On Phil's point about the different senses of culture, what Spengler is doing is mixing several different dimensions of culture. And part of Spengler's lament of the decline of *Kultur* is a lament of a particular class for the decline of the dominant products of that class.

Van Kley

But don't you think that there is something to what Spengler is saying? I have the impression that the lament concerning the decline of culture is a fairly general phenomenon at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th. And one does in fact see certain sorts of trends taking place at that time, signals, if not of decline, at least of considerable changes in the direction of Western culture. I'm thinking of Marcel Proust's psychological-state novel, for example, and the beginning of the suspicion that science is just a construction upon reality not really corre-

sponding to what is out there, and the rise of historicism in the historical studies.

Harper

I'm not so sure that that signals a decline. And I am highly suspicious of the word *culture*. I have been ever since I had to read T. S. Eliot's *Notes Toward the Definition of Culture*. Eliot tried not to fall into Matthew Arnold's trap and Spengler's trap of lamenting the demise of an aristocratic arrangement of value accompanied by objects like paintings and sculptures and that sort of thing. Eliot tried also to be fair to the new kind of anthropology that said that culture is simply everything that human beings do. He tried to tie culture to some state of Christianity which he pegged at 17th-century Anglicanism and the best of 19th-century Anglicanism. But I am not satisfied with what Eliot does, because he winds up saying that culture is a superior state of human being, which inevitably implies a superior social arrangement. I don't think that there is any way around that as long as you use the term *culture*.

Dialogue

Perhaps it would be better to speak of the decline of civilization rather than the decline of culture. A contemporary statement with a vision similar to Spengler comes from Malcolm Muggeridge. He proposes a catalogue of comparisons:

From St. Augustine to St. Ezra Pound, from Plainsong to the Rolling Stones, from El Greco to Picasso, from Chartres to the Empire State Building, from Benvenuto Cellini to Henry Miller, from Pascal's *Pensées* to Robinson's *Honest to God*. A Gaderene descent down which we all must slide, finishing up in the same slough.

Holtrop

I wonder if a tendency to tie culture to a certain concept of Christianity doesn't lie behind Muggeridge's statement. The main notion of Muggeridge, which perhaps itself reflects something of the individualism of the modern West and its cynicism, is that Christendom is sinking but Christ remains. The

way to do something with Christ is as an individual. And here it seems that Muggeridge is playing into the very thing of which he is critical. There is a concept which runs basic to his saying: the denial of the community and the exultation of the individual. Yet it is the decline of the community's culture he is criticizing.

Diephouse

There is laid over the religious dynamic in Muggeridge an almost Arnoldian notion of the cultural products of that commitment. His trajectories of decline have cathedrals on one side and rock music on the other. And, while I

“From St. Augustine to St. Ezra Pound, from Plainsong to the Rolling Stones. . . . A Gaderene descent down which we all must slide, finishing up in the same slough.”

think that one could make a certain kind of case there, he certainly has some overlapping categories.

Van Kley

Once again, though, I wonder if there isn't something to be made of what Muggeridge says. It is generally maintained by historians of civilizations that at the center of any civilization is a religion or a religious tradition. Now, has there not been a decline of the religious tradition of the West, namely Christianity? And from that perspective can one not talk about the decline of Western civilization? Are you really happy with the fact that at the center of our cities is a bank or the Sears Tower or the Empire State Building and not the Cathedral of Chartres?

Harper

I'm not sure that I am dissatisfied with the state of Western civilization. I am dissatisfied with Muggeridge's journalistic cheap shots, his pairing off St. Augustine with St. Ezra Pound and the Empire State Building with Chartres. But I'm not dissatisfied with my time all that much. The obvious thing to be unhappy about is the threat of nuclear accident and biological warfare and that sort of thing. Those threats are very real. But I'm not sure that I am culturally offended by my time, and I don't think that Christianity is suffering all that much.

Van Kley

You can maintain on the one hand that the Christian church is in fairly good shape. But that is a separate kind of consideration. Another kind of consideration is to what degree our cultural forms are influenced by Christianity. Now there I think we can talk about the decline of Christian culture. We have been able to talk about that since at least the 17th century. I think that it is a significant fact that

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offended by my time, and I don't
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all that much.

the likes of the Cathedral of Chartres in the center of cities have been replaced by the Sears Tower.

Diephouse

There is, of course, the Crystal Cathedral. And I say that not all together facetiously. I wonder whether another way of saying what you have been saying, Dale, is that what is happening in Western culture is a shift in the always syncretistic nature of Christendom.

We may not be happy with the form that the syncretism takes, but I suspect that the question of de-Christianization is first of all a question of where the center of gravity is in a particular syncretism. I think that we can meaningfully talk about the migration of that center point. Without becoming Marxist, it may have a lot to do with a shift in classes and a shift in who controls the means of communication. At that point, the Crystal Cathedral is not totally irrelevant, although perhaps depressing.

Holtrop

I wonder if we can get a sharper focus on why we are pleased or displeased with contemporary culture by using something inherent in Muggeridge. Muggeridge is rather cynical about what individual Christians must now do, standing, as they do, over against the wasteland out there. Muggeridge takes his point of beginning from the concept of redemption much more than from the concept of creation. He wants culture to have a redemptive significance and does not see culture as that which is worked out within creation and with the materials of creation. He has become cynical because he doesn't see Christians doing what they ought to be doing. But there is a necessary theological point to make: that culture is related primarily to the doctrine of creation rather than to the doctrine of redemption. We are dissatisfied with culture, from a Reformed perspective, because we recognize the impact of the fall: what was already is now not yet, but what is not yet will be restored in re-creation. If we put it in that perspective, we don't set two principles against each other, we don't lament a Christendom which hasn't lived up to what it should be in opposition to the satanic world. In the perspective of "already but not yet; not yet but to be restored," it seems to me that we can maintain a certain optimism as well as a certain dissatisfaction with culture, without falling into pessimism.

Van Kley

But would you really call that optimism? Isn't "hope" a better term? I would understand optimism to mean that you would take

the historical process itself to be the agent of the restoration, whereas hope would look to Christ for the restoration. On the one hand, I confess to being quite pessimistic, probably as pessimistic about things as Muggeridge is. But, on the other, I do have a sense of hope.

Holtrop

“Optimism” is a bad term if you focus on culture itself. It is not a bad term if you focus on Jesus Christ as the mediator of creation.

Harper

But for every jolt of pessimism, don't you get a jolt of optimism, even in our own times?

Diephouse

You haven't seen the cartoon that Dale had on his door for years. It had various people walking along, and the balloons above them all said, “It has all been down-hill since. . . .” And the dates were the only things that changed.

Harper

It seems to me that every time something bad comes along, something good comes right along after it. And sometimes right within the bad thing itself comes a good thing. Now, case in point. Take the Beatles for the fun of it. They are always easy to use as an indicator. There was a moment, call 1965-1975 a moment, during which the Beatles came on the scene. They took over music from Little Richard and a few other people and brought together all of the noise-making that passed for music and turned it into music. And a lot of it was very good stuff.

Diephouse

But George Harrison has given way to Boy George and John Lennon to Michael Jackson.

Harper

Quite right. But for a time you got such very splendid things. About ten to twelve of the Beatles' songs, looked at simply as lyric poetry, were very good. I do not know anything about music; all I know is what pleases me. And that pleases me very much. Now the cultural situation from which they came was

probably the worst of 19th century left-over conditions in one of the most dismal cities in the world, Liverpool—everybody out of work, town full of people who escaped Ireland only to find worse conditions in Liverpool, no hope. And out of that comes this very vibrant

But George Harrison has given way to Boy George and John Lennon to Michael Jackson.

pop-culture which positively, I think, affected the major culture.

Dialogue

But doesn't your comment, “I do not know anything about music; all I know is what pleases me,” reflect something of the current loss of ideals in modern civilization and a rise of individualism?

Holtrop

And haven't we become so individualistic, so anarchistic in our evaluation that it really is very difficult to talk about culture, the decline of culture, and the like? So many things please so many different people. So how do we get a handle on what standard we are really using here? What do we mean by culture and the decline of it? And how can we be sure whether or not culture ought to please us?

Harper

I don't know. But I can't get past a kind of hedonism.

Van Kley

What most people would take to be one of the signs of cultural decline in the contemporary world is the rampant subjectivism, the sort of practical solipsism, the relativism, the disintegration of any shared standards, and so on.

Diephouse

And the decline of the commons. Geographically, it is significant that our greatest commons is multi-laned asphalt that we drive on in our little encapsulated cells. One source of the commons has been tradition, the tradition of the dominant class. Although this is vastly over-simplified, I conceptualize it this way: over the last couple hundred years, if there are at least two identifiable cultural strains—call them high culture and popular culture—which intersect with each other at various points. In a sense what happens in Spengler's generation is that high culture begins to realize that one of the crucial pieces of its cultural baggage is self-doubt. Self-doubt, in fact, becomes a major part of the expression of high culture. While all this is going on, there is a popular culture which has different roots and different forms of expression. And, while it mimics high culture at certain points, it also has its own tradition. What depresses me is the extent to which popular culture in our technologized world has come to ape, a half-century late, the fashionable pieces of high-cultural baggage of an earlier time. Now it may be, ironically, that post-modernist high culture will come out with the seeds of something new and Tom [Harper] will be right. I agree that it is possible to say with hindsight that the decay is much more visible than the birth pains.

Van Kley

I think that that is one possible reading of Western history since the turn of the century: that what has happened is that what was characteristic and more-or-less limited to the cultural upper-class has spread deeper and wider and now affects everybody. To talk about it in a very limited way, you had, between the war years, the rise of existentialism; and now you have, at a very popular level, the morality of self-fulfillment.

Harper

The morality of self-fulfillment, the freeing of sexual mores and so forth, derives as well from anthropological studies of primitive communities illegitimately transferred to a larger and more complex civilization. Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead are responsible for a great deal of nonsense because they extrapolated from some group of people in the tropical islands to what all teenagers in the Western world ought to be doing. Because it works in the tropical islands, therefore it

must work in our larger civilization. The problem is that our larger civilization is much more complex.

Holtrop

And as Christians we must try to get beyond self-fulfillment morality, existentialism, subjectivism, even a kind of solipsism. It makes all the difference in the world how you evaluate a culture, whether in terms of a Christian social community or a non-Christian one. If you take your standpoint in a Christian social community which is biblically focused, then I think such concepts as the whole before the parts, the community before the individual, or the concept of edification, serving an instrumental significance in our culture—all become very important.

Diephouse

A Christian community has a tradition. Moreover, it has an epistemology and a worldview which make tradition not only possible, but essential. That tradition, in turn, becomes culture-formative. That, for me, is a source of hope as much as anything else.

Van Kley

How would that be a source of hope?

Diephouse

Well, one always understands the past in terms of expectations for the present and vice versa; and, for cultural products to speak intelligibly, they have to speak in a language that touches community. I think that to the extent that tradition creates community, Christianity, as a tradition in itself and as a creator of tradition, is a culture-formative thing.

Harper

But does tradition create community, or does community create tradition? Anthropologists would generally tend to argue that community creates tradition. You derive tradition from what a community does and has done for a long time.

Diephouse

The frightening thing, I suppose, is that in fact behavior creates tradition, if the denial of tradition becomes the behavior pattern of the new tradition, then we must wonder if culture is possible. That may be a source of pessimism. ■

8410.10

I have reality like this:
a floating Christ, barred

to the outlands of whispered
word and strangled shattered

fuselage. A satisfactory realm
for the elect and the damned.

Yet the balance of swallows on
telephone wires is a warm fragile

Hubris, that beckons to me as a
sign of loving destitution,

a brief season of one thousand
autumns compressed in both ears

and the stomach to endure till
summer. But sitting on the porch,

in the full sun, hearing the
twittering connotations from the

lips of repentant, teetering
lovers, I must stop, purse my

lips in gentle ease, and count the
holes in my shoes.

Dave Shaw

8410.17

There she sits, alone, in the middle
of an empty field, dreaming.

The gusts of lies drain the eyes,
they cannot stay open.

This being October, the sun is yellow
like the underside of a god toppled

in a temple. Thus she begins the dream, in
circles, ever widening, brightening:

Ditches full of crows that clamor for air
and bread, as the clouds carry

the shapes of desire and hasten
across the sky like frightened women

lost in suburbs. Bang the sound
on an empty log, this rhythm of frogs

or nervous hands on kitchen tables.
These crows are happy in their presupposed

evil, as they chatter and caw in vacillating
patterns to the hollow sound that rattles

through the beams of barns and the spaces
of her quiet, yellow speculation. Remember

this, you sad sad girl, when you awake,
and stand up, and walk away

that to embrace this temptation of cyclones
and fruitless banal fluttering

in the sacred dankness of your sleep
is the measure of your strength to lie alone

and tell no one who you are.

Dave Shaw



In the Rain
Tracy Van Rys



Wendy
Tracy Van Rys

What dialogue

DIALOGUE

Dialogue

Dialogue Was

Lori Walburg

A sudden spasm of the dreaded, though temporary, illness shakes the cupboards of the brain like an earthquake, and you cannot find the pat answer your mother so carefully stored away for you in the upper right-hand corner of your head. Identity crisis! You dose yourself with old snapshots, a phone call to a distant friend, some scribbled diary lines, praying that you will restore a sense of order, that the shelves marked "who am I," "where am I," and "where am I going" can again be stocked with answers.

Dialogue is a sweet sixteen now and more skilled than ever before in applying the "cosmetics" of art to its physical appearance. But it too goes through its bouts of identity crises, which send staff writers scrambling through its archival issues to find that, even if Dialogue has matured, it still has its own distinctive body, brain, and beauty. From a pile of black-bound Dialogues, I pulled snippets of articles to recall not only the distinctive features of Dialogue, but also to reveal how this offspring of Calvin has captured what Calvin stands for and how this college affects its students—both positively and negatively.

The first editorials of the year often waxed proverbial to specify the editor's definition of "Dialogue":

Whereof one cannot speak dialogue, thereof must one remain silent

(Nov. 1974, p.2);

"Dialogue" as monologue is soon to be a dull bird

(Oct. 1975, p.2);

"Dialogue" should be the place where Calvin talks to itself

(Oct. 1979, p.4);

The name "Dialogue" should not be merely a name, it should be a function

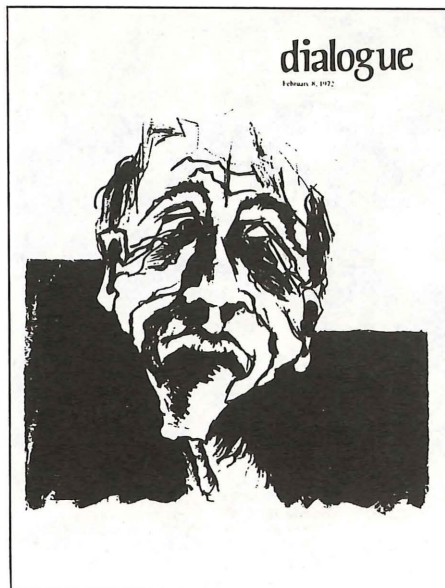
(Oct. 1984, p.4).

Ever since *Dialogue's* birth in 1969, an ongoing definitional debate has centered on the name "Dialogue." To some, *Dialogue* connoted a process out of which one truth would emerge to overcome the divergent opinions or a process merely designed to prevent hostility. The original five-point manifesto pushed for more than a conversation among persons on an issue: *Dialogue* will

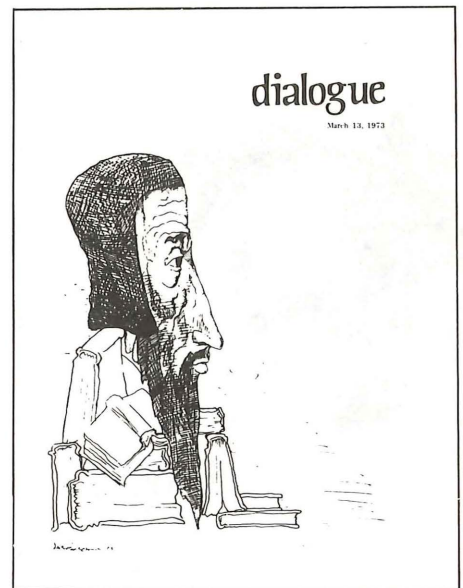
- 1 find and publish valuable ideas,
- 2 describe the intellectual ferment at Calvin,
- 3 stimulate new ideas,
- 4 be a forum for criticism and discussion,
- 5 analyze currents in modern culture.



November 5, 1971



February 8, 1972



March 13, 1973

Evidently mono-logue, a sickness induced by student apathy to “*Dialogue*,” was more dreaded than mononucleosis by many a student editor. Some attributed student apathy to the reputation of *Dialogue* as an intellectual, esoteric magazine. One writer classified three types of minds at Calvin: Heads (Thespians, Chimes, FAG, and *Dialogue*), Jocks (athletes, rednecks, and beeries), and Middle Americans (residence hall staff and loiterers in dorm lobbies). He claimed that *Dialogue* catered to Heads after he heard comments like this from Jock and Middle American:

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?

(Oct. 1975, p.3).

Two issues later another writer begged for a “Depraved *Dialogue*” where all the “literary peons” could express themselves. The “Heads” of *Dialogue* replied that its poetry was intended for contemplation and communication, and that poetry demands hard work, a knowledge of poetic tradition, and readers who are willing to take more than a superficial look at a poem.

The inception in 1978 of “Words and Works,” a feature in which the artist could explain the techniques and meanings of his art, narrowed the gap between all-knowing artist and uninformed reader. The 1980 and 1981 staffs promised to be democratic rather than aristocratic, appealing to more students by publishing a wider variety of articles. Even this attitude was met with suspicion:

Some [thought] that “*Dialogue*” should be addressed to “thinking people,” to students “where they ought to be,” not neces-

sarily where they are. We said that articles should be interesting, or challenging, or even just fun. Not necessarily, they disagreed, “*Dialogue*” should print what people ought to read. . . . Many people thought . . . the “*Dialogue*” should focus on certain “idealistic principles,” not on readers

(Oct. 1981, p.2).

The trend toward popularizing *Dialogue* being too extreme, the current editor sought a compromise:

. . . we hope to upgrade [*Dialogue*’s] appearance and content with the goal of making it to be taken more seriously and so to provide a greater service. . . . We hope to make *Dialogue* more accessible

(Oct. 1984, p.4).

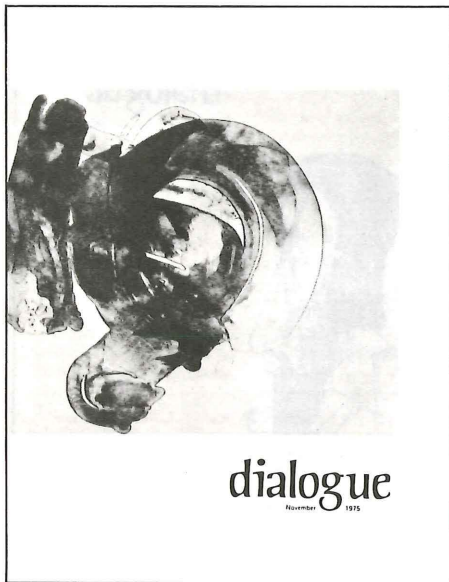
While *Dialogue* defined itself, it also redefined Calvin’s clichés—liberal arts, core curriculum, Christian, Reformed, and so on. The liberal arts have increasingly lost students to pre-professional programs and “practical” majors, but the general attitude at Calvin was and is one expressed by Dr. Diekema:

Calvin is distinctive as a Christian liberal arts institution, and it should not be willing to compromise that . . . strength in liberal arts for paraprofessional programs

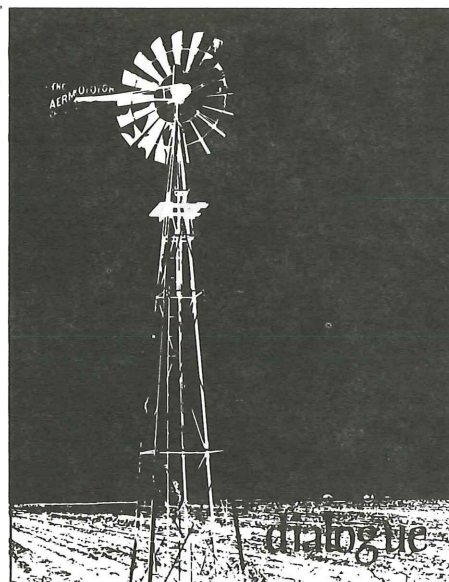
(Nov. 1975, p.34).

When Clarence Boersma reflected on the Christian College, he concluded that the adjective demanded more than integrating faith and learning in courses that presupposed intellectual value judgements; a Christian college also had to teach morality, mold consciences, and instill a sense of responsibility before God (Jan. 1975, pp. 7-8).

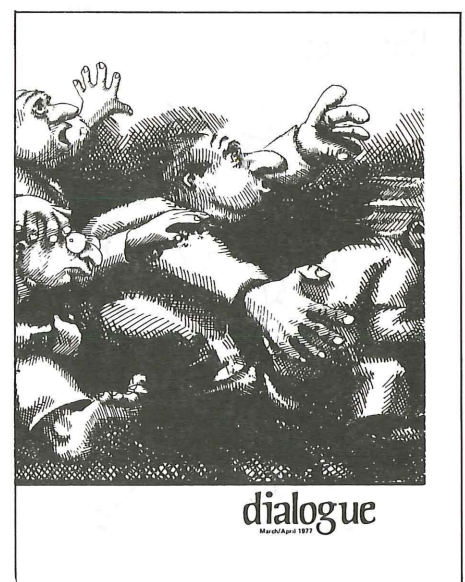
One of the most effective ways of uncover-



November 1975



March 1976



March/April 1977

ing the identity of a college is, as any transfer student knows, comparing and contrasting it to a similar institution. An article on Grand Rapids School of Bible and Music (GRSBM) prompted the dean of GRSBM to reply, thus underscoring the difference between a Bible college and a Christian liberal arts college. Dean Ohlman wrote that one can be led by the Spirit to many occupations, but the Bible institute's conviction is that a thorough knowledge of the Bible is essential for any Christian in any career:

Regardless of how much knowledge one attains, if he is not thoroughly grounded in the principles and precepts of the Word nor completely committed to the cause of Christ, he is totally unprepared to face the real issues of life

(Mar. 1974, p.3).

While GRSBM equips its students to preach the gospel of Christ, Calvin prepares students for an active Christian life in all professions more by applying biblical principles than by requiring in-depth biblical study.

The birth of Redeemer College in Hamilton, Ontario posed a deeper threat to Calvin's identity as revealed most tellingly in the title of a *Dialogue* article: "Calvin and Redeemer: Sisters or Rivals?" Dr. Diekema, commenting on the strong Dooyeweerdian presence at Redeemer, said that did not make Redeemer more Reformed than Calvin:

. . . we will always value [Dooyeweerdianism], but it won't be the only perspective represented at this institution. . . . Calvin has always insisted that there be representatives from different perspectives: that there be a dynamic interaction between them . . . which gives life and

focus to what being Reformed is all about (Oct. 1982, p.25).

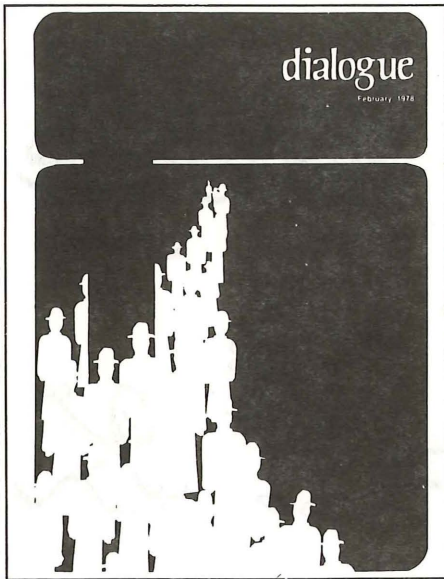
Dr. Theodore Plantinga, who taught philosophy at Calvin and now teaches philosophy at Redeemer, claimed the contrary: that Calvin does have an overriding perspective, that it generally adopts William Jellema's position on common grace rather than that of H. Evan Runner. Jellema's common grace implies that God is the cause of all good things, thus Christians could take a "good" system like Platonism and Christianize it. The Dooyeweerdian minority at Calvin, including Runner, despises any such synthesis; they begin with Biblical principles and say that any part of a system which agrees with the Word has been touched by common grace. Plantinga went on to reflect that common grace has taken on a political cast which he terms "solidarity" thinking:

Earlier we saw that God is the cause of all good things—such as the essentially aristocratic philosophy of Plato. In the new variant Plato is ignored, and it turns out that God is the cause of all battles against oppression, discrimination, sexism, racism, etc., regardless of the religious direction of their participants

(Oct. 1982, p.29).

At a time when Calvin is getting involved in such issues as apartheid, U.S. policy in Central America, and the liberation of women, Plantinga cautions the college not to succumb to solidarity thinking:

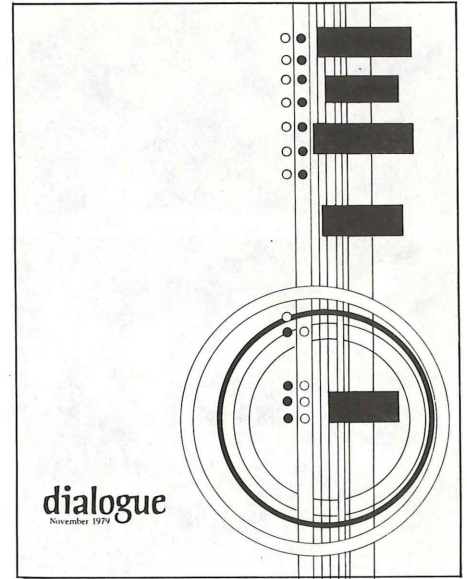
Is such an outlook taking hold on the Calvin campus? Judge for yourself. Decades of common grace thinking have certainly prepared the way for it, for common grace promotes solidarity with the world or



February 1978



October 1979



November 1979

identification with worldly forces supposedly caused by God

(Oct. 1982, p.30).

A more readily recognized undercurrent at Calvin carries female students along in the stream of pearl-diamond-wedding rings: it's the old assumption, perhaps as true today as back in '70, that women go (or are sent) to Calvin to meet nice young Christian men and attain within four years the MRS degree. The assumption, as one male writer puts it, is that if woman seeks fulfillment in the world, she endangers her possibility of security with a husband and family; the only two choices allotted her are "security in subjection and loneliness in independence" (Dec. 1970, p.18). Seven years later the situation had changed little, and female students at Calvin could be typed into three categories: those attending college merely to find a partner; those who were serious about their education but chose marketable majors that would keep them challenged and financially secure until marriage; and the minority who were most serious about scholarship and career but felt subtle pressure to achieve less than their potential (Jan. 1977, pp. 12-13).

The woman-centered, January 1977 *Dialogue* was followed by the May 1980 issue, also dedicated to woman, but not to woman in her multiplicity of functions and personalities; rather, the issue promoted the "strong" or "aggressive" woman only. So stated the editorial which went on to beat woman's ego into shape before declaring "religious" war against all barriers to self-fulfillment:

Women have to learn to think differently of themselves. No longer must we consider ourselves man's "other." We are ourselves.

Each woman must be responsible to *herself*, not to man's concept of herself. Each person, female or male, has this responsibility, not only to him/herself, but to God, the God who made each of us in Her image. We must count it our responsibility to develop the many facets of each of our individual characters. This has been difficult for woman to do; she has been inundated and submerged by the economically and physically stronger male

(p. 4).

The hint of reverse sexism as applied to God—"Her image"—was carried out in an article on "Androgynous [dangerous term in this age of Boy George and Michael Jackson] Liturgy," which argued that male terminology "limits" God and neglected to explain why God chose to have His people *call* Him Father, God using feminine imagery only as simile rather than direct appellation.

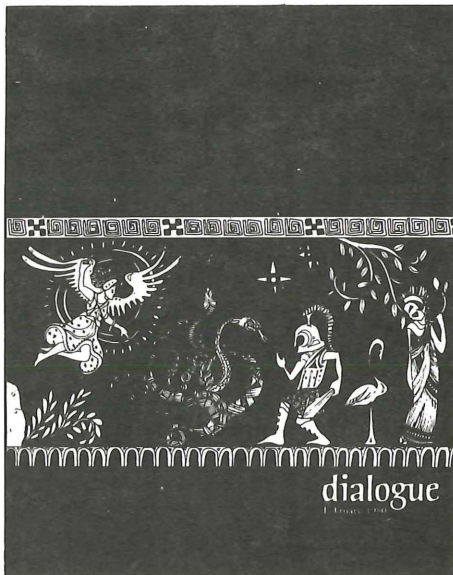
The battle for equality included the question of women in office already in the early 70's, when it began to surface accompanied with its exegetical baggage:

Does Paul make a command for all time, or does this passage only reflect a decision based on social exigencies?

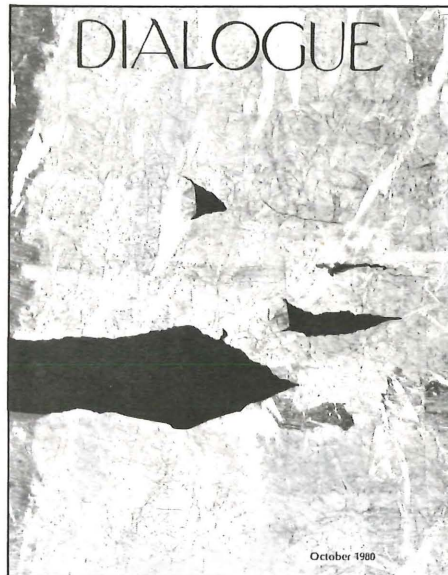
(Dec. 1971, p.11).

An article written in reply to that question clearly supported interpretation of scripture in light of culture and called for men and women to work toward the equality of the sexes which they supposedly enjoyed before the fall (Feb. 1972, pp. 19-22).

A more balanced article in the May 1980 *Dialogue* discussed women in office, James O'Brien arguing against it and Nicholas Wolterstorff arguing for it. Women must not



February 1980



October 1980



March 1982

teach in public worship, said O'Brien, because of the creational ordinance stated in I Timothy 2:13, 14. Wolterstorff could not understand why this ordinance should pertain only to the church and essentially dismissed it, arguing instead that the church should utilize women's spiritual gifts in the offices of the church. By March 1983, however, the balance had shifted, and *Dialogue's* apriori perspective assumed the inevitable inclusion of women:

Regardless of whether or not it ought to be, the day seems to be coming when women may be ordained as deacons, elders, and possibly even as ministers

(Mar. 1983, p. 6).

Dialogue has battled narrow-mindedness in more areas than the place of women. As a showcase for the fine arts of Calvin, *Dialogue* encouraged discussions on the integration of faith and art which ranged from optimistic theses that artists and community should work together—

A celebrative atmosphere where both the community at large and fellow artists support, share, encourage, and respond to each other is essential. A true communal spirit entails work and responsibilities on both the artists' and viewers' parts

(Sept. 1978, p.25).

—to sharp polarizations, especially on the issue of censorship. *Dialogue* of April '75 was forced to eliminate life-drawings of nudes and filled the blank pages with an explanation and a bitter complaint that they had all the "responsible freedom" of "a dog on a 20-foot chain . . . within a 20-foot radius" (p.15). Only three years later, however, *Dialogue* published a nude study of a pregnant woman

(April 1978, p. 16–17) and followed it up, not with letters of protest, but with another nude figure study (May 1978, pp. 20–21). Disgust at the censoring of swear words in Calvin's '73 production of Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* produced amusing lambastes in the article "David and Barbara at the Theater: Phooey on the Torpedoes." "Phooey" attacked the college for pandering to its well-off constituency and shot off quotes like these:

Crossing out dirty words in plays is analogous to going to the bathroom with your eyes closed

(Dec. 1973, p.21);

Pretending to make a Christian presentation of an Arthur Miller play is like staging nuclear war in the name of Gandhi

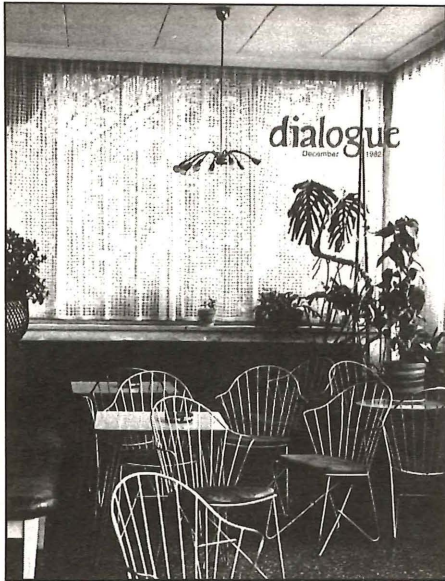
(p.22).

In 1980, an article addressing the question of swear words presented a more conciliatory, reasonable view:

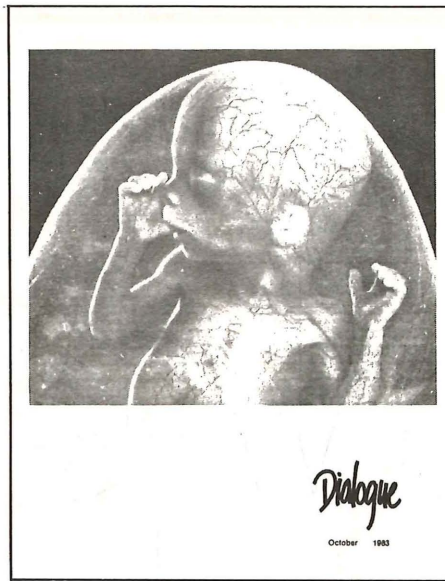
All words are legitimate and all words should be acceptable on stage at Calvin College. Any word may be used provided it helps to establish an important and worthwhile meaning. Words should not be used in a gratuitous manner, and they should not be used to shock or provide any other purely special effect such as humor

(Feb. 1980, p.12).

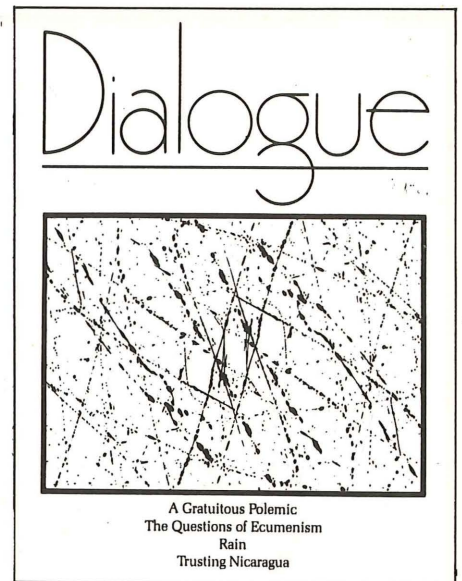
Dialogue may never know what affect, if any, all of Calvin's intellectual ferment had on its average student. Rather than assessing its campus-wide influence, it more often chose to interview learned or scandalous alumnae of Calvin about the affect of Calvin on their "world-and-life-view." One student from the sixties who returned as a visiting history professor noted an encouraging change in, yes,



December 1982



October 1983



November 1984

the place of women at Calvin:

I see an ease and a camaraderie between the sexes that simply did not exist while I was a student, and that cannot help but work to the benefit of men and women alike

(May 1981, p.23).

Confronting a wide variety of faiths and unfaiths at Yale, a graduate student humorously pointed out that "the last thing these people want is for me to attempt to transform culture out from beneath their feet" (May 1981, p.20). Another graduate student faced with his minority as a Reformed Christian was nonetheless grateful for his fundamentalist upbringing and Calvin-taught Reformed perspective, the former giving him a conviction of Christ's love for him and the latter convincing him that his studies have a purpose in God's kingdom (p.21).

As for the scandalous, famous, and thus glorified alumnae, we will allow their highnesses to speak for themselves. William Brashler, author of *The Chosen Prey* and numerous other books, says:

Calvin severely insulates you, it stifles you, it dampens your creativity and limits your horizons. . . . The only thing it has done is make me a very moral person, an ethical person

(May 1981, p.7).

Peter DeVries, for all his portrayal of adulterous bedhopping, seems to have swallowed a dose of morals himself, as a *Dialogue* writer pointed out by quoting DeVries' character Stew Smackenfelt (Jan. 1977, p.33): "That's just it. One liberates himself intellectually to find his morality in his very guts." Even Paul Schrader, who states that executives in the

movie industry have "no personal morality," admits that he's carrying around "a lot of moral baggage":

. . . it's very hard for me to be a hedonist because way back in my head is this whole sense that at the end there's a final decision, an existential decision. And so even in my scripts there is a sense of finally facing major moral issues, and coming to terms with the substance of your character and of your life

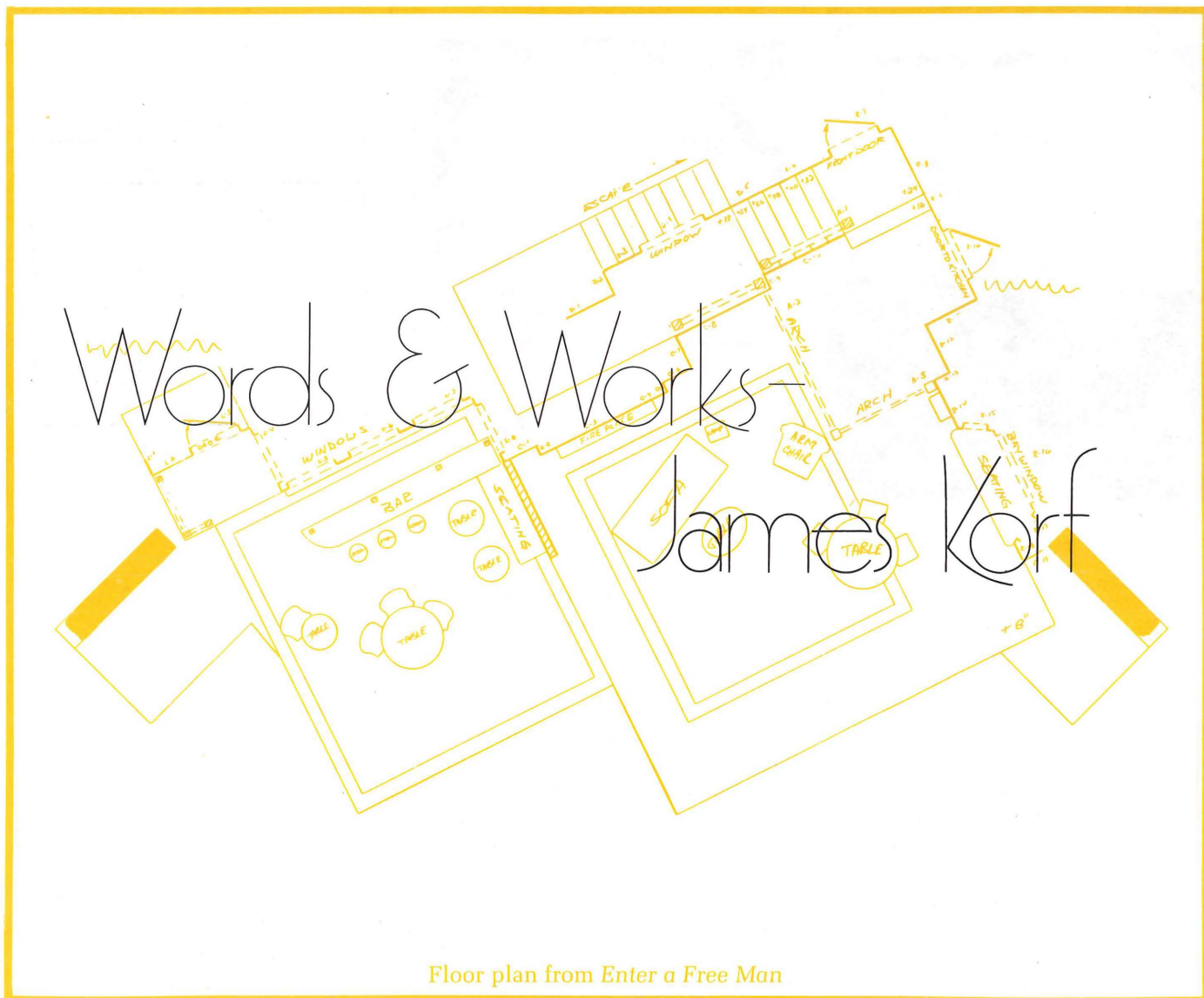
(Dec. 1975, p.23).

While Calvin and the Grand Rapids CRC ponder the ultimate efficacy of feeding the consciences and starving the souls of its rebellious artists, they may be (somewhat) comforted by the conclusion of one normal alumnus:

I have not given up the ideals I set out with when I graduated in 1977. . . . Life after Calvin for me is more Calvin

(May 1981, p.19).

And we all thought Calvin only lasted four years. ■



Floor plan from *Enter a Free Man*

You won't find "scenographer" in the *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*. The word does, however, describe the role played by the designer in a theatrical production team. "Scenographer" describes the relationship of the designer to the script and to fellow artists.

Some years ago I had the opportunity to teach and to work with a person who later became a very fine scenic designer in the theatre. After some extended graduate study and several apprenticeships, this person procured a commission to design the settings for a famous, and difficult, opera. All of the classic obstacles a designer must face were evident in this project. The show required three complete settings. It was to be given in a concert hall which had no wing space, no fly gallery, and lacked even the most basic theatrical machinery.

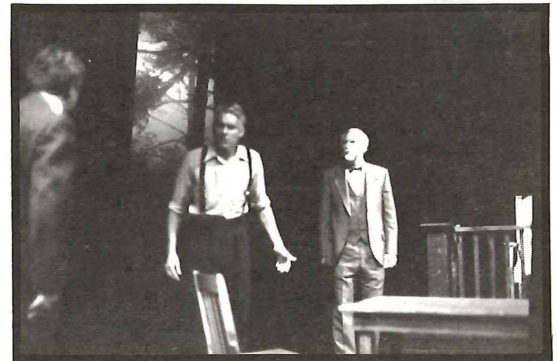
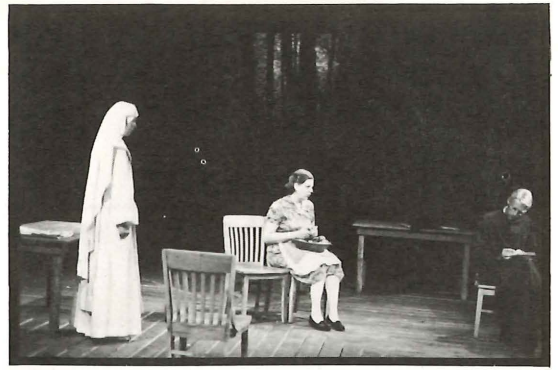
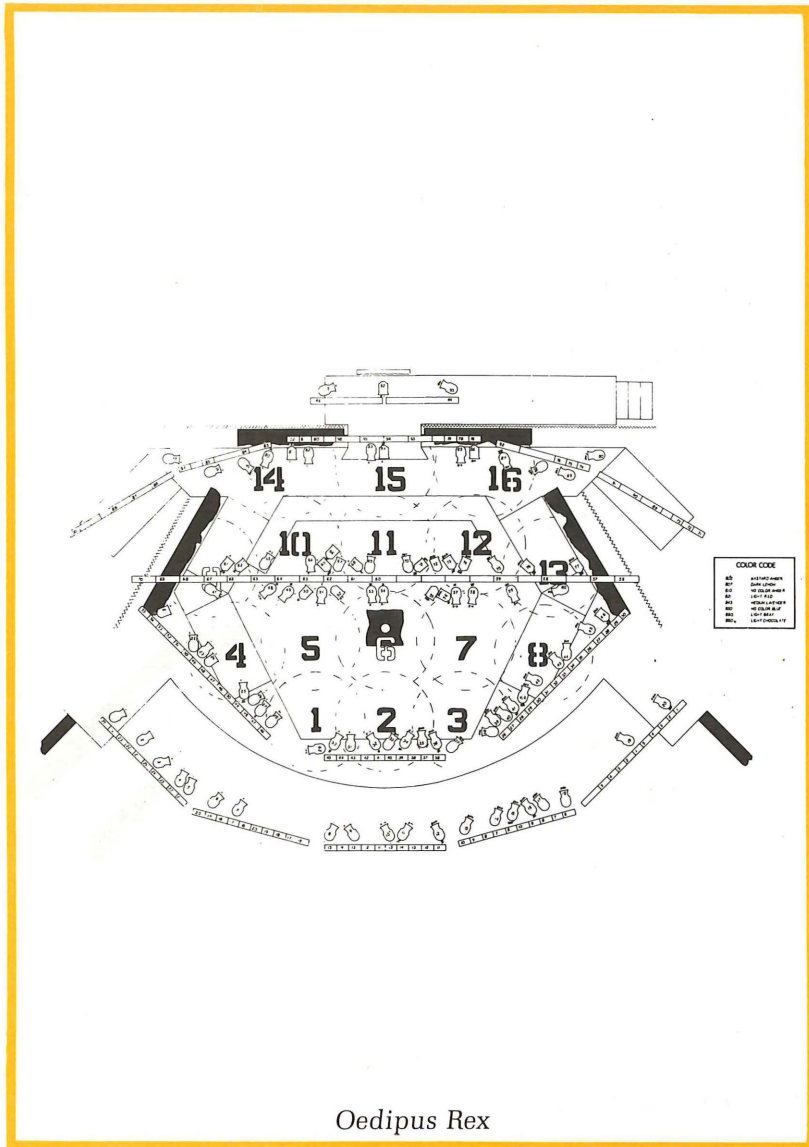
Design to execution took a total of five weeks. The budget was minuscule. The designer herself would have to do most of the building since no staff was available during the summer months.

An impossible challenge? Perhaps. But for the young designer it was her first opportunity to be paid for her talent, an opportunity to actualize on the professional stage an image in her mind.

After a period of research and consultation with the director, the design began to emerge, first in rough thumbnail sketches, then floorplans, working drawings, and, finally, full-colored perspective renderings. At first glance the work was excellent, certainly up to any expectations I had had for this student. In fact, the work was so good that I could not resist being privately envious. I had to re-

mind myself that she was benefitting from my many years of experience and labor in that very same concert hall. I had taught her a few rudimentary techniques and helped her to be in the right place at the right time. But as much as I would have liked to claim a part of her success, I knew I couldn't. She was a natural, and I was proud for her.

The designs for the first and second acts were absolutely brilliant, a unique use of space, line, and color that supported the story, yet reflected the power of the music. But the third act, although consistent stylistically with the first and second, was missing something. Her freedom and personality, so evident in the earlier acts, was almost non-existent here. I expressed my misgivings to her about act three. She agreed. But time was gone and the director had accepted



the concept. He was already rehearsing with the third act floor plan taped to the studio floor.

Some months later, while paging through a new design book, I found what seemed to be an unusual likeness of that third act setting. I did not confront her with my suspicions. But at a later date she admitted with great shame that she had relied very heavily upon someone else's idea to solve her third act problem. I didn't know what to say nor did I feel self-righteous.

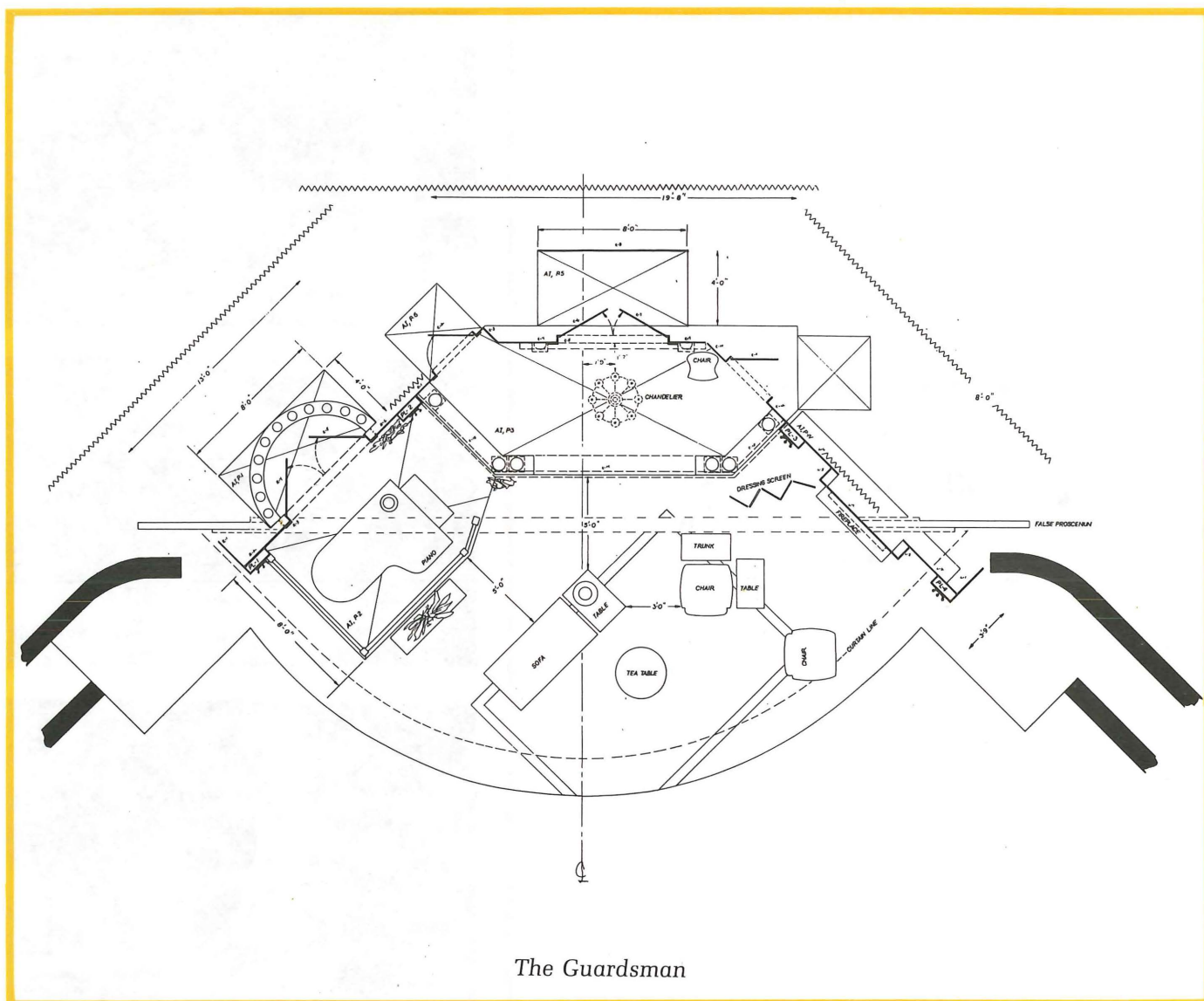
How the scenographer develops a concept for a play or opera often presents sticky ethical questions. What my student did is not unusual and within the situation is certainly understandable. But regardless of the circumstances, it was without a doubt stealing. I wish I could say that I am totally guiltless on this same

count. Although it happens less overtly and more subconsciously, my own design ideas are often just as unoriginal. I am always in the process of observing, cataloguing, and, to the best of my ability, remembering what seem to be good ideas that come from others. It seems to me that the only sin is in the suggestion that one doesn't.

I have learned many lessons in the few years that I have been working at this business of design. Perhaps the accumulation of these lessons entitles me to a few brief words on the subject.

One lesson is that there are precious few genuinely original ideas one might have in an entire career. I think it is saner and more honest to come right out and say so than to make silly and high-flown pretensions about one's creativity. I make a

point to study the masters every chance I get. There is something new to be learned every time I look. I do not advocate copying or lifting entire sets as my student did. But I cannot deny the impressions burned into my mind by the likes of Ming Cho Lee, Donald Oenslager, and Josef Svoboda. I use these impressions freely and often, and I recommend them to any aspiring scenographer. Joshua Reynolds, the art teacher and critic, speaking of painting and drawing in particular, gave advice which cuts across the whole spectrum of creative work: "The greatest natural genius cannot subsist on its own stock; he who resolves never to ransack any mind but his own will soon be reduced from mere barrenness to the poorest of all imitations. It is vain to invent without material on which the mind may work and from which in-



The Guardsman

vention must originate. Nothing can come of nothing.”

No respected designer ever bases his entire concept on secondary sources and the work of others. It just doesn't work. The final design is always an amalgamation of ideas, a series of impressions, hopes, gambles, and many negotiated solutions.

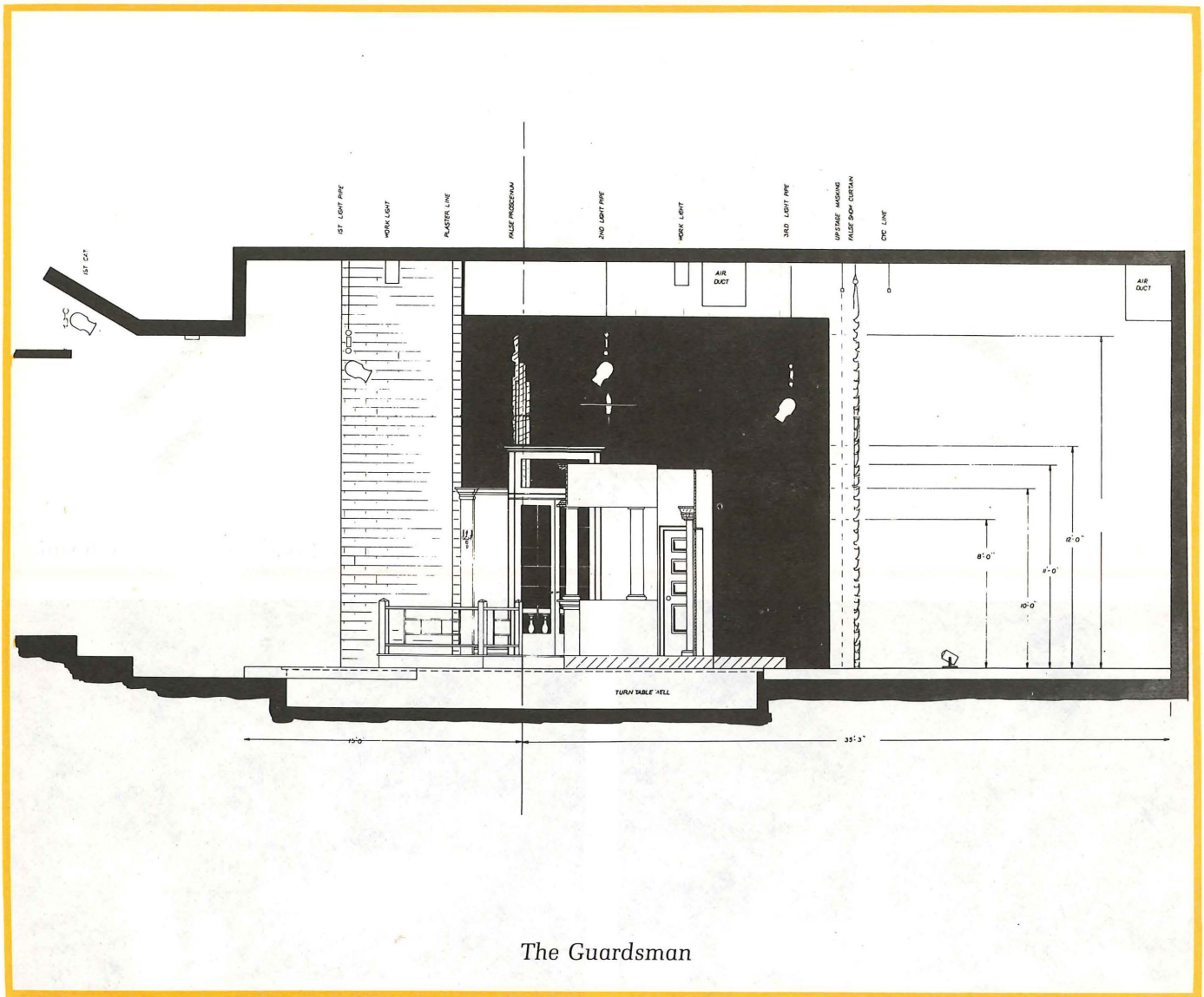
A second lesson is that good design is not hocus-pocus. It is hard work! This lesson was rudely brought to my attention in one of the first courses I took as a graduate student. It was the first assignment. At face value it seemed simple enough. “Choose a play which requires only one setting. Quickly sketch three totally different ways in which the setting could be executed.” I chose Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie*. Within a matter of a few hours I had worked out three plausible solutions

to the problem. The next day in class the professor politely collected our work and then, turning to the class, announced that a week later we were to hand in five more sketches of the same setting, all totally and completely different from the first three. My face flushed. I immediately, and painfully, understood his point. He had taken away and was now holding in his hand the most obvious solutions to our individual problems. We as a class had no where to go. We were being forced into the never-never land of imagination. The results were rather bizarre, but amazingly inventive.

A third lesson is that a scenographer needs a system, a rhythm, to lend security and stability to the designing process. One of the things I remember most about Sundays in my childhood was the long prayer. My

grandfather was a master of the long prayer at the dinner table. The food was usually stone cold by the time he had finished. But as good as my grandfather was, our preacher was even better. He would always pray with arms outstretched and head turned toward heaven. He never looked down nor opened his eyes. I know, because I often watched in amazement through squinting lids. Ten solid minutes of unrehearsed, noteless, spontaneous talking to God. How could he do it?

Our preacher was a sincere and honest man. His prayers were wonderful. But I now know that I was watching an artist with a system, a skeletal organization printed on the inside of his eyelids. He moved from point A—praise, to point B—thanksgiving, and on through point Q—the missionaries on the foreign and do-



The Guardsman

mestic fields, like a ballet dancer. It was beautiful to watch and music to hear. But nonetheless it was a system, a well oiled and carefully cultivated system operating at peak proficiency.

A scenographer, too, needs a system, a personal *modus operandi* into which problems can be plugged, a system that to a naive boy would make it all look easy and very creative.

A fourth lesson, and perhaps a more difficult one to learn, is that the good designer never calls attention to his work. It is a challenge for me to remain unobtrusive and in the background. I cannot help but want my work to be noticed. But I must remember that good design for the theatre is almost always that which is barely perceived. Sets, costumes, lights are well designed when they are unnoticed, when they rivet the

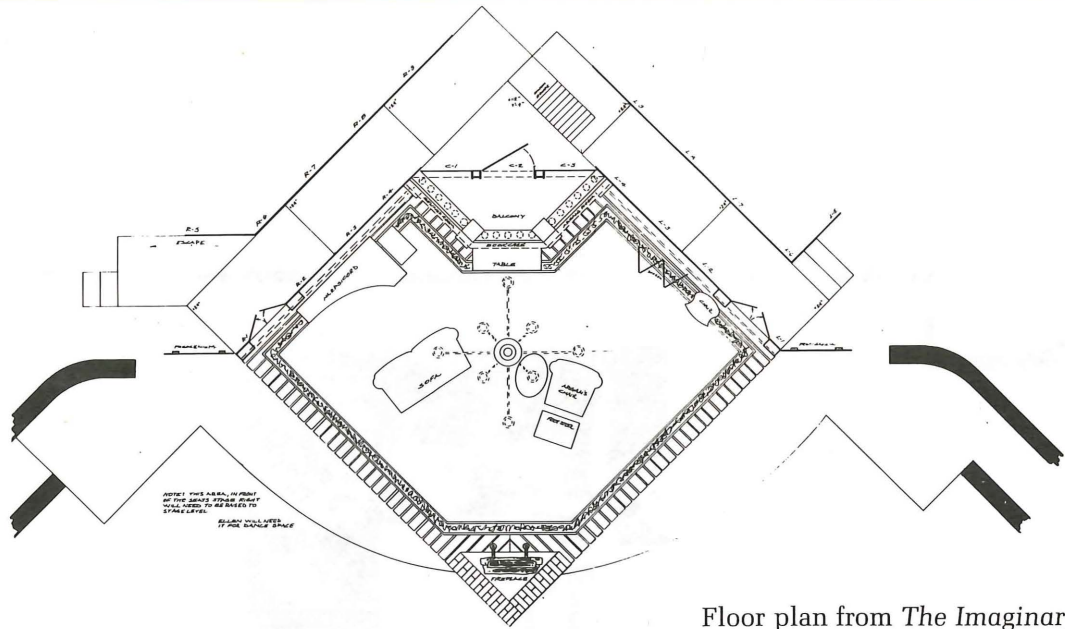
attention of the audience on the outcome of the characters, and not on the sets, costumes, or lights themselves.

It is not unusual for young designers to thwart the larger aim of a production by striving to make a strongly individual impression on the audience. Some designers never grow out of this stage of development. They refuse to realize that they are functionaries, a means to an all important end. They do not realize that it is their job to extend and amplify the underlying meaning of the production in ways that perhaps neither the playwright, director, nor actor had even envisioned.

It is a challenge for me to force the audience to see with the mind's eye, to use its own imagination. Imagination is a wonderful thing. The mind can provide a far broader range of color, more numerous shapes, and

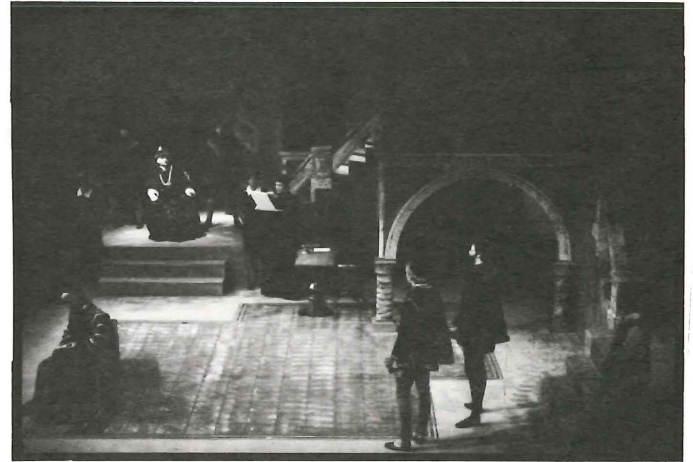
more varied textures than reality could ever offer. It is a challenge to provide enough reality to stimulate the mind's eye, but no more than is necessary. If the modern theatre has failed, it has failed in part because its designers have refused, or been unable to accept, this challenge. Repertory companies, such as that in Stratford, Ontario, have bloomed because their designers have forced the mind's eye to work.

In scenography it is often the case that less is more and more less. One of the greatest challenges that faces a scenographer is to know when more has become less. Student designers are almost always taught to fill the environment with detail. They are urged to make a room look lived in, to show the character of the person living in that room by adding more and more detail. I have never experienced



Floor plan from *The Imaginary Invalid*

The Merchant of Venice



anyone teaching when and how to stop adding. I suspect it can't be taught. When to stop is instinctively known by the artist and generally misunderstood by the craftsman-technician.

Finally, perhaps the most important lesson I have learned in twenty years of design work is how important it is to keep things in perspective and to have a genuine respect for just how uncreative one generally will be.

A scenographer must struggle. He or she must struggle with limitations of facilities, with budgets, with the obscurity of the text, with directors who cannot articulate what they want, with time, with fatigue, with one's own inabilities and deficiencies. And furthermore, the degree of creativity exhibited in scenography is in direct relation to the struggle that goes on between the copyist-thief in

all of us and the number of obvious solutions one is willing to eliminate before a scenic problem is finally solved.

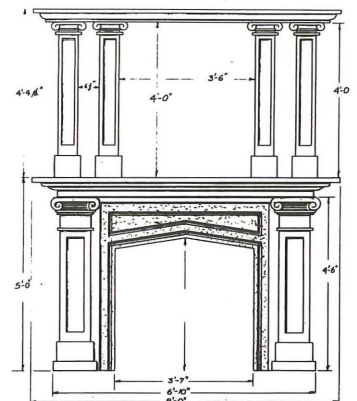
As an artist one must always be struggling with the value, purpose, and quality of his or her work. One cannot afford to be complacent or satisfied, or to seek solace in the latest review.

Deep within this scenographer is an unquenchable need to create to make something which is truly beautiful and unique. I haven't done that yet, and I may never do it, but the need continues to be felt. I believe that need has been planted in me by God, for I am made in his image. Yet, as much as I feel this need to create, and as much as I know that it is God within me, I also feel my deficiencies and know how little I am like him. He makes beauty out of nothing. I can

only copy and reproduce impressions gathered from nature, the masters, and historians.

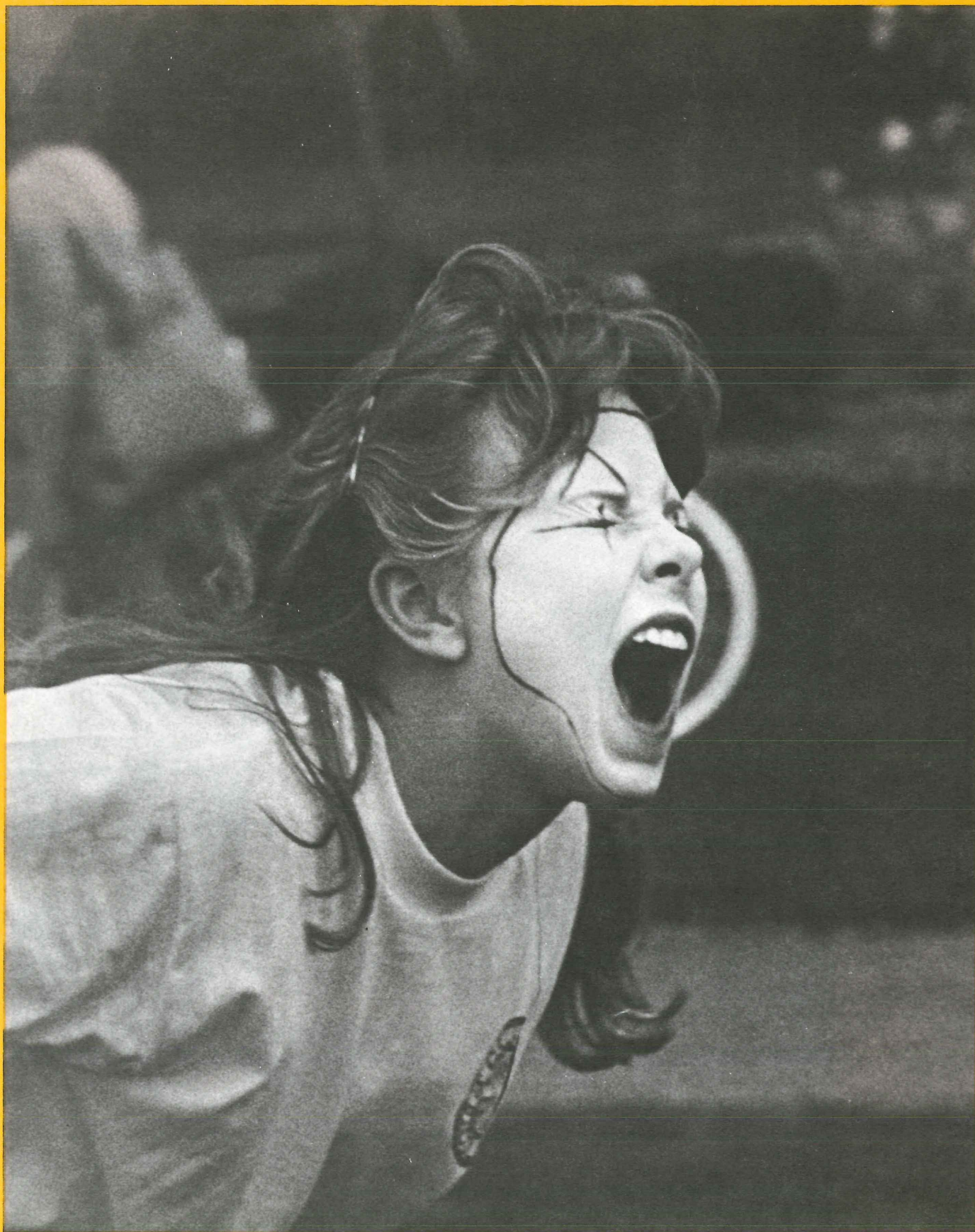
When I say things must be kept in perspective, that is what I mean. True beauty and creativity always seem to escape, are always seen from a distance, seen as though through a glass darkly.

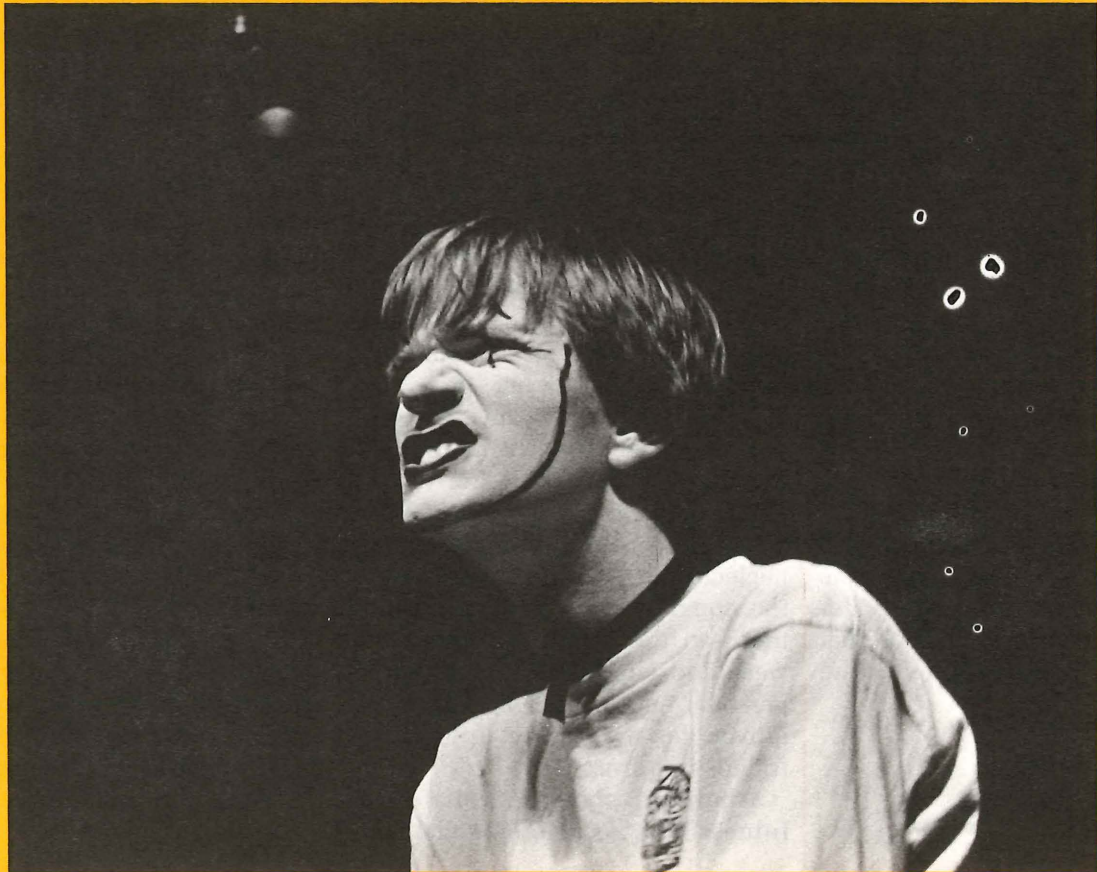
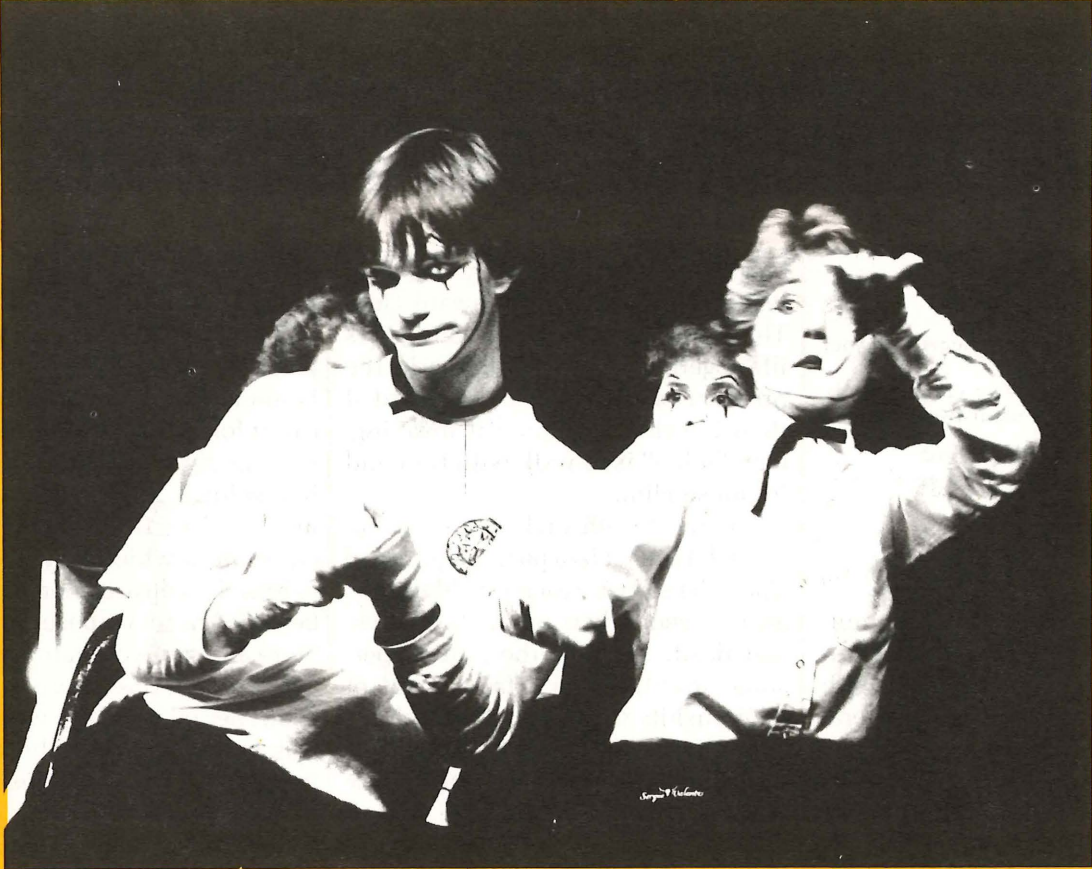
NOTE: THIS FIREPLACE IS TO BE POSITIONED ON THE FRONT OF THE SET, EACH PART DESCRIBED. SCENES WILL BE POSITIONED BETWEEN BOTH LINER WALLS WITH A PICTURE IN THE CENTER.
FIREPLACE UNIT FRONT ELEVATION



Portfolio - Dwight Van Tol







Meditation

You have put me in the lowest pit,
in the darkest depths.
Your wrath lies heavily upon me;
you have overwhelmed me with all your
waves.
You have taken from me my closest friends
and have made me repulsive to them.
But I cry to you for help, O Lord;
in the morning my prayer comes before
you.
Why, O Lord, do you reject me
and hide your face from me?
(from Psalm 88)

What can a passage which communicates so little hope teach us about persons and their relationship with God? I believe that there are several important confessional meanings. Humans were created unified beings. When God breathed the breath of life into dust, the Genesis text tells us that man became *nephesh*. This Hebrew word, translated “soul” in the King James Version, is variously translated “being,” “creature,” and “man began to live” in more recent versions. In other passages this term refers to a person’s throat, neck, desire, and the vital processes that uphold physical life. When all of these references are considered, it becomes clear that, although a person’s identity manifests different aspects, yet that identity may be spoken of singly, as one creature, rooted in the processes of the physical body.

Human *nephesh* also refers to the continuing relationship of our identities to God and to other persons. God breathed into the dust, and man became *nephesh*. Adam’s existence, and the existence of any person whom he represents, remains completely dependent upon the power of God that upholds that life. As long as the

breath sustains us, we may live with responsibility and love toward God. The description of Adam and Eve’s life together in Eden walking in the presence of God follows the record of their creation and gives it meaning. Our “being” is to walk with God and to praise Him.

But the breath of life may be removed. When it is, a person’s praise of God falls silent. Since our identities are engaged fully in our bodies, physical death suggests the end of personal identity and a falling out of relationship with God. *Nephesh* returns to the formless chaos out of which it was created, represented by the images of the pit and the dark of the watery deep. Psalm 88 was very likely written in the context of an extended illness, during which the writer was forced by the slow deterioration of his physical processes to realize the loss of his “being with” God, the loss of his very soul. The psalmist anguishes so deeply because of his commitment to the biblical view of human life.

Janet is a seventy-five-year-old woman who has been diagnosed as having Alzheimer’s disease, a form of progressive brain deterioration and senility. She has been a committed Christian for most of her life.

Throughout her life Janet worshipped at church regularly. Members of the congregation knew her to be a gentle, concerned friend. After services she would take time to seek out neglected persons on the fringes of the congregation’s life. She called them on the telephone during the week and faithfully wrote letters of personal encouragement when they moved far away. She upheld her friends in prayer.

When her symptoms of forgetfulness first became evident, Janet

struggled to compensate. She kept long lists of names with notes attached in order to cue her memory of persons’ needs. She spent many more hours at her typewriter trying to recall information for her letters and to find the right words to communicate her feelings. But the battle was being lost. Her lists filled shoeboxes in the closet from which it was impossible to retrieve a desired name. Her letters became more verbose as they lost more and more of their content.

Janet became deeply troubled about her relationship with God. She was convinced that she had fallen from her walk of discipleship by deserting her friends. The small disagreements that she had experienced with other Christians assumed major importance for her self-understanding. Finally, she concluded that because of her lack of faithfulness she was no longer spiritually fit for the Lord’s service and He was placing her aside.

When her orientation to space and time diminished, Janet lost interest in daily devotions and prayer. Her previously strong sense of meeting regularly with the Lord to bring her cares before Him began to slip away. With this lapse, she began to talk less about God, yet on occasion grieved that life was not now as it had been and wished, at least for that moment, to return to worship again.

Both Psalm 88 and Janet’s personal experience of that death of the body which fragments the soul help to explain why the resurrection of Jesus Christ must be the centerpiece of our Christian faith. For if Christ’s sacrifice on the cross were only substitutionary atonement for the sins of a multitude of “souls,” some now dis-

embodied in heaven and some yet dwelling in bodies upon the earth, then it should have been sufficient for the sweet fragrance of that sacrifice to have reached the presence of God when Christ's soul returned to the Father's side. If, however, as the Scriptures suggest, Christ's death involved a struggle with all of the powers of chaos seeking to undo the order of God's creation, including those which destroy the human *nephesh*, then the resurrection must be the inevitable result of his victory. The direction of cosmic history was reversed from movement toward dissolution to the final fulfillment of the purposes of God. The key to this reversal was the renewal of the image of God as His earthly presence in the pattern originally intended—a new person fully engaged in a body which chaos cannot overcome.

We often think of the resurrection of believers as an entirely future event reserved for the end of time. The Scriptures suggest that it is a present reality as well. When Christ died, descended into the pit, and rose again, creation was changed forever.

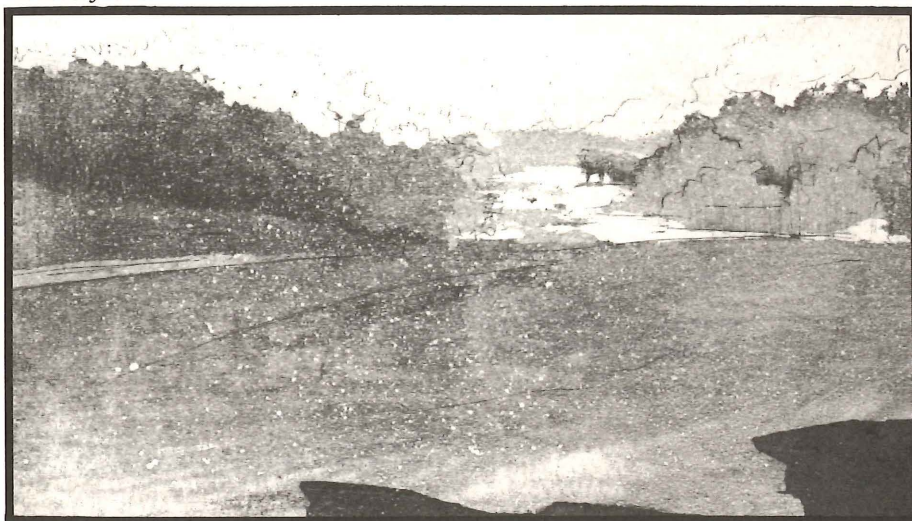
There is a reality in life that serves to uphold human identity even as this present *nephesh* falls toward chaos. This power is the work of the Holy Spirit which mysteriously keeps all believers in the life of Christ, even when our experience seems as distant from God as Janet's had become. The psalmist anticipated this truth in his confession that God would be present to hear even that prayer offered from the darkest pit.

But this power is revealed through that reality which is the presence of the resurrected Christ—His body, the Church. The Church has the mission and the power to renew the creation. It may be that we will realize with what great authority we act only when we commit ourselves to be with persons like Janet, when we take the time to learn who they were in their rapidly forgotten pasts so that we can be a storehouse of memories when recall is gone, when we learn how they think in an increasingly chaotic present so that we can provide a script of understanding when reason has diminished, when we appreciate their longing for God so that we may be the presence of Christ when all else is gone. Are we prepared to taste the powers of the age to come?

Glenn Weaver

Countryside

Deborah Ebbers



Calvin College Cultural Calendar

SPRING SEMESTER 1985

March

- Friday 1 Alumni Association: a film, *Not Being There*, 8:15 p.m., Fieldhouse.
 Saturday 2 Dance Guild: a festival of contemporary dance, 12 a.m., on top of the dirt mound.
 Thursday 7 Playbill*, Communication Arts and Sciences Department: Thespian production, *Oh, Calcutta!*, 8 p.m., Gezon Aud.; also 8, 9, 14-16.
 Saturday 9 Student Recital: Servetus van Steak, sackbut; Johannes Calvinus, jazz piano, 8:15 p.m., FAC.
 Saturday 9 English Department: "Reciting the Rosary," senior poetry reading, 6:30 p.m., Rhetoric Learning Center.
 Tuesday 12 Calvin College Banned Concert: triple feature, The Mormon Tabernacle Choir, Bad Brains, His Own, 8:15 p.m., FAC.
 Friday 15 *Dialogue* Discussion: "Aesthetic Snobbery and the Decline of the North," 12 noon, under the aspect of eternity, room 151.
 Saturday 16 Third World Quartet*, 8:15 p.m., FAC.
 Wednesday 20 Back Week—Physical Education Department: "Sit-Ups and Sit-Ins," 3:30 p.m., Fieldhouse.
 Thursday 21 Back Week—Nursing Department: "Your Backs, Our Bucks," 10:00 p.m., Commons lawn.
 Friday 22 Back Week—Music Department: a Back and Handle workshop, 8:15 p.m., FAC.
 Saturday 23 Back Week—Recital: The Well-Tempered Vertebrae*, 8:15 p.m., FAC.
 Thursday 28 Sinner Art Gallery: fallen art exhibit. Through the rapture. Reception Thursday 28, 7:00-7:05 a.m.
 Saturday 30 Computer Band Concert: the basic program, 8 p.m., Timmer Hall 139.

April

- Tuesday 9 Calvin College: Monday, all day.
 Friday 12 Family Arts Series*, *Bambi* (expurgated), 7:30 p.m., FAC.
 Saturday 13 Calvin College Orchestra Concert: the complete Wagner corpus, 8:15 a.m. through Friday, April 19, Commons lawn.
 Monday 15 Campus Security: a bumper car extravaganza, 8 a.m.-3 p.m., FAC parking lot.
 Wednesday 17 Writers Guild workshop: bathroom graffiti, 7:30 p.m., English Department Conference Room and selected bathrooms.
 Friday 19 Calvin College Capella Concert: Christian contemporary cacophony, 8:30 p.m., College Commons.
 Saturday 20 Calvin Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship: a film, *After the Rapture: What Goes Up, Must Come Down**, 8 p.m., FAC.
 Wednesday 24 Lab Bills: \$29.95.
 Friday 26 Third String Quartet*, 8:15 p.m., FAC.
 Friday 26 Student Recital: Marion Vandermelt, accordion, 8:30 p.m., Meeter Center.
 Sunday 28 Calvin Religion Activities Committee: Amy Grant, in concert, 8:30 p.m., FAC.
 Tuesday 30 Philosophy Major Choir: "Six Instruments on a Modal Scale," by H. Dooyeweerd, 3 p.m.-9 p.m., Gezon Aud.

May

- Friday 3 English Department: Rob Schreur, "Eliot for Everybody But You," 5:00 p.m., Commons Annex 107.
 Saturday 4 Calvin College Marching Orchestra Concert, 7:30 p.m., Faculty parking lot.
 Thursday 9 Playbill*, Communication Arts and Sciences Department: Thespian production, *No Entrance*, Jean-Paul Diekema, 8 p.m., Gezon Aud.; also 10, 11, 16-18.
 Saturday 11 WCAL: an evening of classical music featuring 4'33" by John Cage, 8:00-8:05 p.m., 550 AM.
 Wednesday 15 Dance Guild's Dance Festival: "Ring Around the Rosey" and other deadly numbers, 12 a.m., Science Building basement.
 Friday 17 Playbill*, Communication Arts and Sciences Department: Thespian children's play, "Disembodied Melancholy," Gezon Aud. For times call (616) 459-1212.
 Tuesday 21 Admissions Office: "Calvin and Culture: Alliterative Oxymoron," Donald L. Boender, 11:30 a.m., Commons cafeteria.
 Saturday 25 109th annual dementment.
 Friday 31 Distribution of *Prism*.

*Student Senate approved. "FAC" is For All Calvinists.
 For further information contact *Dialogue* (616) 957-7079.