Dialogue is the journal of Calvin College commentary and the arts published five times a year by the Calvin College Communications Board. Dialogue warmly welcomes submissions of short stories, poetry, essays, commentaries and visual art. Dialogue also welcomes letters of response to submissions. Dialogue reserves the right to edit but will do so only with the author's prior consent. Address correspondence to Dialogue, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, MI, 49546. Entire contents ©1994 by the Calvin College Communications Board. All requests for permission to reprint material must be made in writing to the above address.

Editor
Steve Louthan
Assoc. Editors
Paul LaGrand
Jeremy Lloyd
Art director
Roland Hultink
Editorial staff
Chris Byl
Bo Mi Choi
Emily De Groot
Dave Ihmels
Sandy Reynolds
Design and Production
Susan Holwerda
Steve Luimes
Suzanne Roose
Ted Sandstra
Peter Vandermeer
Mentor
W. Dale Brown
Patron Saint
Frank Zappa
EDITORIAL

Even Mona Lisa Had the Blues: You Can Tell By the Way She Smiles

by Jeremy Lloyd

“Something must drive us into the world of others—suffering.”
from Shadowlands

All my life, my parents and teachers have told me about the real world. Reality has always been looming around the corner, and now as graduation approaches it is about to pounce upon me like a cat on a ball of yarn. Naturally, if my parents and teachers are right, it greatly disturbs me that reality has yet to awaken from its nap. By and large, I feel pounced upon already.

Regardless of which world I or anyone else thinks I am in, the big one, the earth, keeps turning. “I,” the autonomous white male, the stereotypical American, have traversed the teenagerly domains of athletics, the arts, groups of friends and hero worship. Though few would call them such, these steps began a lifelong search for community and identity.

Helped by a blooming ethical conscience, my interest became fixed upon social movements, particularly the freedom struggles of blacks and women. A world of meaning flourished within the collective experience of African-Americans who endured four centuries of slavery and segregation. The sisterhood of women determined to shake off the fetters of society also elicited in me a recognition of my own need for community. Yet blackness and womanness were not my own experience, and I soon learned that I, the “liberated” white male, was not allowed to suffer or claim rights. Where was my oppressor? My participation in these freedom struggles can only be appreciated at a distance. Since I do not directly experience the suffering of race and gender, their community I cannot share. Hence, I have come to realize that individual identity should be dependent on the awareness of one’s role in the bigger picture: a vision is more valuable if it is shared.

While my attempt to penetrate the world of others failed, I discovered that within the separate politics of these freedom struggles there exists a real world with lucid features and margins. When before there was only one real world, now in this “post-modern age,” there are enough real worlds to go around for everyone to have one. Some see this as good since it potentially creates a platform for the celebration of diversity. Indeed, the climate in some pockets of academia and popular culture seem quite conducive for creating diversity within unity. However, humanity’s spiritual common denominator remains obscure. While the political arena becomes increasingly polarized, chances for identifying with the other continues to decrease.

This century has spent trying times expanding reality by unplugging metanarratives that have kept women, African-Americans and homosexuals subdued. Sprouting in its place, however, is not an all-encompassing model of the human family but an archipelago of special interest groups jockeying for the monopoly of rights gained by manipulating the legal system. Laws established to bind us together now only keep us from scratching each other’s eyes out, and then permit us to legally scratch out each other’s eyes in court. Further ensuring that we keep fists astride is the fashioning of a new bumper sticker campaign, the message of tolerance. This notion of tolerating, enduring, of putting up with, advocates a stalemate by demanding respect across enemy lines instead of encouraging the breakdown of those lines through understanding. Unfortunately, we’re all in this together—the least we can do is tolerate each other.

In the view of psychologist/philosopher Otto Rank the rudiments of civilization—customs, morality and religion—are projections of our will which create a self-preserving reality over and against the natural world. This inevitably sets us in opposition to ourselves. We see what we want to see and legislate the outside world to correspond to our inner will. Invalidating the reality of others saves one from rearranging and widening one’s own. Those inner-city blacks wouldn’t bring the rest of the country down if they’d only get jobs, believe in family values and stop shooting one another. If only those right wing fundies figured out what was going on.
Through the media, the opportunity exists to expand our reality. Though often in a trite manner, television potentially raises our conscience to the world of issues. More often, books nudge us out of our comfort zone and into someone else's shoes—for a while. Like museum tourists we may peruse these worlds for a time, but one can lend an open mind for only so long before lines must be drawn in order to clarify truth and reality: someone has got to be “right” and someone has got to be “wrong.” A moral universe will only be realized when we understand what is universal to every human.

If indeed it is suffering that drives us into the world of others, it is our own suffering that we must own up to in order to include ourselves as members of the dysfunctional family of humanity. And yet that is exactly the thing we deny others. As a society we perceive the woman who has had an abortion through the eyes of moral judgement—her rights or responsibilities—and abandon mercy for justice by overlooking her experience primarily as one of suffering. No space is made for her to suffer outloud. We dare not enter into the domain of a suffering other, for it is antithetical to our true purpose in life, the pursuit of happiness. Suffering today means not taking advantage of the system, not striking back, and not trusting in technology to solve one's problems. It means being sub-human and is something in life one must work against, not live through. Dr. Kevorkian—"the right not to suffer"—is the logical end to a spineless culture living in a spiritual void.

The actuality of suffering requires no faith, no rational exegesis, no language—not even oppression by fellow humans, though this may be one of the worst kinds. Life, beginning with a wail and ending in silence, holds an itinerary universal to humanity. In between that start and finish, is a state of brokenness in which we reciprocally offer empathy to others. It is the only domain where, with humility, our truths can take a backseat and our realities unite; where the feminist, the African-American, and I will find we have much in common.

With the Enlightenment model floundering and post-modernism spiraling us into a centerless relativism, a new model is needed. An environment is needed where the energy, humility and forgiveness required to feel empathy is encouraged and where other realities are viewed not through judgmental means customary to civilization but through the lens of the basic human experience. For the Christian who is concerned more with revelation than religion, a theology of the cross is needed. Original sin cannot be distinguished from original suffering. The believer's audacious hope is that suffering is good for something—a resurrection beginning now and reaching full fruition when Sodom will be restored to its former state (Ezekiel 16).

Community begins with conversation; our vision must be confessional. Though not in the throes of persecution and despair, we may, in the end, perceive the scandalous truth: that suffering is a gift because it is universal. When we see ourselves in others and see others in ourselves, the stark reality of suffering is a little more bearable and battle lines are broken. Perhaps the real world—one real world—exists after all. ☼
As many musicians worship great composers and as some business-minded people emulate successful tycoons down to the argyle socks, my admiration of architects borders on the mystical. It was especially pleasing, therefore, to have a conversation with Gunnar Birkerts, one of the foremost architects in the world. His craftsmanship is evident in building designs, whether they be U.S. government embassies, headquarters for Dominoes' brass, a building for Grand Rapids' Church of the Servant, or a residence for a friend in Vail, Colorado.

Birkerts's most recent commission, the new National Library for Latvia, is in some ways the realization of an ideal. His design philosophy seeks to make the structures respond to the aesthetic, geographical, and sociological situations in which they are placed. A prominent building type, his home town, and a culture steeped in metaphor and tradition are all elements which make his latest design an exciting addition to the history of architecture and a distinctively personal outworking of his ideas. With his 'organic synthesis,' Birkerts is able to marry modernism and deeply embedded cultural traditions. In doing so he constructs a dynamic architectural edifice. For the Latvian people, getting back to cultural roots is achieved by and owes its vitality to a thorough understanding of the present.

Is there a common theme running through your memorable aesthetic experiences?

Birkerts: Well it is cliche when you say that there is agony and ecstasy in the work of an architect. When you are finished with something that you have envisioned and then you see it well-built and responding to all the things that you were trying to achieve—you get a high. It is an ecstasy in a way, and I would say that every so often that happens as...
you experience buildings. There is one building where I have this every time I see it, even the first time, and that is the Federal Reserve Bank in Minneapolis. Whenever I stand before it I am in awe and I forget that I had anything to do with it. When I see that building I really have a very special kind of euphoric feeling.

So your most intense aesthetic experiences all have to do with architecture? You wouldn’t say that they occur in nature?

Birkerts: Well certainly, I started with architecture. There are experiences that are memorable in music or just being in the world. It’s second nature. Music is very much a part of me and part of the creative process, and so I experience music very distinctly. It is not just background sound, but it evokes feelings and emotions and many times when I work on the conceptualization, the music is part of the creative structure.

You always listen to music when you are designing and sketching?

Birkerts: I always have music on. Always. It is important what kind of music. I think it should not be one that necessarily jolts you and excites you. It should be music that calms you and that allows you to be there. It should not be obtrusive. And so I have certain times in history—Baroque music for instance or early classical, are ones that I like the most. I like Vivaldi. If I want to get romantic then I have Chopin. If I want to get very revved up then I have Brahms’s First Symphony or a piano concerto and I get reassured that it can be done.

Could you describe your design process. What is design metamorphosis? What does it mean to say that form expresses function.

Birkerts: Design methodology is really the design process. First, there are certain prerequisites. The creator must have a certain educational and cultural background to be able to synthesize the forces or influences that are needed to accommodate and express the function of the building. So first of all, you have to be culturally and educationally informed about history and music, including the zeitgeist. You have to know all about the times we live in. The design appropriate to architecture is that which can be used, accepted, and expressive in and of its own milieu—where it was created. Then you have to put in the specifics: what is it, where is it, how much has to be spent, what has to be accomplished, what has to be expressed. These bring in more tasks on you and you have to be beside your cultural background and also your requirements for the building. You have to study and you have to get to the typology of your building. If you build a church you really are looking at many other churches. It is not necessarily the fact that to find your way somewhere in the typology that you have to accept a particular type. It is added information which will be working in the process of the synthesis. The synthesis is—in my age and where I am now, a subconscious act. I allow this to happen subconsciously. Here I’m talking about the concepts only, I’m not talking about the design development; I don’t sit there and subconsciously dream up details. But now it is the concepts—what the building is, what it has to say, what is the connection, that is the concept. This concept is a synthesis of everything that you are, that the project is and that the world is. So after that, when the concept is stated, then the reality starts, then you start applying the direct facts on it, you start testing your concept to see whether it is valid. You have subconsciously conceived that it is valid when you apply it to the rational criteria. You find that things change. Programmatic things change, the client changes and you may have adjustments. Now, this is the beginning of the metamorphosis. If the concept is strong it should be also
able to undertake certain metamorphosis. That changes within the context, it still could be higher, lower, up, down, or whatever, and it could still be expressive and still accomplish the functional requirements. But it has changed somewhat from the beginning. That is what I call process: organic synthesis. That is because the whole idea is like a plant. A plant is responsive to what it is genetically, what kind of soil it is in, what is around it, what the sun is. It creates, it grows accordingly to the factors that affect it in nature. And so it is in a building.

How do you know when the building is mature enough? To use the plant analogy, how do you know when the fruit has ripened? Is the building finished when the concept is done, is construction the end, or is it finished when it falls apart?

Birkerts: There are certain stages. In the conceptualization stage I would say that the concept is only valid when I cannot find any other place to look for something or to hear or when no one else has anything to say. When we have exhausted the resource of information—then I say, well there is nothing else I can do. Now I should be able to tell what it is. It should gel now. Well you asked me more: what about later? Yes, there is the building phase. That is certainly one where the concept is expressed and that is sometimes a very difficult process. The building has a million parts and a building is similar to, let’s say, an automotive design. The car is designed in a laboratory, and then manufactured and it still has bugs; there are recalls and all that. We do buildings one at time and one of a kind. There is no chance for recall; you have to fix whatever as you go. The building process is again a growth process and it is dependant so much on the quality of the construction documents, the quality of the workmen—the interpreters of the site and the building.

You mentioned that at the concept stage you know that the concept is mature when all the resources are exhausted. How is it that you go about immersing yourself in that milieu or community?

Birkerts: I guess you are addressing now, if all this has been done, when does it happen, when do you say that the concept is done.

Yes and also—let me take the example of the COS building which is a community in its own, how is it that you come to understand them? You will always be an outsider unless you are part of that community. How do you overcome the barriers that being an outsider puts on you?

Birkerts: In architecture, unless you build your own house, you are always an outsider and you have to become an insider by being an impersonator. You can become part of it: into the household, or the business, or the church or whatever the charge is. This comes down now to the sensitivity and the special qualities of the architect. Some people can be more intimate in these situations than others. You have to be sensitive in a way; you cannot necessarily become a member of one religion and the next day another religion. You can only be an observer, not always a participant. You can pretend that you are a member but philosophically you may not be.

You newest project is the Latvian Library in Riga. This project is distinct in that you are very much a direct participant.

Birkerts: That is maybe the most unique of my projects. Aside from designing your own house, a national building is the most extensive and vast because it goes back into the history of your country and your culture, it goes back into the urban context. It is a
highly expressive building. It works with metaphors that most of the Latvian people are familiar with, if not all of them. It leans towards expressing them in architectural form. We accept this with music; whether Respighi talks about Pines of Rome or church windows, he too painted sound pictures though metaphor. In architectural form it is, let me say, a little more difficult because you don’t expressly lean towards teaching things, which is direct replication of an idea. In architecture we work to create the impression; it is the overall dignity and expression that is necessary. So it is a very difficult task. In my presentations of the building I make a conscious mistake by first showing all the influences that have been reflected later on in the building rather than showing the building and saying “what do you see?” For the Latvians I don’t have to go through the all the ingredients in this synthesis. One word could describe it all: the mythical mountain.

This is all that is necessary for the Golden Rider to be visualized. The building is very specific and very particular for that space and place and culture and country. It cannot be, in any way, looked at in universal terms. There is nothing in that building that you can transplant to another location.

How would you expect someone not from Latvia to participate. Is there a way that cultural outsiders can understand the shapes and their meanings?

Birkerts: Well they can of course, it should talk to them. It should talk at least to the point that they say “What is it?” They want to hear the voice. They will find out either by asking or by events of the occasion or they may read something. In the later passing of time they may come across it and say “Ahh that’s what that meant! That’s why it is that way!” It might not be a direct recognition. It might be a later disclosure.

So it need only incite their curiosity.

Birkerts: I would say it does incite their curiosity because it is formalistically, in a way, a non-building form. If it is a building form to them you wonder “What the heck? What is going on? Why is it the way it is?” So you inquire into it.

I’d like to hear your description of how this building situated itself. How did the shapes come to be what they are.

Birkerts: They are all symbols. They are of the country and of the region. The verticality is the birch trees. You know the white birch that grows in Latvia; well naturally, we like them very much so we sing songs on and on about the birch. The main form is, of course, the crystal mountain dealing with the Golden Rider and the Princess. The piece on the top is a symbolic roof form from the crusaders’ castles. Then the other side, which does not have the verticality to it, has just those juxtaposed urban forms that have analogy to Riga on the other side of the river. There is a kind of play off the forms. Then, of course, in the cross section there is an allusion to the Latvian storage shed which, on every farm, is a separate building for storing goods and also other things. These are usually two stories. The common goods, the things you can loose, go on bottom and the precious things go on the top. Here you have, in the same way, the books and the archives on top and the reading and working space goes on the bottom. The other reason for that is that there are hydro-dams upstream on the river. If the dams should fail there would be a rise in water level of 6-8 feet and a wave. That is the reason for putting the books on the top.
What is the primary goal of a religious space? Is there one? Is the methodology different in this case?

Birkerts: The process is still the same, it is just that some aspects are displayed more clearly or more vividly or are more evident. It is related to the use or form for the building. For COS—it is a very strongly philosophical congregation. It was said: look, our beginnings were very humble, we began in our living rooms when we gathered, now we have an edifice which is somewhat our living room. It is an expressive building. We have gathered ourselves in this building and maybe our charge was to go out into the community instead of cuddling up in a building. So they have this philosophical viewing of the building. Even if they have very strong religious beliefs it does not necessarily have to be expressed in very strong architectural forms. It is not like Gothic or Baroque where you try to overwhelm the people in the way with a building that is the biggest and most austere. Here, I think, it is the content of the thought and not the impression that is the most important.

What is it about Scandinavia that makes good architecture?

Birkerts: I think the certain isolation they have had throughout history which has allowed them to work with their own resources, in either a positive or negative way, and to work with materials and with the environment. They understand the sun and daylight better than anybody else. That has started a certain sensitivity of colour and sensitivity in use of material. They have more patience, they have longer winters and shorter summers; they can craft something much better and with more patience. Scandinavians have not been as commercialized as this world has, they have not been corrupted by things that are making our lives difficult. Somehow they have been able to perpetuate this heritage. They are on a high cultural level. You saw the Winter Games, it was so different, everybody has to admit that there is something special about that part of the world.

What is especially relevant about the vocabulary of modernism in contemporary architecture?

Birkerts: I have a certain understanding of modernism. It is certainly not mine alone, I have extracted it from others. Where the modernist differs from other directions is that in modernism you like to advance, you like to create, you are looking for something that was not necessarily there before. You want a new thing, to improve, and to change. Modernism evolves, modernism always goes ahead. That is why modernism had a falling out with classicism; it was looking back, and so was post-modernism. In modernism we don’t look back, we go forward, we invent things. It has failed here and there. Gropius and the Bauhaus wanted to design a house for everyone. Well, they said, let’s build a building on rational thought. So they took off the pitched roofs and made flat roofs to save money. They tried to make a better building but it didn’t work, it didn’t necessarily make a better building. But it was that spirit that Eero Saarinen had when I was there. He was designing a line of chairs. He said that we have seen four-legged chairs, we have seen three-legged chairs, and he said we have seen two-legged chairs, but not one-legged chairs. We are going to design a one-legged chair because it has never happened in the world before. So he did that. The next thing is what modernism always wants to do. ☛
I looked up the word ‘sensuality’ in the thesaurus and found that of the six words given, half imply that sensuality is bad: “carnal, hedonistic, lustful.” I don’t believe that sensuality was intended to connote immorality. The brouhaha surrounding sensual imagery stems from past associations. I try to deny those associations by depicting sensuality as positive. Some works confront our stigmas more than others, as in Toys? where the plural and the question mark are meant to bring sexism to mind. My work isn’t usually about accusations or negative hype. My images are celebrations of who we are.

-Jesseca Davis
Donald Hall
---Poet---

On the weekend of April 21-23, Calvin's English department will sponsor a three-day writing workshop entitled "Christian Writers and their Communities." Of the many Christian writers from around the country who will be attending, the most prolific and widely-acclaimed is Donald Hall. Hall has published over twenty books of poems, short stories and prose memoirs, including, in 1993, a volume of poems entitled *The Museum of Clear Ideas* and a deeply personal prose meditation entitled *Life Work*. In 1975 Hall and his wife Jane Kenyon moved from Ann Arbor to Eagle Pond Farm in Danbury, New Hampshire, which is Hall's ancestral home. This conversation between Hall and senior Colin Jager below took place via fax and letter over the space of one month.

You speak briefly of your faith near the beginning and the end of *Life Work*. Would it be accurate to say that you've experienced a spiritual re-birth? A spiritual homecoming? You've returned to the same church and community that nourished you as a boy—so is it a sense of discovery or rediscovery?

Hall: It was more like a spiritual birth. I don't believe that my mind was active in a Christian way as a child. My faith is the joy of advent and torture of Good Friday, brought together. And I could not be a Christian without including thought. Christian feeling may have led me to Christian thinking but it would not have taken me very far by itself. The position of suffering in Christian thought seems to me really to raise it into the skies. Christ gets born once a year but he is always on the cross! So are you and I, I suppose.

I notice a theme of death and rebirth—regeneration, perhaps—in your poetry from
the very earliest right up to the present. And in *Life Work* you sketch a certain circularity to your own life as well in your return to the family farm in Danbury. Do you think there’s a sense of renewal in both your life and your poetry?

Hall: I’m not sure that I am the one to ask about themes in my own work. You seem to me to suggest certain themes perfectly well...as a critic, as a reader. But a writer does not begin his life deciding that he has certain themes to express. I at least never think of literature in terms of themes. I hate thematic anthologies, or anthologies arranged according to theme. There is no poem about death which is not also about love (as it were) and it seems to me that poetry is too complex ever to be subsumed under theme. At the same time, I acknowledge that certain passions or obsessions or concerns of mine doubtless recur through my whole life. Sometimes I have said that the artist has the kind of mind that can return again and again to the same territory without noticing that it is doing it.

When you ask me these questions, though—let me assert—you are asking me not as the writer of my work but as the reader of my work.

Can you talk a bit about the effect your faith has on your work, then? I notice a shift to more explicitly Christian imagery from *The One Day* [1988] to “Another Elegy” [1993], for example...Or do you consider the interaction between faith and poetry as not easily reducible to theme or “message”?

Hall: My faith is uneasy. I value irony. I value skepticism. I don’t think that anything of any value or use or even utility can be reduced to theme or message! I hate themes and messages. Certainly in some of the late poems I begin to be able to include some Christian ideas—(“Granite and Grass,” “A Sister on the Tracks”; in the person of Bill Trout, in “Another Elegy”) and also some Christian feeling as with that scene in China toward the end of *The One Day*.

When I read your long poem *The One Day* in 1989 it seemed like nothing I’d read before. I’ve re-read it twice more since then, each time with more love and less understanding. Can you talk about the process of writing it, and the place you feel it occupies in your work?

Hall: I’ve answered many many questions about this one, but not for a while. Surely I wanted to make a poem that included everything I knew, everything that had ever happened, and surely I wanted to write a poem of encompassing

Men who lie awake worrying about taxes, vomiting at dawn, whose hands shake as they administer Valium,-

skin will peel from the meat of their thighs.

Armies that march all day with elephants past pyramids and roll pulling missiles past generals weary of saluting and past president-emperors splendid in cloth-of-gold-soft rumps of armies will dissipate in rain. Where square

miles of corn waver in Minnisota, where tobacco ripens in Carolina and apples in New Hampshire, where wheat turns Kansas green, where pulpmills stink in Oregon,-

dust will blow in the darkness and cactus die before it flowers. Where skiers wait for chairlifts, wearing money, low raspberries will part rib bones.

Where the drive-in church raises a chromium cross, dandelions and milkweed will straggle through blacktop.

I will strike from the ocean with waves afire;

I will strike from the hill with rainclouds of lava;

I will strike from the darkened air

with melanoma in the shape of decorative hexagonals.

I will stike down embezzlers and eaters of snails.

from *The One Day* [1988]
WHEN THE FINE DAYS

When the fine days migrate east from Ohio,
climbing Vermont's greenest mountains and fording
the Connecticut at White River
Junction; when our meadows take relief
from inversions and July's lamentable
heat, you and I hike in fortuitous air
up-mountain on logging roads—our dog
Max leading us, bouncing, looking back
with mild impatience, making sure we follow—
and kneel taking joy of tiny red blossoms
in moss. Here are no snakes to beware;
here the shy black bear conceals himself;
here the glory of creation loosens our
spirits into appropriate surrender.
Looking down past a clearing, we fill
with the fullness of the valley's throat,
where the slow cattle grind the abundant grass
and their laboring stomachs turn green to white;
where the fat sheep graze without budging,
like soft white boulders. Now Max settles
alert, his nostrils twitching to read calm air.
Let us descend, Camilla, to the long white
house that holds love and work together,
and play familiar music on each
other's skin. Today we won't worry about
weather, depression, or war; about bad luck
for our labors; about heart attacks
or metastasis to the liver.

always these events are, in the process of trying to make a poem (which is my goal, not accuracy of reportage) altered. Some things that the woman sculptor tells of, in *The One Day*, coincide with some things that literally happened to me. Occasionally I have used fiction because the plain fact, plainly presented, would hurt or deeply upset somebody living. Usually, however, I have altered circumstances for aesthetic reasons, or because the altered story seemed more essentially valid, rather than circumstantially true.

Many things in *Museum* are made up or derived (perversely) from Horace. Others are disguised versions of friends and enemies of mine. I don’t believe that anybody is directly identifiable. Of course, Horsecollar has many of my opinions and prejudices which (again) differ from each other from day to day and contradict themselves.

What role, if any, do you think a sense of place has played in your life and work? Do you notice a significant change, say, between the Ann Arbor and New Hampshire poetry that may be explainable in terms of geography?

Hall: I seem to be universally known as a poet of place. I would never like to be known as a “New Hampshire poet” or a “New England poet”—because all qualifiers are diminutives. But I suppose that Connecticut plays a part in my work here, and there are also some poems in which England figures—as a place, as a landscape and a culture together.

When my *Old and New Poems* came out in 1990, there were many reviews, and they were mostly kind, and virtually every one of them had the equivalent of this sentence in it: “He was one of the poets of his generation for many years, without standing out, until in 1975 he moved with his wife Jane Kenyon to the old family place in New Hampshire, and then...” Everybody said that I finally started being good about the age of fifty, which happened in 1978, the year that *Kicking the Leaves* came out...and everybody credited it to a place and a marriage. I feel a bit wistful for the stuff I was writing in my twenties and thirties and forties...but I would rather be admired for more recent work than for more distant work.

I don’t understand how the “geography” of Ann Arbor and New Hampshire would make a difference. I don’t think I would be inspired to write poems simply by a hilly landscape rather than a relatively flat one. But it is a matter of culture and association. The association of long years; the culture of solitude and eccentricity.

So then what is it like to return to your childhood place, your family’s New Hampshire home and the place where you spent boyhood summers? Are there a lot of ghosts, or is the air pretty clear?

Hall: I’ve spent twenty years writing about what it was like to live in the family house, the place where I spent boyhood summers. It is bliss. And the ghosts were more noticeable when we first moved here. They are relatively quiet now.

Two years ago you were diagnosed with liver cancer, and this February Jane was diagnosed with leukemia. Could you talk about this struggle with sickness and death? In what ways has it changed your relation to each other?

Hall: Jane’s leukemia only continues and deepens the open intensity of our love for each other. As she stayed by my side during recovery two years ago, I stay by her side this time. As I waited for the sound of her feet early in the morning, she waited for the sound of mine. As I felt safe, finally, when I arrived at her side—usually about 5:45—so did she. Irrational but palpable. There is a greater access to joy the moment you begin living in love. But right now I suppose we are still living in the country, or at least the province, of Leukemia. It sounds like one of those countries that the Marx Brothers invented. I wish it were. Φ
After serving twenty-five years of his life in the windowless basement of the College Center, Overvoorde's longing for open spaces was satiated by the breath-taking skies of the Alberta prairie. As part of his artist in residency here at Calvin, Overvoorde spent this last summer in Lethbridge, Alberta, studying the prairie sky. He has returned to his studio with his head in the clouds and a desire to share some of his experience with the Calvin community. His work will be part of a collaborative exhibition coming up this fall, which will be combined with the work of a poet, composer, and sculptor. Overvoorde's studio is open to the public every Wednesday from 1-3 pm.
If you managed to see the Faculty Exhibition last December, you will have seen Oh’s terracottas (fired clay works), which spoke softly of both the pain of the Fall and the elation of the Redemption and Restoration. These works are part of his solo exhibition catalog entitled “Clay, Man, and Fire — A Sculptural Exploration of the Archetype in the Creation and Future of Man,” which is now on exhibition at Messiah College. As the term “artist in residence” implies, Oh’s studio is open to the public every Tuesday afternoon from 1-3 pm. All are invited to experience the artist at work. Dialogue listened as Oh, with the help of an interpreter, spoke about his work and his world.
Who are you? Where do you come from? Why are you here?

I am a professor of art at Hyosung Women's College in Korea. I am a Christian artist (sculptor) and am trying to combine Christianity and art. It is a struggle, however, because Korean society is, for the most part, Buddhist. I am working to "prepare the way" for Christian art in Korea, and had heard about Calvin from colleagues and from brochures and decided to experience the art community here.

Is there no 'Christian' art in Korea?

All of modern society operates under a secular world view, and it permeates the art world as well. So we must keep the Christian tradition alive in art. In countries like Korea, artists are taught the traditions of Buddhism and can only make art that embraces that tradition. As a professor, I would like to be able to equip my students with the tools of the Christian tradition in a Christian atmosphere. I will continue to teach in a secular university to challenge my students and the culture we live in.
Why do you enjoy working in clay? Have you worked with other media?

For eleven years I worked with steel, creating sculptures in the style of modernism, but in 1989, I began to work with clay because it traces further back historically, and even scripturally, than steel. It is more effective as a vehicle for connoting where we came from. I also enjoy the analogy between the clay figures that I create and the sense that we are made by God in much the same way. As the clay is fired, its purity is tested, and reminds me that life is like the firing of clay, and we are called upon to endure. Sometimes, however, I will combine clay and steel to juxtapose the old with the new.
What does it mean to be an artist in residence?

Well, the concept, what I have always thought about it, when I was in residency in '85 as well as this year, is to expose the students and this community to what I call the creative process. You look around the studio, you see drawings up, you see watercolors up, you see me work from them— you see the process ongoing. Students can come in when I’ve started a painting, maybe see it halfway done two days later, and two weeks later they can see the finished product. And even then they don’t see the finished product because it isn’t framed yet. And it’s a totally different experience from seeing the work in the gallery.
Rain Coming, Road 265, Alberta

Clouds Breaking Near Fort McLeod, Alb.

Watercolor

Mountain View Near Claresholm, Alb.

Watercolor

From 520 Towards Claresholm

Watercolor

Oil on Canvas
Where do the landscapes come from?

The landscape for me is a continuing theme. As a Dutchman, I’ve looked with Dutch eyes at the midwest landscape. Sometimes I get frustrated because of the limited amount of exposed space in Michigan; there are very few places where you can find wide open meadows and hills with vast skies. When you go to Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, you have a much better sense of space. So I was, in part, inspired by the midwest.

As a sabbatical study, I decided I was going to do something with the prairie. The prairie is a very unique place. The word prairie in the mind of many people is something loathsome, something awesome, something on the one hand terribly intriguing and on the other hand repulsive. One guy called it the best synonym for loneliness. If you look twenty or thirty miles north, you see the occasional tree, and no houses—nobody else around. You go out on a dirt road and you don’t know where you’re going, and you have these beautiful, wide, quiet places. You get out of the car and it’s just absolutely quiet. It’s marvelous—the silence. So some of my paintings I think reflect that in their quiet majesty, and at the same time their awesome heaviness.
How do you see the relationship between students and faculty here?

There is a kind of freedom at Calvin. Faculty members give the students freedom to choose whatever medium and style they want. In Korea, students copy their instructors' methods and art. At first, I expected the professors would be teaching "this is Christian art, you must do it this way." But instead, I found that because you are Christian students surrounded by a Christian environment, you are free to manoeuvre within that environment, to react and respond to modernity in your own way. And that's a good thing.

Has your stay here influenced your own work?

I am grateful to have had the chance to work here for this short time. My exposure to various works and methods here has broadened my perspective in general. Although the basic direction of my art is much the same as it was when I first arrived, the future development of this direction has been challenged and deepened.

Professor Oh will return to his hometown of Tae Gu, southeastern Korea, this upcoming August. His studio (located in the southwest corner of the sculpture studio, in the basement of the College Center) is open to the public every Tuesday from 1-3 pm. Stop by and see the artist at work.
Life. Pretty big, deep subject. Science. Pretty big, deep subject? When contemplating life, one might propose that there are some fundamental questions to consider. Some might dare say that there are some fundamental answers—no, answers is a bad word—maybe some fundamental guiding principles. Indeed, being short of any answers, some might say that the one fundamental principle is that we can find no sure answers.

The same with contemplating science. Probably there are some fundamental questions. Most would dare say there are some fundamental (not answers) principles. Again, the most fundamental principles may necessarily be uncertainty and indeterminacy.

In this essay I’m going to speculate recklessly about some common would-be fundamental questions of both science and life. In doing so, I hope to show in only uncertain terms how some would-be fundamental principles of science may or may not be seen as fundamental principles of life.

For guidance in this speculation I’m going to invoke the ideas of some pretty prominent scientists. This gives me some credibility. All of these scientists, however, are dead. Thus, in some ways their ideas might be outdated rather than accurate. For this reason, this essay is more of historical interest than scientific interest. Still the genetic theories outlined in this essay (although historical) are important and formative theories not wholly devoid of truth.

One further disclaimer: I ask that the reader keep in mind that even though I’ve studied these scientists and read some of their stuff, I must reserve the right to unintentionally misrepresent them. Relative to them, I know very little about science. Still, where would science be if nobody ever had the audacity to speculate recklessly? Fortunately that question is well beyond the scope of this essay.

To brutally strip away all suspense, here’s the nickel summary:

1st Common Fundamental Question
In what way does life perpetuate itself?

1st Fundamental Principle:
Through nature, i.e. biology, i.e. struggle for life, i.e. natural selection, i.e. a general order that is sometimes interrupted by slight variances, i.e. quantum physics, i.e. indeterminate(?), “quantum jumps.”

2nd Common Fundamental Question:
What makes living things different from non-living things?

2nd Fundamental Principle (some physicists’ proposed options and non-options):
• Max Delbrück: We don’t know, but someday maybe we can.
• Neils Bohr: We don’t know and maybe we never can.
• Erwin Schrödinger: Maybe it’s the free will of the Brahman.

In the end, we shall see that the two questions are really sort of the same question, but for now let’s take them one at a time.

First Question and Darwin’s Principle
So, what can science say about the
way that life perpetuates itself? Is life perpetuated in an orderly (i.e., "scientific") way? If so, does this order allow for slight variations? If so, can science discover the mechanisms that govern the orderly but varied way that life perpetuates itself?

Prior to 1859 Charles Darwin made a lot of observations. In 1859 he summarized these observations and drew some conclusions from them in the 460 pages of his "brief abstract"—The Origin of the Species. Central to his thoughts is the familiar concept of the evolution of species from previous species via the "daily and hourly scrutinising" of natural selection. As species struggle for life, they perpetuate themselves in an evolutionary way. In his own words (115), "All these results... follow inevitably from the struggle for life. Owing to this struggle for life, any variation, however slight and from whatever cause proceeding, if it be in any degree profitable to an individual of any species, in its infinitely complex relations to other organic beings and to external nature, will tend to the preservation of that individual, and will generally be inherited to by its offspring."

In this way, the generally constant order of life is gradually altered by "rejecting what is bad, preserving and adding up all that is good" (133).

Darwin's Principle is Incomplete

If we buy Darwin (and we do), we have a coherent but incomplete theory of how life perpetuates itself. Through his many observations, Darwin concluded that species evolved slowly. That is, a species remains generally constant (orderly perpetuation), excepting occasional slight variances. But Darwin's treatment of the first question is incomplete. He fails to supply any principles that account for this order and these slight variances. Natural Selection is an eloquent explanation for how good variances are preserved but says nothing about how variances are initiated from within what is otherwise orderly.

Of course, Darwin never claimed to understand all the mechanisms behind Natural Selection. Still, given the observations that Darwin made, we can press on determined to answer the (now more specific) first question—how is it that life perpetuates itself in an orderly way allowing for slight variances?

First Question and the Statistical Mechanical Principle

Prior to 1900, physicists were feeling pretty smug about how well they had everything figured out. Most thought that all of nature could theoretically be understood in terms of Newton's physics, so that they could understand even very complex phenomena. For example, these two ambitious men thought of the many atoms contained in bulk substances as simply large collections of Newtonian masses. Each atom obeyed the laws of Newtonian (classical) mechanics. When the effects of all of these atoms were added together, the most probable macroscopic properties of the bulk matter could be predicted using statistical methods. This system of statistical mechanics was so powerful that it reduced the business of physicists to the monotonous tasks of technicians. To understand nature they would take it apart until it could be explained in terms of these laws.

So, following this route of reductionism, a pre-1900 physicist might try to explain Darwin's slight variations in terms of statistical mechanics. And, as we shall see, they would have apparent success.

The statistical mechanic would view a living organism as a bulk substance made up of a lot of atoms. Each of these atoms would act according to the laws of classical physics. For each atom in each moment of time there would exist many different possible events. The atom might move unencumbered through the organism.
stabilize a chromosome molecule. This stabilization would be sufficient to overcome the disorder predicted by a classical, statistical mechanical approach. The atoms in the chromosome molecule could remain in a stable orientation not because of the balancing of Newtonian forces, but because they were subject to quantum effects. So the Biophysical Magi took one step towards explaining Darwin's incomplete first principle as quantum physics could finally account for the orderly way that life perpetuated itself. Max Delbriick realized this and linked heredity to quantum physics: "The stability and reproducibility of type in biology we think is a result of the stability and reproducibility of the genes, and this stability we think is based upon the stability of certain complex molecular structures" (a 17).

Beyond accounting for the stability of chromosomes (and hence accounting for order in inheritance), quantum mechanics could also account for Darwin's slight variations in inheritance. For although the chromosome molecule could remain in a stable state often enough to maintain order, it could also "get excited" and change its state via a quantum-jump. Although Bohr does not explicitly mention the biological significance of quantum-jumps, he did allude to it in 1933 when he said that in the adaption of living things "the feature of individuality symbolised by the quantum of action, together with some amplifying mechanism, is of decisive importance" (a 457).

Schrödinger makes a much more explicit link between the quantum-jumps of quantum mechanics and Darwin's slight variations when he writes, "We shall assume the structure of a gene to be that of a huge molecule, capable only of discontinuous change.... These rare events we shall identify with spontaneous mutations" (56). It follows for Schrödinger, "In Darwin's theory, you just have to substitute 'mutations' for his 'slight accidental variation' (just as quantum theory substitutes 'quantum jump' for 'continuous transfer of energy')" (35).

So, again we ask the first question: how is it that such a small thing as a chromosome can perpetuate life in an orderly way that allows for slight variations? The principle provided by the Biophysical Magi: through the stability and variability that comes along with quantization.
complexity of life in its evolved state: “any living cell carries with it the experiences of a billion years of experimentation by its ancestors” (a 11). He knew that the complexity of evolved living systems made them difficult objects of study. Speaking of this complexity Delbrück wrote, “such a situation from the outset diminishes the hope of understanding any one living thing by itself and the hope of discovering universal laws, the pride and ambition of physicists” (a 10). Yet, Delbrück was convinced that even complex living systems could be explained with a quantum mechanical understanding of molecular genetics. He wrote in his 1970 essay “A Physicist’s Renewed Look at Biology: Twenty Years Later,” “Molecular genetics, our latest wonder, has taught us to spell out the connectivity of the tree of life in such palpable detail that we may say in plain words, ‘This riddle of life has been solved’” (b 1312).

For Bohr, biology was more mysterious than it was for Delbrück. As shown earlier, he did think that the quantum physics of non-living systems played an important role in the heredity mechanism of living systems, but he thought that there was more to it. He wrote of his limited contentment (a 457): “The recognition of the essential importance of fundamentally atomistic features in the functions of living organisms is by no mean sufficient, however, for a comprehensive explanation of biological phenomena. The question at issue, therefore, is whether some fundamental traits are still missing in the analysis of natural phenomena, before we can reach an understanding of life on the basis of physical experience.

Bohr continued to speculate about the difference between studying biological system and studying physical systems. He knew that the study of physical systems involved an inherent uncertainty in the observation (i.e. Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle—a principle of quantum mechanics that I will neglect to explain here) because the act of observation disturbs the system. Along these same lines, he thought that living systems might be altered in a unique way when studied. For instance, to study the makeup of a gene we might separate it from the living organism. At this point the gene is no longer living. And so the laws that are unique to living things are not able to be studied because as we observe living things, the laws that make them uniquely alive are made unobservable. Bohr sums up this idea of a biological indeterminacy, “This fundamental difference between physical and biological investigations implies that no well-defined limit can be drawn for the applicability of physical ideas to the phenomena of life” (a 458).

Schrödinger also remained discontent, and thought that there must be a fundamental difference between living and non-living things. Unlike Bohr, who had only vague ideas of laws that were unique to living things but were masked by a biological uncertainty, Schrödinger had some very specific ideas about what it was that made living systems different. He was particularly impressed by the structure of the chromosome. Although the details of the chromosome’s structure were not yet well known, it was known that it was made up of a limited number of different subunits all linked together in a long chain-like structure. The order of these subunits seemed to follow no pattern. For this reason Schrödinger referred to the chromosome as an aperiodic crystal (2): "The arrangements of the atoms in the most vital parts of an organism and the interplay of these arrangements differ in a fundamental way from all those arrangements of atoms which physicists and chemists have hitherto made the object of their experimental and theoretical research."

Since the chromosome was so unlike anything found in non-living things, Schrödinger thought that it must be the key to what makes living things different from non-living things. He thought that such a unique molecule would necessarily be governed by some unique laws. It is for this reason that Schrödinger was not convinced that quantum mechanics could be the last word in explaining the order and variability of life. Schrödinger was ready to speculate about the possibility of some yet unknown and unique laws that might govern the action of the chromosome (3): "It is well-nigh unthinkable that the laws and regularities thus discovered should happen to apply immediately to the behavior of systems which do not exhibit the structure on which those laws and regularities are based."

Still, unlike Bohr, Schrödinger was not ready to give up the search for these laws on the basis of a biological uncertainty. He still believed that inheritance could be explained (78): "We must not be discouraged by the difficulty of interpreting life by the ordinary laws of physics. For that is just what is to be expected from the knowledge we have gained of the structure of living matter. We must be
prepared to find a new type of physical law prevailing in it."

But what would this “new type of physical law” be like? Like many prominent scientists, Schrödinger was not at all reluctant to speculate recklessly about the details of new laws. And like many revolutionary scientific ideas, Schrödinger’s ideas of these new types of physical laws sounded too absurd. In his speculation he puts forth the following two premises (85): "(i) My body functions as a pure mechanism according to the Laws of Nature. (ii) Yet I know, by incontrovertible direct experience, that I am directing its motions, of which I foresee the effects, that may be fateful and all-important, in which case I feel and take full responsibility for them. The only possible inference from these two facts is, I think, that I, who controls the motion of the atoms, according to the Laws of Nature.

Schrödinger goes on to say that the new laws which govern the inheritance mechanism used by the “aperiodic crystal” should be in terms of the free will of the Brahman (omnipresent, all-comprehending eternal self). Living things differ from non-living things in that they perpetuate themselves in a very orderly way. Living things also vary from non-living things in that they have a free will. It is the common free will of all living things that has the power to sustain the orderly perpetuation of life. Schrödinger believed that this sort of revolutionary type of physical law would be “the closest a biologist can get to proving God and immortality in one stroke” (85).

To us, Schrödinger’s speculations might sound unscientific. Indeed, some might say that they border on insanity. It seems that Schrödinger is treating a scientific question in an all too philosophical way. But I contend that the distinction between a scientific question and a philosophical question (a fundamental question of life) is at best a blurry one. Again, there might be some common would-be fundamental questions of both science and life. And some would-be fundamental principles of science may or may not be seen as fundamental principles of life. In this essay we’ve seen how many scientists have speculated about life under the disguise of science. Darwin speculated about the unique order and variations of living things and came up with an incomplete principle that described how life perpetuated itself. Statistical mechanics like Boltzmann and Gibbs mistakenly thought that the sheer bulk of living things allowed for heredity’s order and disorder. Quantum mechanics like Delbrück, Bohr and Schrödinger realized that, when speculating about life, quantization was a crucial consideration due to the small nature of the chromosome. Still suspecting that there was more to it than quantum mechanics, Bohr and Schrödinger proposed that there are still more laws that need to be considered in our speculations about life.

Really though, nobody has yet found out how exactly the Brahman comes into play in modern genetics. Perhaps they never will. I do not want to consider the question of who was right in their early genetic theories. That is not the point of this essay. I only mean to illustrate that science can be an appropriate vehicle for speculation when contemplating the fundamental questions of life. In doing this sort of speculation, it is possible that we might conclude that science has something to say sometimes. It is also possible to conclude that science has nothing to say sometimes.

So, yes:

Life. Big, deep subject.
Science. Big, deep subject (sometimes).
References and Resources


Bonds

-i.

I bought and own the definition of chagrin,
Instalment returns of interest
On a seven-year investment:
I own a counterfeit given currency
as friend.

-ii.

Meretricious marketplace like smacked marbles.
A chaotic Greek-god-spat. Or
How the Father must’ve felt
At Adam’s smashing?
Brouhaha of babblers buying,
lying, spreading themselves
in a tenuous, desultory layer
I’ll invest again in the dead stock
knowing
People can’t make good some debts,
Some diseases are friends we disguise.

-Timothy Ladd
Though talented musicians are a dime a dozen, few excellent musicians are also talented poets. Over the past twenty-four years he has recorded more than twenty albums and has established himself among such greats as Paul Simon, James Taylor, Neil Young and Bob Dylan. What makes Cockburn particularly interesting is the subject matter of his songs. He is a person of faith, and his pervasive Christian hope is evident in the stories he tells.

He began his career as a street musician in Paris during the sixties, and has performed just about everywhere, including the Clinton inauguration last year. Though a Canadian living in the Toronto area, his music is appreciated around the world. His earlier albums contain the serious poetry and acoustic guitar work of a self-styled vagabond. In the eighties, while his American audience grew dramatically, the subject matter of his songs shifted. He became heavily involved in the struggles of Central America. Cockburn’s songs expressed the painful shortcomings of democracy and capitalism in their joint rape of Central America. In 1991 with the remarkable success of Nothing But A Burning Light, Cockburn returned to the forefront of the international music scene.

With the release of his new album Dart To The Heart and his upcoming show at Calvin, Dialogue had the opportunity to talk with Bruce Cockburn about his music and faith. He will be performing on May 7 in the Calvin Field house, with John Trudell as his opening act.

It seems that musicians often have a carry-over in creativity from album to album. Was your latest album, Dart To The Heart, inspired by your Christmas album? And if not, this album certainly makes a break with your history as a social critic. Songs like “Indian Wars” and “Kit Carson” from Nothing But A Burning Light, they’re just not on this latest album.

Cockburn: That’s true. This album has nothing whatever to do with the Christmas album. It was recorded primarily before we started work on the Christmas album, and the Christmas album was always intended to be centered around a more traditional style of Christmas music. So far as the political or social commentary goes its true that there aren’t, you know, issues... In fact I will agree with you.

In an interview I heard with you on the radio a number of years back, you said that you got involved with Latin America simply because you went there, and because you were involved naturally you wrote songs about it. In terms of you making a change on this album, is it just that you are not going to Central America any more, and if so how come? Why aren’t there songs about political strife?

Cockburn: Well, there are songs, there was one song I wrote about a certain Canadian politician, but in the light of the rest of the album it did not make sense. It is an album with songs mostly about love. It ruined the album to have a song with more political aspects in there. However, there are some songs like “Scanning This Crowd”, which is definitely a political song, but it is more about the nature of politics. Not like “Rocket Launcher” which is about, you know, killing. In “Scanning This Crowd” I am basically saying get off your ass and do a few things right. That’s what it came to.

With the song “Southland Of The Heart” are you reflecting on your project in Dart to the Hart, an album love songs. It seemed that you depicted having arrived at a feeling of contentment.

Cockburn: Well that might be making too much out of it. I particularly like that song because it talked more about the “I” in the song than most love songs do. The “I” really doesn’t come out in most love songs. It is the notion of
offering love to the “I” in the song, as a kind of refuge from all this crap that can dominate our lives. I tried to pull the two of them together [the “I” and the “you”], so to conceive artistically of receiving this mythical wave of love.

I sort of got a picture of heaven.

Cockburn: Well yeah, there is sort of that ambiguity to it, and I don’t mind that. Love is kind of mythical, and the “Southland” has traditionally had that mythical appeal to it as well.

On your most recent album you worked with musicians like Michael Been, Sam Phillips and T-Bone Burnett, who all happen to profess the Christian faith, and then also Bono quoted you on Rattle and Hum—“kick the darkness until it bleeds daylight.” Is this incidental, or is it an intended community?

Cockburn: Well, it is the kind of coincidence that I choose to refer to a couple of albums back as the “Big Circumstance.” There is a kind of community but nobody thinks about it that way. Everyone involved would throw up their hands in horror if you called it that. We all have certain differences, but there is some kind of Christianity or appreciation for faith. I think that any of those names could come together coincidentally, but there is more to it than that. There is a certain kind of person that you end up working with. But you also have to remember that Jackson Browne appeared on my last album and he is as agnostic as you can get.

Cockburn: Well I am not necessarily thinking of hierarchy and out of context I don’t know what T-Bone meant by that. Some people need structure and if they want it that is fine. If someone likes hierarchy they can have it, just keep it away from me.

In a previous interview you were quoted as saying that compared to most Rock & Roll your music is not materialistic or cynical. Could you elaborate?

Cockburn: I am not necessarily thinking of hierarchy and out of context I don’t know what T-Bone meant by that. Some people need structure and if they want it that is fine. If someone likes hierarchy they can have it, just keep it away from me.

Cockburn: Well I am not necessarily thinking of hierarchy and out of context I don’t know what T-Bone meant by that. Some people need structure and if they want it that is fine. If someone likes hierarchy they can have it, just keep it away from me.

In a previous interview you were quoted as saying that compared to most Rock & Roll your music is not materialistic or cynical. Could you elaborate?

Cockburn: I am not necessarily thinking of hierarchy and out of context I don’t know what T-Bone meant by that. Some people need structure and if they want it that is fine. If someone likes hierarchy they can have it, just keep it away from me.

T-Bone Burnett was quoted in an interview as saying that “the more structure and hierarchy in the church the better.” Do you agree? You made a comment in “Southland Of The Heart” that “When the preacher lays his insight down and claims to lead the blind, when those you trust just get you hooked....” So are you cynical of the church hierarchy?

Cockburn: I am not necessarily thinking of hierarchy and out of context I don’t know what T-Bone meant by that. Some people need structure and if they want it that is fine. If someone likes hierarchy they can have it, just keep it away from me.

In a previous interview you were quoted as saying that compared to most Rock & Roll your music is not materialistic or cynical. Could you elaborate?

Cockburn: I am not necessarily thinking of hierarchy and out of context I don’t know what T-Bone meant by that. Some people need structure and if they want it that is fine. If someone likes hierarchy they can have it, just keep it away from me.

Where do you go to find your intellectual and spiritual nourishment?

Cockburn: I try not to go anywhere, I just try to shut up and listen. I think that is what works for me, but I’m not offering that as a method for other people. I don’t live with a structure, I get up in the morning because the horses have to be fed. When I go to a gig, the bus pulls up to the back door and I go in and play. That happens according to a schedule but other than that I pretty much float, and for me this has been a means of exploration.

In the eighties you moved away from your folk style, into a more Rock & Roll format and you got very socially active. And then with Nothing But A Burning Light you kept some
of your political critique even though you returned to your folk roots musically. Have you moved on to the environmental issue with your endorsement of Friends of the Earth on the back of the new album? Are you involved with different struggles, or do you see yourself as not as effective?

Cockburn: The songs are about experiences, they are not there to sell anything. Although if they succeed in doing that of course that’s fine. I don’t write these songs with this sort of thing in mind and I certainly don’t go out with the goal to hold up another sign. With the issue of the environment, there is not a song about that on the album, but I feel that it is an important thing to be involved in—an issue which is going to need to be dealt with. It is not going to go away, it will get worse and worse and it will continue to compound.

So you think that your focus has gradually shifted, that you have travelled on, but you don’t see that as being essentially different?

Cockburn: No I don’t. Not in terms of the writing of the music. If the writing undergoes certain changes that’s fine, but the transition in the focus of my music probably has more to do with my age than anything else.

It’s been rumored that you are a friend of Sojourners. I was wondering if you are in agreement with Sojourners on issues concerning people of faith—are they heading in the right direction?

Cockburn: I haven’t read an issue of Sojourners in a year or so, so I don’t really know what I can tell you. But, if you’re going to have a Jimmy Swagart, you had better have a Sojourners.

I was wondering what your thoughts are on liberation theology, particularly Gutierrez, from your wanderings in Central America?

Cockburn: I think if anybody tries to draw too tight a line around anything, you might say you can interfere with the whole of it. But I think that the motivation is headed in the right direction, it’s sound and appropriate. However what gets turned into in practice is always less firm. But as a motivating force and as framework for Protestant churches, it may be something that we have need for.

Would you call yourself an evangelical?

Cockburn: I wouldn’t call myself anything.

With reference to American Fundamentalism and whatnot,

Gavin’s Woodpile

working out on Gavin’s woodpile
safe within the harmony of kin
visions begin to crowd my eyes
like a meteor shower in the autumn skies
and the soil beneath me seems to moan
with a sound like the wind through a hollow bone
and my mind fills with figures like Lappish runes of power...
and log slams on rough-hewn log
and a voice from somewhere scolds a barking dog

i remember a bleak-eyed prisoner
in the Stoney Mountain life-suspension home
you drink and fight and damage someone
and they throw you away for some years of boredom
one year done and five more to go—
no job waiting so no parole
and over and over they tell you that you’re nothing...
and i toss another log on Gavin’s woodpile
and wonder at the lamp-worn window’s welcome smile

i remember crackling embers
coloured windows shining through the rain
like the coloured slicks on the English River
death in the marrow and death in the liver
and some government gambler with his mouth full of steak
saying “if you can’t eat the fish, fish in some other lake
To watch a people die—it is no new thing.”
and the stack of wood grows higher and higher
and a helpless rage seems to set my brain on fire
and everywhere the free space fills
like a punctured diving suit and i’m paralyzed in the face of it all
cursed with the curse of these modern times
distant mountains, blue and liquid
luminous like a thickening of sky
flash in my mind like a stairway to life—
a train whistle cuts through the scene like a knife
three hawks wheel in a dazzling sky—
a slow motion jet makes them look like a lie
and i’m left to conclude there’s no human answer near...
but there’s a narrow path to a life to come
that explodes into sight with the power of the sun

a mist rises as the sun goes down
and the light that’s left forms a kind of crown
the earth is bread, the sun is wine
it’s a sign of a hope that’s ours for all time

Burritts Rapids 17/11/75

“English River”—
river system in northwestern Ontario, polluted by Reid paper company.
Nobody is doing much about the fact that the native people who live
along its course have lost both food and livelihood, as well as being poisoned, because of the contaminated fish.
CALL IT DEMOCRACY

padded with power here they come
international loan sharks backed by the guns
of market hungry military profiteers
whose word is a swamp and whose brow is smeared
with the blood of the poor

who rob life of its quality
who render rage a necessity
by turning countries into labour camps
modern slavers in drag as champions of freedom

sinister cynical instrument
who makes the gun into a sacrament-
the only response to the deification
of tyranny by so-called “developed” nations’
idolatry of ideology

north south east west
kill the best and buy the rest
it’s just spend a buck to make a buck
you don’t give a flying f**k
about the people in misery

IMF dirty MF
takes away everything it can get
always making certain that there’s one thing left
keep them on the hook with insupportable debt

see the paid-off local bottom feeders
passing themselves off as leaders
kiss the ladies shake hands like a cheap bordello

and they call it democracy
and they call it democracy

see the loaded eyes of the children too
trying to make the best of it the way kids do
one day you’re going to rise from your habitual feast
to find yourself staring down the throat of the beast
they call the revolution

IMF dirty MF
takes away everything it can get
always making certain that there’s one thing left
keep them on the hook with insupportable debt

TORONTO, 11/85

Both songs reprinted by permission from World of Wonders

you have mentioned in the past your disappointment with Fundamentalism and Christianity in the limelight. But you don’t hide your Christianity--if you look at your lyrics every other song seems to have a suggestion there. How do you deal with this?

Cockburn: I stopped trying to separate myself a long time ago. When I first became a Christian, Fundamentalism was the loudest voice around. But I became a Christian through a kind of roundabout process, through the influences of various writers, and I wasn’t sure that I had got it right. When I first took communion I wasn’t sure what I had done.

I didn’t know anything about the Church except that I had gotten married in one. So I went up to the preacher afterwards—it was an Anglican church—and I asked him what I had just done. He had the kindness to not to get caught up in the pietism of the church. He took the time to explain it to me.

Can everybody find it out for themselves?

Cockburn: Well I think there is always room to be helped. For me it has not been by people who claim to have the answers. You can write about Christianity in a very dogmatic way, but usually when people claim to have all the answers they are spouting bullshit. Again, you can write about Christianity in a very dogmatic way or you can write about Christianity the way a Charles Williams or C.S. Lewis did, although C.S. Lewis is a bit dogmatic at points. I guess it comes down to your personality, whether or not you take well to strong assertions.

Are there others besides Charles Williams and C.S. Lewis who have influenced you?

Cockburn: Thomas Merton, Simone Weil and some of the other French spiritual writers.

Back to Rock & Roll. You have been around almost as long as Dylan and the Grateful Dead. How seriously do you take Rock & Roll? For those of us with a cynical disposition, Rock & Roll often appears to be a hoax. How do you deal with this and how does it relate to your song on the new album “Tie me at the Cross Roads”?

Cockburn: Well that song has more to do with fame in general than it does with Rock & Roll in particular. Rock & Roll is enjoyable music to me. Still, I have always been perplexed by those who raise their fists in the air and yell “Rock & Roll.” I do not think that this sort of thing corrupts the mind of the youth, if you bring up a kid well she will be able to see through the negative aspects.

Still, how do you deal with the cheesy profiteering aspects of the Rock & Roll industry?

Cockburn: The cheesy aspects tick me off every now and then but they have not affected me. I wouldn’t limit these negative aspects to Rock & Roll, it has to do with everything media related.

Do you see yourself doing this ten years from now?

Cockburn: Well let’s just say that I can’t see myself doing anything else ten years from now—how is that for commitment.
The Unlucky Sharpshooter, and Other Stories
by Kristen Dombek

The day Sam went too far, which was also the first day Mr. Mudden was in bed with a coma, I wasn’t there. But since that day each of the key players, except Sam, has given me an account, and I gather it went something like this:

The day begins at the earliest instant of midnight. The first measure of the day is called cockcrow, long before light, which only the cock notices and announces. The next is silence. The next is dawn, insisted upon by the cock—the cock without which sluggish men would never rise to do their work, wrote Pliny, and therefore the progenitor of all human achievement.

A sun had not risen quietly over the Mudden farm in seven years, not since Sam reached maturity. During summers such as this one, he initiated every morning with his sore-throated reveille. After which the geese stretched and yawned by attacking the air with their wings and screaming, and then Mr. Mudden took to the fields with his growling machinery, and to the east and west Mr. Noble and Mr. Hettington with theirs.

But it had been many weeks since Mr. Mudden had pushed his tractor across the fields. He had lain in bed so long that the corn field was clotted with dockweed and, because it was a dry August, the bean field was peppered with patches of brown. Such was the state of things when one day, Sam did not observe the period of silence between cockcrow and dawn. At four o’clock in the morning he perched, erect, atop the fencepost at the southwest corner of the baryard, began crowing, and did not stop.

If in the morning the sacred cock comes from his coop and eats, the omens are good: the battle will be won, the decision will be wise, the woman will be fertile. So victories are decided, so the land is ruled, so the rulers are fettered to the will of the rooster. Even the lion listens to the rooster and flees; make a broth of a cock and garlic, smear it on your body, and wild beasts will not harm you.

When Mrs. Mudden opened the kitchen door and stood in
the doorway in her thin grey nightgown with a broom in her hand, she saw Sam orbiting the lilac bush. It was six o’clock. Behind her, on the basement stairway wall, hung a gun. Sam was not, she gathered, concerned with announcing the dawn at all; he seemed to be crowing about something else altogether. She had lain awake for hours listening to that infernal noise and her husband’s labored breathing. She could not abide it. Her eyes were starchy and her mind was bubbling with ferocious thoughts. The lilac bush was only a dozen feet from the house; she must beat the bird into a retreat. She approached the lilac bush slowly, testing the weight of the broom in her palms. She bent down, stretched the broom as if she were sweeping under a bed, and nudged Sam gently. He squawked even more loudly and maintained orbit. She charged, pummelled the bush, beat it, her eyes closed and her nightgown flapping. Sam shrieked, but her shriek was louder. Yet nothing, it seemed, would budge him. She gave up. The morning air chilled her and stones had ground into the soles of her feet.

Some that follow the way of Mohammed say that there is in the sky a giant cock that holds the heavens apart, one from another, and that it is when this giant cock crows that all cocks crow. He is the wise one who is the conscience of humankind, commanding and admonishing—transcendent, yet between his rubbery crown and scaled claws lies the strength that holds day and night apart.

Mrs. Mudden moved the covers aside and injected insulin into her husband’s calloused thigh. She had gone to bed with her hair still pinned back, and now it hung loose in pieces, framing her face in a dishevelled halo as she leaned over him. “Something’s wrong with that rooster,” she said. He opened his eyes, smiled sweetly, and said, “Good.”

It was not until seven-thirty that Michael Mudden woke up. He woke up annoyed. It was not an unusual state for him in this, his thirteenth year, but this morning there was a distinct cause, which he ascertained as soon as the crowing cut through his drowsy fog. He swore, took a neatly folded t-shirt and shorts from a drawer, dressed, hooked his basketball under his arm, and went outside, passing his mother’s “good morning” without so much as glancing at her. By the barn Mr. Mudden had poured a cement square and erected a hoop. Michael always shot fifty free-throws before breakfast. This morning he worked, as always, efficiently, making eighteen of the first twenty-five shots without pausing or taking his eyes off the basket. But before free-throw twenty-six he stopped, the ball in the crook of his elbow. He gave no sign that the incessant noise was getting to him; he seemed to be studying something a few hundred yards away in the back field. After a moment he finished the fifty shots. On his way back to the house, without looking or missing a step, he hurled the ball at the lilac bush, but he picked it up again, brushed it off, and took it inside.

Despite the injection of insulin, and though he had not kept food down for two days, Mr. Mudden’s blood sugar had reached 1800 mg/100ml by nine o’clock. To combat the osmotic pressure of blood hypertonic with sugar, water in his cells was being sucked into his bloodstream. So his cells were shrivelled and dry, and his blood glutted and heavy. Earlier in the summer doctors had removed a pancreatic tumor by performing a pancreadoduodenectomy, a choledochoduodenostomy, and a gastrojejunostomy, in that order. The acute physical stress had prompted his present condition—teetering on the edge of a hyperglycemic hyperosmolar non-ketotic coma.

“That rooster’s been crowing since about three o’clock,” said Mrs. Mudden. She leaned against the kitchen sink watching Michael, who was staring fixedly at four eggs he was frying in a saucepan. “Something’s wrong with him. Your father’s in bad shape.” Michael grunted, flipped the
eggs onto a plate, and stalked out of the room.

In the late morning the hypersomality of Mr. Mudden’s blood began to cause osmotic diuresis. Volume depletion combined with this hypersomality can prompt hypovolemic shock. At eleven o’clock Mrs. Mudden noticed that her husband was catatonic. She injected 5 units of Regular insulin and called the doctor, who told her it would be more dangerous to move him than to be without professional assistance.

Mrs. Noble came at noon with frozen chicken patties and cole slaw, potato salad, and sweet pickles in plastic containers from Fletcher’s Market. “Mother,” said Mrs. Mudden, “there’s something wrong with that rooster. It hasn’t stopped crowing since two o’clock this morning.” “Sam,” said Mrs. Noble, “stop that. What’s wrong with you?” The women arranged the food and three plates on the Formica table by the kitchen window. From that view the lilac bush seemed to be doing a little dance of its own accord.

The roaring of the electric guitar had been going on for over an hour, so Mrs. Mudden approached Michael’s bedroom door with some trepidation. “Lunch,” she said, a few feet from the door. Nothing. She pounded on the door and shouted, “Lunch.” She opened the door and screamed, “Lunch!” The noise was deafening; Michael was standing with his back toward her, looking out his bedroom window, distorting the reverberation from a chord he had played some time ago. “Lunch?” she said. He turned to look at her, hit a new chord, and started cranking a metal lever on his guitar. She knew this was affirmation. “That rooster’s been crowing non-stop since one o’clock this morning,” she said. “I’m really worried about him.” Michael hit another chord and stomped on a small box on the floor.

By early afternoon Mr. Mudden’s plasma osmality was as high as the osmality of the tissues of his kidney’s distal tubes and collecting ducts. So even in his kidney the blood received no water, and the water was excreted. Hypervolumia was increased, renal blood flow decreased, and though this decreased blood flow conserved urine, it also curtailed most remaining glucose excretion in the kidney. A vicious cycle.

Indeed the cock is a magical bird, sending the evil demons of the night into blithering retreat with one blast from his powerful lungs. As every follower of the great Zoroaster knew, and kept his own cock ready to frighten antagonistic spirits away. Mr. Hettington, one farm to the west, has always said that a farm without a rooster is like a milk cow with no teats.

At 3:00 Michael went to the cellar stairway and took down the .22 caliber rifle from a rack on the wall. In the garden, picking beans, Mrs. Mudden and Mrs. Noble saw him walk out of the house carrying the gun. “Where’s he going with that thing?” said Mrs. Noble. “I don’t think he’s touched the gun in his life,” said Mrs. Mudden. They watched him with great interest. He walked straight out the back door to a point just opposite the lilac bush, took aim, and shot Sam through the right eye.

Sam was an old rooster, and therefore too stringy to eat, but there is no chicken that can’t make a decent broth. Giggling, Mrs. Mudden and Mrs. Noble broke his neck, plucked his feathers while he was still warm, pulled out his organs a few at a time, and sent him simmering in a big pot on the stove.

Michael passed through the kitchen on his way to shoot his fifty free-throws before supper. “Michael,” said his mother, speaking in the raised voice one uses with people who are always leaving rooms as you begin, “how did you manage to shoot that rooster right through the eye like that? Was it luck?”

Michael said, “No.”
Seeing how Calvin College is primarily a religious institution, we at *Dialogue* are especially on the lookout for **religious poetry**, though we are not quite sure what it is (Well, for that matter, we aren’t quite sure what art is). Still, we think we may have found some, and it is rumored that the poet is a PK—a preachers kid, that is. The little that we know about the habits of this particular PK (just another rabble-rouser?) and religious poetry in general, we wonder about the security of his soul, and more importantly, is this religious poetry? So help us out and send in a ballot.

---

**Christ at Camp**

Don’t tell me I’m Jesus when it’s lunchtime, Not when thou hast prepared a table before me in the presence of eight, no wait get back here, Maurice nine bobbing, nappy-headed kids, Not when the bread for which we give thanks is broken into three pieces and two, three, four hands reach for seconds, Not when God helps those who put their greedy worm-baiting fingers over one leaving two No dessert, Lorenzo, Not when it is better to give the rest to the two whiniest than receive their cries of malnourishment during naptime, I get you any extra slice at dinner, okay, Kenny?

Don’t remind me I’m with Jesus when it’s lunchtime, Not when his chicken bone shoulders tremble Not when he exposes a week’s neglect in a shaky whisper I wanna go home

Not when home sent him off without a change of hand-me-downs Not when I’m a goat.

---

**The Experiment**

God plopped me in a beaker turned Time on **LOW** and watched me wade grinning, knee-deep in slow-warm water. * * *

“Spring your frog legs” He cried, but I floated oblivious Then bubbles flipped me belly-up and the experiment ended. * * *

He drained bliss down the sink and sealed my boiled body in a plastic bag marked **FAILURE #278746**