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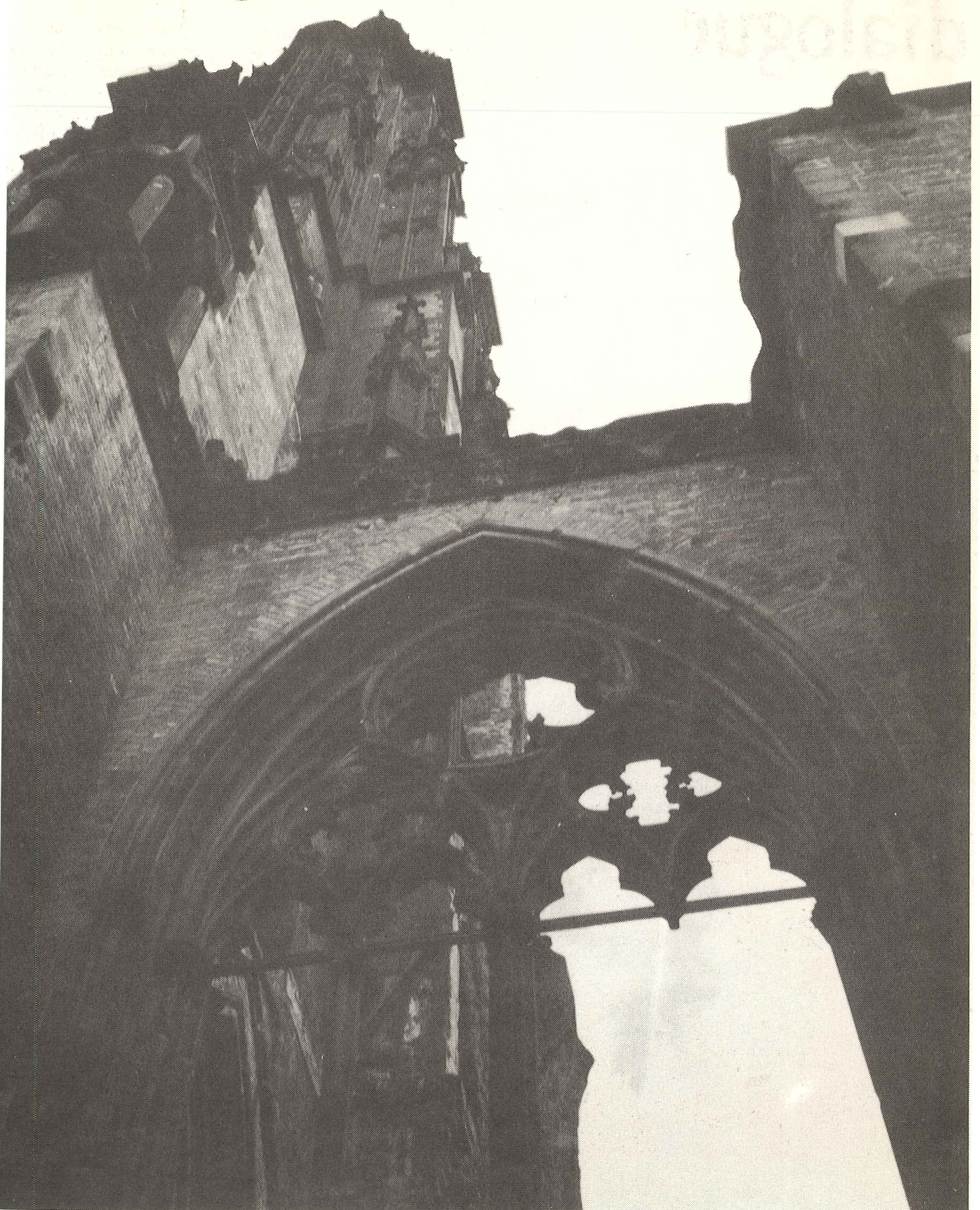
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Editorial

Once upon a midnight dreary,
while I pondered, weak and weary,
Over many a quaint and curious volume of
forgotten lore—
While I nodded, nearly napping,
suddenly there came a tapping
As of someone gently rapping,
rapping at the Dialogue door.
“Tis someone from SVS,” I muttered
“tapping at my office door—only this and
nothing more.”

Thus, it was, however, that I, perusing dusty old copies of *Dialogue*, found the ghost of Ray Vannevermore, one of the original founders of *Dialogue* in the late 60s, waiting at my office door dressed in a pale yellow and green glowing plaid sport coat and holding a strangely sweet-smelling cigarette. Like Horatio I cried “Stay illusion! If thou has any sound or use of voice speak to me: if there be any good thing to be done that may to thee do ease and grace to me speak to me!” Taking one last puff on his cigarette, he handed it to me and settling back in a chair, began to speak. This interview is the result.

Q: I am the spirit of *Dialogue*’s past, Ray Vannevermore, come to haunt the present. I am a spirit of the 60s; who are you?

A: I am just the editor.

Q: The editor! Editor of my child?

A: *Dialogue*?

Q: Yes! My poor orphaned child.

A: But why so ghostly?

Q: I was murdered. . . a foul business. Let’s just say foul business did me in.

A: And you’ve come to get revenge on your murderers?

Q: Yes, I’ve come to ask you to avenge me.

A: Me?

Q: Yes, can you tell me the purpose of *Dialogue* in twenty-five words or less?

A: Well. . . Yes, this.

Q: This what?

A: This—what we’re doing.

Q: You mean talking.

A: Yes, talking, and writing, and drawing.

Q: What! No sparkling Platonic forms, no counterculture ideals to strive for? Aren’t you one of the elite of Calvin College?

A: Whenever I think that, I think again. I consider that just yesterday I bought a purple shirt at a thrift store for a dollar. Today I went to church with everyone else and then played three-on-three football with a six-year-old named Derek. I just drank a cup of hot chocolate, and now I have to go to the bathroom.

Q: You aren’t using this magazine as a last refuge for the arts at Calvin, the last unadulterated bastion against bourgeoisie materialism?

A: No. On the other hand, I won’t sacrifice quality. “Elite” is a loaded word. Elitists are those who use jargon and artificial distinctions to elevate themselves, while the truly elite make themselves understandable to everyone.

Q: Then you’re receptive to the new age we’re living in?

A: I want to be relevant to 1987 without being controlled by it. *Chimes* is here to address campus issues. The *Grand Rapids Press* has its “Flair” section. *Dialogue* is for broader, more thoughtful perspectives: those with a past, present, and future. These are in a sense timeless.

Q: Heavy. How does this question strike you? Can you tell me what you consider to be the purpose of art in the 20th century, in, say, 25 words or less. (I have a sunrise to beat.)

A: No.

Q: How about 50?

A: No.

Q: How. . .

A: . . .but it's a good question. Many in the 20th century claim that art is totally objective. Art can only describe what is; the artist tells what happens and lets the viewer reach his own conclusions. On the other hand, there are those like Tolstoy who say art must be moral as well. Novelist John Gardner says that "art today ought to stop snivelling, go for the answers, or shut up." He thinks art has an edifying purpose, that it should teach morality.

A: And where do you stand?

A: I'm—as any Christian—ambivalent. The Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard describes us both as seekers and apostles. Seekers because we are students trying to distill the truth from our experiences, and apostles because as Christians we—in a paradoxical sense—already have the Truth. Too much apostleship and one becomes dry and didactic, too much seeking and one forgets how to say to another, "This is the Truth that will set you free."

Q: Heavy. Heavy. This Kierkegaard reminds me of Brautigan.

A: He also describes something he calls the three spheres of existence. The lowest sphere, the aesthetic, is covered by the ethical sphere, which in turn is covered by the religious sphere. I feel this is an analogy for *Dialogue*. We publish the purely aesthetic—like the artwork of Tom Bryant, but also the ethical exploration of Eric Jekkals into Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*, and finally the religious meditation of Lisa Van Houten. The religious sphere, because it is the highest, sinks into and nourishes the others like water into soil.

Q: Sounds like Dooyeweerdian spheres.

A: Let's not juggle metaphors.

Q: What sort of things are going into *Dialogue* this year?

A: The best writing, the best artwork that I can find, the best stuff sent to me here at the *Dialogue* office in the Commons Annex. Fiction,

poetry, essays, art, photography, meditations, responses to earlier issues, new genres. I'm open to anything.

Q: But isn't that sort of broad? Aren't you addressing issues like nuclear disarmament or destruction of the environment?

A: Yes, the good of technology vs. the bad.

Q: . . .or black and women's rights?

A: Yes, women's equality vs. women's stereotypes.

Q: . . .or the bourgeoisie oppression of the students by the faculty?

A: Yes, academic freedom vs. academic rigor.

Q: . . .or the spiritual wasteland on campus?

A: Yes, Christianity vs. Christendom.

Q: . . .or where the world we're going?

A: Yes, the future of Calvin College.

Q: And you want biting criticism. . .

A: . . .as well as clear-headed argument and heartfelt praise.

Q: Why are you agreeing with me so much?

A: Maybe I do.

Q: I think something is rotten in Denmark. Are you going to help me get revenge on my murderers or not?

A: Maybe I won't.

Q: Is that all you have to say? Can't you be more decisive than that?

A: Yes. Keep reading.

(With that the ghost vanished in a fit of croaking "Nevermore!")

—MJR



I
English is the cruellest class, forcing
Writing from a dead mind, mixing
Grammar and insight, stirring
Dull brains with strange poems.
Calculus kept us sane, hiding
Inspiration in kind equations, supporting
A little self-confidence with truly right answers
Exams surprised us, and we went
And drank coffee, and studied for some hours.
Ich bin, du bist, er sie, es ist; ja, echt deutsch.
When we were children, it wasn't as bad as this.
We went sledding instead, when the snow came.
Now I study much of the night, and sleep
Whenever I can.

Unreal life,
Through the thick snow of a winter dawn,
A crowd flowed over trodden paths
Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled
As all flowed through the doors into the coffee-shop
Where minutes clicked past upon the clocks
With a dead sound on the click of twenty past ten.
I had not thought life had undone so many.

II

"My nerves are bad tonight. Yes, bad.
"I should not have had that coffee. I should not have drunk that final cup.
"I do not know what to write. Keep thinking. Think."

I think we are in rat's alley
Where the dead men lost their minds

"What is that book?"

The Wind in the Willows."

"What is *that* book? And *that*? What has happened to my Eliot?"
Nothing again nothing.

"Do

"You know anything? Do you see nothing? Do you remember
"Nothing?"

I remember

You put it *there* before you left for class.

III

Unreal life
Into the darkness of a winter night
The violet hour, when most eyes turn
Upwards from the desk, when most put down their work
I, though half blind with reading,
At the violet hour, the evening hour that strives
Homeward, brings the worker home from work
I continue, on into the night
I, too, await the expected stroke of one
When my work is only just begun.

IV

Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead,
Forgot that he could ever read, or write,
Rode peacefully on the deep-sea swell,
Looked up into the gentle stars, the night
One sad dolphin cushioning his head.

Student or scholar, you who read reviews,
You who turn the wheel and look to windward.
Look the other way, and you may see
Upon the waves
Phlebas, who once tried as hard as you.

V

"On T. S. Eliot
I can connect
Nothing with nothing.
My teacher terrible teacher who misses
Nothing."

la la

My eyes were sunken, and with limp eyelids
I waited for class, while sleep's black clouds
Gathered in my mind. Then the terrible voice
"You must give. You must give
"Your sources. Why have you not given
"Your sources?
"How can I sympathize with you
"If you do not give your sources?"
"And have you no control
"Over the structure of your paragraphs?"
I could not
Speak, as my eyes failed. I was neither
Living nor dead, and I said nothing.

I sat upon my bed,
Thinking, the arid time behind me.
Should I at least put my books in order?

Sleep was sudden, God-given
And my breath came calmly once again.
Shantih shantih shantih

—Chris Wolterstorff



The Moral of *The Rime*

by Eric Jekkals

In response to a charge by Mrs. Barbauld that the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* "had no moral," Coleridge is reputed to have said:

. . . in my own judgment the poem had too much; and that the only, or chief fault, if I may say so, was the obtrusion of the moral sentiment so openly on the reader as a principle or cause of action in a work of such pure imagination. It ought to have had no more moral than the Arabian Nights tale of the merchant's sitting down to eat dates by the side of a well, and throwing the shells aside, and lo! a genie starts up, and says he must kill the aforesaid merchant because one of the date shells had, it seems, put out the eye of the genie's son. (Table Talk, 1835, in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner: A Handbook*, edited by Royal A. Gettman. San Francisco: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1961, 66-67.)

The conclusion some want us to draw from this is that Coleridge had no moral intention in the poem, or further, that whatever is there is not Coleridge's own and cannot be taken seriously. The value of the poem, it is argued, may be literary or psychological, but any moral or religious overtones are only devices to accomplish those ends.

Another possibility, however, is that the moral sentiment conveyed in the *Rime* was intentional and was Coleridge's own; his regret was only that it ought not to have obtruded so *openly* on the reader: that it should have been conveyed less explicitly, but conveyed nonetheless. I shall argue that based on what we know about Coleridge, and on evidence from the poem itself, this explanation is the correct one.

The moral sentiment in question is presumably summarized in lines 612-17 of the *Rime*:

*He prayeth well, who loveth well
Both man and bird and beast.*

*He prayeth best, who loveth best
All things both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all.*

By contrast, the passage in the Arabian Nights alluded to by Coleridge is certainly not the moral

message of *that* tale. But, as Humphrey House points out (*The Ancient Mariner*, Gettman), that the Arabian tale does have a moral is hardly disputable—it is just that the moral isn't summarized in a neat little maxim. It is certainly possible, then, that what Coleridge was said to have regretted in *Table Talk* was not that the *Rime* contained a moral sentiment, but that the sentiment was distilled into an explicit six-line statement.

In considering the truth of this hypothesis we must first reckon with Coleridge's claim (Gettman, p. 43) that the *Rime* was originally written *instead* of the *Wanderings of Cain* (which was written at a later date). Because both these stories share the theme of sin, guilt and expiation, it seems likely that Coleridge had a moral point in mind when he wrote the *Rime*. Furthermore, Coleridge's philosophy of poetry itself recommends this hypothesis. In the *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* (these ballads being the set of works to which the *Rime* originally belonged), Wordsworth states that "Poetry is the image of man and Nature." (From the *Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Vol. 2, Fifth Edition, W.W. Norton and Co., 1986, p. 165) Coleridge, in the *Biographical Literaria* (Gettman, p. 42) writes, "During the first year that Mr. Wordsworth and I were neighbors, our conversations turned frequently on the two cardinal points of poetry, the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty by modifying the colors of imagination." Since Coleridge was so concerned about presenting the *truth* of reality in his poems, and because virtually everything we know about Coleridge suggests that he felt moral truth to be a very important aspect of reality, it looks as if the burden of proof falls on those who want us to believe that it is impossible to take the moral of the *Rime* seriously enough to demonstrate from the poem itself that this is the case. Unless such evidence can be supplied, we are not justified in believing that Coleridge had no moral intent in the *Rime*.

Perhaps the most common objection to taking the moral of the *Rime* seriously is the apparent disproportion between the Mariner's "crime" and the consequences it brings: ". . . because the Mariner has shot a bird, four times fifty sailors

drop down dead and the slayer himself is doomed to an endless life” (John Livingston Lowes, from Gettman, p. 67). Indeed, this is a reasonable objection, but only so long as the Mariner’s crime is merely that he shot a bird. Similarly, the Genesis account of the Fall would be a sore affront to our sense of justice if Adam’s and Eve’s offense was simply that they ate an apple. The Scriptures indicate, however, that Adam and Eve’s apple-eating was only an outward manifestation of a much more serious kind of act—one for which they deserved every bit of what they got. It makes sense then, to consider whether or not the Mariner’s shooting of the Albatross was meant to signify something deeper.

Actually, it is rather hard to read the *Rime* without getting the impression that the Albatross was meant to be, in some sense, a Christ-figure. I am told that an albatross in flight has a cruciform appearance, and the albatross in this poem was hailed “in God’s name,” “as if it were a Christian soul.” It also “ate the food it ne’er had eat”—the same can be said of Christ during his time on earth—and “perched for vespers nine.” The Mariner shot the Albatross with a crossbow, and was made to wear the dead bird suspended from his neck “Instead of the cross.” One of the spirit-voices tells us that the Albatross was “harmless” and that it

. . . loved the man
who shot him with his bow.

reminding the reader of Christ’s love for his executioners. Additionally, the spirit-voice begins his little speech with the words: “By him who died on cross.”

In view of all this, it seems that the Mariner in the *Rime* was guilty of killing more than an ordinary bird. In fact, he was guilty of killing Christ. If anyone thinks this is stretching things, I refer him to Coleridge’s own words in *Notes on Pilgrim’s Progress* concerning the meaning of the crucifixion:

Alas! How many Protestants make a mental idol of the cross scarcely less injurious to the true faith than the wooden crosses and crucifixes of the Romanists! And this because they have not been taught that Jesus was both the Christ and the great symbol of Christ. Strange, that we can explain spiritually what to take up the cross of Christ, to be crucified with Christ means; yet never ask what the crucifixion itself signifies, but rest satisfied in the historic image. That one declaration of the Apostles, that by willful sin we crucify the Son of God afresh, might have roused us to nobler thoughts. (From Owen Barfield,

What Coleridge Thought, Middletown, 1971, p. 157.)

When the Mariner’s killing of the Albatross is seen in this light, as an act of willful sin, his subsequent suffering ceases to seem so ridiculous, and the poem’s sin-expiation motif gains considerable plausibility.

But not enough plausibility, according to some. Critics beginning as early as Wordsworth have bemoaned the fact that the Mariner doesn’t really do anything by his own initiative other than bite his arm. He blesses the water-snakes, but this is done “unawares.” As for shooting the albatross, we are not offered any motive that could have possibly inclined him to do such a thing. Thus, as George Watson concludes, the poem has little value as a Christian parable because “The Mariner is simply not felt to be morally responsible” (*Coleridge the Poet*, London, 1966, p. 97). This conclusion, however, betrays a considerable ignorance of Coleridge’s beliefs about human moral responsibility.

For Coleridge, *will* is the fundamental ground of personality and individuality. Thus, God exists as the Absolute Will, which exists in a relationship of complete identity with His reason, the Universal Reason. Man exists as a finite will, whose proper activity is to conform itself reasonably to the Absolute Will. However, the relation of man’s will to his reason is not one of identity, as is God’s, but only of a *possible synthesis*. Herein lies free will and the possibility for sin. For, as Barth explains Coleridge’s doctrine as set forth in the *Opus Maximum*:

. . . it is the nature of the will to assert its own individual existence. But it must do so honestly, that is, according to its own nature. The nature of finite will is to be an image of the Absolute Will. If, however, the finite will asserts its own individuality for its own self-realization alone, “under the predominance of the particular,” instead of willing the particular “solely as the glory and representation of the plentitude of the universal,” then it becomes a “separated finite.” To do so is to contradict one’s own being. To do so is to bring moral evil, sin into the world. (Coleridge and Christian Doctrine, Harvard, 1969, p. 111.)

In the Mariner’s shooting of the Albatross, we find precisely the sort of wanton, unreasonable, self-asserting act that exemplifies what Coleridge understood *Original Sin* to be, that is, “an evil which has its ground or origin in the agent, and not in the compulsion of circumstances” (*Aids to Reflection*, from Gettman, p. 65). This is the kind of sin that crucifies “the Son of God afresh.” The

fact that we are not offered a motive for the Mariner's act should not cause us to feel him to be morally irresponsible; that there was no "compulsion of circumstances" assures us that killing the harmless, friendly Albatross was an act of pure self-will on the part of the Mariner. Furthermore, it is not at all surprising that Coleridge chose for the symbolic sin of this poem the killing of a seabird rather than a more conventionally serious crime such as, say, shooting an old lady. If the Mariner had shot an old lady, we would have been too repulsed to understand the moral point Coleridge was trying to make, viz., that any particular act willed for purposes of self-realization rather than "solely as the glory and representation of the plenitude of the universal" is a damnable sin.

The Mariner's shipmates, as the gloss informs us, justify his act and thereby share his guilt. They, however, get off easy—they simply die. The Mariner, on the other hand, must continue living and begins to experience the alienation which is not an arbitrary punishment for, but a logical consequence of, the self-contradictory act he has performed. In short, he begins to experience Hell itself, the state where "nothing of vice remains but its guilt and its misery—vice must be misery itself; all and utter misery" (*Aids to Reflection*, from Barth, p. 192). It is interesting that the Mariner facilitates the infliction of punishment on himself and his crew by his only other self-initiated act, that of biting his arm and sucking his blood so he can cry out. As soon as he does this, those undesirable personages, Death and Life-in-Death, stop tacking and head straight for the Mariner's ship. The poor Mariner can't do anything right.

But that he can't do anything right makes sense in light of Coleridge's belief that the human will is corrupt and cannot by its own efforts save itself. Thus, it is also fitting that the beginning of the Mariner's redemption from hell—his love for the water-snakes—is something that seemed to be visited upon him from above:

*Sure my kind saint took pity on me,
And I blessed them unaware.*

For, as Coleridge wrote in 1814, "From all experience as well as *a priori* from the constitution of the human soul I gather that without a miraculous Intervention of Omnipotence the Punishment must continue as long as the soul—which I believe imperishable" (from Barth, p. 193).

Furthermore, it is fitting that the Mariner's redemption began with an act of love. Love, for Coleridge, represents a reversal of the self-contradictory and alienating act of asserting one's self-will. "It is an act of will," says

Lockridge, "that, extraordinarily, would subvert the will's own drive toward separateness" (*Coleridge the Moralist*, New York, 1977, p. 193). "It promises to redress the evil tendency of will to establish an independent base and, in so doing, would free the moral eye of its 'film'" (Lockridge, p. 184). This is what the Mariner, "whose eye is bright" has learned—though much penance remains for him to do.

There is one more objection to be met, however, which Watson construes as follows:

The Mariner's moral, "He prayeth best who loveth best. . ." is not depressing or even discouraging, and not, in itself, out of keeping with the mood of a wedding celebration. But the wedding guest, on hearing it, simply cannot face the party; "He went like one that hath been stunned" and he wakes up the next morning "sadder and wiser. . ." If the story is saddening, which it is, and its stated moral is not, then the moral can hardly fit the story.

Now it is true that the stated moral of the *Rime* is not saddening, but it is not for this reason unable the story. Sad stories do not have to have sad morals—how can a moral, in itself, be "saddening" anyhow? Only stories (or real-life experiences) can be sad. Which is exactly the case with the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*: the Mariner has learned a most important lesson—but at a great price. He was an ordinary man who had an extraordinary encounter with supernatural reality, through which he was able to experience the logical consequences of sin to a degree that other people, during their earthly lives, never do. As a result, he has attained to a degree of moral awareness—an awareness of the principle behind all moral imperatives—which far exceeds that of most men, and makes him somewhat eccentric, to say the least. But as often as "That agony returns" and he is compelled to hypnotize some innocent bystander and tell them his tale, something of the moral awareness gets passed on, and the hearer becomes sadder and wiser. It makes sense that the Wedding Guest turns away from the wedding: the kind of truth he has glimpsed is the sort that touches the core of one's being and disturbs everyday patterns of thinking.

Thus, the moral stands: "He prayeth best, who loveth best." Perhaps Coleridge was right that an epigram like this does not belong in "a work of such pure imagination" (although it would be a pity if these words had never been written). But to say that Coleridge had no moral intent in the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* is to ignore a great deal of evidence to the contrary.

Mendel and the Chicken

by Heather Bouman



Illustrated by

14 **Dialogue**

Ed Heil

Mendel and I and my older brother Michael walked home from school together every day. We were next-door-neighbors to Mendel. That day was just warm enough to tell us it was spring, but not warm enough for us to believe it. The air was a little bit damp and had a cushioned feel to it.

"He's tough," Mendel said. "I've seen him. He's little, but he's tough." He walked his bike as Michael and I walked on either side of him, a backpack on each back.

"You mean that new little kid in your class—the really little one?" Michael, a 7th-grader, was a year older than Mendel and I, and he liked us to remember that sometimes. But this time he was right.

"Yeah," Mendel said. "I bet he's even smaller than you, Glory."

"Boy, he must really be wimpy, then." Michael laughed.

"Oh, shuttup."

"He's not wimpy, though. He's really tough. I watched him—during gym class."

"Really?" Michael turned on me. "Did you see him?"

"No. Us girls were doing tumbling."

"And the guys?"

Mendel answered. "Weight lifting. And Duane—that's his name—could lift more than anyone." He was about to go on, but I stopped him.

"What about Chicken?"

"What about Chicken?"

"Did Duane lift more than Chicken?"

"Chicken wasn't in the gym today. He—had a stomach ache."

I laughed. Michael turned to stare at me, and then he started laughing, too. I laughed and laughed, and then I couldn't stand up, and fell to my knees on the sidewalk. I couldn't breathe except in gasps. My stomach hurt. And I had to go to the bathroom. Michael fell back on the grass between the sidewalk and the road and laughed to the clouds in the sky. Mendel held on to his black three-speed and watched us laugh. He laughed a little, too, but mostly he watched.

Slowly everything calmed down. I rubbed my stomach with one hand and my jaw with the other. Michael sat up, and I hiccupped. Then Mendel said, smoothly—he had a way of talking that was like melted butter on toast—"Maybe it was something he ate." And Michael and I started laughing all over again.

Maybe I should explain. Chicken is the fattest boy in the whole school. Even his hair is fat. It's a thick, unruly, Dutch blond.

Privately, we kids call him Chicken, not be-

cause he is one, but because last year at our church picnic, Mendel and Michael and I saw him eat a whole one, roasted. Since then, the name stuck. But his real name is Luke.

We tease him a lot, but sometimes he seems to ask for it. On the last day of fifth grade, he leaned on his desk, and the metal support bent under his weight. Our teacher had to call the janitor to fix it. And he always brings a big plastic bag for his lunch—it won't fit into a regular brown paper sack. And he keeps candy bars from home in his desk and eats them when the teacher isn't looking. He broke two swings on the playground before he even reached fourth grade. Chicken is just plain huge.

It wasn't any surprise to us that he had gotten out of gym class. He usually did—he didn't like exercise, and the gym teacher didn't really like him much, either.

What was surprising was that the new kid was so strong. "You think Duane could beat up Chicken?" Michael asked. We had finished laughing and started talking again.

"Of course, not!" I said. "No one could beat Chicken up. He's too big."

"I wasn't asking you." He turned to Mendel.

Mendel unzipped his navy blue jacket slowly, until it was exactly half open and half zipped. "I think so." He looked at me. "I think Duane could beat Chicken."

A last little hiccup from laughing bubbled up, and then I said, "No way, Men-dell." I drew his name out. I knew he didn't like his name very much. "All he'd have to do is sit on Duane, and Duane would be squished. He wouldn't have a chance."

"I think Duane would win."

"No way!"

He zipped his jacket three-fourths up just as the breeze began to turn into wind. I shivered. "You wanna bet?" he said, grinning.

"Okay—a dollar."

Michael started to say something, but coughed instead.

"A dollar? You must be afraid you're going to lose."

"I am not—"

"Two dollars."

"Glory—" Michael said.

"Two dollars," I agreed. We shook hands. Michael glared at me.

Mendel swung his leg over his bike as if he were getting on a black horse. "All we have to do now is get them to fight." He adjusted his red backpack and started pedaling, calling back to us: "I'm not going home yet—I have a piano lesson now." His words got softer and softer until they

melted into the pillows in the air.

Michael turned to me. "If mom finds out you're gambling, she'll kill you." His eyes were the color of the sky right before a big rain.

I swung my backpack through the air, watching its blue against the blue of the sky. My backpack, unlike Michael's was light and swung easily. "It's not gambling if I know I'm going to win."

He snorted. "Good luck."

Michael turned off at the next corner. I called after him. "Where are you going?"

"I'm taking the back way."

"Oh."

"Don't follow me."

"Don't worry—I don't want to."

"Good."

I walked home slowly, alone. We live only about half a mile from school, on Centennial Street, the oldest street in town. The school is on one side of town and our little, black-and-white house is on the other.

When I got home, Michael was lying on the sofa, watching an *ABC After School Special* rerun. My mom had left a note to please take some hamburger out of the freezer, but Michael hadn't done it. He hadn't set the table or folded the laundry from the dryer, either.

He didn't even look away from the TV when I asked him about it. "That's women's work."

"What?"

"I said, that's women's—"

"I heard you the first time. Look at this note. Does this note say 'Dear Gloria' on it? No! It says 'Dear Gloria and Michael.' That means both of us. *Together*." I waved the note in his face.

He didn't even look at the note. "I know what it says."

"Then do it! —I'll call Mom!"

He half-sat up and slowly pulled his tennis shoes off. "Listen. I'm the man of the house. I mow the lawn. I shovel the driveway—"

"We didn't even get any snow this winter! And you only mow the lawn once a week. I think you can handle a little more work."

"Did you ever mow the lawn?" He sat up all the way.

I crumpled the note and looked at it. My hands were moist and had blurred the ink. 'Dear Gloria and Michael' was smeared, and it ran together into one long word. "No, I didn't. —But I would if Mom would let me."

"You would not. Besides, she won't let you anyway. That's the man's job."

"Since when? And since when are you a man? Mike—"

"Michael."

"Mike. I'm going to call mom if you don't help

me." He shrugged and started watching TV again.

I was angry. Michael made me so angry. I kicked the sofa cushion right under his head, but he didn't even move. So I went over and turned the TV set off. And then I left the room, dropping the note in the wastebasket on the way out. I heard him get up and turn the TV back on after I left.

I put the hamburger on the counter, folded all the laundry except Michael's and set the table for two places—mine and my mom's. Then I went up to my room and half-read a book.

When my mom came home, she made Micheal fold his clothes and set his place. "And next time, do it right away." Michael wouldn't talk to me the rest of the night. So I read my book again until I fell asleep.

The next day was so hot it seemed like spring had decided not to come at all and had sent summer to take her place. I thought about wearing a dress—we weren't allowed to wear shorts to school, and a dress would be cooler than jeans. But if I did, I wouldn't be able to play kickball with Mendel and some of the other guys. Most of the boys played baseball, but Mendel and I and a few others played kickball during recess. Chicken usually watched us, sitting on the dirt on the edge of the field, leaning his back against the fence, eating. He took so long to eat, he never had time to play.

Mendel asked the new kid, Duane, to play. He was on our team. He was good—he didn't talk much, but he could really kick.

Chicken liked him. When he came up to bat the second time, he said, "You're doing real good, Duane. Real good." He nodded. All his chins nodded.

"Thanks," Duane said. He was walking with Mendel. I was walking behind them, wondering why Mendel wasn't walking with me like he always did.

Chicken nodded again. "You're good, all right." He reached into his bag. "Here, you want some chips?" He held them out, smiling. I caught up with Mendel and Duane.

"No thanks," said Duane. He didn't look at Chicken—only at his chins. He seemed fascinated and horrified, hypnotized. Then he walked past Chicken and followed Mendel to the spot where we batted, only a little way from Chicken. "Holy shit," Duane said. It sounded like his mouth swore by accident, apart from the rest of his body. "He's so *fat*, it's gross. It's really gross."

I turned to see Chicken. He had heard. We all had heard. We poked fun of Chicken, of course, but we never swore about him. And we never

said he was gross. Chicken put the chips back in his yellow plastic bag and stood up. His mouth drooped. His chins drooped. Then he walked away, back into the school. When lunch recess was over, he sat in his seat like a big stone. He didn't raise his hand in class or talk to anyone or eat food when the teacher was turned around. And he didn't come out to the kickball field at last recess—he stayed inside with a headache.

Mendel ran outside with Duane at last recess, and they beat everyone else to the field. I was right behind them. I was really hot. My skin was sticky, and I knew that if I could only peel it off, I would be cool. I wished I had worn my little sundress. But then I couldn't play with Mendel.

So we played kickball, and my hair stuck to my neck in curly little clumps.

Mendel didn't walk home with us—he went home with Duane. They were going to play with Duane's computer. He didn't ask me to come. I walked home with Michael, and when he asked me if Chicken and Duane had their fight yet, I said no. I didn't think they were going to, either. Then Michael lipped his lips and said, "I think I'll tell Mom about the bet."

I kicked him in the shin. He went home the back way again.

When I got home, I put on my bathing suit and went in the backyard and sprayed myself with the hose. Then, when I had stopped dripping (mostly), I went inside. Michael had set his place at the table, so I set mine and my mom's. He had also washed his breakfast dishes. I washed mine, and my mom's coffee cup. Then I got the chicken out for supper and put it on the counter to thaw.

I looked in the family room. Michael was lying on the couch in shorts, doing his math homework. He had a little bruise already on his shin. The fan was on, and it blew his hair back. His hair was curly like mine, and almost as long.

I went back outside and played with the hose until my mom came home, and made supper.

She hugged us when we came in the kitchen. "How are my little curlyheads today?" She has straight hair, as straight as if she irons it every morning when she irons her blouses and skirts.

"I'm not little," Michael said. He pulled away.

"Me either," I said.

"And I thought you were my children this morning. You grew up on me in one day?" She put the chicken down in front of us. Michael and I each took a leg.

The next day was just as hot. I wore jeans and the coolest shirt I could find. My mom dropped us off at school on her way to work. Mendel was already there with Duane. They were sitting on the steps outside the building, sketching out what looked like baseball strategies. I asked what

they were.

"Baseball strategies," Duane said.

"Why? We play kickball every recess," I said to Mendel.

Mendel looked a little embarrassed. "Duane and I want to play baseball today. You see, we have this really great game plan."

"Oh," I said, like I understood. But I didn't. "Can I play?"

"No," said Duane. "We don't want any girls. We're going to win." Mendel looked down at the strategies and studied them. I went inside and sat at my desk and waited for school to start.

At recess and lunch I played kickball, and Mendel and Duane played baseball. Chicken watched me play. I could see Mendel and Duane in the other field—it didn't look like they were winning. Mendel wasn't very good. Duane was, though. They came back to class laughing and making bets with the other guys on how they would win next time.

By afternoon recess, I was so hot I didn't want to play kickball. So I sat by Chicken on the dirt and watched the others. He shared a candy bar with me. We sweated together.

Michael and Mendel and I walked home together. Michael and Mendel walked ahead of me, but I took the back way and beat them both. Then I set the table and took the hamburger out and put it on the counter. I changed into my bathing suit and went into the backyard and sprayed myself with the hose. Then I turned the hose off and looked at the grass. A whole yard full of grass. It was wet and shiny in a circle all around me. I turned the hose back on and sprayed the whole backyard so that all the grass was wet, as wet as me. The water could feed the lawn, and it would grow to be tall and green, long and tall and green and sparkling wet.

Then I thought, I can do it. Mom will let me. *I want to.* And I turned the hose off and went back inside.

The next day was hot again, so I wore my sundress to school. The teacher liked it—she said it was pretty. So did my friend Tara. She lives a couple of blocks away from me. She's my best friend now, even though we never used to play together very much.

Mendel and I never finished our bet, because Duane and Chicken never fought. Michael never did tell on me, either. And he's glad I mow the lawn now, because he never liked doing it. But he still won't set the table unless I make him. So I make him.



Tom Bryant

INTERVIEW

Excuse, me, miss, what's your name?
Bessie Smith.

Where do you live?
Stiff in a shell, weeping.

What do you do?
I cry and sing; I'm a fool.

Do you have any brothers or sisters?
They're black,
but I'm alone.

Who is your husband?
Every sonofabitch around Dark.

Can you be more specific?
I speak clear
On scratchy records.

So, what do you do?
I swallow it down with cheap Gin
But these lamentations, up they creep out.

When?
When the Ol'Town is hot
and I can't.

Why do you sing?
To let the whole world know
Whites ain't the only blacks alive.

Who are your friends?
Dark parties,
Cornet accompaniments.

When do you see them?
The first, seen alone—
The second, when I growl a mahogany moan.

Where have you been?
Through the states with
The Theatre Owner's Booking Association.
We call it TOBA.
Tough On Black Asses.

Where are you going?
Don't know. Already been where I'm going.
Heaven's hard to reach
Alcohol sucks me in with a steel straw.

How did you die?
Car accident.
My red just like yours blood
washed the road
on the way to
a denial
at a white man's hospital.

What did you see?
I stumbled on an insult
and watched the moon stagger.

Which way now?
Already been through where I'm going.

—David Jellema

Liberty and Law: Recovering the Lost Balance

by Ronald A. Wells

In this year of the bicentennial of the Constitution, Americans are engaging in various celebrations of the sturdy document which has governed our lives for two hundred years. Unlike the bicentennial of 1976, which focused patriotic ideology, this bicentennial does not have for most Americans a clear focus. Most intelligent and literate people have a vague idea of what it is we celebrate, a sort of gratitude that law has “ordered liberty” (in John Adams’ great phrase), and that we should be grateful for political-legal reality that is the envy of most of the world—a workable balance between the liberty of persons and the law that guards the common good.

Many among us, however, wonder aloud whether or not the balance is still workable as the Republic begins its third century under the Constitution. Mostly from the right, especially the so-called “new Christian right,” come criticisms of contemporary American life. The concern is that we have drifted or fallen from the intent of the Constitution writers. Even the Attorney-General of the United States has said that we should try to recover the socio-moral understandings that undergirded the work of the founders; in doing so we would restore the health of the Republic. But, while much of the force in calling for restoration comes from neoconservatives, I want to suggest that persons of other political persuasions have a stake in this too. I agree that the United States would be a much healthier nation if we recovered—and lived by—the set of assumptions which energized the Founders. But, as this article will try to show, there are many ironies and paradoxes in assessing the meaning of that restoration.

We can identify a constellation of views which undergirded the work of the framers of the American Constitution. As Richard Hofstadter pointed out a generation ago in a memorable phrase, “the Constitution of the United States was based on the philosophy of Hobbes and the religion of Calvin.”¹ While the Constitution was not intended to be an exercise in abstract reason-

ing but a practical document to govern a nation, it was nevertheless a major event in the intellectual history of the West. As Hofstadter writes, “The men who drew up the Constitution in Philadelphia during the summer of 1787 had a vivid Calvinistic sense of human evil and damnation, and believed with Hobbes that men are selfish and contentious.”² In view of the conviction that “natural” man is oriented toward vice, the Founders believed that a government of virtue could emerge only when vice checked vice in a balanced institutionalization of countervailing forces.

James Madison, properly regarded as the philosopher of the Constitution, explained this view in his now-familiar *Federalist*, number 51:

Ambition must be made to counteract ambition. . . . It may be a reflection on human nature that such devices should be necessary to control the abuses of government. But what is government itself, but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary. . . . In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself.

This, surely, was not an idealistic basis on which to found the American government. But, some argue, won’t such a strong dose of realism disillusion the idealism of Americans, especially young people? Madison was asked the same question by a mocking delegate at the Constitutional Convention: was he saying that “the frailties of human nature are the proper elements of good government?” Madison replied, “I know no other.” As Alistair Cooke has commented, “That simple sentence, which reflects Madison’s unsleeping sense of reality and his ability to get the Convention to set up a system that hopes for the best in human nature, but is always on guard against the worst, is what—I believe—has guaranteed the survival of the Constitution as a hardy and practical instrument of government.”³

So it would seem possible for us to identify a fundamental aspect of the worldview of the Founders. One supposes it could be restored if the relatively monist, Protestant (even Calvinist) worldview of the 18th century were reasserted. But in our more pluralist times that does not seem possible. While Americans are free to accept a Calvinist worldview, those who call for a reassertation of the “Judeo-Christian heritage” cannot realistically expect American belief and behavior to change that radically, at least in a deeply religious sense.

Shifting now from ideology to social behavior, we inquire into how Americans have behaved and do behave. Undergirding the work of the Founders was an unspoken, but deeply felt, conviction that there was such a thing as “the public good,” or as they often called it, “the commonweal.” While the Founders cherished and guaranteed individual liberty, they assumed that liberty would always be referred against what Daniel Boorstin has called “the givens” of the social order, based on the Protestant notion of covenant or contract.⁴ Judicially, this was repeatedly reaffirmed during the Federal ascendancy on the courts, especially in such landmark cases as *Marbury v. Madison*, *McCulloch v. Maryland*, and *Gibbons v. Ogden*.

What broke apart the context which formed this unspoken consensus? The answer is complex. A shorthand version would go something like this: The consensus about “the common good” (what the classically educated called “virtue”) was broken by no less than the experience of the American people in the 19th century—in short, the history of liberty. The history of liberty has always been the history of attempts to negate restraints. Freedom has typically been seen as “freedom from,” and as the American people moved west, as they built cities, a new ideology arose to describe their actual and hoped-for experiences. The given of a commonweal in an organic social order was replaced by an ideology that was individualistic and atomistic, which is at the heart of the mythos of American liberalism and a central cultural theme in American history. Stephan Thernstrom

has called this “the mobility ideology,” as follows:

According to this complex of ideas, American society was a collection of mobile, freely competing atoms; divisions between rich and poor could not produce destructive social conflict because the status rich and poor was not permanent. If society was in a state of constant circulation, if every man had an opportunity to rise to the top, all would be well.⁵

. . . the Founders believed that a government of virtue could emerge only when vice checked vice. . . .

For a time, indeed, it seemed that all might be well in the land of the free. Powered by a “Transportation Revolution” across the frontier, the “common man” was supposedly liberated during the era of Andrew Jackson. To what extent the “common man” was actually liberated is a matter of some doubt, but there is no doubt that capitalism was liberated. And with the liberation of capitalism came the rejection of the Federalist culture (and its view of human nature), which had given America both the Hamiltonian financial system and the Constitution.⁶

During the middle third of the 19th century, many Americans began to wonder just where an ever expanding liberty would lead. With fewer and fewer common bonds, some citizens began to object to the behavior of others, as witness the attempts to “reform” social behavior first through persuasion, then through attempts at social control. The “ferment of reform” was part of the general ferment of American society—a society without national institutions. As Stanley Elkins and C.S. Griffin have shown, reform was

largely a failure in the ante-bellum period: despite the campaign against slavery, the cotton kingdom flourished; despite the campaign against drink, the whiskey flowed; despite the campaign against Catholic immigration, Ireland and Germany gave forth their huddled masses. Reform was a failure precisely because a society dedicated to liberty had no core values upon which all citizens could rely. The frustration and anger of reformers and those resisting their attempted controls resulted in social violence in the growing cities and, finally Civil War itself.

While it is difficult to assign precisely a time when America became a “modern” society, surely after the Civil War Americans felt the pressures of modernity more deeply. As the nation began its second century, industrialization transformed American society and created a large urban middle class and working class. Cities grew rapidly, swelled both by internal migration and by the “new” immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe. A mass market emerged, tied to a national economy. Businesses, separating ownership from control, became large through horizontal and vertical integration. Business leaders were opposed to the rise of the “administrative state,” which itself was a structural reply to the nature of rationalized behavior begun by the business community.⁸ As Glenn Porter writes, “The nation remade itself to accommodate to the requirements of the modern corporation.”⁹ It was not easy for Americans to understand the nature of the emerging society, and they groped for new principles of social order in a nationalized, mechanized, urbanized, and industrialized set of institutions. In an excellent summary paragraph, Robert Wiebe suggests the paradoxical nature of the modern state:

Yet to almost all of the people who created them, these themes meant only dislocation and bewilderment. America in the late nineteenth century was a society without a core. It lacked those national centers of authority and information which might have given order to such swift changes. American institutions were still oriented toward a community life where family and church, education and press, professions and government, all largely found their meaning by the way they fit one with another inside a town or a detached portion of a city. As men ranged farther and farther from their communities, they tried desperately to understand the larger world in terms of their small, familiar environment. They tried, on other words,

to impose the known upon the unknown, to master an impersonal world through the customs of a personal society. They failed, usually without recognizing why; and that failure to comprehend a society they were helping to make contained the essence of the nation’s story.¹⁰

In a context of social upheaval, conservative judges and lawyers thought America to be in a state of crisis, and they worried deeply about the stability of society and the rule of law. At the same time Populists and Progressives were appealing to the state for intervention on behalf of those victimized by the same changes. Both sides were looking to law for the purpose of social control and stability, but their respective visions of that stability varied markedly.¹¹ There was a “psychic crisis” in the 1890’s centered on no less than two levels of consciousness about the very meaning of America itself. “In the eyes of those farmers, laborers and radicals who joined in the People’s Party of the 1890’s, America incorporated represented a misappropriation of the name. To the Republican Party, swept to victory in 1896 under William McKinley, it represented the exact fulfillment of the name.”¹² In short, as Alan Trachtenberg asks, was the new America represented by the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893—called “The White City”—or was it represented by the blood and fire of the great railroad strike of 1894? Both visions of American reality could not be simultaneously true.

In the 1890’s there were concerted attempts to enact legislation of social order and control. As Morton Keller writes:

The definition of social status in the late nineteenth century was intimately linked to the control of social behavior. . . . Social and economic change gave new force to old concerns over the threat to public order. . . . The conflict between freedom and constraint of course predated industrialism; the coming of a new economic and social order heightened rather than resolved that tension.¹³

Both in legislation and in judicial decisions, the period 1890-1920 saw a massive and concerted attempt to define, or redefine, the status of persons before the law: immigration was restricted (Chinese Exclusion Act, Johnson-Reed Act); Black participation in American life was narrowly restricted (“Jim Crow” laws, Plessy v. Ferguson); Indians were put in their “place” on reservations (Dawes Act); and family life, sexuality, and women’s rights were

addressed by a legion of laws, regulations, and decisions.¹⁴

The belief in the importance of marriage and family as guarantors of social order was so deeply felt that areas hitherto untouched by law, and even unmentioned in public discourse, were now to be regulated, as witness the anti-abortion laws passed in most states by 1900. Anti-abortion policy cannot be seen apart from the general institutional history of the late 19th century.¹⁵ In a generally “free” society before the coming of the administrative state, Americans had used their liberty very widely indeed. Throughout the 19th century abortions were performed, on a national level, on 25 percent of all pregnancies. Michigan had a national high of 34 percent. In the population history of the United States, a massive shift took place during the 19th century. In 1810 there were 1,058 children under the age of five for every 1,000 white women of childbearing age. By 1890, it had dropped to 685 per 1,000. In other words, whereas the average family at the beginning of the century had seven children, by the end of the century it had three or four. Contraception alone cannot account for the steep decline, because birth-control information was haphazardly distributed and its methods were marginally effective at best. It seems that abortion was the main means of American birth control.

By 1900, most states had some form of anti-abortion law in place. The crusaders for these laws were physicians, not clergy or other moral reformers, and their crusade should be understood more in institutional terms than in moral ones. University-trained doctors, calling themselves “regulars,” banded together in a new organization, the American Medical Association, founded in 1847. They campaigned against the irregularly trained persons posing as doctors and against home-remedy-type “folk healers.” It was the latter group which performed most abortions. The “regulars” believed, rightly as it turned out, that if they were successful in criminalizing abortions, they would deprive the “competition” from a considerable part of its business and income. As James Mohr notes, in a most incisive book on the subject, two factors emerged after 1870 which allowed the AMA, and its indefatigable leader, Boston doctor Horatio Storer, to succeed in the campaign to enact anti-abortion legislation. Amidst the general professionalism of America the doctors were increasingly seen as the only credible group to deal with health issues. Accompanying this was the rise of the Republican party, “whose members were willing to use the powers of the

state, were predisposed to rationalizing and bureaucratizing public policies of all sorts, and were very open to the influence and the advice of professionals and experts.”¹⁶ While anti-abortion policy never became a politically partisan issue, it was supported by persons who were worried about the general threat to social order and who supported both legislation and judicial decisions which brought social stability. It is in this sense that historian Gabriel Kolko could assert that the triumph of “progressive” legislation was, in a certain sense, “the triumph of conservatism.”¹⁷

In Constitutional and legal terms the “psychic crisis” of the 1890’s, and its result, can best be seen in the transition on the Supreme Court from a kind of legal formalism to a new kind of law called “sociological law.” Formalism in law seeks to perpetuate the law as immune from social influence, and sociological law accepts social influence. It is this transition which has vexed and exercised such contemporary writers on the new “Christian Right” as John Whitehead, Rousas Rushdoony, and Francis A. Schaeffer.

Schaeffer finds it intolerable that legal scholars like Oliver Wendell Holmes should write that “the life of the law has not been logic: it has been experience,” and the former Chief Justice Frederick Vinson should state: “Nothing is more certain in modern societies than the principle that there should be no absolutes.”¹⁸ Schaeffer’s insight is valuable, but in offering it he loses sight of the fact that the common law itself was changing. The best (or worst) example of formal legal thinking gone mad is the Supreme Court case of *Santa Clara County v. Southern Pacific Railway Company* (1886), the famous case which allowed large corporations to be declared “persons” under the meaning of the “due process” clauses of the 5th and 14th amendments, and thereby largely freed from restraint by the “Administrative State.” This doctrine was developed and formalized in *Smyth v. Ames* in 1898. It would seem to be the height of legal formalism, untouched by reality, if the Supreme Court cannot distinguish between a “person” who is a freed slave who needs protection of his civil rights and a “person” who is Carnegie Steel Corporation. In fact, even in “formal” legal thinking, there had already been an adaptation to social change, as noted above, when law and the administrative state moved to create a new pattern of social order in the face of perceived threat. Indeed, the advent of “sociological law” does not run to the logical antithesis of formal law. The acceptance of materials other than purely legal precedents in making judicial decisions does not imply that

precedents are no longer important but that courts and bureaus must also bring sociological, economic, medical, or other social-scientific materials in the decision-making process.

The first major break in formal legal decisions came in *Muller v. Oregon* in 1908. Louis D. Brandeis, then still in private practice, presented a brief that was accepted by the court in which both social information and precedent were heard. Indeed, this did open the way for a new understanding of law, in which legal formalism was balanced with extra-legal information. Under this new style of thinking, many Acts of Congress were now deemed Constitutional which in prior times would probably have been regarded as unconstitutional. In the Pure Food and Drug Act, the Meat Inspection Act, and even the morals-related Mann Act, the Court listened to, and partly based its decision on, extra-legal information. Under the influence of law professors such as Roscoe Pound, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Thomas Powell, and Felix Frankfurter, legal formalism was devalued in the education of lawyers, and by mid-20th century sociological law was widely accepted. The most memorable recent example was in the landmark Supreme Court case, *Brown v. The Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (1954) on school segregation. The lawyers for the Board thought they had the case won in citing prior precedents, especially the “separate but equal” doctrine of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896). In the end, the Supreme Court made its decision more on the basis of the social-psychological information on the effects of segregation on children than on prior legal precedent. Despite one’s personal views on whether or not the Court did right in banning segregation from any legal standing, it surely allowed the question to be raised which John Adams voiced long ago: “Is this a government of laws or of men?”

All parties in the contemporary debate about the future of America are agreed that an essential social consensus no longer exists. Conservative commentators insist that the only way forward is to admit fully and frankly that we have lost the mentality which undergirded the work of the Constitution writers—i.e., that there is such a thing as the commonweal—and that the whole discussion of public virtue must take place in a context in which religious values are formative, as they were then. The essential thesis of this article is to affirm that view. But proceeding further, we must see how and why the mind of the Constitution was lost. In short, that mind was lost because of the history of liberty in America. Community in America was not lost because

elite groups began to think differently, but because the American people as a whole began to behave differently. So before conservative commentators too quickly savor their intellectual victory, they should be aware of what that victory will cost them. Most contemporary conservatives, of course, are really radical liberals in that they have a foundational belief in individual liberty and a distrust of a government which would shape the exercise of that liberty. Only in America could radical liberals get away with calling themselves conservatives!

One of the most telling examples of the contemporary confusion about “liberal” and “conservative” viewpoints is that about “Right to Choose” and “Right to Life.” Pro-abortionists believe in liberty, an individual’s right to choose,

. . .the extant lexicon (liberal, conservative, left, right) contains not only not useful, but essentially secular distinctions. . .

and, in doing so, stand squarely in the mainline tradition of the American people who celebrate a good society as one which gave scope for an ever expanding liberty. Anti-abortionists do not believe in liberty because they deplore the result of the individual’s free choice. They say that community is violated by such liberty, that the virtue necessary for a commonweal does not exist. In taking these positions for “choice” and for “life,” many commentators argue at philosophical cross-purposes, apparently unaware of the paradoxes and ironies involved. For example, Jerry Falwell, a noted anti-abortionist, founded a university he insists on calling “Liberty.” I take it that Falwell means to assert community, so he really should have named his school “Solidarity” (or perchance “Commonweal”) University. It is functional nonsense for someone to look out on the disarray of contemporary America and say “liberty has failed, give us more liberty.” Similarly Francis Schaeffer, who did more than any other person to make anti-abortion a Christian issue, was confused about law and liberty.¹⁹ He believed that the reason for the abortion crisis is the prior acceptance of sociological law. The irony here is that under immanent law throughout the 19th century there were millions

of abortions, but it is only through instrumental law that states criminalized abortion in a desire for social control. To be sure, he is correct in believing that the recriminalizing of abortion in our time would restore the foundational beliefs of the founding, and Constitutional, generation of Americans, but it would do so in self-conscious rejection of the main American cultural belief in an ever expanding liberty.

It would seem that we need some new ways of talking about our current problems because the extant lexicon (liberal, conservative, left, right) contains not only not useful, but essentially secular distinctions, which should not define the work of Christian writers. Richard John Neuhaus helps from a new basis for discussion by speaking of the arena for the commonweal as “the public square.”²⁰ The public square, the forum for public discourse and the place where the American consensus was formed, was once “clothed” with the conviction that public attitudes and policies were, and ought to be, informed by religious values. In Neuhaus’ view, that public square has in the past half-century become “naked,” both because a “new class” of elite thinkers has asserted and assumed that American society is now secular and because the courts have pressed relentlessly the Constitutional requirement of the separation of church and state to ends which the writers of the Constitution and the majority of the American people never intended. In putting the argument in this ingenious way, Neuhaus caused his readers rise above the conventional wisdom positions of left and right. He is critical of “mainline-liberalism” and of the politicized “sectarianism” of fundamentalist evangelicalism. Very much in the Niebuhrian mold of “Christian realism,” he calls for a new “third way” which equally rejects the vacuousness of religious liberalism’s embrace of modernity and the absolutism of the moral majoritarians’ desperate clinging to a monist culture of a white Protestant hegemony.

A. James Reichley further expands our new ways of talking about the subject we all want to redefine, the role of religion in American life.²¹ Reichley insists on what by now must be seen as a starting place for redefinition—i.e., that whatever Americans might mean by the establishment clause in the Constitution, the founding generation and the majority of Americans since then have believed that the functional separation of church and state in no way excludes the notion that religious values should guide and support government in the American republic. He calls his prescription for

good government “theistic humanism,” which indicates a commitment to the ordering of human life in accountability to transcendent truth.

Robert Bellah and his associates have written what I believe to be both the best analysis of the American malaise and the best prescription for recovering the lost consensus.²² They invoke the analysis of Alexis de Tocqueville, whose *Democracy in America* (1835, 1840) may be the best and most enduring work about America. Tocqueville hoped that America would succeed, both for itself, but also as an example to the world. Yet, he warned, the race was on between the vitality of liberty’s possibilities and the decadence of liberty’s excess. He believed that Americans need not go all the way to the anarchy toward which the logic of their liberty tended. Rather, liberty would be safeguarded by certain “givens”—most notably “the equality of condition”—in the context of a consensual community. Bellah and his associates see decadence winning over vitality.

A decadent America is not so much reprehensible as pitiable. The Americans to be pitied in Bellah’s work are not the oppressed and out-groups, but the winners and holders of the American Dream. The people who form the basis for Bellah’s study are those who, in one definition or another, are successful. They are winners but they are not fulfilled. The American ideal of liberty has propelled them on their way. But where has it brought, or left, them? (Here one thinks of Whitman in “Facing West From California’s Shores,” saying, “Where is what I started for so long ago, and why is it yet unbound?”)

The main reason that Americans are unfulfilled, even in their success, is they have lost even the way of expressing themselves in culture, with a language to disclose real human needs. Bellah *et al.* make the very important point about the “two languages” Americans speak. The first language reflects the prevailing ideology of individualism, of which there are two types: utilitarian individualism, related to jobs and consumption; and expressive individualism, related to psychological fulfillment, spoken in the jargon of psychotherapy. The prevailing American ideology says that the most fulfilled person is the unencumbered autonomous self, but down deep in the unspoken affective, people know, or feel, that that just is so. Bellah reminds us that there is a second language, deep in cultural memory, now nearly lost, in which Americans express themselves in terms of their callings and commitments, both for the self and

for society. Bellah calls these older patterns of discourse republican and biblical. The authentic self, in this language, sees itself as anchored in a "community of memory," related to much more than our jobs, leisure, or the pursuit of the "unencumbered self." Bellah and his associates believe that it is only in the recovery of biblical and republican language that Americans can recover a sense of what to say in "the public square."

So the message, after all, is recovery of the lost heritage. One might ask: "Isn't this just an academically respectable version of what the moral majoritarians are calling for in a less articulate way?" No, it is not. Bellah recognizes, as we all must, that the world we have lost is lost indeed. There is no way to "return to religion" in the manner advocated by reconstructionists. That world is unrecoverable because the structures which brought our modern world into being cannot now be unstructured. And a restoration of the monist world of the Protestant "righteous empire" would be worse still. We must somehow make do with the modern nature of our society and especially with its pluralistic character. But just because we cannot see the way to restore the former community, we must not conclude that we can do nothing at all. Recovering the mind behind biblical and republican language can help us to re-achieve that lost balance between the dual imperatives of society—in short, the one and the many—which was present in the American consensus before liberty broke it apart. It is with this reestablished consensus that Americans might see the way forward, and that they can go on. They would recover the habit of heart, a deep conviction in the unspoken affective, that causes them to walk with confidence into the future because they remember how far they have come together in those two hundred years since the Founders gave them a document which would endow them with the blessings of liberty. ■

NOTES

1. Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition* (New York: Knopf, 1948), 3.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Alistair Cooke, *The Patient Has the Floor* (New York: Knopf, 1985).
4. Daniel Boorstin, *The Genius of American Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953).
5. Stephan Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), 56.
6. George Rogers Taylor, *The Transportation*

Revolution, 1815-1860 (New York: Rinehart, 1951); Douglas North, *The Economic Growth of the United States* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1961); Edward Pessen, "The Egalitarian Myth and the American Social Reality: Wealth, Mobility and Equality in the 'Era of the Common Man,'" *American Historical Review*, 76 (October 1971), 989-1034; Bray Hammond, *Banks and Politics in America from the Revolution to the Civil War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970); Richard D. Brown, *Modernization: The Transformation of American Life* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976).

7. C.S. Griffin, *The Ferment of Reform, 1830-1860* (New York: Crowell, 1967); Stanley Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959); Michael Feldberg, *The Turbulent Era: Riot and Disorder in Jacksonian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

8. Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982).

9. Glenn Porter, *The Rise of Big Business* (New York: Crowell, 1973), 25.

10. Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 12.

11. William M. Wiecek, *Constitutional Development in a Modernizing Society* (Washington, D.C.: American Historical Association, 1985), 55-74.

12. Trachtenberg, *Incorporation of America*, 7-8.

13. Morton Keller, *Affairs of State: Public Life in Late Nineteenth Century America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 473.

14. Barbara M. Solomon, *Ancestors and Immigrants* (New York: John Wiley, 1956); John Higham, *Strangers in the Land* (New York: Atheneum, 1970); Keller, *Affairs of State*, 454; C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 67-109.

15. Most of the following discussion is drawn freely from James C. Mohr, *Abortion in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

16. *Ibid.*, 203-04.

17. Gabriel Kolko, *The Triumph of Conservatism. A Reinterpretation of American History, 1900-1916* (New York: Free Press, 1977).

18. Francis A. Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto* (Winchester, IL: Crossway, 1981), 17, 131.

19. The confusion in Schaeffer's thought can be seen in several of his books. See Ronald W. Ruegsegger (ed.), *Reflections on Francis Schaeffer* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986).

20. Richard J. Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984).

21. A. James Reichley, *Religion in American Public Life* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1985), 112-13.

22. Robert Bellah, et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), esp. 27-34.

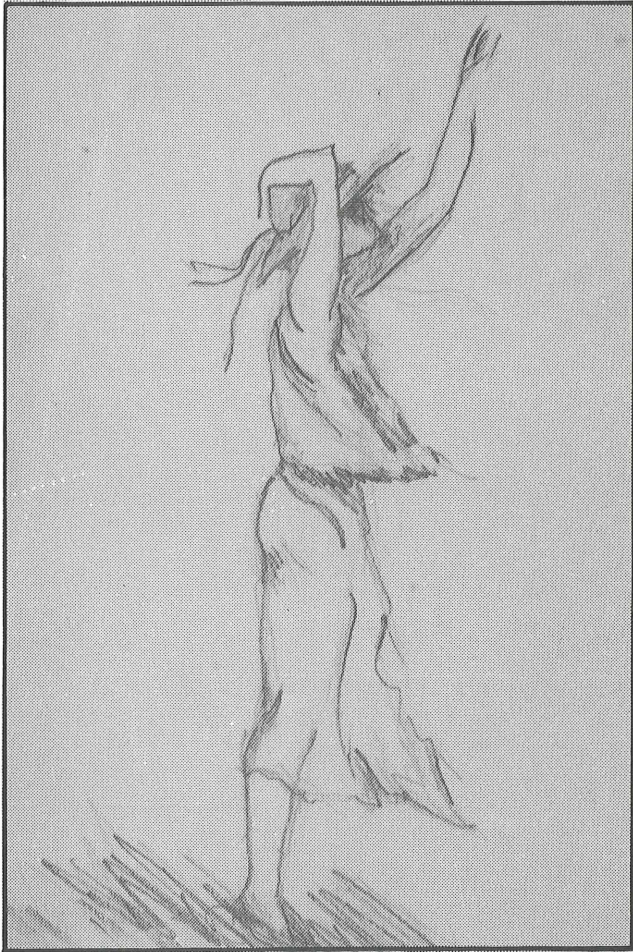
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This article is adapted from an essay to appear in a book edited by Professor Wells and Thomas Askew entitled "Liberty and Law: Reflections on the Constitution in American Life and Thought" (Eerdmans, October).



Susan McBurney

Dialogue 27



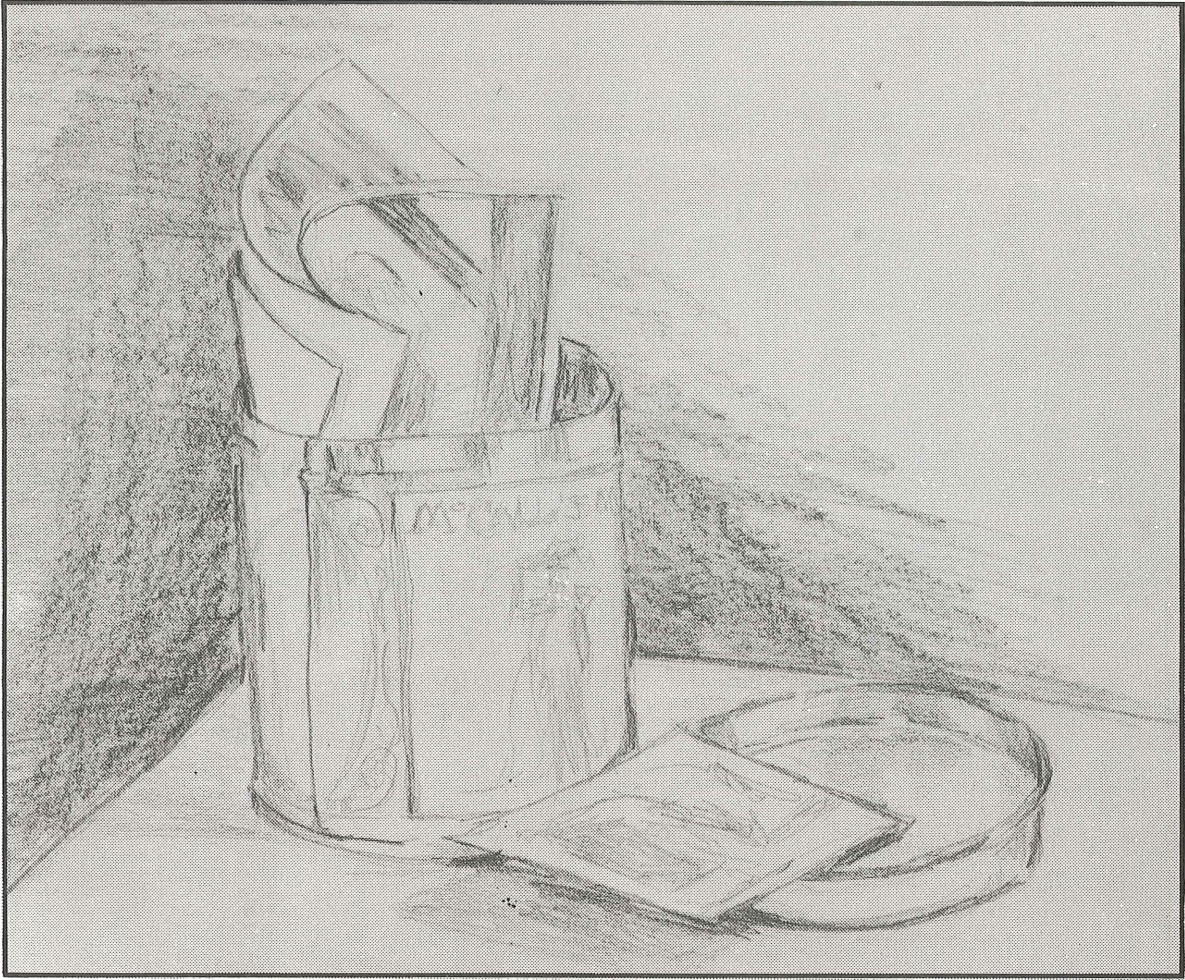
Christina

by Mike Rubingh

Dear Christina,

Your letter was uplifting. Thank you for writing, but why now—after so long? It's strange; I was thinking about you just before your letter came. Really you had no reason to write at all, after what I did. She's gone now, by the way. So . . . it's been awhile. I don't know what to say, really. Three years is a long time; some things change but others stay the same. It's that time of year again—springtime; the magnolias are starting to bloom, and it's hurricane weather: (Guinevere, perhaps, is coming soon). I still distinctly remember you standing under the magnolias at the airport holding onto your white hat with the red ribbon about the same time of year in '84. I remember the smell; was it your perfume or perhaps the lilacs, or just the tight magnolia buds? I have that picture here, in fact. I've gathered all the old pictures I could find and put them in the gaudy old cookie tin your mother gave us the time we went canoeing. I should be more careful with them; the edges of some are

getting bent and smudged. I was surprised to find this particular one in my briefcase, though, when I opened it to get out my latest project. It must've fallen between the pages of "Data Encapsulation for Expert Systems." I'm making quite a name for myself, especially just a single year out of Georgia Tech. I look out over Atlanta from here as if I own the city. She is beautiful from 17 stories up. Only sometimes I wish I could let the wind in; I feel like I'm suffocating at times—one of the hazards of computer programming—where you begin to feel like the computer screen is an abyss engulfing you and your heart becomes synchronized to that little blinking cursor. I'm looking out my window now. . . I wonder if I could break it? It's made of thick plexiglass with little silver filaments inside the edges. I have a strange impulse to make those little Y-shaped paper helicopters weighted down by paperclips, like when we were kids, and drop them 17 stories to the street. I always wanted to write a message on one of those, so that someone could find it and read it and fall in love with me. I used to wonder too: would people twirl like that if they fell from so



high up? I see some newly-planted magnolias along the front of the bank below. Some are blooming. They look like little girls in pink dresses.

How is school going? It was shocking to hear you're contemplating seminary. What on earth's got into you?; you never seemed the theological type to me. No, I can't imagine going to a class where one learns about predestination, I can't imagine even talking about it with friends. How could God be so inhuman? It's ridiculous. I suppose they practice infant baptism too! Actually, I've decided the world would be a much better place if human beings would just be more tolerant. I've met more decent, respectable, productive people outside the church than inside. I haven't been going much lately, I haven't been very spirit-filled. I'm so busy. Religion is a burden right now, one I don't want to carry. If I'm not a lapsed Baptist, I'm at least a relaxed one. They seem happy with me at church as long as I tithe a gentlemanly sum and don't smoke or drink. And these, of course, are already part of my lifestyle. Jerry isn't as bad as some out there, but he has

the same tendencies. Look at Oral Roberts, Jim and Tammy Bakker, Gopelgate. Too many of them are hypocrites, and if there's one thing I don't want to be it's a hypocrite, Christina. I wish you could come home more often; you don't know what you're missing. I'll be getting a BMW in two-and-a-half weeks—echt Deutsch—no more of these Japanese emasculates for me. We could go riding in the springtime, crank down the windows, bring along my black Lab, Dante, who would enjoy the wind in his fur as much as I. We could head out for a ritzy place, the beach, anywhere. . . .

I hope you aren't too bored up there in Michigan. It sounds terrible—to be a blonde among 4,000 other blondes—when down here you were as rare as an ivory-billed woodpecker. My lunch break is over, so I've got to get back to work. Sorry I spilled the cream on page one.

Evening. Thinking about old times makes me wish you were here, Christina. Strangely, I'm always less sure about the course my life is taking at night. I usually work or go out with Madeline, but tonight I'm alone. You'd like Madeline; she's



a fine woman, a true southern belle who's been urbanized. We make a good-looking couple. Yesterday we went to the symphony to hear two of my favorites: Brahms and Bruckner. Remember the time we rigged two pairs of headphones to your little Walkman and listened to Dvorak's "New World" until the batteries ran out? I have it by Sir George Solti and the CSO on CD if you ever get the urge to listen when you come home. Sad music. . . I mean it ended on the sad part: "Goin' home"—the old spiritual our maid used to sing on rainy summer nights.

I've been watching the clock and time is melting away like that Salvador Dali painting. It's hard for me to write what I've been thinking; it seems so nostalgic and womanish. But I had a few gin and tonics, and if my hand still retains the capacity to make readable letters, I will get this irrational catharsis over with. By now I am acquainted with at least the late evening, and I feel hollow, like the peal of a gong or a canoe paddle glancing off an aluminum stern. I've been looking at old pictures ever since I put the magnolia picture back, and I've seen more

trees—warlock pines and haunting cypresses. I've been remembering our strange trip into the heart of the swamp in vivid detail, and it haunts me.

You remember the utter recklessness of it all, don't you: how we set out with Hershey bars and marshmallows, grandma's cookies, a canteen of fresh water, a camera, and a notebook? As if that weren't dangerous enough, we left with the foolish romantic-souled intention of withstanding hurricane Faith together. I remember the curious quietness before the storm: the scream of a hawk far away, the noiseless slide of alligators into the tannin-black water. We reached the comparative safety of the island and grounded the canoe just as the storm grew potent. Giddy with weather and overdosed on oxygen, we talked louder and louder as the storm increased, yelled, screamed inanities at each other until almost delirious we began to wrestle in the wind and the rain and the quackgrass. A facefull of wet, sharp weeds, a little blood on my lip. Your hands clenched around my neck, strong thighs on my back until I countered,

laughing, pulling you forward and rolling. The rain pasting our hair to our scalps, the strength in my arms overpowering yours finally, until on top of you with the hurricane behind me and pounding in my head, I looked into those eyes.

“No.” they said: a single word in utter calmness. Ashamed, I sat down beside you marvelling that the storm had suddenly stilled, looking up to see stars again overhead, watched them go reeling across the sky. We were together in the eye, the center. Later we crawled out of the gigantic cypress in whose hollow core we had wedged ourselves in refuge for the remainder of the storm. You stood up, a cypress knee tripped you, legs crumpled, and you sat there in the mud, laughing. We found the canoe overturned, but with only a single cross-hatched dent in the side. We found the marshmallows under the canoe, a little soggy, but delicious; we ate them for the sugar. Taking out the flashlight, I flipped on the bright beam and discovered that the log behind us was a 14-foot alligator, lying stunned. We left in haste, but paddled back leisurely in the darkness, peculiarly lighthearted, with only a

flashlight to guide us.

Christina, what I want to know before I pass out tonight is this: what did you find that night that I didn't? What did you think or feel inside the still point of that hurricane? I need to know. Was it for real? Did all this happen, or did I just dream it once too often? I'm not sure anymore; the line between fantasy and reality is so vague. You had a secret, something deep inside you, something pure and inviolate that you wouldn't reveal to me, and I couldn't touch. Why did you say no Christina? I'm burning to find out. Why was I so happy in such terrible circumstances, so happy to be different? What did your eyes see in the eye? I only saw stars, and now I'm more confused than ever. I want to see you again. I'm seeing stars now—green and blue ones inside my eyelids; my writing would fail a policeman's straight-line test. My Southern Comfort is almost gone. I'm counting sheep to fall asleep. . .counting sheep jumping over the stars.

Cal

4/7/87 —Burn this letter.



Illustrated by

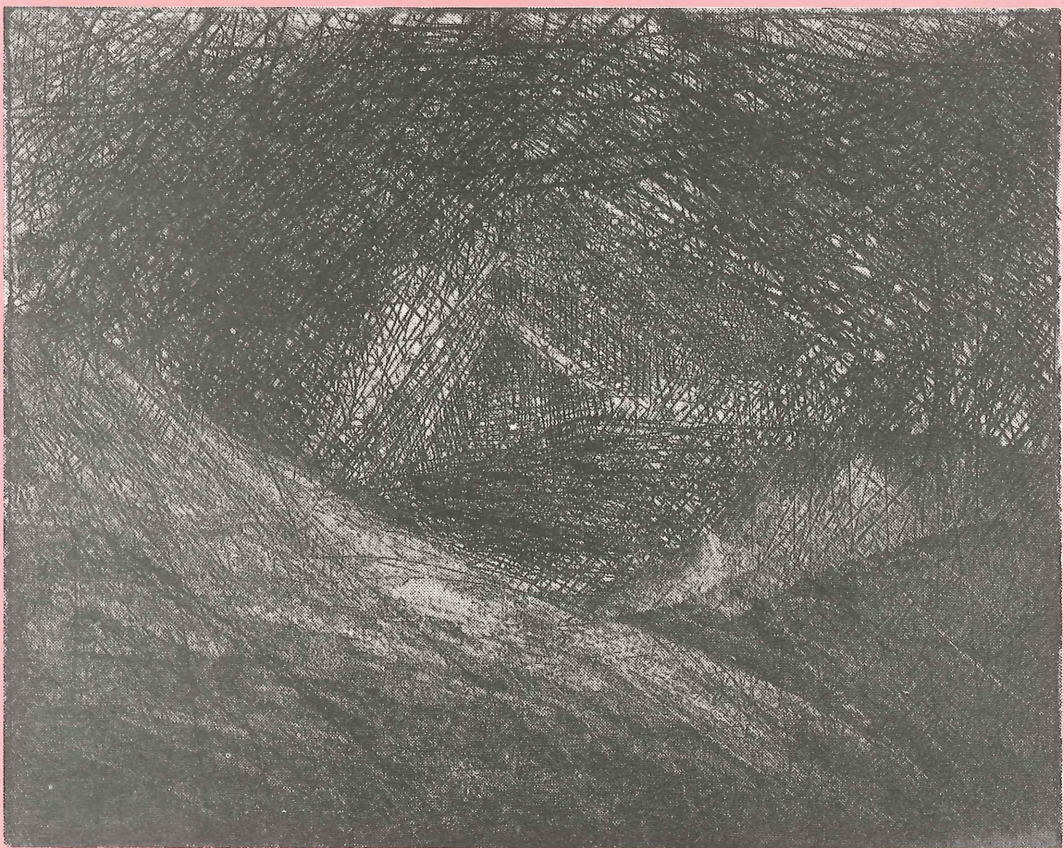
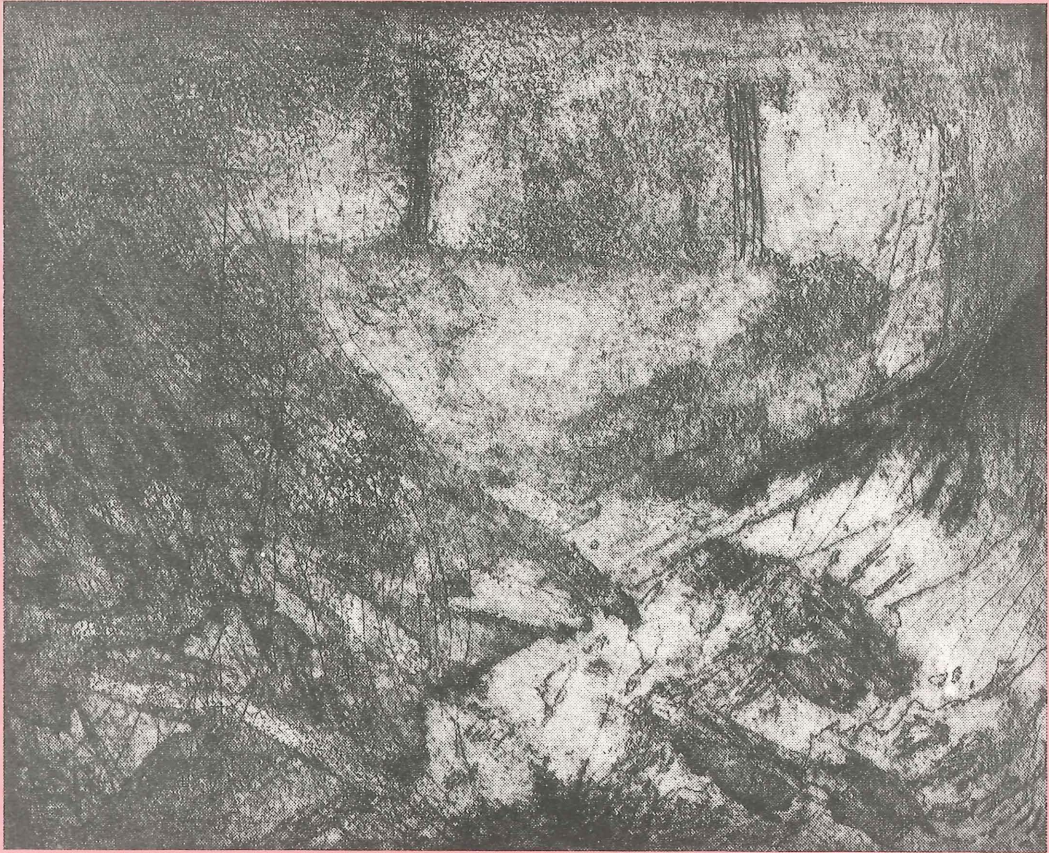
Renee VanderStelt

Portfólio

Tom Bryant







GOING HOME

Through the large bus window
we watch the neon-studded sunset—
the old Indian and I—
we speed past lit factories
still billowing smoke from their stacks.
He laughs,
spits,
and says how, before he came to El Paso,
he never knew factories ran all night.
We talk over the noisy engine
and he tells me
he's going back to the desert—
for good.
He says Indians don't last long in the city,
moccasins fall apart too fast on hard pavement.
I look down, through the dark,
at his feet.
He laughs again
and sticks his finger
through a hole in his leather soles.
After Truth or Consequences—
in the middle of nowhere—
he asks the bus driver to let him off.
I cram a sandwich and half a candy bar
into his hand.
He smiles
and tips his black felt hat
releasing his long hair
to fall across his face.
As the bus pulls away,
I watch him close his jacket tight
against the January chill,
and I hope his feet don't freeze
before he makes it home.

—Becky Tempest

THE RESORT ACROSS THE POND

Gravity, at this remove,
is not a major force.
I write her letters, write "I love
you." She writes "weak," or worse.

I use the phone. I spin my line
and hope to turn her head:
"Be mine." She scans the bait and then
guffaws. The line goes dead.

Telekinesis doesn't work,
my thoughts reach someone else—
invariably a working bloke
somewhere outside York Mills.

Calvin Sem's the only way
remaining now, I hear.
"Masters of Divinity":
they make them over there.

—Tom VanMilligen

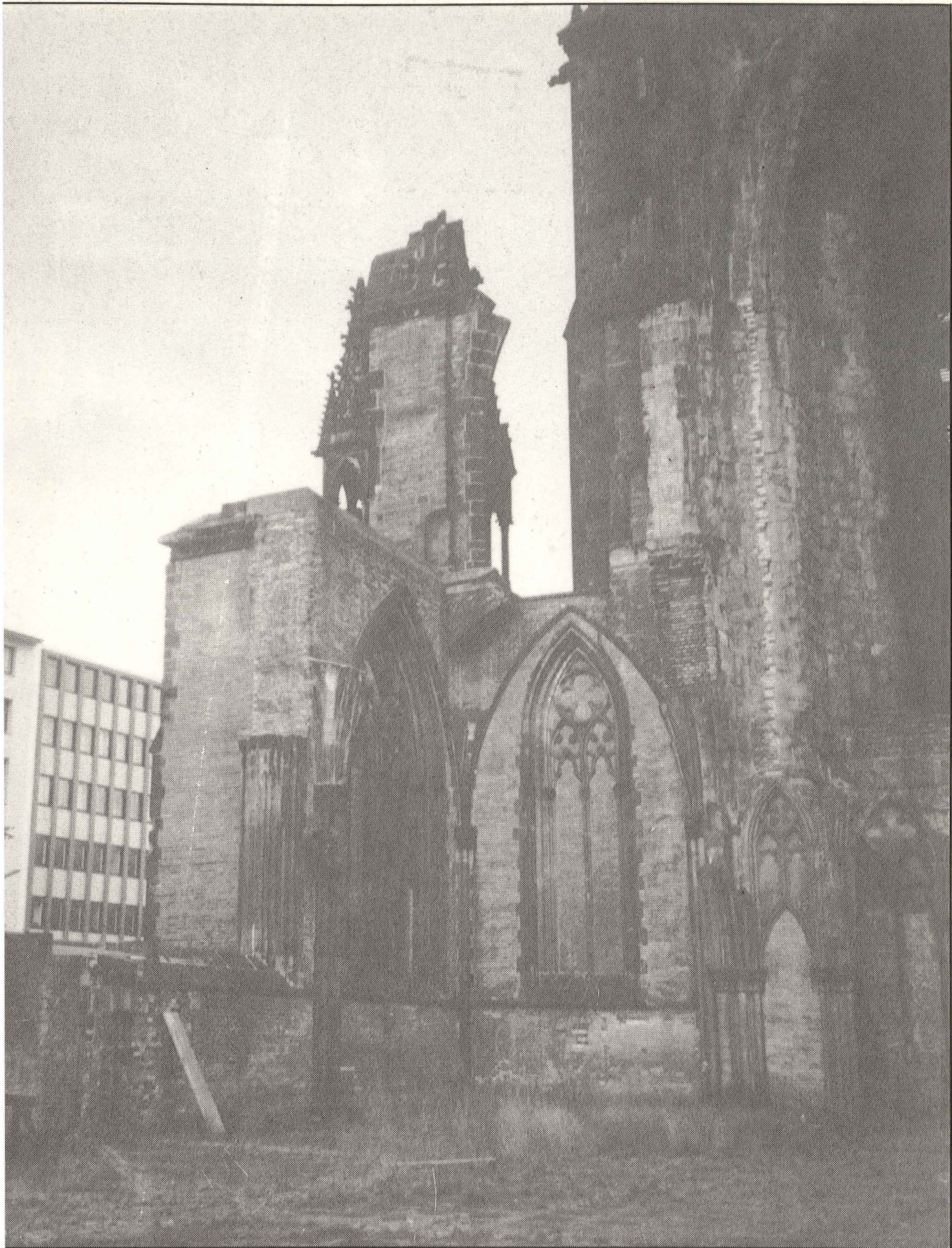
Meditation

My grandmother is lying helplessly in the bed of a rest home. For the past year she has been suffering the turmoils of cancer and will soon taste death. Quite frankly, I am uncertain of what I am supposed to think and feel at this time. Surely I have the knowledge that my grandmother will be free from all suffering, pain and anxiety when she makes the transition from this world into the everlasting one, and surely I can rest in the sweet consolation of her eternal redemption. Yet I cannot deny my own feelings of fear and sadness. I cannot deny that I was anticipating a great loss. Each time the phone rings my entire being freezes in expectation of the grim news.

Why am I unable to be overcome with the profound joy and relief a believer should experience at the time of another's death? "She'll be so much happier," I've always heard. But what about those of us who are left behind, and for whom this will be the darkest moment? We are losing the one who loved us so selflessly and who scolded us for having one too many of her ice-box cookies or too much of her strawberry jam on a single piece of bread: "You've got enough jam on there for six!" she would say. Perhaps I am simply too selfish to find peace and contentment in my anticipated loss. Is this also why I'll undeniably need comfort at the time of her death? But did not Christ himself need to be comforted at the death of his friend Lazarus? And did he not also pray tearfully in Gethsemane that his own life be spared if it be his Father's will?

My Father's will. From this phrase I derive all of my comfort. For it is my Father's will that my grandmother be restored to perfection and taken home to live forever in immortality and supreme blessedness. It is my Father's will that I bid her adieu, knowing that the greatest joy awaits her. I would not encourage her now to rage against the dying of this earthly light, for soon she will be face to face with our Creator, and will dwell in the eternal light of His countenance.

—Lisa Van Houten



Susan McBurney

Dialogue 39

A student recently referred to the victory of Sparta Over Athens in the Peloponnesian Wars as a "Phallic victory." He meant, I think, "Pyrrhic" victory.

Without any dignity or self-respect Maitre has no desire to live, and his death is conscientiously or subconsciously wished on by himself.

English 200

"Borculo and Zealand have renovated their old town areas and converted old warehouses into quaint shopping malls."

Warehouses, in Borculo

"This poem is called Marianne by Tennyson. Is about a girl who was deprived of a sexual act which caused her much grief."

Except for dying happily, though stories conclude with slightly opposite endings.

203 final

INSTRUCTOR FAILS STUDENT: COLLEGE FRET

"I think I remember your reading this guy ((passage from Joyce's Ulysses; spent 1/2 hour on it, &c.)) in class and I concluded that it wasn't worth remembering this author's name. I decided then that this guy was either actually insane for writing ((actually, writing)) such garbage or that he knew that there were actually idiots in the world who would buy this stuff and he is just in it for the money."

Soph, Eng 203 final

"Not much is said about the man's family except that his sons like to play with their toy gun, something that minorly upsets the writer."

"I am an honors graduate of X high school....."

Fr. ad hoc autobiog.

Huck's estimation of himself is not as high as he gives himself credit for.

--212 Examination

Fr. Journal

Mythology is stupid. A guy told me about Golden Fleece. Why would anyone want Golden Fleece?

Fr. narrative tobacco smoke.

Marianne was impatient for the service to end, but she sat as still as she could stand.

--freshm. pa

Preserve. The birds were chattering...."

Fr. paper