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Dialogue

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—Jon Vandervel

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—David Smil

Editorial

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/ through three-foot snowdrifts
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is is true; no Calvinist would deny
But what if there is more to be
en into consideration than just
s, what if the world has been turned upside-down and our neat categories have been confused like street signs turned 90 degrees by pranksters? Then a rebel student or a rebel professor is no longer necessarily emulating the arch-rebel Satan, but rebel against worldliness Jesus Christ. And considering these questions—the gist of which is "Why are so many people unhappy in good environments and happy in bad environments?"—is it not likely that the world is indeed upside-down, backwards, or somehow out of joint?

When I was younger my dad used to take my brother and I on hikes in the midwinter. On sunny days he would tell us, "Don't look at the snow for long; it'll make you snow-blind." Impossible, I though; I never become blind looking at the snow. Only later did I learn how the brilliant glare of the sun reflecting off a mirror of white snow can actually burn the corneas, temporarily stunting vision. Consider this analogy applied to human beings: people in "good" environments too often can likewise suffer from "good-blindness." The prosperous nation we grew up in, the church we belong to, the no-fault college we attend, the traditions we inherit—all these somehow seem trite and stale after 18 years; we've seen nothing else, nothing worse, nothing that makes their true value apparent to us. On the other hand, we've seen nothing better either, so no better reason than pressure to conform usually keeps us on the side of tradition. It's a no-win situation, one difficult to break out of. Essential to breaking free is a better understanding of what Christ intends his people to do in this world. Christians are called to build a kingdom and not a utopia. They have the humble task of gathering sheep, not perfecting the world. Christians need to beware of the siren-song of utopianism. God help us if our religion has become equivalent to the "soma" in Huxley's *Brave New World,* God a beneficent version of Orwell's *Big Brother,* or faith merely a product of positive and negative reinforcement as in Skinner's *Walden Two.* These are negative utopias, or dystopias, of course, but they have a common flaw that seems to creep into even the most well-meaning plan for social betterment. This flaw has been called the loss of freedom or the loss of self.

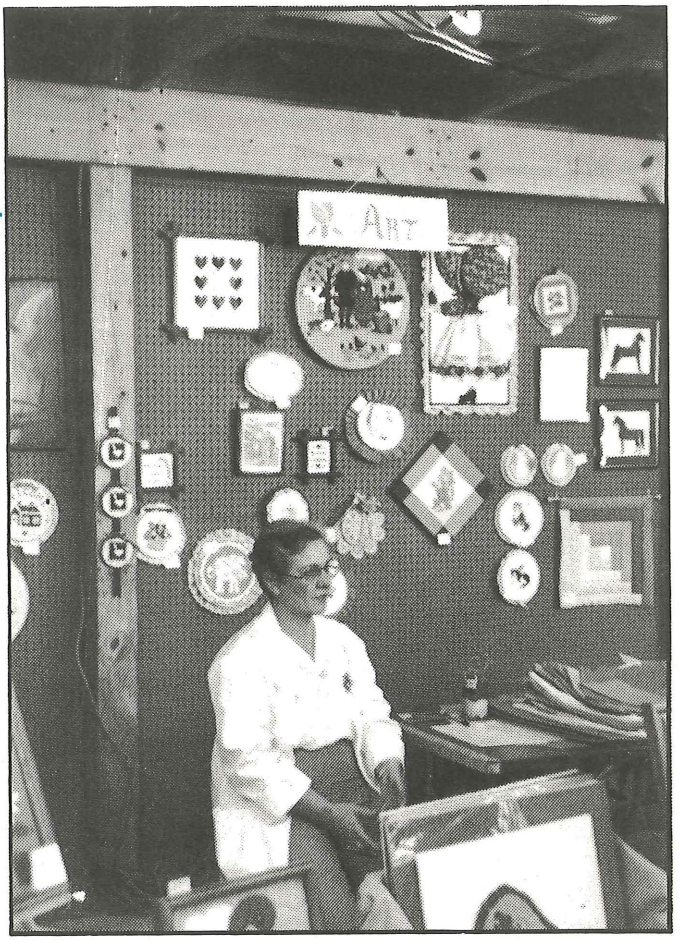
In the first decade of the 20th century, mathematicians Bertrand Russel and Alfred North Whitehead (the former perhaps more famous for his book *Why I am Not a Christian)* attempted to formalize mathematics into a single consistent system, their *Principia Mathematica.* An inconsistency they could not iron out came to be known as Russel's Paradox. Twenty years later another mathematician named Kurt Goedel blew Russel's paradox up into a full-blown theorem, now know as Goedel's Theorem. In mathematical language the proof of the theorem is over 60 pages long; put more simply, the theorem says "All consistent axiomatic formu-

lations of number theory include undecidable propositions." Douglas Hofstadter, in his book *Goedel, Escher, Bach* makes it even easier to grasp by comparing it to the Epimenides Paradox. According to philosophical and biblical history (see Titus 1:12), Epimenides was a Cretan—that is, someone from the island of Crete—immortalized for his statement "All Cretans are liars." My question to you is this: is Epimenides telling the truth in making this statement, or is he lying? The Epimenides Paradox is an undecidable proposition in philosophy just as Russel's Paradox is undecidable in mathematics. Each has at its core the idea of self-reference: something that refers to itself resists formalization. While Goedel's Theorem was quite revolutionary when it was published in 1931, the same message had been proclaimed already back in 1864, albeit in literary form.

Fyodor Dostoyevsky, in his *Notes From Underground,* a treasure trove of psychological and philosophical insights, finds the parallel to mathematical self-reference in human beings, self-awareness, to be opposed, sometimes bitterly to the process of formalization. What good is the Crystal Palace, he asks, referring to a 19th century vision of a scientific utopia, if one hasn't the free will to stick one's tongue out at it? A human being's central reason for living, in Dostoyevsky's opinion, is to "prove to himself every minute that he is a man and not a piano key or an organ stop." In other words he is no mere machine. He even includes his own version of the Epimenides Paradox: "Mind you, I quite agree that twice-two-makes-four is a most excellent thing; but if we are to give everything its due, then twice-two-makes-five is sometimes a most charming little thing too." What Dostoyevsky fears is the 19th century positivist mindset that, aware of it or not, was bent on creating a perfect world scientifically and defining it mathematically—without paradox. Today's scientists are more modest. Although worshipped by the public more than ever, they acknowledge the limitations of science, often claiming a more comprehensive worldview in the bargain. Unfortunately, many naively choose eastern mysticism, in vogue after Hofstadter's look at Zen Buddhism in *Goedel, Escher, Bach* and books like *The Tao of Physics* and *The Dancing Wu Li Masters.* In choosing a set of beliefs that claims all is One, that self, freedom, good and evil are all illusions to be overcome, they rechoose determinism. It is Christianity that has a positive view of freedom and self.

Too many however—even Christians themselves—consider Christianity a kind of slavery to endure grudgingly rather than freedom. Christ sets his people free; rarely do we sense the full implications of the word "free." In restoring freedom Christ restores the self in the image of God, replacing the machinelike self en- this freedom in *Either/Or:* "For freedom, therefore, I am fighting (partly in this letter, partly a principially within myself), I fighting for the future, for either/ This is the treasure I desire bequeath to those whom I love in world. . .There lies a treasure thine own inner self: there is either/or which makes a m greater than the angels." This is same freedom Dostoyevsky not the freedom to make moral fact of more value than pragmatic on the ethical nature of man t artists, particularly Christian artis have explored over the centuri Dutch Reformed writer Jan Schaap, for example, takes message of John Gardner's *Moral Fiction* and restores to it Christian dimension of Kierk gaard. Moral fiction shows char ters in the position of affirming th humanity, making either/ choices, distinguishing betwe good and evil, not succumbing fate or being puppets to vario social forces or ideologies. *Oedip Rex* is not moral fiction; nor for th matter are fatalistic modern nov like those of Kurt Vonneg Preaching may give more defin answers, but it is art that a proaches ethics in all its co plexity. And it is art that conne this amalgam of philosoph religion, and mathematics Calvin College.

Traditionally, issues tend divide the campus into two warri camps: us, the students, and the the professors, administrators, the "system." The students typica virulently denounce the evils of "t



ɛm" and propose nothing better
s place. In concluding I'd like to
d that stereotype and make a
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logue editor cannot help being
d when a set of committees
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ɛs of *Dialogue* from the normal
n to six, cutting the budget
ɔrdingly, as happened this year.
e the proverbial chicken,
logue was plucked. The reason-
backed only by the vague
nations of a few committee
ɑbers, was that certain issues of
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nough students. In other words,
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ɛrve to exist. Such an attitude
ɛs *The National Enquirer* or
mi Vice, or even cross-stitch as
nacles of our cultural
evement, while relegating the
ighted creations of a John
ɑne or Gustav Mahler to
curity. But how does one fight a
ɑmittee? A committee can
ɔme something faceless, mind-
, and voiceless, a device with
ch to evade responsibility. Plato
ɔgnized the danger the arts
ɜent; he banished poets from his
ɔublic to ensure conformity.
haps Calvin should do so too,
ɑaps it does already. Things
ɑld run more smoothly, more like
ɛkwork. Shelley's famed quote
ld then be revised to "Poets are
unacknowledged, legislated of
world." Art by definition is not
ctical; often it is not popular
ɑer, especially in 20th century
ɑerica. But then is Calvinism

popular today? Are Christian ideals ever popular? It's frightening to see Calvin's student body approximate the average body in the 80s—a body buzzing with caffeine, avid for security and success on one hand, while as apathetic as a person recovering from a hangover on the other. It's frightening to see students suppressed who are devoted to the life of Calvin College as much as to their own futures. It's frightening to see professors unable to say what they believe to be true for fear of losing their tenures or jobs. Let's not be chicken-hearted in the face of truth, let's not have a smooth-running utopia of amicable robots at Calvin College. A flawless exterior is no guarantee of good fruit, as some seem to think; the Pharisees were excellent white-washers. That is something for students, professors, administrators, and even the constituency to ponder. Cluck, cluck, cluck.

—MJR

On Immoral Fiction

by Kurt Hoeksema

Book reading, like talking on the front porch, holding hands, and walking in the woods, has been forced into a corner of cultural irrelevance. Why read Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* when you can see the movie version by Francois Truffant? Why mess around with dating when you can get what you want right away? The demise of book reading can be blamed in part on the convenience of other media. Reading does take concentration and a certain amount of effort, which modern entertainment discourages.

But decline in book reading is only a result of a greater problem—a debate over the nature of reality and truty. I'm not being overdramatic. There have been instances in world history in which the debate over the nature of reality and truth didn't matter. Os Guinnes in *The Gravedigger File* mentioned the West Bank of Paris in the 1930s. Greats like Picasso, Sartre, Gide, Malraux, Bunuel, deBeauvoir all had gathered there, but in the 1930s they produced no great works of art. Their collective indifference toward truth and reality undermined those individual geniuses during that decade, said Guinness.

If you're still not convinced and the nature of truth and reality seems obvious to you, try to explain it to a younger brother or your parents. While you're trying to explain, ask yourself these questions: Is *Miami Vice* real? Is Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* real? Is free love real? Is college real?

Are any of these true? In modern society, what is visible is the sole reality and the sole truth. Under these terms, book reading, containing no real visual content, would have no value, and *Miami Vice,* an ecstasy of the visual, would be an experience of divinity. Reality can rightly be seen as what we see. But reality and truth aren't interchangeable terms. Truth comes in the form of communication (written or spoken) and includes the ambiguity and misunderstanding that goes with communication.

Reading questions the common understanding of reality. I've been criticized for liking experimental fiction for its questioning of reality. But I maintain that all good writing (literature included) questions some form of reality. Literary critics like John Gardner call for an objective, moral reality in a piece of fiction for an understanding of the human condition. As a Christian, I can see the need for standards in understanding humanity.

But I also see the subjective, immoral realities of this world. Surely nuclear war is neither an objective nor a moral reality. One subjective lunatic decides to push the button, and the world could be over. Nor is the destruction of the world ever a moral choice. In a novel like *Cat's Cradle,* Kurt Vonnegut satirizes the absurdities of nuclear war and of religion and its perversions. Novelists like Robert Coover, William Gass, John Barth, and Kurt Vonnegut explore these and other absurdities with an energy that is surprising for their pessimistic tendencies. Vonnegut and other modern writers have trouble giving solutions to human problems, but at least they have some of the questions right. All too often the objective moralists have the answers but don't ask the questions—"Sin results in death, but don't ask us why it has to be so horrible." Nor are these modern writers totally subjective. They believe in evil. And they hope in their pessimistic way that writing is relevant, somehow valuable. For they ask, what is relevant if reading and writing aren't? Is watching *M*A*S*H* relevant? Is drinking beer relevant? Is dissecting a cat relevant?

Some of the immoral fiction is bad, both aesthetically and morally. But overall, these writers understand the brokenness of all we once believed is necessary to get us thinking again about this world we live in. Only when the gospel emphasizes that we are in this world along with its traditional emphasis of not being of it will we communicate with the best writers. But enough of this. I feel like walking in the woods; are you doing anything this Friday night?

—Sonja Overvoorde

Dialogue 9

Talking with Prometheus

Those who participated in the January, 1987 interim, "Marxism in Toronto," conducted an interview with Bruce Cockburn.

Cockburn, a Canadian musician, appeals to many through the medium of his music. He writes songs in poetic form, much like Bob Dylan and John Lennon, in order to draw the listener into the lyrical content.

A good deal of Cockburn's material expresses concern with political issues, especially the political state of Nicaragua. The interview, however, covers many different topics, including religion, artistic responsibility, revolution and its role in the '60s and '70s, and his role in the music industry.

Professor Zuidervaart of the Philosophy Department travelled with a group of Calvin students to Toronto. Nine students from Calvin and three from the Institute for Christian Studies participated in the one-month analysis of Marxism and its role in the arts and literature. This group included the following students: Sarita Baker, Paul DeJong, Gary DeLang, Dennis Epplett, Judy Rhebergen, Jeanne Rikkers, David Smilde, Phil Stapert, Rachel VerBurg, Priscilla Reimes, Fran Wong, and Henry Luttikhuizen.

The interim was structured in such a way that students received a good deal of free time. Each morning the group met for three hours. The afternoons were set aside for exploration of the city, excursions to museums, art galleries, and films, concerts, and other cultural events.

The morning sessions usually included discussion of assigned reading material. The discussions were intense and challenging, yet enjoyable. Bruce Cockburn attended one of these sessions, and his conversation with the group follows.

DeLang: What sort of people in music have influenced you or do you like?

Cockburn: I don't really like the work of that many people in the pop music scene, or in any scene for that matter. I guess I'm kind of fussy. Generally speaking, I like the pop music that has strong lyrical content. Chrissie Hynde, for instance, is somebody whose work I like a lot. The people who were an influence on me initially were John Lennon, Bob Dylan—again, people who had some substance to their lyrics. They were, in fact, the people who led the way in showing that you could actually use a pop song to say something. Before them there wasn't much of that. There was the whole bit of what has been called folk music—all the way through Pete Seeger who influenced Bob Dylan. Dylan, of course, had an influence on the rock scene in his early days.

As for classical music I don't know enough about it to know whom I prefer. I like a lot of Renaissance music that I've heard—Bartok, Sibelius, some of the more modern things—but I'm not very up-to-date on what's going on currently.

DeLang: You said that you are mainly attracted to lyrical content in music but who has influenced you musically?

Cockburn: Musically, the influences are more—well, they come from everywhere really, least of all the classical area. I like ethnic music from all over the place, blues (that's a big one), country blues (from the Southern states) which I first learned to play on finger-style guitar, rock and roll (Buddy Holly, the Ventures—in those days nobody really thought about lyrics, they were just there to carry a tune). Early rock and roll is what got me interested in music in the first place. It's hard to pin down any one important influence other than the sort of basic ones. The guitar style I use is very much derived from the blues guitar styles of several people, mainly from the 1920s. But whenever I hear anything I like, it sort of incorporates itself into that momentum too.

Reimes: How entangled is the medium with the message? How much do the form and content relate to each other?

Cockburn: It'd be pretty hard to separate them, but the relationship varies from context to context. For example, the relationship in an album situation is different from that in a live situation, and different again from a theoretical situation where we're talking about it like this or I'm talking to a journalist. I don't spend a lot of time thinking about this really. There are certain things I want to get said and I get a certain impulse to write a song. Then you want to make it sound good after that. So my way of looking at it is pretty much a pragmatic one—how do I get these words out musically, or how do I support them musically and bring out what I want to bring out? Then, how do we record that so people are moved by it and I am moved by it?

DeLang: Who are you working with right now?

Cockburn: At the moment I'm not really working. We've got one show coming up in March, which is a benefit here in town. Other than that I'm not going to work until next September or October, and then I'll be working solo, actually, for the first time in a long time. Five or six years with the band—I need a break from it, mostly because it's tiring trying to keep track of where all these people are going on the road and what they're all doing.

DeLang: There is also a lot more involved monetarily with a rock band and going on the road, isn't there? What led you to do that about five or six years ago? Money influences?

Cockburn: Definitely there is more involved. But money was not really involved. I'll make more money going solo than with the band—which I don't have any particular objection to—but that's not the reason for doing it. I'm making a living as it is.

But the band for me is different. The medium of rock music for me is a very viable one. I'm getting fed up with it because there is so much of it around, and you can never get away from it. I hear somebody like Billy Bragg come along who does basically just solo stuff, but, although he has weak points about what he does, it's really refreshing to hear someone do something with just a guitar, whether it's electric or not. I guess I'm going through the same sort of thing now that led me to form a band in the first place, which was that I was tired of my own company on stage and I wanted to get some input from somewhere else. I've had enough of that for a while.

DeLang: Obviously that means a change in style. Will this change your music lyrically as well?

Cockburn: I don't know, because I haven't written any songs lately.

Baker: You were saying that all of the rock music out there bothers you. Do you see this pluralism as a problem?

Cockburn: I wonder. Because rock music has the ear of so many people it can be an effective medium for getting information out, or for swinging people's feelings, at least temporarily. It's also the "opiate of the masses" in a way that the church has never been successful in being. It's this sort of large-scale palliate that is impressed

on us to some extent. It's not just rock music either, but it's everything that's on the radio all the time, from Barry Manilow, to the stuff that comes out of Nashville, to whatever else. In the same way, you can have a rock band—like Run DMC—that is extremely revolutionary in their attitude but has a sort of dual function of rabble rousers on the one hand and social drug on the other. And that's a tricky balance. I think you have to take it one step at a time if you're involved in it as I am. You say "Do I really want my song on the radio in between the other ones that are on? Is it going to mean anything to anybody? Then you usually decide to take the chance that it will, because there is nothing to be gained by maintaining silence. But you have to have your wits about you to maintain any level of meaning in what you are doing, and to do that I have to step back from it every now and then to see where I actually am. The more you get embroiled in the political arena, too, the more you tend to lose the perspective of things, because you adopt a certain cause, for instance. You have to shake off the rhetoric that goes with that cause. In my case it is the Central American issue I have become associated with, and I'm very clear where I stand on that. But at the same time I have to keep my eyes open for any factors that might come along and change that stance. Therefore, I cannot get caught up in all the revolutionary rhetoric or the rhetoric of imperialism and all the "isms" generally. When you start talking about "isms" you start losing sight of the truth. That doesn't have very much to do with being surrounded by rock music but it seems to be part of that same picture. Rock music is a medium the same way that newspapers and television are media, and it has its political ramifications as do those other media whether the people practicing them know that or not. Obviously, anytime I come out with a song called "Call It Democracy" it is very conspicuously political in its tone, but so is any song by any black musician that doesn't address the issue of "blackness," for instance, because it's playing into the status quo. That may not be a particularly evil thing at that moment, but it has that overtone.

VerBurg: Do new events trigger songs, and can they change your ideas of things? Do you have a basic foundation for your beliefs?

Cockburn: I have a basic foundation in my Christian beliefs, but, in terms of a particular issue, I've changed my mind a couple of times over the years. If there are songs that express that change, they show up. There's a song on one of my older albums called "Gavin's Woodpile," in which I say something to the effect that there really aren't any political solutions. I firmly believed that at the time and in a certain way I still do, because whatever we accomplish with politics is going to be less than perfect. But at that time I didn't recognize any value to conscious political action, and I certainly didn't recognize the unconscious political action that we're carrying on all of the time. It wasn't until I went to Central America and saw what politics really meant in a direct way that I changed. Growing up in this country, the political scene, like the rest of the Canadian scene, has an overriding blandness that tends to make you take it for granted. You can vote for the NDP or you can vote for the conservatives, but in the end the quality of life doesn't seem to change much. It goes on much as it did before when the Liberals were in. That's not true across the board, but generally it is, compared to the situation of the people in Guatemala, or Nicaragua, or Honduras, or just about anywhere else outside the developed world. Those are people who are faced with politics on a day-to-day basis, and on a life-and-death basis. People got killed in Guatemala for wearing glasses because it might mean that they could read, which is a threat to the status quo. We're not faced with that. But we also better not take what we have for granted, because it may not always be this way. There's nothing that says that this country can't degenerate the way Chile has. That was especially brought home to me going there because Chile looks different from Central America. It's got high-rise buildings and a subway system in Santiago. It looks like a modern European city, until you get to the outskirts and there are concentric rings of more or less developed squatter communities which are always subjected to harassment by the military and police. The innermost ring represents the settlers who have been there the longest. They have houses that look like houses, and maybe electricity and running water. Further from the center of the city there are communities of people whoe live in houses that are made of sewn-together old clothes, and cardboard and bits of tin and lumber, and whatever they scrounge. There communities of several thousand people—three thousand families in one that I was in—without running water and no electricity, and the houses are closer together than you are to me. They tap into hydro lines, and there's a piece of baling wire coming down to someone's house that runs a lightbulb. They've dug up the storm sewer to get water, or the water line in one case, and there is a group of people lined up to get water with sawed-off gasoline cans. That's politics. Those people used to have a democratic government, and the present government is

perhaps the only military government Chile has ever had. It could happen here. So, philosophy aside, there is a pragmatic point to this. I don't really take back what I said in "Gavin's Woodpile," but it's modified by those experiences I see that there is a need, to word it as cornily as possible, to accept one's civic responsibility. Without that, some asshole's going to come along and start telling us what to do, and we won't be able to do anything about.

Luttikhuizen: What made you select Central America instead of other areas of oppression or poverty?

Cockburn: That was circumstantial. I was given a book of poems by Arnesto Cardenal, who is currently the Minister of Culture in Nicaragua. Those poems were very much a historical document of the recent history of Central America. I got very interested in the bits about the Nicaraguan revolution because it didn't conform to my stereotype of what a public revolution was. There wasn't a blood bath following the triumph, and that sort of thing. And there didn't seem to be the usual sort of charismatic, fist-shaking, caudillo-type leader. I was actually interested in going to Nicaragua out of curiosity but after several months of idly casting around I hadn't succeeded in finding a way to go there other than as a tourist, which I didn't want to do because I wanted to have some kind of inside contact. Osfan came along and asked me if I would like to go for them, so I jumped at the chance. Once I'd been there I was involved.

Do you think U2's work is significant in terms of addressing political concerns?

Rikkers: There is a lot of music that comes out on college radio that never gets heard, because people don't listen to lyrics that have a message unless they're by somebody who has already established himself. John Cougar Mellencamp can sing songs about farmers because he's already established himself as a good rocker. In the States, you have to wait so long to hear something that has something to say.

Cockburn: Yeah, it's boring. That's always going to be true I think. There's something in Trotsky's *Literature and Revolution* that says that the masses are never going to want to move unless somebody drives them to it. I think that's a given. There's a certain inertia that systems of society are always set up to enhance, the pop music system being no exception. The whole system is based on dealing with a manipulable public. It's like the fashion industry. Whatever somebody dictates as being "groovy" this year is what they can convince everybody to buy. That's the way most people like it, because they don't want to think about it. They've got enough trouble in their lives already, without having to deal with those things that they consider peripheral. The trick is to convince them that of course it's not peripheral at all.

Rhebergen: Do you feel that your music has made some sort of difference?

Cockburn: In a small way I think it has. I base that on letters that I get from people. There are three or four people who have written me letters saying they were inspired to go to Nicaragua on work brigades and stuff from hearing the songs, which makes them feel pretty good, because at that point you know there's actually contact. There are a lot of other people who have written saying that they were affected one way or another by this stuff. But it's obviously a very small scale thing. That's where the one-on-one comes into it. In a way you throw all this stuff out into a big scene, but the real effect of it is always going to be one-to-one. The greater the number of people exposed to it, the greater the possibilities for that one-on-one experience. In the end that's what happens. I don't really write the songs to try to convince people of anything. I write the songs because I am moved. After the fact I say, "Yeah, I want people to hear this," because I know that I saw and felt, and I think other people, if they were in that position, would have seen and felt the same thing. So I want to show them what that was, but I can't start out to write a song from that point of view because it becomes a piece of propaganda. I manipulate it too much myself and editorialize, instead of just showing what I saw.

Rhebergen: So you're hoping in a certain way that you're affecting someone?

Cockburn: In a cautious way I'm hopeful.

DeJong: I'm interested in the evolution of your natural progression or a conscious change?

Cockburn: Yeah, I guess so. It's kind of a reflex or involuntary impulse. The initial impetus to change was that I was tired of what I was doing. I think the first thing that got me interested was discovering reggae music, which is very much a rhythm-oriented music and rhythm in a way that's pretty hard to do by myself. You can sort of approximate it. I got interested in getting some of that into my music, and I was just exploring things I hadn't explored before. I had explored a

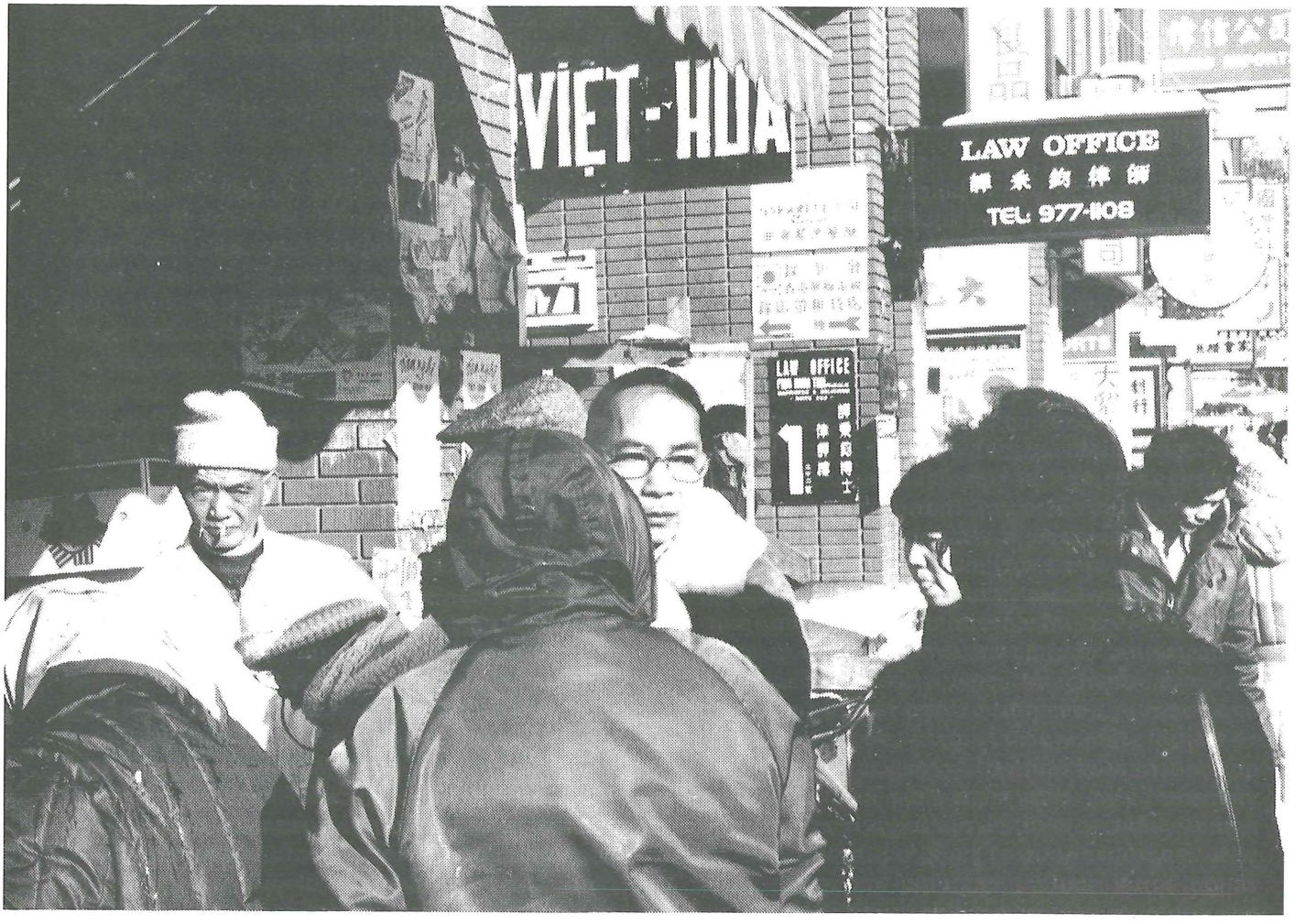
lot of approaches to music that could be done in a solitary way, but I hadn't really, since my days in a rock band, paid much attention to what you could do with a group of musicians, whether the result was jazz or some kind of collective folk music, rock or whatever. When the punk movement came along it sort of revitalized rock for me, because all of a sudden it wasn't disco anymore and again there were lyrics that were saying something. There was an intensity about it and a sort of fist-shaking rawness that was exciting. I wanted to feel some of that excitement about my own stuff too. So that got me heading in those directions and then once you start of course you realize there's the possibility that these songs might get played on the radio more than the old songs did. Then you start looking at it when you're making an album. You say "which one of these songs could be a single?" Then you have to start watching out, because you can kill it by giving too much of that kind of attention to it.

VerBurg: Do you see a lot of political movies like *Salvador* for example?

Cockburn: I haven't seen *Salvador,* but I saw *Missing.* Yeah, I guess I go to a fair number of those kinds of movies for the same reason that I like the kind of music I do—because I want to go see a movie that is about something. I don't go to very many comedies.

Luttikhuizen: So "realism" means a lot to you? That is, if you go to see something in the visual arts it will be something you can relate to politically.

Cockburn: Not necessarily. That's different for me. Although I like a lot of stuff that I can relate to in a direct way, there's a lot of less representational art that I really like too. The same with music. As soon as you eliminate the lyrics in music you have a much more abstract political element. In some cases you have political element that's not discernable at all. Sibelius, for instance, had a political, or was perceived as performing a political act, when he played symphonies with titles that had elements of Finnish nationalism. But the actual music doesn't say anything about anything; it just exists. The same is true of painting and so on. It doesn't matter so much whether the art has a particular message or not. This is where the form and content thing gets hard to pin down, because it may be more valid



even if it doesn't have a particular message.
Luttikhuizen: Would you say you're more concerned with the artistic process than the product?
Cockburn: I'd say the fun lies in the artistic process, but I'm concerned about the product.
Smilde: It seems like rebellious music serves as an inculturation tool for acceptance into the status quo which had the appearance of rebellion. What will it take to have a widespread rebellion or integrity in music again? Will it take another war?
Cockburn: In this culture it's hard to say what that will be. I don't think, for instance, it's a question of the integrity in the music as much as it's a question of the social function of the music and how it's used. The sensibility of the New Wave movement—if you can call it a movement—definitely plays into the status quo because it's blantantly cynical and materialistic, and that's what the status quo is all about. In the early days of rock and roll there was an element of rebellion. It was more conscious in the '60s and it was maybe more of a focus for the widespread sentiments that were around. But in the end it wasn't any more of a rebellion than the guys in their yellow shirts that Trotsky talks about in *Literature and Revolution.* That's the reason why so many people sort of swung so far away from it and you had this right-wing backlash that developed throughout the '70s. I think people approached revolutionary change in an extremely naive way. It was all peace and love without any sort of planning and brainwork. It was what he (Trotsky) was talking about in the two pages I read. It was very much a bourgeois revolution to the extent that it was a revolution at all. I mean who was out there in the streets? It was all the children of middle-class parents. The working-class was all over there in uniform being blown away. The same thing is happening now. The same thing happened with rock 'n roll when it first started. It wasn't a conscious rebellion. Elvis Presley and Buddy Holly and those guys didn't sit down and say, "Hey, we're revolutionaries," they're saying "Hey, I want to make some money, this is how I can do it, and this is what I like to do." So they weren't revolutionaries at all. Youth culture was born in that era. You know, the post-war thing. All of a sudden there was a big market that discovered its buying power and it was going to make use of that, so you had rock 'n roll. But again, it was the same kind of rebellion—it's not really rebellion against the status quo, but a rebellion in favor of it almost. We want to have our version of the status quo, you know. We want to have the same thing you guys have, "you guys" being in that case their parents, which is cars and property and the right to do what we want to do. Of course that's an illusion but that's the way it looks when you're a teenager I guess.
Smilde: It seems the era of the late '60s was kind of a rebellion against the establishment, but I don't know that much about it since I'm not from that era. It seems like the rebellion now isn't really that way.
Cockburn: The '60s were very attractive because they had the appearance of rebellion. At the time I didn't think of it as rebellion. I don't think anybody really did. It was more of a giving up. It was like "the world is screwed up and we don't want anything to do with it." It wasn't an activist type of situation at all. Once you had a war with people getting killed, the sensibilities that started with the Beat generation diffused to a lot of people and became the hippie phenomenon. Then you had something that was more socially conscious or more motivated to try to change things, but for most people involved in it, it was never very clear or very directed. People didn't or couldn't say anything about it except that "we all have to love each other," which is basically true. Except what does that mean? Or "You've got to drop out of the system." Of course that's a very subversive thing to do and it was effective in a certain way. But it was only effective until that movement realized its buying power. Then all of a sudden it was "You should go to San Francisco and wear a bunch of flowers in your hair." More than anything else I've summed up the death of the hippie movement as anything meaningful. There used to be a club in Montreal that I played at that was next door to a restaurant that was a Mafioso hangout. The mobsters are always sitting in there, and whenever someone who looked like a hippie came in one of them would go over and play that song on the jukebox. They never said anything or harrassed anyone, but that always happened. It was like "OK, we know where you're coming from." And that, sadly, was true.
Baker: Do you ever feel like you're compelled by the masses to fulfill a certain need or to be a certain way?
Cockburn: Yes. There's a sort of give and take there. I don't think any person can move the masses either. I think that's a role that history decides with hindsight. But it comes down to a question of responsibility. People buy what I do, and I'm obliged to produce what I consider to be quality stuff. I'm also obliged if I go out of my way to say things to people. Then I have to be answerable for what I say. I see it in those terms more than in a generalized social sense. There's some kind of hole there that the last couple of albums has filled in the States, for example,

whereas the earlier albums didn't or were not needed. That kind of need was very evident on the tour that we did with the release of *Stealing Fire* in the States, which was right around the last election. And there were a lot of intense feelings, especially among the people who were coming to the shows, because they were people who were not Reagan supporters. They felt, it seemed, that they had no voice. There's no alternative voice in the States. There's no voice of the left anywhere, or even the middle really. Here were all these people—most of them student-age—who had given up hope in a way, because the Reagan machine seemed like such a steamroller. They were coming to the shows and hearing things that they wanted said, and there was no one who was saying that. There was a really intense emotional feeling in those shows, and it was quite exciting, and I think there was a lot to give and take there. It was evident to me that we were fulfilling a social function there, because we were actually in a position to hearten those people to some degree. You can't ever access how that works or what the degree is, but it was there.

DeLang: Do you feel hopeful as a musician in Canada because there are opportunities for taking chances that aren't found in America?

Cockburn: In a way that's two different questions. Yes, the Canadian scene is more open in certain ways. The American scene, as it is in Canada, is not all one scene. It's regionalized to some extent. You go through New England—especially the rural areas in New Hampshire and Maine—where there's a strongly-entrenched, so-called "counter-culture" scene which has arisen in the Northwest and various other spots around the country. In those scenes there's an audience for me, for instance, that's a little harder to generate than in a city like Miami. You have to be careful when talking about scenes on a national basis. Obviously the industry operates on a national basis and doesn't regard those regional factors very much. It seems to be quite successful in taking that approach. The Canadian music industry is really weird, because it's owned by the American music industry, except for a few small, independent record companies, one of which happens to be mine. I think there's an openness about getting started here perhaps. At least there was when I first came on the scene (I don't know if it's still true), because Canada was sort of discovering itself as a cultural entity and that process is still going on. In the States, the industry is more entrenched. Once you rise above a certain point in the hierarchy of things you run into a stone wall which is not there in the States. The record companies here—and I'm still talking about getting started—can't do anything on their own. They have to ask somebody in LA or New York what to do, and they're not interested in doing anything on their own either. The president of the record companies here are all Americans who are stationed here. That has a tremendous effect on what you can accomplish here. Growing up in this country is a very different prospect. To whatever extent the music rises out of people's experience here. I think you have a greater degree of openness here than you do in the States. We don't grow up saluting the flag. We don't grow up using the term "un-Canadian." There's a whole sensibility in the States that doesn't exist in this country.

DeLang: I'm Canadian, and I've heard the term "un-Canadian" a few times.

Cockburn: That's something that's come along recently. That sensibility is here a lot more deliberately with this government than it's ever been before. It's a very blatant trend to adopt the trappings of the Presidential system in this country. Mulroney wants his picture in all the immigration offices, just like Reagan. There's all this bullshit that these gookies are buying into the success, or what they think of as the success, of the United States. "If we Canadians do all the things the Americans do, then we'll be rich and powerful like them." Of course, that's garbage, because we're not in that position at all. We don't have that kind of money, or that kind of population, or that kind of historical place in things. That sensibility is there, so I'm not surprised that the terms are starting to change, too. In terms of music, you're coming from a different place. I think Canadians grow up in general, even though there is massive ignorance here as well, a little more open to the rest of the world than kids in the United States do. I think we get more international news in the newspapers and on TV. It comes from a different perspective, too, even though it's all from the American wire services. It's presented in our context. So we have a certain objectivity about things that is harder to achieve in the States. But at the same time, we lack the sort of aggressive drive that comes from being told, "You're the best, and you can just go ahead and do whatever the hell you want." Even though that's not really true for most people in the United States they grow up thinking it is. In a way that means things are possible, because you can think of them. In terms of musicians I don't know how that affects what anybody does or who makes it or who doesn't. Obviously, there's more money to be made in the States. The systems are in place to be more powerful and to be more of an influence. Influence in a certain way I mean.

Lionel Richie can influence people to do anything he chooses to influence them to do, as long as its not anything that's not part of the system. Michael Jackson can get people to drink soft-drinks. That kind of potential for influence is there. I guess I'm fulfilling the same kind of function in a certain way, because people think I can influence others about certain political issues. The Steelworkers' union wants to interview me for their magazine, because they think I can somehow enhance their image.

Zuidervaart: Do you think if you had sought your first recording contract from A & A or one of the other big companies that dominated the scene in the late '60s and early '70s, would that have significantly shaded the kind of music you did?

Cockburn: Yes. I would have had to modify what I was doing to a great degree to get accepted by a major record company, unless I happened to get lucky and there was a man in the right place at the right time for me. Those things happen. Dylan got a recording contract coming out of the Folk Movement. He was a novelty, and there was already a trend that way. Holes appear every now and then, if you happen to be lucky enough to slide through. I found a hole like that with Bob Marley and Island Records. Island Records started as a guy with a pushcart in London selling records on the street, and then it became a record company. He got lucky with writing music, and Bob Marley became a tremendous influence because Chris Blackwell got lucky. So we all did. Without that key-chain circumstance we wouldn't have heard Bob Marley. So there are gaps, and there are gaps that nobody can really control. Record companies go around periodically tearing their hair out trying to figure what the next thing will be. It's obvious sales are dropping off and people are bored with whatever is happening. They try this and they try that, and then those windows appear when you come along at one of those moments. Of course whatever doesn't sell is culled quickly, so a lot of people only get to make one album if it doesn't sell a lot. My situation was a very good one for me because it was the first record for a small record company, and the guy who runs the record company is also my manager. He is a very aggressive and astute individual who can get people to do what he wants them to do.

Reimes: In spite of all the breaks that history has given you, you several times voiced a sense of responsibility to invest what's been given to you. Are you able to say that or are you conscious of that?

Cockburn: Yes. I think that goes with being an artist generally. I think there is a certain moral responsibility to tell the truth, first of all, as far as you can discern it, and to be accountable for what you do. I don't subscribe to the view that art has no moral connection, but that's a hard thing to pin down. I wouldn't want to be the one, and I would resist anyone who would try to make a moral code for artists to go by. Nevertheless, there is a moral responsibility there. For instance, I have a responsibility not to write or promote songs that encourage people to use heroin, to take a simple example, because it's personally, spiritually, and socially destructive. I don't want to be responsible for that, for destroying someone's life. There's an artistic responsibility, and on top of that, because I am a Christian, I accept a certain set of moral standards that go with that. I think in general, that doesn't add very much to what I would think about artistic responsibility. It doesn't always look "proper," unfortunately. The responsibility to tell the truth means you'll end up irritating a lot of people a lot of the time.

Epplett: This question depends on your knowledge of a certain group. Do you think U2's work is significant in terms of addressing political concerns?

When you start talking about "—isms," you start losing sight of the truth.

Cockburn: I'm not sure that I have enough knowledge about them. I know their albums, what I hear on the radio, and what I hear about them, so I have some sense of how they are perceived. What they represent in Ireland may be totally different from what they represent in North America. In fact, I would be very surprised if that were not the case. In North America I don't think they represent very much that has anything to do with anything. On the positive side, they make good music and they come from a spiritually and politically acceptable space. On the negative side, I don't think there are enough people in North America that have any idea of what they are talking about except in the Christian community, as far as that type of lyric goes. Politically speaking, none of us know what it's really like living in Ireland to have that. Even though they're not from Northern Ireland, to be looking at the stuff that's happening—it's so close and so horrible. Any statement about that at all, no matter how soft a statement, becomes intense

in that kind of situation, I suspect. Here it's not so intense. I think people see them as having a political and spiritual stance, but in a way it works against their ability to influence people because it's perceived as a nebulous one. They are somehow okay and they are somehow right, but we don't really have to think too hard about how they are right or how they are okay. For something to be politically meaningful in a conscious way, people have to know what you are saying and what it's about. You have to hit them in the face with it in most cases. Most of us are not that willing to do a lot of digging to find out what's behind something.

DeJong: Was it your marketing man who put your song "Maybe the Poet" on *Miami Vice,* or did you okay that?

Cockburn: Well, I didn't resist it. I was aware of it beforehand. I thought it was amusing, first of all. The show is stupid, but a lot of people watch it. I hadn't anticipated them cutting up the song the way they did, but in the end that didn't hurt anything really. The whole thing was so ridiculous. For those who didn't see it, the song talks about the role of poets in society and how they are kept from exercising that role. It has a groovy, Afro beat to it. *Miami Vice* used it in a show about a poet from an unspecified Latin American country, presumably El Salvador, who had been tortured by security police and reduced to wheelchair status. He was coming to Miami to lecture at the University, and the "Vice" squad was assigned to protect his life. He was also going through a severe case of writer's block, which the "Miami Vice" squad was able to counsel him about. He was also the subject of an assassination plot. He was almost broader than you can imagine a stereotype to be. He was a cross between the public image of Dylan Thomas as a drunk and Papell Noruda as a great artist. The guy was so ridiculous, and it was embarrassing, in a way, to see the song in that context. It said nothing about nothing in the end. The only thing it did was implicate the CIA in the attempt to kill this guy, which was actually a pretty progressive thing for "Miami Vice" to do. Subsequently they have done things in that direction that are even more blatant, using that medium, too, to get through to people.

DeJong: I thought it was a good thing in that context. I think there is a good chance that some teenager, at least, was influenced by the song.

Cockburn: Yes. It's a case of trying to get through the swamp without getting muddy. You have to take certain risks to get to the public at all, and that's risk that it'll be tainted beyond all recognition by the time it actually gets out to everybody. Certain people believe that whatever is good will ultimately show through. I'm not so convinced, but sometimes it happens.

Stapert: When you compose a song do you think of the music itself as part of the language that supports the lyrics, or is the music something that is neutral?

Cockburn: I think the music, at least ideally, is an important part of the picture. In some ways that's hard to define, because you can't say that a certain type of music carries a certain type of baggage for the people who hear it. No doubt it carries some. So a certain set of lyrics can work a lot better presented in a reggae context than they will in a Renaissance art song or a rock and roll song. Other kinds of lyrics will work better with a heavier or more aggressive rhythm behind them. It's hard to say exactly why that happens.

They also wanted to put a sticker on it: "Warning, this album contains materials on it that would offend Republicans."

Wong: Was part of your attention to reggae a result of that kind of music traditionally having social and political content?

Cockburn: That's part of it. It has it already built into it. It's grown up around that conveying of messages. It's very easy to put different messages with that music.

Reimes: Do you have a certain method of working, or is the artistic process very spontaneous for you?

Cockburn: It tends to be less spontaneous and more work as I get older, partly because there is a body of work where I have already said certain things. So I have to struggle a little harder to find things to say or ways of saying things that aren't just repeating myself. I keep a notebook and I write ideas for lyrics as I get them, and in that sense there's an element of spontaneity. Rarely, (but sometimes) a whole song will come out at once or almost all at once. I have an idea and it just happens. Most of the time it takes the accumulation of a body of imagery or some catch phrases or some kind of sparking point. When you get enough of that, a song gets generated. Then it's a question of looking for music that

supports it. I am told that I'm not typical in that sense. Most people write music, and then try to find lyrics to fit it. I don't have any idea how that works, or what's involved for them. The act of writing gets less frequent and more demanding as time goes on to the point where it's hardly moving at all. At this point I don't know what to compare it to. In the early stages of something growing, you can see it grow quickly, and later on growth is going on but it's much less obvious.

DeLang: Have you gone through writer's block before?

Cockburn: Yes, I've had that periodically. You have to sort of kick yourself in the ass every once in a while. I think that's probably true no matter what line of work you're in, and it's certainly true on a personal level aside from work. It seems especially true when you're trying to do something "creative." Periodically you have to have your own little cultural revolution. You have to shake yourself free from all the accumulated assumptions, and some people accomplish that by drugs, a new sex partner, or a number of other ways. I've never really figured out how to do that. I just grab at whatever comes along to see if it works.

Rikkers: Is it frustrating for a lot of artists (who don't have the weight to throw around and who want to do something to maintain their integrity) to know that they won't necessarily pull in the big bucks when they try to convey a message?

Cockburn: Yes, it's a tricky thing. What do you do when you are someone who doesn't have an audience? I had an audience before I was a Christian, so I didn't have to deal with getting an audience even though I was a Christian. I had a Christian audience before I said anything that people recognized as political. So when I started doing that I didn't have to come to grips with getting recognized as being too political for someone to handle. I was innocuous in people's eyes when I appeared on the scene. I think if I started out now with the things I am saying, I would have a lot harder time getting any kind of media or industry acceptance.

Rikkers: Do you think the industry in the States, as it works with American audiences, is less willing to try something or do something controversial? Is it the same in British music?

Cockburn: Britain is a weird thing. In the States they'll try anything; they can afford to take chances. There are periods when they are less willing to and other periods where it opens up. Nevertheless, American record companies don't care what you say on records, as long as you can sell it. They get uptight if the word "fuck" appears in a song, like in "Call It Democracy." We went through this ridiculous discussion with MCA in the States about highlighting the word "fuck" in yellow ink on the back which they did against our will. Then they changed it on the next issue of the album, and we were told the lyrics would be on the back but not the yellow highlighting. It's so self-defeating and ridiculous anyway, because of the whole thing with the Washington wives and the attempt to get a campaign against excesses—as they thought of them—in rock music. They all wanted to play it safe, and be able to say their bases were covered. I know that they personally didn't care one way or another. They wanted to be able to send the album into the radio station and have the radio people, who in some cases act as a self-appointed conscience for the nation in terms of rock music because they don't want to get sued, play it. They also wanted to put a sticker on it and everything that said something like, "Warning, this album contains materials on it that would offend Republicans." That would get it on the front racks of record stores.

Epplett: As an artist who addresses social and political concerns, do you feel that you are not accepted by some people in the Christian church?

Cockburn: Oh yes. I guess I've always been on the fringe of the church in the sense that I didn't grow up in it. I mostly went to an Anglican church when I was going to church more than I do now, because once I had gone a few times I knew what was happening. Also, I came to Christianity through C.S. Lewis and other Anglicans, so I sort of knew what I was getting into. I tried for a while to be a Fundamentalist without much success. There are certain people who think that I have lost it or am lost, because I take the side of a bunch of "commies" in Central America or maybe I use language that's not sanctioned in my songs. Or maybe it's because I have a girlfriend to whom I'm not married or whatever people know or think they know about me. There's always going to be somebody who gets outraged easily, but in the end that doesn't really matter. I could never be a card-carrying communist for the same reason. I would always be doing something that would irritate the Party.

DeLang: How are you viewed in Quebec? What is the music scene like there?

Cockburn: I don't think people in Quebec are particularly impressed with my attempts to write in French, but they did like the fact that we put translations on albums—especially a few years ago when the language issue was a lot hotter than it is now. It gave us an opportunity to tour in more of Quebec than just Montreal. The Quebec music scene is hard to sustain because the

audience is so limited in size. They're very loyal but eventually they get bored. There are just so many musicians who can work in such a small scene. Right now I think it is in a state of decay because the artists are performing in English. There is not enough money to support them singing in French. That will change again. There's bound to be another backlash. It's been allowed to slide and things haven't really changed. Quebec still has to fight no matter how many concessions it gets from the Federal Government. Culturally, it is still an underdog and always will be in North America, because by itself it's not that big. East of Quebec it's a whole other thing with all those Newfoundlanders out there. The pop music that happens in Newfoundland has a strong element of folk music in it. They listen to the same records we do, but the bands out there that I've heard all have some element of folk music about them mixed with rock in varying degrees.

Luttikhuizen: How do you feel about pop music sung in English hitting nations where English is not the primary language?

Cockburn: It's sort of paradoxical. On the one hand, it's another aspect of colonialism. On the other hand, it's a lot of other things too—dance music that doesn't mean anything more than that. People throughout the developed world—Western world, I guess I should say—are used to listening to English language pop music. In Italy, people learn their English by trying to decipher English records. That's good in a way, because it means they aren't bothered by going out and listening to an English artist, whereas we would have a very hard time trying to motivate ourselves to go out and hear an Italian rock band, because we wouldn't know what was going on. They at least think that they know what's going on. They don't always. That's the down side of it. They hear a few words and think they know what the song is about, but they don't unless they can sit down with the lyrics and read them. They really don't always have a clue, which is a weird thing to work with. The first tour in Italy that we did was like that. In most cases the shows were organized by the local Communist Party or Communist radio stations. They were embarrassed about all the God stuff in the songs, being a bunch of godless materialists, they chose to portray me as an environmentalist. Nobody could say different because they thought, "This guy is really into nature." They just didn't want to know they need the Soviet Union at this point; it's their bread and butter in certain areas of the economy anyway. There are a lot of Marxists who think the Soviet system must be good since it professes to Marxist, too. Maybe East Germany is an even better example because it's more blatant there. We did "Maybe the Poet" in this big festival in East Berlin, which was called "The International Festival of Political Song" and had an audience of maybe 100,000 people. They were all in the Communist Youth Movement, because if they weren't they would have had a very hard time getting tickets to go to this thing. That's the way the society is set up. We had a translator who was making comments before the songs. We did the song and I said, "The thing we have to keep in mind, and I'm sure you know(because they do know) is that they don't like the Russians in East Germany at all personally. They can't philosophically disagree though, at least overtly." I made this little statement of the fact that East and West are not so different: "In the West we subdue our poets economically and write them off in various ways. In the East we put them in insane asylums and silence them in more physical ways." The translator did a lot of swallowing and gulping, and left a lot out. Each person reading those lyrics has to go through the same thing on their own and make the judgment.

Luttikhuizen: How do you feel if an audience doesn't understand your lyrics, or if the majority of people you are singing to don't?

Cockburn: Is a different thing. People try to understand in Germany, where they are more familiar with English. They can usually follow to some extent if they can hear them. The sound thing becomes real important then. There the shows are just an ad for the album: "Okay, go out and buy the album. You can find out what we're really saying." The first time you hear a song in any language, even if you speak the language, you never get all the words anyway. So they buy the albums with translations in German and all that, and they figure out exactly what is being said. The same thing happens in Japan.

Reimes: So your albums are available with translations?

Cockburn: Yes, in those countries.

Reimes: Even in the East?

Cockburn: They come out in East Germany, and I think that's the only one. That's because it's the only country that the album company in West Germany can reach. That's our major European contact. There was some talk of getting one or more of them out in Russia, but I don't think that has materialized. There are bootlegs floating around in the Eastern bloc. In fact somebody a few years ago sent me a picture of one of my albums being held up in front of the Kremlin by someone who appeared to be Russian. I know

that the albums are in Central America. Somebody wrote me recounting an episode in El Salvador where they met somebody who had been down there as part of some type of church delegation. They hadn't really gotten to see anything except what the officials wanted them to see. They could see all around them how horrible everything was, but couldn't really get to it. The guy was quite disappointed. He ended up sitting in a restaurant the day before he left El Salvador. There was only one other guy in the restaurant and he was Salvadorian. They got to talking, and it turned out he was a musician. He knew American musicians, and this guy asked him if he'd ever heard of me. His voice dropped, and he said, "Yes, he's really great, but we can't get his albums here." So this guy said he would send him one. The Salvadorian said, "Okay, but don't send it in its own cover. Send it in a Rolling Stones cover, otherwise I'll get killed." You hear stuff like that, and you know that it's there and getting to someone. I'd like to have the albums out in the East, because whenever the albums are out and they do anything, I get a chance to tour and see what's going on.

Smilde: Could you share some of your views, experiences, and perspectives on Central America?

Cockburn: Nicaragua is a very beautiful country, first of all. It's physically beautiful and climatically beautiful—it has everything that a country should have, in a way. From the early colonial days until a few years ago, it was consistently and ruthlessly exploited. As in other exploited countries, people don't always like that. There are always those people who make a living from that situation, and there are those who support those people—the workers in the factories, for example, and the middle-class kids who go to college and get exposed to philosophical and political ideas, and experiences from other countries. Eventually those sentiments culminate in a revolution like the way they are now. It's a revolution that has taken the form of a socialist revolution. It's been spearheaded by the Sandinistas, most of whom declare themselves Marxists. It's a revolution that would have happened. It would have found some other rhetoric if Marxist rhetoric hadn't been there to support it or to focus it. The need for revolution was there, and really there, too, like it was in France. In fact, that's a fairly workable way to think about it too, in terms of the French Revolution. The same would be true if it happens in all the other countries in Latin America as it is bound to do. You just can't keep that many people that long without something exploding. That's the basic picture. On top of that you have everybody's invested interest being expressed. What we get in North American newspapers and television is very distorted. It's distorted in favor of the Republican point of view even in Canada, because we get all our news from the same wire services. It has been manipulated to a great degree, as we are finding out from the elements of the Iran-Contra affair which are dribbled out to us. It is an interesting strategy that's being used there, and in a way it's a good introduction to media manipulation. The White House has this concept of "staying ahead of the curve" whereby they know that all this bad news is going to come out. So they release it themselves, but they release one little point at a time. That means that it

I don't subscribe to the view that art has no moral connection, but I wouldn't want to be the one, and I will resist anyone who would try to make a moral code for artists to go by.

appears on page nine instead of getting headlines. So most of the people who read the newspaper will never see it, and those who do see it are influenced subliminally to think that it's of lesser importance than a lot of other things that are going on. In the meantime, we're getting all these revelations that are just as much an exposure of an institutionalized system of deceit as the Watergate thing was in the '60s. All through the '60s people were saying, "The CIA is spying on students" and "My phone is being tapped" and all this stuff. I always thought it was just paranoia and probably drug-induced. In the end it wasn't that way at all. Everyone's conspiracy theory turned out to be right. There's no reason to believe that's not the case right now. I know from my own experiences and contacts with people that almost anything you can think of as going on is going on. We're just seeing the tip of the iceberg with these revelations that are coming out. So it's important when you're looking at El Salvador and Nicaragua particularly, to bear in mind that no matter how objective you're trying to be, you have been conditioned by some very subtle deliberate attempts to make sure that you are conditioned that way. That's true for me and for all of us. Basically, the Sandinistas represent the

aspirations of the Nicaraguan people. They definitely do. There's no question about that, no matter how much people bitch about specific programs or the lack thereof in Nicaragua. They voted them in in a fair election. They like the fact that they are in now. You can go to parts of the country like anywhere else where there is less support or there is more support. What that means to me is that it is a country that has elected its government and has every right to govern itself the way it sees fit. We should allow it to do so, encourage it to do so, and support its attempts to do that. In the end, the thing that scares the Reaganites and people of that ilk about Nicaragua is that it's a case in point. If it succeeds, all the other countries can point at Nicaragua and say, "They did it. We can do it too," and they will.

The Salvadorian said, "Okay, but don't send it in its own cover. Send it in a Rolling Stones cover, otherwise I'll get killed."

They will anyway. That's where the Republican/right wing point-of-view falls down. It's that those revolutions are going to happen anyway and the sooner we in the developed world get off our asses, support them, and try to encourage positive social change, the less bloody, disastrous, and catastrophic those revolutions will be. The longer we wait the worse it will be, just like South Africa. Nobody has acted until now, and it's hard to imagine any outcome to the events in South Africa that's not just going to be a horror show.

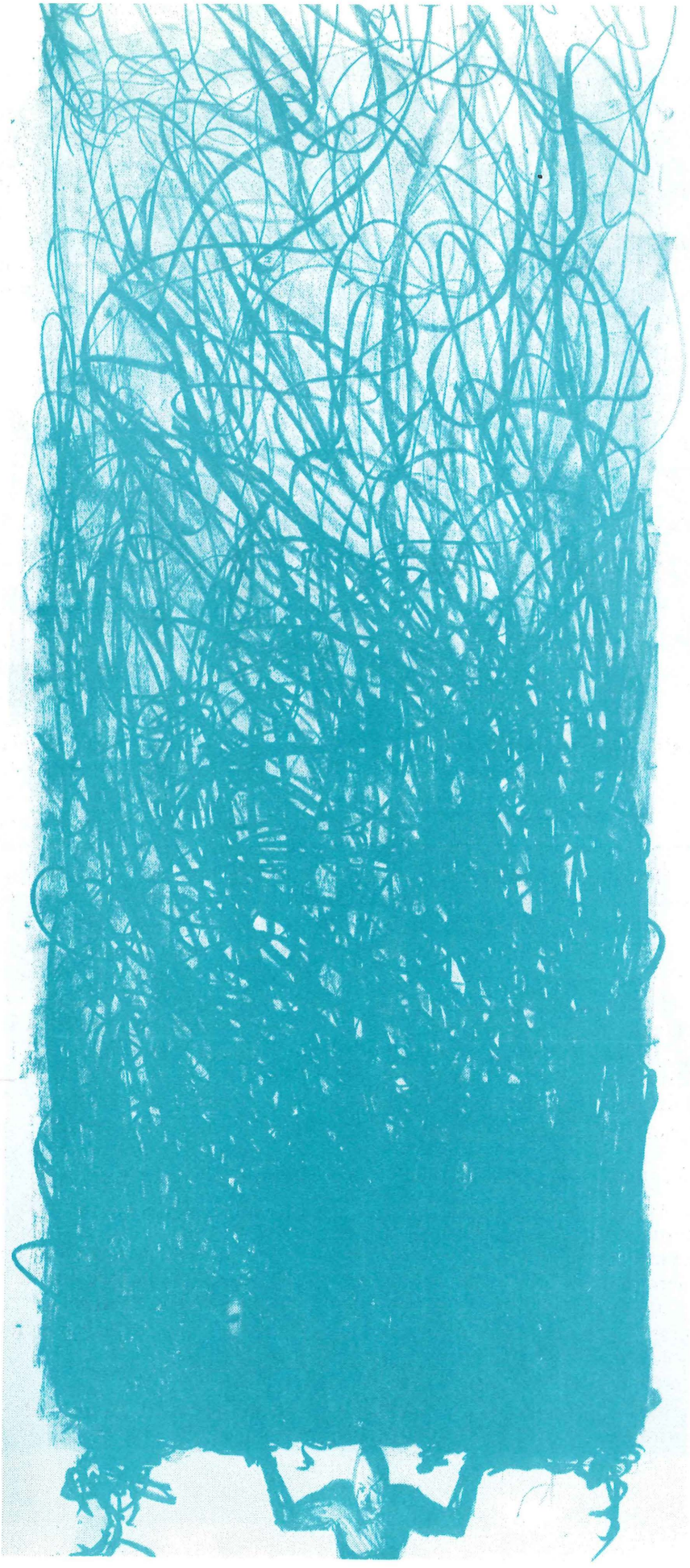
Smilde: It seems the irony of the situation is that in our interfering we are causing the thing we don't want. We didn't want a "Little Russia" in Nicaragua so we are trying to conquer the Marxist faction there, but we are pushing them toward Russia.

Cockburn: Of course. The understanding that I have of it is a horrible one. I'm not sure that this is right, but this is how I perceive it. I think that the policy that we go by as Canadians and Americans is so cynical. They know very well that there is no danger of Nicaragua becoming a Soviet satellite, but they're losing money. So they will make it a Soviet satellite so they can say they have to destroy it because it's a Soviet satellite. Then they'll be able to make money again. I think that's what it's all about. I don't think it has anything at the bottom to do with who controls what part of the world, except as a source of income. I'm sure the people who make the policy cloak the problem in rhetoric for themselves. They make themselves feel better by pretending that the world is threatened by communism.

Smilde: Is that an indication of the imperialism of multinationals who need the resources of Nicaragua to exploit?

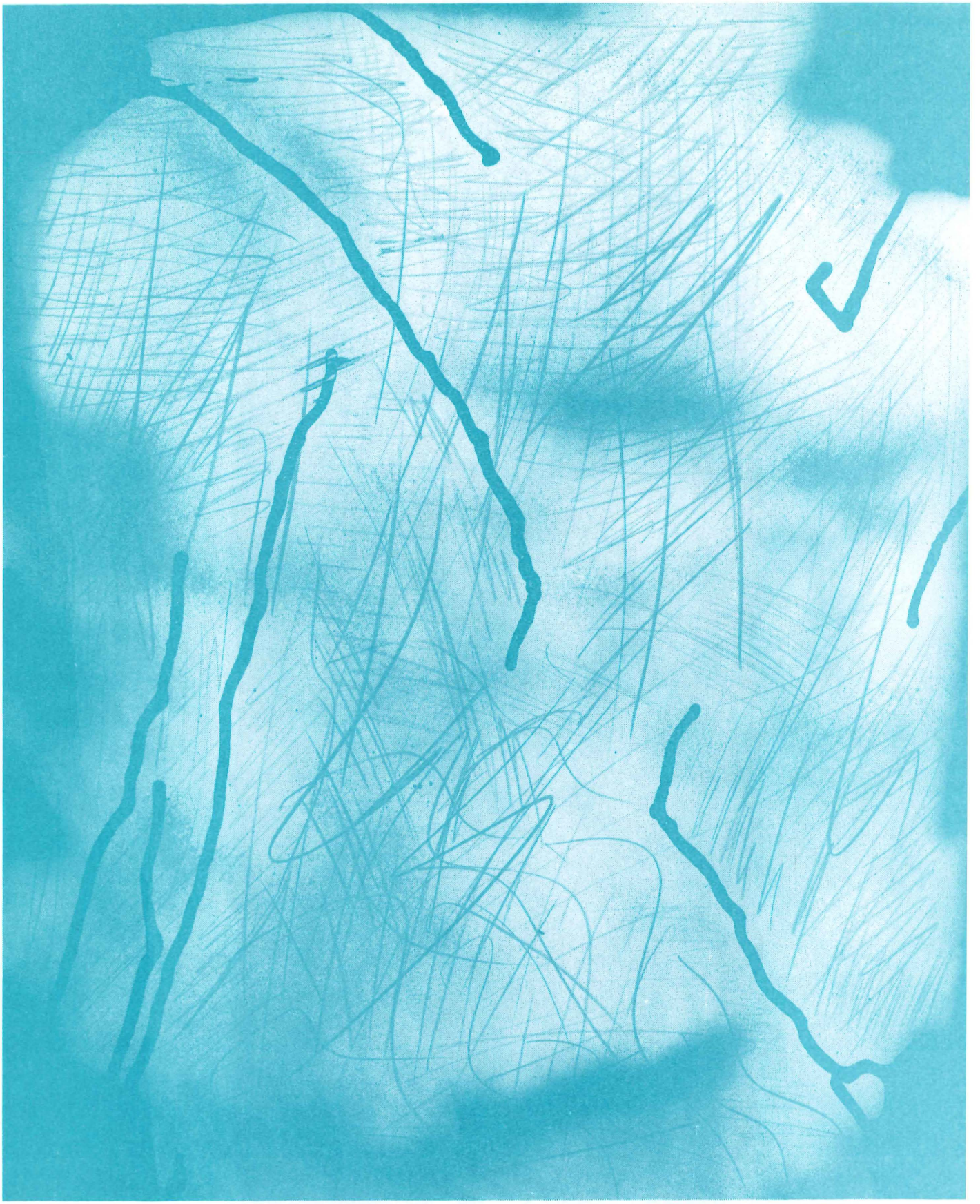
Cockburn: Yes. Calling them multinationals is sort of dangerous. There is a danger in being able to put a name on these things, because you can't conceive of "a multinational." What is it? How do you picture it in your head, and how do you fight it? I find it better to think of the people as individuals, because then I can conceive of someone making these choices. Then the rest of us are in some way or another allowing them to do that. It's a strange thing. We're all afraid and grow up afraid of all kinds of stuff, so it's easy to buy into it. We've always had them, but in this age we have the fears that go with the great peculiarities of the age-technology, the massification of the age, and so on. Because you can't put a face on technology and you can't put a face on being swallowed in some huge collectivity, you want to attach it to something. Then you immediately become vulnerable to manipulation by people who have something to gain. It's particularly evident in the Christian community, where it's easy to say, "Communists don't believe in God. Communists are expansionists in their Russian manifestation at least." Therefore, you are threatened personally by the existence of communism, so any manifestation of communism has to be rooted out for the protection of God. Now God doesn't need us to protect Him, I don't think, but half of the Christian world thinks He does. I've had arguments with people on that very point. It's okay that the Guatemalan government kills a million of its citizens, because we have to keep godless communism out. I've had a Christian look me right in the eye and say that very thing: "How can this guy call himself a Christian? How can he talk about love on one hand and do this on the other?" It's because he's afraid, and because someone gave him a convenient place to put that fear.

—Photography by David Smilde,



—Sonja Overvoorde

Dialogue 23



—Tom Bryan

ON THE EDGE

Pulsating strategies amplify confidence
unreasonable resistance affects solitary conditioning
solidly concealed cerebral exchanges
inadvertently blocks flow of
massive rivers of conceptual awareness
single-minded myopics accentuate the divide
Polarities prime misunderstandings by becoming elements in a static reality
rigidly held polar positions dry up rich lakes of stored energy
affected by discourteous impulses
neither either/or nor both/and will captivate the actual
Reality is a massive complex of interwoven complexities
within the complex are arrays of possibilities
to insist upon polar structures
disavows the complexity of the given arrays
It is possible to maintain
several structures simultaneously
that seem contradictory yet
address differing aspects of reality
Inter-relational concerns bind
several assumed polarities into a unifying complex...

—Tom Bryant

Portfolio

LAMBERT

HIKING

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EASTERN LESSON

question:

if
infinite
is
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would
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believe?

answer:

if infinite
is
large
would
you
understand?

EVENING IN SPRING

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named
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showered
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I-94 TOWARDS LENT

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sun
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PUZZLE, 1986

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cosmic
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logs
beating
questions
into
night.

No Home on the Coast

By Rachel Van Harmelen

A concerned elderly lady once remarked after hearing that I was a preacher's daughter: "Oh you poor soul! Have you moved often?" I nodded. She looked toward my mother disapprovingly, "It's not good for a child not to have a place to call home." She clicked her tongue twice and walked away.

I stood and watched her walk away, puzzled by her reaction. I had never considered myself homeless. I could not fathom her idea that home was a specific place—a house, a neighborhood, or a town. I have lived in many houses, but have only one home.

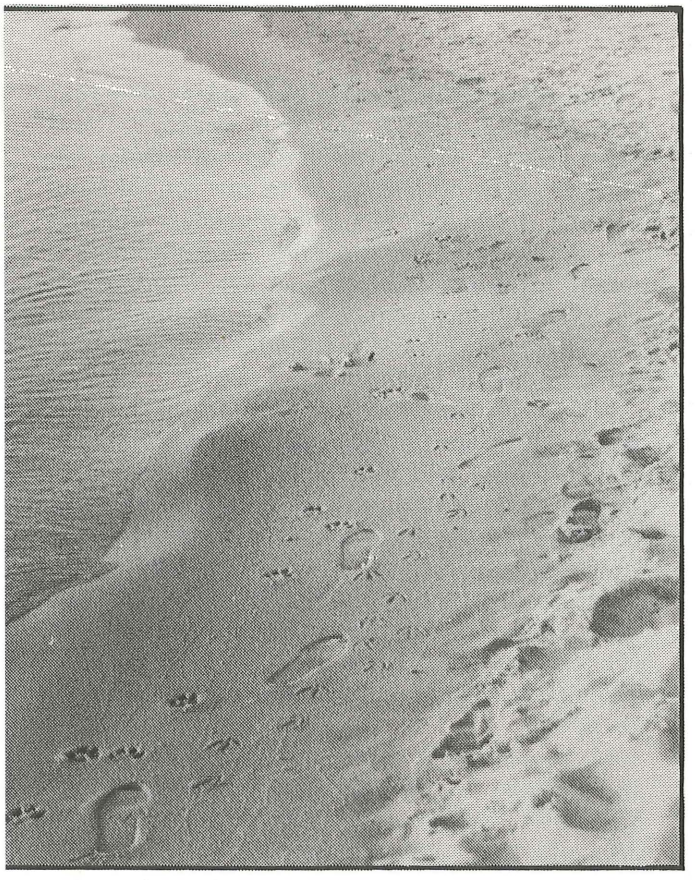
In the middle of the winter of my 13th year, my father was asked to come pastor a church in Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia. He asked the six of us children one night at the supper table if we felt like moving. We hauled out the *Atlas* and gathered round the map of eastern Canada to locate Shubenacadie. Later that night, we sat around the living room, planning, talking excitedly about what life would be like there, all of us restless and ready to pack up and leave that very night.

Two months later we toasted the New Year in the candlelight of an empty house. We sat on boxes in a circle, my brothers singing '60s folk music, restless songs about travelling and endless highways. I watched them in the midst of their music, anxious about our journey. I had some reservations about going, but did not voice them. I was afraid that my fears would be a sign that I didn't belong with them. And when we left for Nova Scotia, I knew that if I did not belong with my family, I would not belong anywhere.

We trekked 1600 miles in the dead of winter, imagining ever more splendid visions of our destination. But when we arrived in Nova Scotia there was not much to see. The church was puny; it looked like a trailer with a steeple. Next door was the parsonage, a tiny two-bedroom house with a flooded basement and dark, ugly decor. We just unloaded our boxes and tried hard to hide our despondency. That night we ate our first meal in Nova Scotia with an elder's family from the church. They were stern, conservative Dutch farmers. They had nine children, lived quiet lives, and worked long, hard hours. Sitting around their table that night, I felt completely estranged. They watched us dubiously and gawked at my three hippy brothers, glancing now and then toward my father, as if they had not known we were part of the deal.

That night I slept on the floor of my new bedroom. Hiding myself deep in my sleeping bag, I lay awake most of the night, feeling empty and frightened. I pulled the bag suit tightly over my head and tried to imagine that we had not moved, but my feet were cold and my head ached, and I laid there shivering til morning.

The next day was dismal and grey. And the day after. And in the months that came after, my whole world seemed covered with dank fog. At school I joined the band and basketball team but sat alone in the library during lunch. When I did get attention it was for my novelty and what they called "cute southern accent." My older brother quit school. My other two brothers could not find work and grew more frustrated and depressed each day. My sister would just sit in our room every night writing letters until I finally would become angry and yell at her to turn off the light. The house was crowded. The church people drained the basement and tried to fix it up with panelling and carpet. But my brothers got sick from the constant dampness and soon the carpet



started to rot. I tried not to think about what I was doing. I hated the hollowness I felt seeing my family in such disarray. We argued and at night we didn't sit around with coffee to talk like we used to; we just watched stupid programs on the television.

Gradually we got everything unpacked. My oldest brother found a job. The days cleared and the dreary winter began to fade away. The first nice day that spring we all got into the van and drove to the coast. The beach stretched for miles, and I was amazed at how far the shoreline had receded with the out-going tide. Far out I could see placid green water, fading into foamy whiteness at its edge. Tommy and I ran far down the beach. Our feet pounded in the wet sand, and soon our shoes were soaked and whitened by the icy salt water. But we ran and ran, pounding out the frustration of the past winter into the sand.

After that day Nova Scotia was never quite the same. The dark fog came and went often, but I started to love that fog as it came in with the tide on the river. I became fascinated with the river at low tide, the way the water seemed to stand still, the way the sticky red clay reflected the sunlight. I even made some friends at school. My brothers moved to Halifax, where they had jobs and their own apartment. But my sister still sat on her bed writing letters to her friends.

Kids at school were nice to me but I never saw them outside of school hours, and I was never invited to parties or the movies. They could never get used to the idea that I was a preacher's daughter. They seemed to tiptoe around so not to offend me. Meanwhile, they christened me "P.K." and laughed at my Michigan dipthongs.

Tommy had it easier. He went to a small Christian school and found friends rather quickly. I know he got razzed for not knowing how to play hockey, but he seemed happy in those first years at his school. My sister graduated the first spring we were in Nova Scotia and got a job in a gift shop. She didn't know what she wanted to do. At night she still wrote her epistles. At times she talked about college, but she always meant that to be a year or two away. The move had displaced her worse than the rest of us. All her plans had been ruined. I knew that when she went to college it would not be in Nova Scotia but in Michigan. And I sympathized with her longings for the familiar.

The church people were distant that first year. I think they wondered what they had gotten themselves into when they hired my father. They still shook their heads at my brothers' long hair and cringed when they came to the house unexpectedly and found my father smoking his pipe. In those first years I always got the feeling that they thought we were a little odd and a little less than devout.

But the ocean made up for the misgivings we had about the place. We'd meet there, the whole family, for picnics, and we'd swim until late in the afternoon. Sometimes we'd go there early in the morning to clam. We'd search the sand flats at low tide for tiny holes in the wet sand. When we found the holes, we'd dig until we could pull the clams out of the mud with our fingers. When we left, the flats would be torn up and ugly, but the tide always came in and went out again, restoring the beauty. At the ocean, I felt I'd finally found a place worthy of being called home, and I vowed that one day I would live there in a tiny cottage and never move away.

My brothers were restless though, and by the following spring they were ready to be on their way. This time would be different. This time they would go alone. Nova Scotia was no more home to them than had been Hamilton or Riverdrive Park. The next place always looked better than the place they were leaving—until they got there.

So in July they gave their landlord notice, sold the Kawasaki, donned strong leather boots, and packed their duffel bags. We drove them to the Nova Scotia border. We stopped along the side of the highway and I remember their tear-rimmed

eyes and trembling voices as we said goodbye. I remember their strong hugs and kissing them quickly so they could not see me cry, and leaving them there on the side of the road, my three big brothers with their duffel bags, their cigarettes and romantic plans. Two turned and started walking; Mark put out his thumb and waved with the other arm until we were out of sight.

They went to Michigan for a while and then decided to try California. All that winter they hitchhiked the golden west. Off and on we got long, exciting letters about their travels. When we didn't, we'd all worry and try not to talk about them.

My sister decided to do volunteer work in Colombia the following summer. After that she made plans to go to Calvin College back in Michigan. She thought it was home. She still made daily trips to the post office.

Toward the end of the second year at my new school, I finally made a place for myself. I was elected to student council. People invited me to sit with them during lunch. A pleasant redhead asked me to come to her house after school. They started to call me Rachel, and only rarely after that time did I hear "P.K." They lost their fascination with the way I talked. Sometimes they could even forget that I wasn't really one of them.

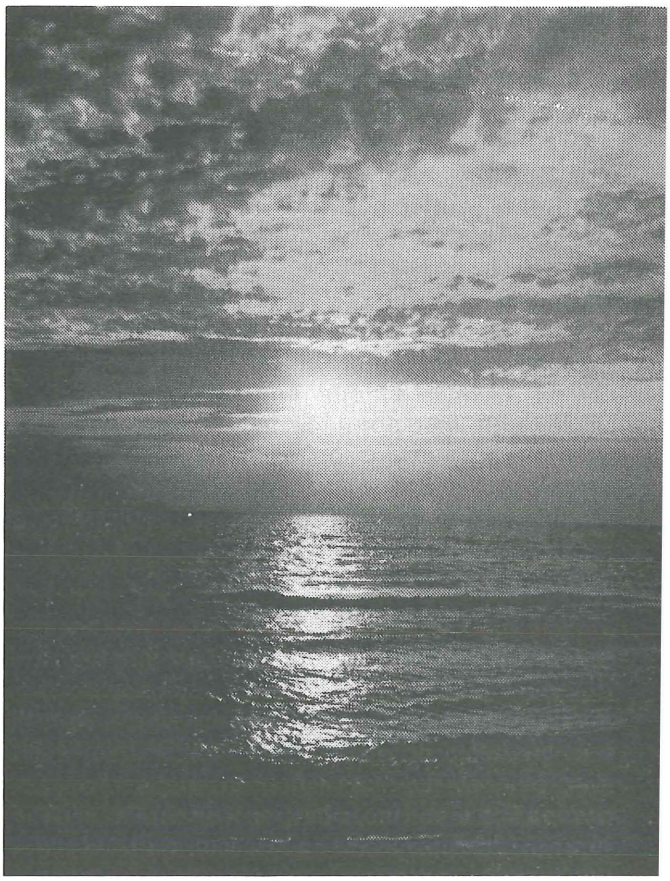
The summer my sister was in Colombia we spent three weeks camping on the coast. The park was a sprawling wilderness, and at night I could see more stars than I ever knew existed. Each night I fell asleep to the distant roar of the waves as they broke over the lagoon. In the morning it was always damp and cold. I would hurry into clammy jeans and a sweatshirt and bike with Tommy to the lagoon. The beach was deserted so early in the morning, and at low tide the sand flats stretched on and on, shining gloriously in the rising sun, the fog receding with the lap, lap of the waves. Tommy and I would sit there and watch the sandpipers frantically hunting a breakfast of bugs and algae. Sometimes we talked, but mostly we just sat there dazzled by the serenity of the place. We'd wade in tidal pools already warmed by the rising sun.

The days on the coast that summer seemed like heaven to me. I fell in love with the Atlantic, my days moved with the rhythm of the tides. I grew accustomed to the frigid salt water and the feeling of sand between my toes. My skin turned dark brown and my hair almost white. Tommy would build a fire, and we'd all huddle around its warmth, gazing upward to the stars, tired after another day of swimming and clamming in the salty wind.

That school year I was in ninth grade. The year brought me an MVP award in basketball and many friends. I finally felt like an insider. In March a new student came to our school from Ontario. I watched her sitting in class the first day, obviously nervous and self-conscious, a picture of myself two years earlier. I thought to warn her that acceptance takes time, but I never did. Three months later her family packed up and moved back to Toronto.

We got a phone call from my brothers in late March. They were in Houston and were hungry and flat broke. My dad sighed heavily and wired them money. Two days later we picked them up at a desolate bus station on the Maine border. I remember them saying when they walked in the door of our tiny house, thin and pale and trail-worn, that it felt so good to be home. I was puzzled because I knew that Nova Scotia had never been their home and I knew that it could never be.

My sister met a young man at Calvin College and decided to get married. She brought him home at Christmas. We took him to the coast in that cold, icy December. The tide was out and the seaweed was frozen into piles on the sand flats. The water was ice-blue and foaming. We walked to the edge of the waves and my sister's fiance



stood silent in the subzero wind, awed by the ocean's roar. I liked him from that moment. The following semester they got married in Michigan. We made the trip out for the wedding.

My brothers once again found jobs and got an apartment on their own. My mom and dad made friends in the church and went out visiting at night. On Sundays the congregation took on a new air, warm and familial.

In the evenings that school year Tommy and I would hike to the river and watch the logs float out with the tide. If there were a full moon, the marsh would sometimes be flooded by the high tides and freeze over. Then we'd skate there in the moonlight, chasing each other along the river's edge, occasionally startled by sharp cracks from the ice that would send us flying for solid ground. Tommy and I were happy, secure, and content with our lives. Mom and dad talked to real estate agents about buying a house, the ultimate symbol of performance, something we had never dared consider before.

My brothers decided to leave again. . .back to Michigan. I wondered how they could just pack up and leave us all behind. Moving seemed too easy for them. But we received long letters from them after they left. They were homesick, they said, and on Christmas Eve I thought they were close to crying over the phone. That night I sensed that home was not the Nova Scotia we'd grown to love, nor the people who had accepted us as their own, but the circle of my family—we six children and my parents.

That winter my sister was pregnant and her husband had to quit college to work. We picked them up at the train station, Elizabeth five months pregnant, with swollen ankles. The reunion was joyous, and she was crying with happiness to be home once more. I watched her carefully, but she wrote no letters. I wondered if she had realized the hopelessness of trying to find a home in terms of places that would sooner or later be left behind.

Our lives moved slowly. We were all serene and satisfied. In the summer we went camping on the coast. We spoiled our brand-new nephew. We got long letters from my brothers. I thought about college and where it might take me. And I realized our stay in Nova Scotia would be no more permanent than any one of the "homes" I'd grown to love.

In the spring of 1985 my father decided that his work in Shubenacadie was finished. There were goodbye parties, good-luck cakes and presents and tears. My friends acted betrayed and could not understand why we hadn't settled there permanently. Hadn't Shubenacadie become our home? I shrugged because I knew they wouldn't understand. In the last few weeks of our stay the distant coldness returned, as if they suddenly remembered that I was not one of them. The night before we left we drove to the coast. The tide was the lowest we'd ever seen, and the sand flats were wet and shiny with the light of a full moon. The ocean was strangely calm. From the swamps behind the dunes I heard the repeated cry of a loon. The water was so placid that I could not even identify its sound. As I walked down the sand flats, the moon's reflection was always ahead of me. At the water's edge wavelets splashed lightly on my toes. Suddenly Tommy was beside me and we walked waist deep in the rippling waves. I knew that if I looked at him I would cry, so I stared straight ahead into the silvery water. He said nothing, but stood straight and tall beside me; in the silence we shared a silent sorrow. As we turned to head back I saw my father farther down the flat, pipe in hand, standing slumped and weary. I led Tommy the other way. But father saw us, and turning his back to the ocean, came plodding along behind us. My mother stood farther up the beach in the dry sand. We stood together there for a while, then headed for the van, defying this place that had tried to become our home. When I last looked, the sky had turned black and bitter, and an angry wind swept the waves into a fury, the sand flats quickly covered by the foaming waves. I thought to myself as we drove away that we took our home with us, even though the ocean remained.

—Illustrated by Laura R. Herder

Variations on a Theme
Opus 1 & 2

I.
THAT SHY SMILE

There is a girl who sits alone
And munches her tiny lunch with tiny bites;
Every day in a corner, every day alone,
She quickly eats and quickly alights.

One day I decided to give it a try,
So I sat and watched and waited a while;
I saw my chance and introduced myself with a lie,
But all she could manage was a tight-lipped shy smile.

I sat down beside her and played the part of Freud
While she munched to one side and missed my eye—
I tried to get inside, but she left me in the void,
So I gave up and found my friend—then I saw her cry.

Since then that corner seat remains empty,
But I think about her smile when I start to eat
And I wonder if I am just as empty
As that lonely, awkward corner seat.

II.
WHEN THE FIRE BRIGADE WENT BY

This morning when the fire brigade went by
I wondered where it was going, and why—
Just like yesterday and the day before.
Chrome fittings blurrr into red speeed—
Bluered strobe pounds pounds as the Siren ro(screams)ars;
49 or 57—that what it did.
A Tar fire HErE aND a car flre there
CONFUsED cars break aNd TURN and movE right quick

With snakeSalive blAck coats wResTle
Smoking BlACK bURNs anD tears ANd blEEds the cUt
VENGEful FLAmes RIP and CUT and KiCK at briCKS
aND wreCKS AnD gLass ANd blOODANDFLESHAND

This morning when the fire brigade went by
I knew where it was going, and why.

Words & Works

Tim VanNoord

"But what is the theme—why did you put these poems together?"

I had hoped that someone would raise this question. One of the main reasons that I married "Smile" and "Fire Brigade" was to puzzle the reader into thinking about the common thread woven through the two.

These two poems are in many ways radically different. One is clear, concrete, and to the point while the other is vague, crumbling, and a bit uneasy on the eye and the intellect. But both are introspective. "Smile" needs little explanation: what you see is what you get. "Fire Brigade" was inspired, in part, by W.B. Yeats' poem *The Second Coming:*

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world. . . .

While "Smile" deals with emotional pain, "Fire Brigade" examines a world that is flying apart and the physical pain which results. The fire truck functions in our world as a machine attempting to wrestle whatever can be wrestled from the jaws of destruction. It symbolizes, to me, a world in pain. The common thread then, the theme variated upon: pain: the pain of living in a fallen world: life in a fallen world.

Living in the world that we do is a painful experience: armies chuck missiles at other armies, governments torture citizens, citizens stick knives in each other, husbands beat wives, parents crack children, children thump each other on the playground at school. People kill themselves. Life in a fallen world is a common experience: both Christians and non-Christians feel pain, both Christians and non-Christians can inflict pain. Both Christians and non-Christians are fallen. We need to be redeemed. The human race. Every man, every woman, every child. Christians have recognized this need for redemption by recognizing the pain and realizing that we, as fallen people, are responsible for it. Responsible to God. Responsible to Christ. Responsible for the cross.

But this world in which we live has found a way to ignore the pain: superficiality. We gloss it over with a few too many beers and try to patch the cracks in our armor with the latest word from Hollywood. We measure worth by the state of the external, the temporary, rather than the internal, the eternal. We measure beauty by the shape of a nose rather than the shape of a heart. We cover our "defects," our individual differences, rather than celebrate them.

"Isn't he digressing a bit from the point?"

Maybe, but his is all part of the world that I see, the world that I am part of. All parts of the world that I see are fused into me and my poetry. I am as superficial as anyone else—I often play the part of Freud when I should be a friend. I inflict pain. I stick knives into turned backs. But it bothers me.

I don't like to be superficial, I don't like to conform, I don't like to inflict pain, but I do. We all do. We have common links. We hold common ground. We all are fallen. We all sin. We all inflict pain. We all feel pain.

The protagonist in both poems looks, at first, superficially, but is forced to take a deeper look at his world and himself: the tear in the girl's eye shows the presence of pain, just as does the fire truck flying by. The pain exists at the beginning of both poems and can be found, if searched for: why does she eat alone? why does she leave so fast? why the same routine every day? what about the fire truck—just another fire truck—so what? Think about where it is going. The flames, the glass, the blood. It symbolizes pain. She symbolizes pain. Pain abounds, sometimes hidden in a corner without a sound, sometimes screaming by. It is there if we look for it, there if we ask "why?". But, I am not a sadist. I don't enjoy pain. I don't enjoy writing about pain. I write about pain so that I may recognize pain and try to do something about alleviating it rather than, in my ignorance, inflicting more of it.

"We need a new realization of *the artist as translator*. . .we must have an art that translates, conveys us to the [core] of the deepest reality which otherwise 'we may die without ever having known'; that *transmits* us there, not in the sense of bringing the information to the receiver but of putting the receiver in the place of the event—alive."

So writes contemporary poet Denise Levertov in her book *The Poet in the World.* Pain is part of the reality that I see. We need to recognize it, rather than deny it. We need to reach out to that girl in the corner rather than laugh at her. We need to ask "why?" rather than "what?". But, we must first realize the pain before we can search for a way to change it. Of course, we can't stop every fire or car crash before it happens. We can smile. We can say hello. We can reach out to those nearby. Easier said than done. I don't smile enough. I look away when others pass by. I try to convince myself that by writing about pain I've done my part. But it's not enough, we must put love into practice. We must at least try.

"But how can this be 'Christian poetry'? You mention nothing of Jesus or God—you show only pain."

I don't want these poems to be "religious" poems. They are meant to bump the brain into asking questions. They're meant to begin a search for answers to questions and questions to answer. Within the word "question" exists the word "quest." Eventually an open heart will find truth, will find an end to the quest. The Truth. The End. I can't force the truth upon someone, by doing so truth would be cheapened, would be made to appear weaker than it is. I dislike it when others cram ideas down my throat and never give me a chance to explore them for myself—my first, and many times only, reaction is to reject outright these ideas and those persons pitching them. People have depth, many times unknown to themselves, and, with the power of the Spirit, they will be led in the right direction through the process of finding out more about themselves by seeing themselves through themselves. My job is to point the way by poking about at what lies beneath the surface, to take a deeper look.

" 'Why do you speak to people in parables?'

He replied, 'The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. This is why I speak to them in parables:

Though seeing, they do not see;
  though hearing, they do not hear or
  understand.
In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah:
  "You will be ever hearing but never
    understanding;
  you will be ever seeing but never
    perceiving.
  For this people's heart has become
    calloused;
  they hardly hear with their ears,
  and they have closed their eyes.
  Otherwise they might see with their eyes,
    hear with their ears,
    understand with their hearts
    and turn, and I would heal them." ' "

In Matthew 13, Christ addresses His disciples' question about His use of parables: why doesn't He tell it straight—why use parables? Christ responds by stating that the "people's heart has become calloused," otherwise they could see and hear who He was. I'm not trying to be presumptuous by putting any poet or poetry on the same level as Christ and the Word, but I feel that a Christian writer today is facing an audience in the "secular" population which has also grown tired of seeing and hearing the Word in front of them—they would rather read a "secular" novel or a "secular" poem than read something that quotes

the Bible in every other line. We had enough of stuff," they say, when we were kids in Sunday School." So a Christian artist must somehow find a way to present the Truth by arranging symbols in ways which might not be explicit, but which will still point the way. It's not easy to do. Some will say you're not saying enough, while others won't touch art created by Christians. It is a difficult position to be in, but a position that needs to be occupied by those who feel they are called to communicate to the "world" via written words or other artistic channels.

"The poet does not *use* poetry, but is at the service of poetry."

Ms. Levertov again.

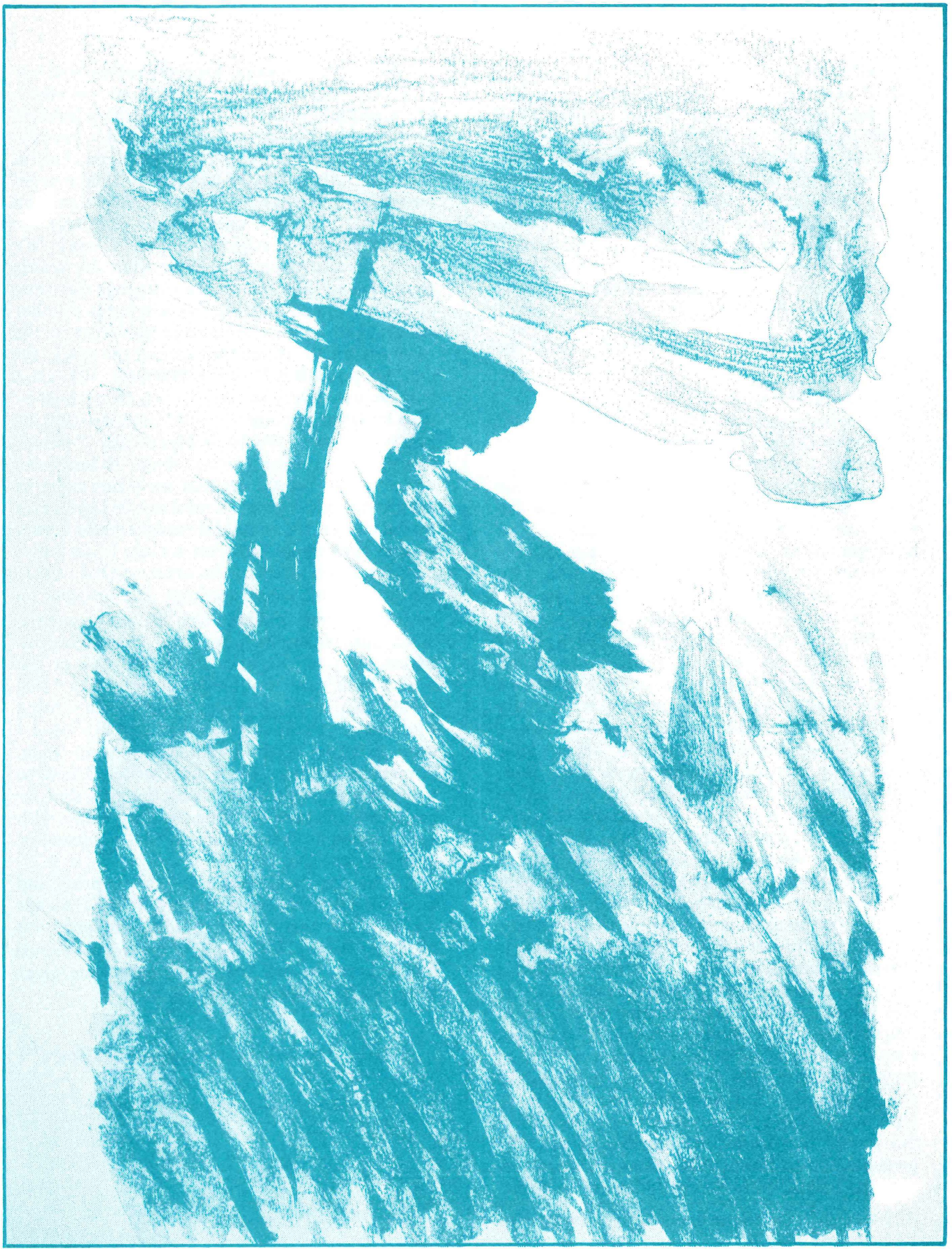
I write because I have to. I write because I want to. I write things that might appeal to anyone occupying a position in the human race, but I also write about my Christianity and my "spiritual status." As a Christian, I know the source of Truth and Love, the ultimate End of any quest—as a fallen man I am always wandering from that source—as a wanderer who is a Christian, my guilt tells me when my footsteps are out of place—as a guilty seeker I search for a way back to the source of Life. Fallen people constantly search—we have to. Because we are fallen we live every moment striving to obtain certain goals that we can never reach. Goals grounded in the world never grant satisfaction—we always demand more than what they can give. They grant only discontentment. As Christians, Christ should be our goal, a perfection that we must strive for, a perfection we can never reach. But we must keep striving. We must strive to be like Christ. We must acknowledge the pain of failure, but build upon that failure and that pain after leaving it in the past. And we can only build now, in the present, at this moment. One of the ways that I monitor and move my search along is to write about it. I come to understand new things about myself and God by organizing my thoughts into visible entities. I pray on paper with pen and ink, forcing myself to concentrate on every word. I write letters to God which get answered even as they are being written. It is a way to meditate and concentrate on God and your relationship to Him, to see the questions that you have, to feel the praise flow from the fingertips, to ask forgiveness and to think about what the word forgiveness means. I use poetry and poetry uses me.

"I thought this was an essay on art—he gives us an essay, on life."

"Yes, because I think that every person that has lived, is living, and will live is an artist, and time is our medium. When our time on earth is finished so is our work of art, however flawed it may be. Yet every moment that we live is a work of art in itself, for only in the present are we able to mold ourselves, to change the shape of who we are and what we do. In the end, only God can judge the motives and the meanings behind the work. We won't have to explain to Him what the words mean, He already knows. He will judge the value of the work, and only He. He will judge whether the art is to be burned or to be perfected by the Master's touch. He commissioned the work. He paid the price. It is His time, His tools, His talent that we use. Every moment given to us must be used to define the inner "vision" placed within the heart—we must try to interpret this "vision," translate it, into terms that others can understand—but the art that we create must be faithful to that "vision": it must not be conformed by the viewer, but somehow transform the viewer so that they might see what we see. It must also transform the mind of the artist so that unseen things become seen through the process of creation, things hidden even from the artist's mind until snapping into view, until being revealed. Not to conform should be one of the artist's basic rules. Follow the inner "vision." Not always easy to do. At times I find myself writing what other people want to read and not what I want to write. And sometimes I hate to write. Sometimes it hurts. But I must write—I have to write. We must perform, using the gifts that we have—we must use our time, we must create with every moment. We have no choice: construct or destruct, we must create.

All we can do is read His Words, pray, and have faith that He leads the way. When He leads the way, we must follow, molding ourselves out of lumps of clay. He does lead the way. We must now create: we are artists, we have been given time, we have been shown the way.

"And after the fire came a gentle whisper." I Kings 12:12B.



—Sonja Overvoorde

MAGNIFICAT

Mary's month: blue being her color,
The sky is fresh-washed
That spirits may soar in a shaft of
Gold climbing high that is
Touching with liquid light
Softened form of trees,
    Encouraging.
Lift high white hands to the shining brightness
The center-heart, white-hot
Sears without gentleness, but pours
Gold over green, expectant earth.
Rich tilled, the black soil clings to soles of shoes;
Raised hands commit to the blue and rejoice
In planting.

—Rose Cunningham

TERRA INCOGNITA

What fools call me mother,
Then hang all hope on a stake
Which they daftly pound into my skull?
Their's is a hest (do they understand?):
    They must be purged of familial filth
    To regain the approval of their father.
But how (or how but) by this sacrifice
Could that awful, primeval hiatus be sealed?
This they cannot answer,
For they know not what they are doing.
In blind deference to notions of deceived patriarchs,
They have shunned me too.
For I, they say, bear the seed of alienation
And widen the rift between father and children.
I await them and shall behold their faces
When they realize that I too received their father's love,
And that their hope has joined me, the Earth,
And all Heaven
To them and to their father.

—Matthew Walhout

LeDejeuner Sur l'herbe

by Robert McRuer

Cold morning air always made Jane shiver, but she liked the fresh quietness that came right after dawn. She liked to get up early to watch the chipmunks in the woods; she liked to walk down along the still, misty beach. Jay usually slept an hour or so longer than she whenever they vacationed at his parents' cottage, but she wasn't going to give up her love of the morning for him. Lake Huron was too beautiful to be ignored at seven am, when the sun hung tentatively over the water, a timid but certain reminder that another day was coming, after all. Jane breathed deeply and descended the steps that led down from their deck.

No one was on the beach then, and she began walking toward the pier. Jane wondered if many people would even be there that weekend; the weather reports promised rain. She herself had only seen the McCaffertys, a middle-aged Irish couple, up from Grosse Point, but Mrs. McCafferty had assured her that more would be coming. Mr. McCafferty was quiet and tired, and didn't like to talk much. Mrs. McCafferty, however, did the talking for a party of five. She informed Jane that the house on the end of the beach was being lived in by some Detroit executive *and* his secretary, and that the Wilsons wouldn't be coming on account of Mrs. Wilson's scheduled masectomy. Mr. and Mrs. Steen's son was coming with college friends, but Jane didn't need to worry—Mrs. Steen had promised Mrs. McCafferty *personally* that these kids weren't the rock-and-roll-get-drunk-till-two-am party type. Oh, no. Mrs. McCafferty trusted Mrs. Steen. She was *sure* her son's friends were "nice, happy youngsters." Jane laughed when she remembered Mrs. Steen's serious face. Jane was just two years out of college herself.

Jane Lendon had married Edward John Motman one year and a half earlier, on December 14. It had been a cold month for a marriage, and a bitter, wet snow had plagued the night of rehearsal. Still, they had both been ready, and she had fallen sufficiently in love with him. He was beginning a pastorate the following January, and a wife would be a wonderful support for him in the ministry. She was a good partner.

They had come out to the cottage during their first May of marriage, and had decided to repeat the trek every year. Jay liked to have the time to plan his summer series of sermons. Jane used the time to drink in the sunshine and the blooming flowers. Lake Huron made her feel good about her life.

Jane saw the couple coming down the beach, and they did not see her. She turned and sat down where the sand of the bank met the sand of the beach, and looked at them, still in the distance. They were Rod Steen's college friends.

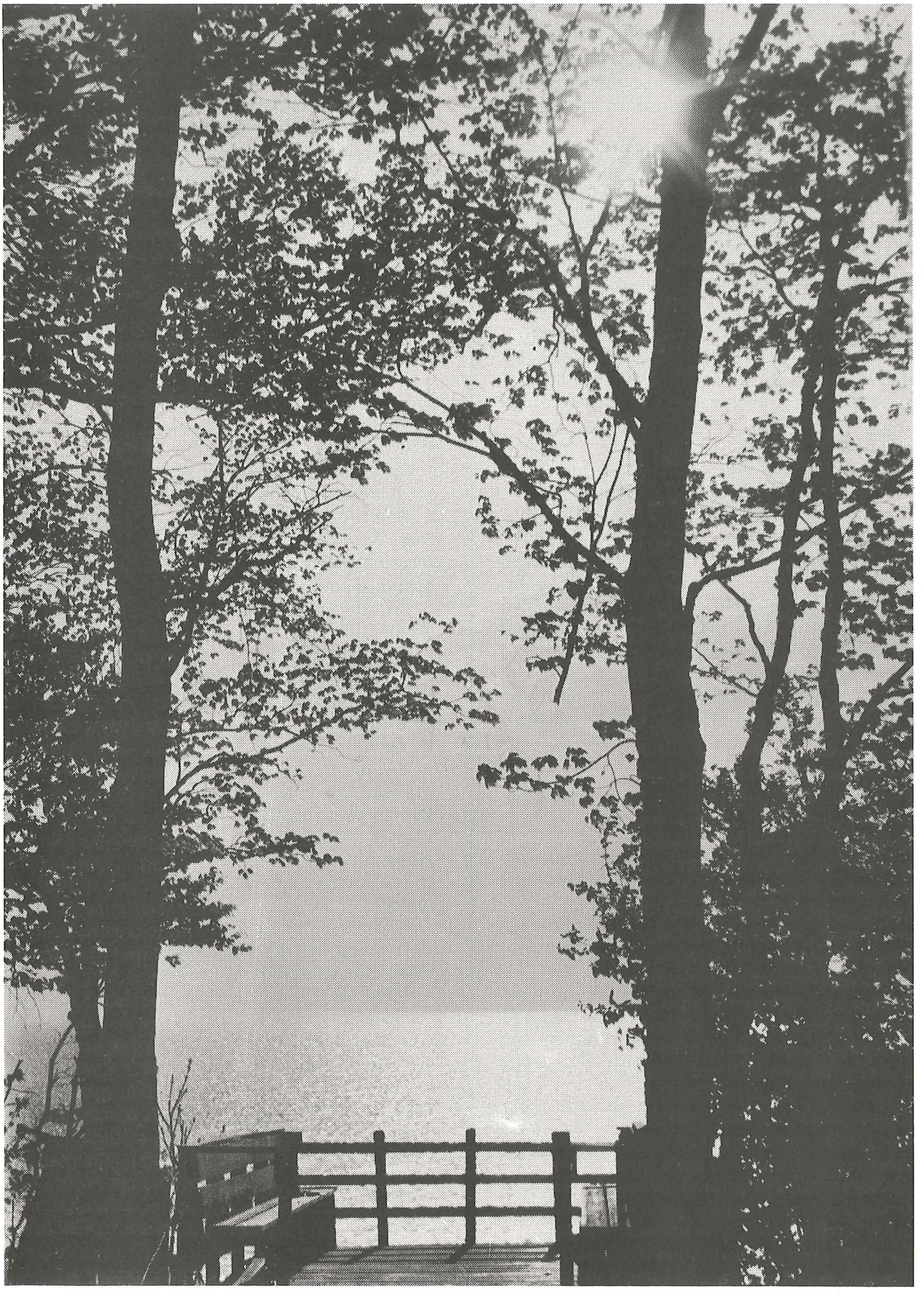
The girl was a dishwater blond, wearing gray sweat pants rolled up to the knees. She kept trying to pull the boy into the water, but laughingly, he was resisting. He was still jingling his car keys, and Jane guessed that they had only just arrived. He threw the keys in the air with his right arm, catching them again with his left. The blond laughed and told him to try it again. He threw the keys up and the girl tried to knock them away, but the young man caught them just above her head. That was when Jane saw that it was Eddie.

"Okay, John Lennon," he had said to her that morning as they climbed out of his '73 Pinto with the baskets and blankets. "Put on your jacket. I know this cold morning air makes you shiver. Let's go now—I've got a perfect place."

Jane laughed and said, "You know, that boy David asked me last night at church if I was really related to John Lennon." She picked up a basket. "I've told him ten times it's *Lendon.*"

They walked down the hillside through the violets and dandelions. Jane was 19, and her light brown hair still hung down to her shoulders. She was done with her sophomore year at the University of Michigan; she was working as a waitress for the summer.

The boy Eddie was just out of high school, a tall young man with tanned arms from working as an outdoor painter. Monday being his day off, the two had driven to a secluded local lake for a picnic. They were to be back for some great aunt's 150th birthday party, but had until five that



evening. The early morning sun glistened on the lake and on the wet grass at the bottom of the hillside. The day was simply and sincerely beautiful.

"This is the place," Eddie announced at the lake's edge. He slowly looked in Jane's direction. "And *you're* going in!"

The boy dropped his basket and lurched toward Jane. She shrieked and dropped what she was carrying, but was not quick enough. Eddie landed on top of her, knocking her to the ground. They rolled laughingly toward the water, but Eddie didn't throw her in. They just suddenly stopped and listened to the quiet of the morning. Finally, Jane got up. "Let's get this thing going."

She picked up the car keys that had fallen out of Eddie's pocket; she threw them in the air. Eddie caught them above her head and threw them up again. Jane laughed and laid out a blanket.

Their luncheon on the grass was heavenly. While they talked, they ate crackers and fruit. Eddie began to sketch an old barn that he saw in the distance. "This beats house painting any day," he said, smiling at Jane.

The couple played catch in the grass, and fed the ducks on the lake. They sang old TV songs, and choruses from their church group: Fairest Lord Jesus, Ruler of all Nature. . . . Jane sighed and was content. "I don't want the summer to end," she said, turning.

"Don't you?" Eddie answered thoughtfully, adding a touch of green to the pond he was then sketching.

"*You* do?"

"I am looking forward to studying art seriously at college."

"Yeah. I guess you need that."

Eddie faced her. "I'm going to paint a great one someday," he said. "Something that shows all I think about life."

"What do you think of life?" Jane returned.

"I don't know yet," he had answered. "Can you wait?"

The young couple had passed without noticing Jane on the bank. Yet still she sat in thought. They would have to pass the cottage on their way back to the Steen's. Jane didn't know then if she would talk to Eddie.

"You're not very talkative," Eddie said to her after they had eaten their croissants. They were drinking the champagne Eddie's mother had reluctantly provided, champagne that Eddie promised would come back half-full. "What are you thinking of?"

"You," Jane had answered. "I'm wondering why you think you don't understand life. We seem to do fine."

Eddie smiled. "Maybe to understand life you've first gotta say that you don't really understand anything."

"Maybe."

"Anyway, an artist doesn't always understand life, he just lives it." Eddie paused. "He starts with love, though," he said finally, "and then he doesn't have much farther to go." He kissed her.

"Eddie!" Jane said, looking at her watch. "We may not make it to Aunt Helen's party."

Eddie stood up, taking his keys from his pocket. As he tossed them in the air, he said, "We may not make it to the nighttime, but at least we had the morning." And she loved him.

"Jane!" a voice called from the deck above. "I'm up."

Jane turned in time to see Jay disappearing into the cottage. "You clod," she said aloud. "Did you even notice the sunshine?" She walked up the steps to make breakfast.

Jay Motman was a 26-year-old Baptist preacher from Ann Arbor. The couple had met during Jane's junior year at Michigan, at a church that she was attending then. Jay was blond, medium height and athletic looking. He was drinking coffee when Jane entered the kitchen.

"What do you think of a summer series on temperance?" he said, looking up.

"Temperance?"

"You know. 'Do all things in moderation' and all that. I could start with the carnal Corinthians and branch out from there."

"Sounds fine, Jay."

"I think so, too, honey. After all, summertime can lead the church through lots of temptations. People take vacations; they have more free time. Dancing, drinking. . . ." Jay was visibly excited. He wanted to reach his people. Jane smiled and shook her head as she popped two waffles into the toaster.

"I know, hon, I get all worked up when I just start preparing my series," Jay conceded. Then, "Hey, did you enjoy your morning walk?"

"Uh-huh. It's a little cold, but so beautiful."

"That's okay. Cold air wakes you up. Makes you think clearly."

"Yeah." They were silent.

"Hey, hon, would you mind if I just took an hour or so this morning to get some of my ideas down on paper? I don't want to interrupt vacation time, but I don't want to forget anything, either."

Jane smiled. "That's no problem. I'll lay in the sun."

"Okay." Jay grinned as she set two waffles before him. "You'll get skin cancer, though, and die before I do."

The McCaffertys were having breakfast on their deck when Jane came outside again. Mrs. McCafferty waved at her. "Those Steen kids are here," she yelled, a morning drink in hand." "I know," Jane yelled back, sitting down in a deck chair. She turned away from the McCaffertys. She wasn't in the mood for a discussion.

"I think a discussion is just what we need now," Eddie said, outside the university book store in Ann Arbor. "You're the one that invited me down here."

"I don't know what to think," Jane said anxiously. "We had a few dates. We get along."

"Don't worry. There was no commitment between *us.* We hadn't made any plans."

"I know." Jane looked down. The sidewalk was covered with crumpled brown and yellow leaves.

"We never talked about *our* future. Maybe I just didn't know what to tell you."

"Isn't that a cop-out?" Jane said, flushing. She was suddenly angry. "Don't you want to know what's coming for us? We had something wonderful. We had tennis games and picnics. . . ."

"Can't your preacher friend tell you what's coming?" Eddie interrupted. "He's probably got your whole life planned out. Is that what you want?"

"I want to know now," she yelled, stamping her foot. "Is there anything wrong with wanting to know now?"

"We've been living in now, Jane," he said. "What you want to know is later."

"What's wrong with that?" she pleaded. "Am I so crazy? At least I attempt to make up my mind! You're as confused as I am. Don't tell me you don't have just as much trouble living in now as I do!"

"You're right," Eddie replied. "But at least I'm admitting it."

They were silent. "Go on," he said finally, jingling his car keys. "Old Edward John Motman is waiting."

"He goes by Jay," she said reflexively.

"Jane?"

"No, *Jay,*" Jane said aloud.

"Honey, what are you talking about?"

"Oh, I was just thinking," Jane said distractedly, getting out of her deck chair.

"About me, it sounds like," said Jay, opening the screen door and joining her on the deck.

"Hellooo, Rev. Motman!" Mrs. McCafferty called out.

"Good morning, Mrs. McCafferty," Jay called back. He said to Jane, "Sure is a friendly Catholic."

"Sure is a friendly *person,*" Jane mumbled.

"Anyway," Jay said, "I was wondering if you knew where my concordance is."

"In the back room," Jane answered. "What do you need to know?"

" 'Do not be drunk on wine. . . .' "

"Ephesians 5. Trust me."

Laughter sounded from the lake. The Steen boy was out on the water with his friends. The Motmans turned to see a 20-foot motorboat cruising by, driven by Rod Steen. The girl in the gray sweats was standing in front, her blond hair blown back by the breeze. Jane saw Eddie beside her.

"Okay, thanks hon," Jay said and went back inside to work. Jane walked to the edge of the deck. Eddie had almost fallen overboard as Rod turned the motorboat around. The blond in the gray sweat pants was laughing.

"I had to, Eddie," Jane whispered. "You don't know what you want from life."

"I know what I want to give to life," she knew he would answer, for he had told her often enough. "Even Christ preached continuous love to the people of His day," he had said to her that weekend in Ann Arbor.

"But He died for their future, to save them from death," Jane said, a little too hastily.

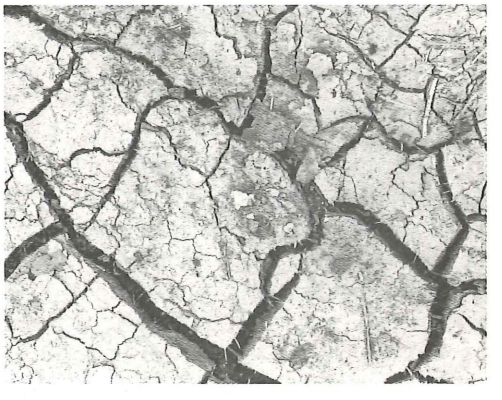
"I would say He rather died to bring them life. I hope your preacher friend remembers it. He'll never love you if he doesn't."

Jane was quiet, and thought of Edward John Motman. She was glad somehow that he didn't go by his first name. It would have almost seemed inauthentic.

"I've gotta go now," Eddie said, taking the keys from his pocket. "I'm really busy."

Jay was never quite so busy as Eddie. But what did Eddie have to do? He turned back to Jane. "Jane, artists die a lot younger than Fundamentalist preachers, anyway." And he had a faraway look in his eyes.

The day was warmer, and Jane no longer needed a coat. "This whole damned world is inauthentic," she whispered, and went inside to find Jay.



Meditation

"to all who have loved his appearing" 2 Timothy 4:8

I often wonder if faith would be easier for me were I an inhabitant of Capernaum when Jesus came through, or if the angels had woken me up in the field with their jazz. He whose name I carry had the opportunity to perform a certainty test according to his own regulations. I, on the other hand, count myself among those who have not seen.

But even if I could go back, I'm not sure it would have been any less difficult. Certainly there woud be no way to slip into the comfortable docetism that always tries to pass itself off as Christianity. I'd be faced with a man a few years older than me claiming to be sent from God. Would I allow that assertion to take root in my mind, subconsciously aware as I would be of the implications? Maybe not.

And perhaps he would slip by me, the way most happy things do. Our parents tell us, with a combination of regret and urgency that baffles us, to make the most of these years. Pop wisdom reminds us that we don't know what we've got till it's gone. The Romantic movement in poetry stems from that sadness that comes when something good is taken from us—ultimately, life itself, whether our own or another's. In the midst of our joy, says Thomas Hardy, "we were looking away," at something else.

The theme of goodness missed is not absent from the Bible, either. The Roman soldier, commenting on the dead Jesus, realizes "surely this was the son of God." The use of the past tense carries with it that guilt we feel for having not only not heard the music, but for having helped slam the lid on the player's fingers.

But there is another way among our ancestors in faith of dealing with the past: Mary's. In her we see a consistent refusal to judge, to see this as a precious moment to be exploited to its full value. Rather, she seems to be spending most of her time reflecting on what is going on through this son of hers. There is a patience in her that is hard for this Romantic age to understand. The Rose of Sharon is in her house, and she abstains from gathering it while she has the chance. This is not the same thing as stoic or buddhist calm, nor is it bland relativism. It is not indifference to pleasure. Who can hear anything but a robust and deep joy in the song she sings at the annunciation? It strikes me rather as the same faith that makes Paul thankful. Jesus is not a transient phenomenon and, though he is a rose, he does not fade like the flower. Jesus is in fact the son of God under whom this dying creation is placed. Mary seemed to know that the baby she was bringing into the world was not an isolated event, but the focal point of God's dealings with the world: for you have remembered the promises you made to Abraham our father. Jesus was the sign of a continuing

reality: God's being with us—Immanuel. Mary lived with Jesus as in the presence of God, with whom there is no failing and from whom there is no escaping.

This is the faith of Paul, who loves the Lord's appearing. As God Himself, this Rose can promise to be with us. He is not a flower that fades, and it is the Holy Spirit who makes Christ real to us in the very act of remembering his death; who communicates Christ's promise to us: I am with you always. This is the same declaration that came to Mary: the Lord is with you. The beauty of Jesus is not withheld from us because we missed him, or previously ignored him. As God, Jesus was raised and lives. The Spirit is sent from the Father and the Son.

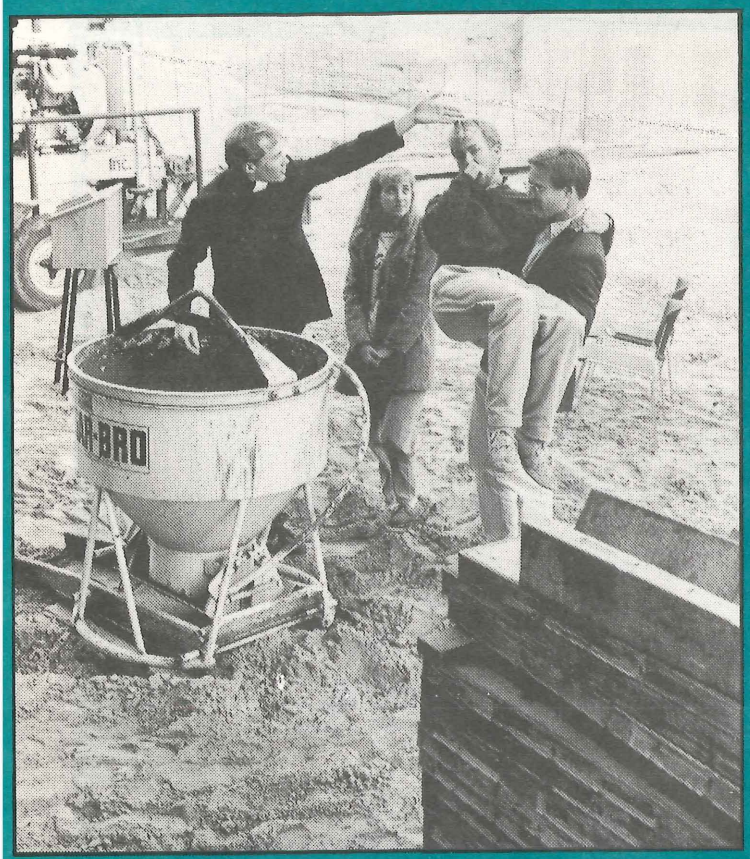
I still regret not having said things to, not having asked questions of, people who are now dead. There is an incompleteness to the relationships that death has ended. I missed conveying my appreciation, my love, my deep conviction that what I perceived in those people now gone was the radiance of Christ himself.

But we believe in a second coming, a second chance—though it is not really a second chance since it will be unending. We believe that though Christ is not visible, he is nevertheless around, and will soon prove it. At that time Christ will gather his own and the dead shall be raised, undying, unfading. In Christian faith we know that the conversations will be renewed, and enjoyed. And we will enjoy each other and the Rose forever.

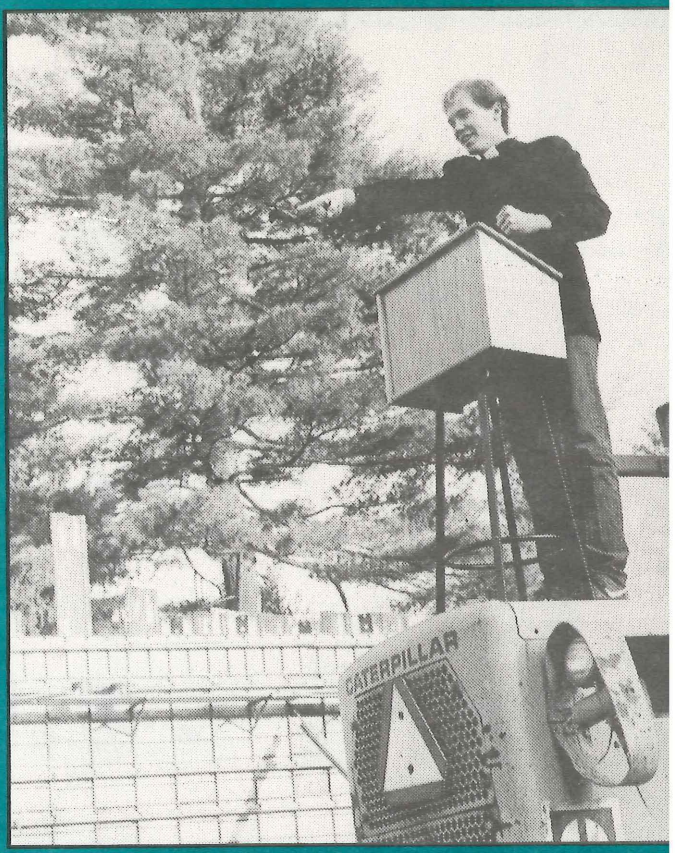
All this because we believe that Jesus' life and death and resurrection was the clearest sign of God's being with us: the Lord's appearing, which we love.

His death we proclaim
His resurrection we declare,
His coming we await.
Glory be to you, O Lord.

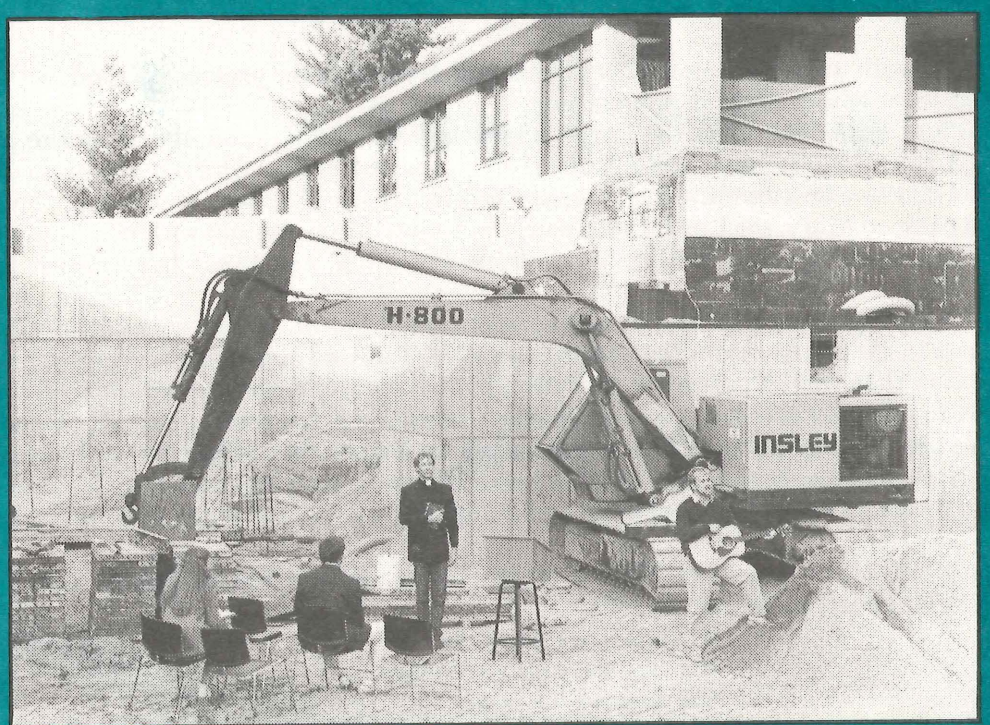
—Tom vanMilligen



"Versatility marks the interior"



. . .development was as much, or more, an elaborat Calvin College's educational thought and purpose as a matter of land, brick, and mortar."



"Great care and attention accompanied the design of the sanctuary, with emphasis on creating a meaningful setting for worship both for smaller and larger audiences."