This issue of Cannon introduces us to the black humor in Marcel Duchamp's art.

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On Monday afternoon Jacob was sitting on a rock by the river thinking about Mary. A playful sparrow became exhausted from bucking the warm breezes and landed on the sand not far from him. Jacob watched the curious creature as it cocked a searching eye at his disconsolate figure. Mary was dead and that was all he could think about.

"Go away little bird," he murmured. Don't you know that Mary is dead? You can't see her now! Go away!"

Silence. The little bird bowed its head to the sand, still listening. Then, with a brief flutter of wings, it was gone; its tiny frame scudded before the playful breezes. Muddy river water swirled at Jacob's feet as he watched the feathered messenger disappear into the waving cottonwood branches.

A car rumbled across the bridge up the river. Mary was dead. A squirrel chattered furiously at Jacob from the branches of an oak tree. Winter was not far away. Jacob limped up the rocky path to his cottage. He would have to make his own supper now. It was getting late.

Jacob sat in front of his cabin and listened to the angry squirrel while he peeled two small potatoes. A small pile of colored leaves lay at his feet. Mary had gone looking for them on the day she died. She had wanted to hang them on the wall next to the fireplace. Now she was dead.

Jacob put the potatoes on the wood stove to boil while he went to milk his cow. When he finished, the sun was pink on the horizon and the mosquitoes were buzzing in the chokecherry trees. "Colder weather within three days," Jacob said. "The signs are right."

After supper, Jacob sat in front of his shack and smoked his pipe. The river was whispering goodnight to the sun while the darkness slowly reconnoitered its forces behind the trees. Forgotten crickets were chirping their song of neglect and danger in the dark bushes near the river. Mary was dead. The muddy river had claimed its prize. Occasionally the dog would bound away from Jacob's pipe.

"I know." Jacob tapped out his pipe and went inside the cabin. The boy remained outside with his back resting comfortably against the unpainted shack. The river slapped gently at the rocks, preparing its bed for the coming night.

The boy's name was Clarence. His parents were dead and now Mary was dead. Jacob was the only one left in the family.

The boy watched as a small rabbit hopped slowly along the river bank through the gathering dusk. He watched as a family of skunks arched their striped tails over the large mound of black dirt adding a sweet perfume to the gentle odor of Mary's death. An old raccoon padded disconsolately to the river's edge to pay its last respects to Mary. Clarence watches as the company of sparrows conceded to the gathering darkness and returned to the safety of their nest.

Then the silence attacked. The evening breeze froze and became darkness. The forgotten crickets concluded their song and bowed their heads. An eerie quietness settled over the entire forest. The boy remained outside, watching the silence celebrate its victory.

Clarence heard it first. The sound of a horn floated softly through the forest from far away. The music slowly grew louder, becoming a distinct melody as Jacob came out of the shack to listen. Jacob recognized the song and smiled at Clarence. The boy nodded his head and together they entered the cabin. Jacob lit a large lantern on the table while Clarence got out the checkerboard and made the first move.

Mary is dead. Jacob and Clarence are alone and living by a river in Iowa. When they speak, the forest listens to their command. Jacob and Clarence are the only ones left in the family.

Jerry van Tol
Do you know that teeling after you’ve eaten too much? A sore, upset stomach. A stuffed, gnawed on from what you don’t. You know, the right from the wrong. And I’m sure you know that inside, and you try to sort out what you need sometimes excreting can be a real hard time. That stuff you thought was meat was really cereal, and you just can’t get rid of it. Do you mean? well. sorta feel that way now; stuffed with info and thoughts from stories, Feedback, and various conversations, dealing with art, its standards, aesthetics, and the very life, of literary works. This doesn’t imply that I suggest that there are no norms for art at all. Instead, each piece of work is in a limited way a work unto itself. Why? Simply because a work of art is an expression of one aspect of life. It cannot be both a work of art and a comprehensive purview of all of reality; it can only be expressive of so much meaning and no more. Thus a Christian writer does not have to, and I believe, cannot, incorporate the full-orbed beauty and order of creation, and God’s masterful love for man in His creation, every time he sets his pen to paper. How can one work of art be that? Art is not life; the greatest masterpiece is only a partial expression of it. A Christian artist can only attempt in his art to be holy even as Christ is holy, but he may not damn himself, nor may others damn him, if he does not always succeed. It comes to this: I deny absolute norms for artistic expression because I can’t deny the diversity of a God-ordered creation. However, there are general guidelines which aid an artist in being creatively expressive of a community. With this approach, I first of all suggest that a literary work must have a

A Doctor in the House?

by Wally van de Kleut

Do you know that teeling after you’ve eaten too much? A sore, upset stomach. A stuffed, gnawed on from what you don’t. You know, the right from the wrong. And I’m sure you know that inside, and you try to sort out what you need sometimes excreting can be a real hard time. That stuff you thought was meat was really cereal, and you just can’t get rid of it. Do you mean? well. sorta feel that way now; stuffed with info and thoughts from stories, Feedback, and various conversations, dealing with art, its standards, aesthetics, and the very life, of literary works. This doesn’t imply that I suggest that there are no norms for art at all. Instead, each piece of work is in a limited way a work unto itself. Why? Simply because a work of art is an expression of one aspect of life. It cannot be both a work of art and a comprehensive purview of all of reality; it can only be expressive of so much meaning and no more. Thus a Christian writer does not have to, and I believe, cannot, incorporate the full-orbed beauty and order of creation, and God’s masterful love for man in His creation, every time he sets his pen to paper. How can one work of art be that? Art is not life; the greatest masterpiece is only a partial expression of it. A Christian artist can only attempt in his art to be holy even as Christ is holy, but he may not damn himself, nor may others damn him, if he does not always succeed. It comes to this: I deny absolute norms for artistic expression because I can’t deny the diversity of a God-ordered creation. However, there are general guidelines which aid an artist in being creatively expressive of a community. With this approach, I first of all suggest that a literary work must have a

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member of the Christian community has no right to state that there is no meaning or no form in the work he has read. I ask, is such criticism upbuilding? does it nurture a Christian art community? and does such a critic have the right to assume that the Christian artist has not struggled with his art? Let such a Christian critic remember his place as reader, and let him remember not to categorically deny the Christ-directed confession a Christian artist also makes. So too, the "dabbling poet" should not resign, and should not refrain from publishing his work. He has every right to do so within a Christian community. In fact, I feel, he must attempt to do so. Likewise, members of the Christian community have the task to sustain and nurture him if they can empathize with his particular mode of aesthetic expression. For the dabbling poet (artist), who realizes the importance of a Christian artist within a community, there is a great fear to share his work by publishing it. Don’t knock it too easily.

Specifically, all works of art do not have to, and in fact cannot abide by, and be subject to, an abstract set of rules or norms. For example, not all poems have to express a certain meaning in the same way to be good poems. A comprehensive body of norms consistent with a designated aesthetic philosophy destroys the very aesthetics, the very life, of literary works. This doesn’t imply that I suggest that there are no norms for art at all. Instead, each piece of work is in a limited way a work unto itself. Why? Simply because a work of art is an expression of one aspect of life. It cannot be both a work of art and a comprehensive purview of all of reality; it can only be expressive of so much meaning and no more. Thus a Christian writer does not have to, and I believe, cannot, incorporate the full-orbed beauty and order of creation, and God’s masterful love for man in His creation, every time he sets his pen to paper. How can one work of art be that? Art is not life; the greatest masterpiece is only a partial expression of it. A Christian artist can only attempt in his art to be holy even as Christ is holy, but he may not damn himself, nor may others damn him, if he does not always succeed. It comes to this: I deny absolute norms for artistic expression because I can’t deny the diversity of a God-ordered creation. However, there are general guidelines which aid an artist in being creatively expressive of a community. With this approach, I first of all suggest that a literary work must have a

(contr, page 3)
great thrust of meaning (especially true for
the poem and the short story) and that this
degree to which associable meanings can be
incorporated within the central thrust of the
Christian has the saving grace to know not to
to the Christian artist because only the
broad art guidelines.

praise our Lord. The fulness of creation is to
be subdued by God's servants, and I see a

absolutize anyone technique so that
there must be an appropriate use made of
literary techniques is in my mind
presupposed, and the capability of such use is
what distinguishes a good artist from a

of literary techniques cannot be standar-
dized; it is a matter of taste.

Thirdly, there is clarity of meaning. This is
a matter of how the artist feels about his
subject matter, and it varies with how
symbolic he feels he has to be. Although
clarity/ambiguity is relative, it is not
arbitrary. The Christian artist must never be
ashamed, or even hesitant, to express his
praise, be it as it may well be, a simple
recognition of the God-ordered creation we
live in. In conjunction, I can't see why any
Christian artist should be overly hesitant to
express that part of ourselves and our lives
which manifests itself in an irrational
manner.

Also I would like to add that the criteria for
good art is not one of the laboriousness of the
creative act, because it is not the art process
but the product that is shared with a
community.

There are more than these three areas that
should be thought and written about, but
right now my mind's doing that stuffed up
thing again. Besides, this article is long
enough. Finally, a friend of mine I met
asked me how I know what I think out of my butt. He could be
right, but then, the upset stomach never
really leaves.
Art Profile

LAUGH IF YOU DARE

by Syd Hielema

Art historian H.R. Rookmaker from the Free University in Amsterdam once stated in a lecture that the artist Marcel Duchamp had one of the greatest minds of our century. Though this does not, of course, mean that he is one of the greatest artists, we can conclude that the direction of Duchamp’s art is probably noteworthy. If we look at him a little more closely, we would learn that he was blessed with artistic talents also, making his work worth consideration.

Even so, his work is by and large nauseating. Perhaps you have come to the same conclusion after glancing over the paintings reproduced on this page. A great mind based on an evil heart becomes cynical and ugly. The artistry of such a man must also be bitter.

Duchamp, a Frenchman, was most active during the early part of this century. Like many modern artists, he was heavily influenced by Pablo Picasso. When Picasso, after some struggle, came to the conclusion that life is meaningless and absurd, Duchamp responded with an “Amen!” The bulk of Duchamp’s work is part of his attempt to develop this seemingly dead-end theme.

God is dead? No, said Duchamp, if we say that we are assuming that there once was a God who died. We must not even talk about God, for whatever that word stands for is just a human concoction. Rather, man is dead! There is no such thing as humanity. The scribbled inscription on a book of his art reads, “Eros, c'est la vie.” (Sex, that is life.) All that man has left is his sexuality, but even this cannot make him human, for animals also have a sex life. Basically, man is reduced to a biological machine.

This belief works itself out in his paintings in two different ways. First of all, in his works which, because of their title, lead us to believe that he is representing humans, we find only grotesque, mechanical shapes. More often than not the titles have some sort of sexual connotation, as, for example, “The Bride Stripped Bare by the Bachelors” or “The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride.”

Secondly, he has pieces which seem to indicate that he as the artist is also nothing more than a biological machine. These works are called “Ready-mades”, mainly because he takes an existing thing, gives it a title, and poof! as if it had been touched by King Midas himself, the “thing” becomes art. Just as John Cage says any sound can be music, so Duchamp believes any thing can be art. There is no distinction between life and art. No biological mechanism can set himself apart and call himself an artist.

If you have scanned the paintings on this page you may say, “Yes, but one of these does portray an actual human being.” Not really. Duchamp’s “Mona Lisa” is not a reproduction of a human being, but rather of DaVinci’s famous painting, which Duchamp has completely destroyed with a few quick strokes of his brush. Not only is life absurd, but art, which represented the noble human values of times past is also absurd, mockable.

Maybe you thought this painting, which Duchamp entitled “L.H.O.O.Q.”, (literally, “she has a hot bottom”) was funny. At least Duchamp thought so. He believed that true humour often contains more truth than the most serious seriousness. One would think that for him true humour also contains deep cynicism. The belief that life is absurd leaves man with two “choices”, two ways in which he can view reality: he can laugh or he can cry. Duchamp has obviously no tears to waste.

In retrospect I think now that it may have been a poor decision to feature Marcel Duchamp in an art profile. This semester we have already looked at Salvador Dali, Karel Appel, and John Cage in the Cannon. On campus Thalians has presented us with the absurd play Endgame. We may have received an overdose of the distortion and despair which we call the twentieth century.

Does that mean that we ignore what is going on today? Obviously not, we all know that we are called to test the spirits of our age. Yet, we cannot plunge headfirst into material filled with God-damning lies and expect to be untouched by it. Perhaps the best solutions would be for us to publish an art profile which will end with the line, “Praise the Lord for the work of such a man.” That would be a real mind-blower.

game unended
break not the walls that bind my world
the emptiness you cannot share
you damned disturber out I say
and leave me packaged in despair
in solitude to tread along,
the jumbled roads I know not where
my scattered yoke my unfit shell
too heavily broken for one to bear
no use to search for any place
to hide in nothing anywhere
my glasses cleaned but my blind eyes
unfocused to the order there
for all is vain if vain things dare
be to no thing except unended
nothing...empty vain despair
not despair...not anything...nothing
extinguished existence...nothing...is there
dare certainty to impinge somewhere

oh death do break the void despair

Duane Plantinga

*Lwritten after seeing the play Endgame*
An Epistle

To Those Concerned:

Last week, I experienced what has to be the most jam-packed four days I have ever spent on Dordt’s campus. The bulk of that time centered around discussions about art, and, literary theory. Although I enjoyed and gained from the discussions, I was surprised to discover that many of the theories I learned three and four years ago are still in the air today, theories that contain the same sort of aesthetic laws, unbending, unchanging, and obviously not subject to the reformed spirit any longer. I felt as if some people involved with art and aesthetic theory had stopped exploring and re-evaluating their positions.

As a full-time writer, I do not have the time nor the tools to thoroughly investigate the topics of aesthetic norms and the role between the writer and society, although I do “work with them” everyday with my writing. And at this stage of my work, I do not have the power to fully set down a theoretic pattern concerning these norms and responsibilities, something many of you have asked me about. It seems to me, unless I am mistaken about Dordt’s purpose, that it is your “job” to do the exploring, the searching, the investigating about these topics—yet, it also seems many of you in the arts ride the same exploratory road, disregarding (probably not deliberately) other possibilities and roads. If there is further research, further exploration, I certainly did not find the information coming from the mouths of concerned students: this information, however minute or important, I found coming from professors and people not directly, fully involved in the arts. (I realize the drift of this paragraph is generalizing, however, those I talked with understand well what I am aiming at).

To help push for further investigation and research on the topics of a writer’s responsibility, and, about discerning aesthetic norms, let me present a list of comments I gathered during my four days’ stay in the Dordt campus. Perhaps some of you can pick out one or two of these comments, or comments not listed here, and do some urgent research and thinking—it may not seem urgent to you, but for many of us outside of the academic community, it is urgent:

1) “Yes, a Christian writer has a responsibility to society, but he never knows it, is never aware of it.”

2) “No, a Christian writer does not have a responsibility to society, and yet…”

3) “No, a Christian writer does not have a responsibility to society.”

4) “Why this ‘writer’s responsibility’ business? Isn’t it about time we begin looking into the reader’s responsibility?"

5) “Perhaps ‘responsibility’ is the wrong word to use—perhaps it should be ‘rapport’ or ‘relationship’ or some other word—but not ‘responsibility.’”

6) “Perhaps we ought to take a deeper look at the genre of literature first. As an example, the Victorian poets had a considerably different view of society than the Victorian novelists.”

Another item that disturbs me is this: I brought my work down to Dordt for the community to see. I returned to Minneapolis empty-handed, something I did not expect to happen. I asked several people for copies of their poems, be it prose or poetry, and their replies were odd and, with all I say, “unbecoming” of Christian artists. I’ll be out with it; some of the replies I received bordered on self-glorification (one person’s reply had faint echoes of Kafka’s orders to Missed to burn everything when he died). I confess, I let Nigel Weaver down by forgetting to take back copies of the Cannon (that can quickly be remedied via postal service). But the irony with Nigel is this: he asked me to view his work. Yet, those I asked, refused. Pardon the triteness of the cliche, but I cannot help but smell a rat that may be bugging those artists I approached and my request refused.

In summary: Please, Dordt students, don’t forget that you are in an academic center involved with the glorious Kingdom of Jesus Christ. Many of us not at Dordt are relying on you to do the researching, the discovering, the discussing, the experimenting, the exploring, the community do not have time to do—work the community expects you to be doing. And secondly, those who are involved with the arts, to what purpose do you execute your work if you file it in some secret hutch? Art for art’s sake? Art for your own sake? Will you turn into Franz Kafka giving orders to Max Brods someday? Do not be afraid to share what you have made—the Christian community certainly should be the least of your worries.

For those of you who have forgotten what Dordt College is and why you are there, you do yourself a favor to talk with Len Van Noord. I recall as a freshman at Dordt, Len telling me his experiences at another academic institution, I believe it was Michigan State University. And when you finish listening to what Len has to say, talk with Jerry Van Tol who spent a year in the academic community at the University of North Carolina. It is no puzzle that their stories are practically identical.

There is more I could write, but probably not without repetition—so I will terminate this letter.

In Christ,
W.N. Farr

Wayne Farr, a former Dordt student and Cannon staff member, now devotes all his energies to writing in Minneapolis. Earlier this month he visited our campus for a few days, and shortly after he left we received this letter from him.

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The Death Passover

Sheep’s blood on door frames. Deathutters by to other colors. Hitting hard—death dies to a sniffle of fluttering white among black.

Like Playboy at the drugstore no freedom from censure can remove it.

Re-incarnation—Non-existence. Theories of the inevitable. Why can’t the reason of life explode into reality?

The soul from body wrenching plague was once removed by blood.

Shed lambs’ blood on heart’s tinted. The Angel of Death passes over to eternity.

Cal Tuininga

FEEDBACK

The four “poems” featured in the center of the last issue of the “Cannon” were all written by the undersigned. We wrote them as a commentary on the “poetry” that has been printed in the “Cannon.” We feel that the “poetry” that has been printed on this campus is generally lacking in quality. In fact, we feel that the great majority of the “poems” are not poetry at all.

Poetry must have some form, some internal structure. It need not necessarily have rhyme (e.g., blank verse), but it should have meter, or at the very least some metrical or lyrical quality. The “poetry” that has been printed in the “Cannon” this year, with the exception of “Winter Triolet,” “a marriage,” and “Trials of a Toolman,” has had no form whatsoever. Most of the “poetry” is spaced-out prose, or run-on sentences, or disjointed adjective phrases. And is this really Christian poetry? Isn’t this type of “poetry” indicative of a fractured view of humanity, of the denial of absolutes, of a distinctly non-Christian mentality? Should not Christian poetry be ordered, since God is a God of order (1 Cor. 14:40)? The form must support and strengthen the content.

We also question the meaning of these poems, that is, if there is any meaning. What meaning is there in the poems “a marriage,” “Separate Cupboards,” and “One Late Night”? We would like to know. By the way, are we to consider “After Its Kind” a poem? It looks like a fun-filled typing exercise for beginning typists.

In closing, we would like to emphasize Duane Plantinga’s words in the last issue of the “Cannon”: “perhaps the dabbling poet who carelessly cripples the art of poetry should resign. However, it is not my intent to say that the ‘poor’ poet should refrain from writing poetry, but until he learns to master the techniques of this art, he should not publish or market his poems.”

Doug Eckardt
Steve Hoogerhyde
A City Street Song For Being Alone

The city street is a friend of the night,
and through its rushing, I hear it groan.
(It sings of cities and being alone.)
I've searched all my life and it doesn't seem right,
To be wearing out shoes and the tip of my cane,
And I still have found no one to call me by name.

The steeple held their bells with pride,
And stood in silence withholding the song
That I have waited to hear, for so long.
If I could only be inside,
I'd climb up and ring the glad sound;
But when I come, the door is bound.

I pushed against that portal, as countless times preceding.
It swung open to a cool, black chamber.
My faint hopes turned into a shiver.
Steadily stepping, two feet were tapping,
Like a grandfather clock pendulum, ticking.
Then came stillness, and the blood of souls, dripping.

Keith Voss

Mythology Revised

I
The moon
no longer
stalks
with bow
and arrow.

One single
lens reflex
eye pins
a sleeping
duck
to her nest
with a shaft
of silver light

II
The milky way
chalked against
the blackboard
holds plotted stars
firmly
in the graph.

III
driving across the sky
clouds as mileposts
the sun
glimpsed the cornfields
through rearview mirror
and side windows
while following maps
to a western horizon.

Carol Veldmen

Laziness

To lie on your bed isn't crazy,
Thinking, while hours crawl by,
I could just stop being lazy
But I guess I'm too lazy to try.

Sandy van den Berg

Myshkin's Madness
(The Execution)

Thin purple lips greedily kiss the priest's cross,
a vain attempt to suck immortality from its dead worm-eaten wood;
eyes roll in their sockets, cheeks drained of all color;
the body emits sweat and strange strong animal odors,
finger-nails are driven deep into palms;
sweat rolls down back and legs forming small puddles on the hard wooden platform.
The blonde headed lad had yet to see a boxing match;
the blue-suited salesman was an experienced spectator of such affairs;
the white-shoed nurse had witnessed the delicate removal of human testicles;
they move closer as the moment nears.
Legs give way, the body wracked by spastic convulsions;
sweat and saliva mixed with tears drop in a basket,
followed by a head: eyes bulging, lids raised, mouth clenched tightly shut;
the crowd gasps, loses interest, and strolls away.

C. Huizenga

photo by Calvin Meuzelaar