The Canon, [1976-77]: Volume 7, Number 12

Dordt College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/dordt_canon

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/dordt_canon/78
Prodigal Son

comes running, backsliding home, free. 
the screendoor slams on his bearded face, leaving an impression.

echoes of "home is where your heart is" dry up in his throat swallowing hard
but adam's apple refuses to be gulped down.
motherly arms are lost about herself. Daderly handshake has lost its grip on.

preferring pig-slop to filet mignon with trimmings he leaves by the back door with an empty stomach and a box lunch of cold heart sandwiches.

Dennis De Groot

Spots and a Horizontal Line: This photograph, done by Cal Meuselar as part of an independent study, is an experiment in composition. If a spot is placed at one end of a horizontal line, on top of the line, the line is supposed to appear tilted. If another spot is placed at the other end of the line, at the bottom of the line, the tilted effect is supposed to be exaggerated. In this photograph, however, the effect is negated for two reasons: first, the horizontal line (the roof) is so wide that it offsets the effect of the spots (the window and the antenna) and, second, the wires on the antenna travel in the opposite direction of the tilt.
Ernest Hemingway and the Indian Bluffs
by Dave Groenenboom

Until last week, I enjoyed reading Ernest Hemingway’s novels and short stories. Hemingway always intrigued me: reading his writings was like stealing apples. I immensely enjoyed reading what he wrote, but at the same time knew my Christian presuppositions should make me enjoy it not quite so much.

But last week my American Literature class studied him, and, under the able direction of the professor, my interest in Hemingway was severely injured. While I always knew that dear Ernest wrote from a particular world view, I never bothered to determine exactly what his world view entailed. Hemingway was a mystery man, and to have to learn not only what perspective he wrote from, but also, horror of horrors, to be forced to discover that his perspective was frighteningly consistent destroyed the mystery of Hemingway and, in the same view entailed. Hemingway was a mystery man, and to have to learn not only what perspective he wrote from, to discover that his perspective was frighteningly consistent destroyed the mystery of Hemingway and, in the same tragic crash, left my interest in him a cripple for life.

A similar incident occurred in my childhood, and, combined with the Hemingway disaster, forces me to wonder if I haven’t discovered a bit of wisdom.

I grew up in a small Iowa town, but as small Iowa towns go it was quite large: twelve thousand people. The larger smallness of the town made for an ideal situation: the town was small enough to eliminate nearly all the symptoms of that disease known as “urban blight,” and was still large enough to offer a number of conveniences. Unlike other small Iowa towns my town had both and “A and W Root Beer” stand and a “Kentucky Fried Chicken” outlet. It had two grocery stores that were open all night, and three more that weren’t. It had three absolutely beautiful junk yards, from which could be salvaged anything from a crankshaft for a 1950 Pontiac “Straight-8” engine to an old street sign.

But more importantly for a boy of nine tender years, it had a small creek that flowed through the north end of town, through and sometimes under back yards, under streets through muskrat-infested culverts, next to one of the town’s small cemeteries, out past the sewage treatment plant and one of the junkyards, and then directly below the small dirt cliffs we lovingly referred to as the Indian Bluffs.

The creek (or “crick,” as it was pronounced) began from a spring in my parents’ back yard. It intrigued me for as long as I can remember, and I remember thinking that the water from that creek probably ended up in some ocean somewhere, or maybe even in China, because China was on the other side of the world and it would have to flow down to get there. There were a few young adventurers in the neighborhood, and, under the direction of an older and loving cousin named Bernie, we determined to follow the creek from its inception to whatever was in that huge body it emptied its eel-like content into. We made several day-long voyages down the creek, tracing one of the branches which it divided into near the cemetery, but we never found the ocean. Actually, we never cared to go past the Indian Bluffs.

The Bluffs were, as mention before, small dirt cliffs. They rose probably sixty feet above the creek, but to young boys in flat Iowa, they could have been the Rocky Mountains. We were in love with the Indian Bluffs. We held contests to see who could climb the Bluffs the fastest, threw gigantic rocks down the bluffs to hear the splash they made when they hit the creek, and learned about the literal wisdom of that phrase, “NEVER SPIT INTO THE WIND!” from the top of the Bluffs.

And, if the Bluffs themselves weren’t disaster enough, Bernie magnified our romantic attachment to those hills by spinning long tales of the Indian tribes that very possibly had lived on the Bluffs. He told stories of Indian campgrounds at the very edge of the cliffs, about how the Indians had to camp there because the... (Continued on page 6)
"Prelude—for Mimi"

for Mimi who needs
to give love without
understanding it

little moth, why do you flutter
round the great white light
darting in
then out
swift as the darkness
swallows
the hairs on your head that are numbered?

little moth, I see your blind fears
etched sharply on the
head of a
pin then
the light snaps off and
you fall
but the hairs on your head are numbered.

little moth, you flutter grace ful
'til the white light burns
the flutter
out—fly
swift through the dark night
with me
the rough paths of the great world need you.

Sandy Van Den Berg

"To An Ode Businessman"
[with apologies to John Visser]

Who cares about salesmen, commissions, or price?
Why bother with management games?
A general knowledge of this would suffice,
I've other more personal aims.

The business I'm in needs no salesmen to sell,
I was sold from the very first day.
Returns on investment continue to swell;
The price, although high, I can pay.

Research takes some effort, but is well worth the time;
Development comes of its own.
I don't advertise, 'cause the product's just mine,
And the dividends—wow! how they've grown!

My company's small; only two employees,
And neither of us is the boss.
But we still get the job done, 'cause we aim to please,
And we've not had a serious loss.

This business is fun, and it's profitable.
And it's something to be thinking of,
'Cause it's easy to start, and you're all capable.
What is it? Quite simply, it's love.

Roy Hoogerhyde
The Finish

by Otto Keyes

A large tear-drop began to form in the corner of Johnny's eye. It slowly built until at last the tiny floor broke over the dark of his sagging eye-lid and started to erode a crevasse down the grimy cheek. He hooked his trembling thumb inside his cuff and, lifting it to his face, drew dirty sleeve across dirty cheek, obliterating the effect of the cleansing stream.

As he blinked his eyes slowly, trying to focus them, he picked out the forms of his classmates emerging from the white, one-room schoolhouse. Their laughter, lifting on the air, they plowed through the heavy snow, scooping it up in their hands as they came. With unsteady feet he eagerly pushed down the street toward them wearing an expectant smile; but then checked himself as the somehow strange laughter echoed around him.

The first snowball struck his shoulder where it exploded, sending its cold shrapnel into his ear. He shook his head and ducked, but not in time to avoid the salvo which had been launched at him.

"Finn! Stupid Finn!"

"Hey Johnny! Don'tcher fat ol' lady speak no English?"

He stumbled backward to escape, but they were already on him. A sudden blow on the chest sent him sprawling. His head bounced smartly on the hard-packed snow.

The fall seemed to clear his blurry eyes and he looked up at the leering circle of faces. Cold from the snow mingled with growing terror as the faces slowly underwent a metamorphosis. Eyes shifted, sagged, and hung from their sockets; mucous dripped from twisted noses which slewed down the sides of distorted faces; some gaping mouths shed teeth that dropped icy-cold upon him, while others grew sabre-fangs—but all belched forth their putrid stench and began to suck his air and then began to bite into the back of his leg. The hot flash of pain instantly rooted in the ground, dooming him to endure the raucous crescendo of the saw closing in behind him, while he stared at the seeming safety of the unattainable circle of light.

Stragglng hairs whipped over and around the smooth spot of skin as his floppy, old hat escaped toward the circle of safety. His wooden legs rooted in the ground, dooming him to endure the raucous crescendo of the saw closing in behind him, while he stared at the seeming safety of the unattainable circle of light.

A shiver shook him as the whine of the snowmobile faded away into the night. Trembling fingers wiped the melting snow from the patch of bare skin and pulled the ragged pant leg down over the top of his boot.

Johnny broke into a stumbling run; pushed by the wind toward the safety of the street-light. His bloated belly jiggled as it strained against the buttons of his coat. This expansive girth was incongruous with the rest of his build, which was generally slight.

(Continued on page 5)
He sank down on his knees under the street-light—his breath coming in short gasps, punctuated by coughs and bursts of nervously relieved laughter. A shudder racked his gaunt features and he cursed his so-called friends—damning them for their damming him to his present state. They'd been friendly enough last night when he'd had some money. Another bitter tear freed itself.

"Juha."

Damp sleeve froze to dirty cheek. He hadn't heard his name in Finnish for a long time.

"Juha."

Even the familiarity of the soothing voice could not immediately coax open the tightly shut eyes. It came again in Finnish.

"Juha, we're worried about you."

Squinting, he could see the form of an old man beside him. He scrubbed at his eyes and, looking again, recognized Pekka, the gentle old lukkari, who used to visit his parents' little homestead. After his Sunday duties as the parish clerk were completed, he would set out with the "pappi" to visit the parish families. Old Pekka had even come to visit Johnny occasionally after he had left the family homestead.

"What went wrong, Juha? We don't see you on Sundays anymore."

A welling tear was quickly blinked back into the reddened eye. Johnny's lips would not move to speak.

Old Pekka talked for a while and read very far and the wind propelled him along, his steps became slower and his breath came harder as the wind snatched it away. Handfuls of clean, white snow finally washed the acrid taste from his mouth. He pulled himself up and sat on one of the hard lumps of snow a plow had imbedded in the bank. He brushed himself off with unfeeling hands on which white spots were forming their damning him to his present state. Almost gagging again from the awful taste, he gave up trying to warm his fingers in his mouth and stuck them under his armpits.

Eyes squinted against the intensifying mass of swirling snow, he scanned the perimeter of light in a fruitless search for him. Taking his woolen scarf, he looped it up over his bald spot and down around his rosy cold ears. He reluctantly scooted off the snow bank and stepped into the wall of darkness which hid his house. Although it wasn't very far and the wind propelled him along, his steps became slower and his breath came harder as the wind snatched it away from his mouth.

He left the street, turning down a narrow, drifted path where the snow dragged upon his feet. Stiff hands fell from beneath his armpits and swung limply by his sides—pushed at will by the gusts which prodded him on. Exhausted, he stopped and stared blankly into the pile of snow in front of him. He turned and sat down heavily against it; the warning scream of the wind unheeded.

He propped an elbow on the low, wooden platform beside the snow pile, closed his eyes, and drifted slowly away from the cold.


Eeva stood before him clutching the front of her dress. The summer sun sent diamond sparkles shimmering from the tear on her cheek. If only she hadn't

(Continued on page 7)
Indian Bluffs

(Continued from page 2)

was the only way they could see the
cowboys attacking from across the
grassy fields. We dreamed of campfires
and of smoke signals floating across the
blue Iowa sky. We imagined clusters of
colorful tepees and of watchful braves
smoking long pipes, one eye always
turned to the plains. We searched for
Indian artifacts: arrow heads, axe
heads, pipes, and feathers, but never
found anything significant. We were
still young enough to convince ourselves
that we had lost contact with all
civilization, and could reveal ourselves
to humans only by tracing our steps
back up the creek, past the small red
brick building, and the cemetery, and
the streets, and through the back yards.
We actually believed that no man could
find us as long as we kept lookout from
our small Bluffs.

But then Bernie went to college, and
our leader was gone. We still took hikes
out to the Indian Bluffs, but it didn’t
take many trips (without a leader to
teach us) before we began to explore
the area immediately surrounding the
Bluffs. We worked our way further and
further from the Bluffs, wondering
what mysteries waited just beyond the
next milkweed.

And then cousin Marvin noticed the
telephone wires. There were telephone
wires not one thousand yards from the
very edge of the Bluffs! They hung in
the air, singing in the wind of a
civilization that could not be left
behind.

We explored further, and found a
gravel road. We walked down the road
and discovered that it was paved only
a half mile from where we had begun to
follow it. And soon we discovered
dwellings: a lot of houses. We were in
town! We didn’t even know there was a
road so close to the Bluffs, much less an
entire town! We were amazed. We
wondered what town it was. We knew
we were still in Iowa, but who could tell
what town it was?

We walked on, and then we saw it.
The First Christian Reformed Church
of, , , , , Iowa. Our church. We were
in our town. We knew the way home
from church, and walked that last mile
in record time. We were still amazed,
and swore to let cousin Bernie in on the
secret that there was a road only that
far from the Indian Bluffs the first time
he came home from college.

And we did. But Bernie flippantly
informed us that he knew it all the time,
and that the Bluffs wouldn’t be any fun
if we didn’t have to walk along the
creek. Then he told us that the little red
building we knew so well was a sewage
treatment plant, and that a sewage
treatment plant was a place where they
took poop and pee and made it clean
and put it in the creek and that was why
the creek got so big all of a sudden.

That we couldn’t quite handle. All
that time there was poop and pee floating by in our creek below our
Indian Bluffs and we didn’t even know
it and if we would have known it
wouldn’t have walked through the
creek so often or pushed each other
so often or even walked down that creek
at all.

Bernie just smiled. I didn’t know
the time he was smiling about
because finding out about poop and pee
in our creek was pretty traumatic, and
we were still proud about finding the
road so close to the Indian Bluffs; but
now, after having my naive interest
in Ernest Hemingway so completely
destroyed by too much knowledge
I think I finally realize what that small
thing meant. There are some things in
life that should be investigated, but there
are other things that should simply
be enjoyed. Ernest Hemingway and Indian
Bluffs should simply be enjoyed. If you
enjoy something because it is
mysterious, you should not attempt to
solve the mystery of it, because if you
can solve the mystery, you won’t love the
thing anymore. We seldom journeyed
out to the Indian Bluffs after that, as
often as not, we took the road;
because we could make better time that
day. We had the Bluffs figured out.
They were no longer alive. They were
nothing but little cliffs carved out by
meandering, poop-and-pee-infected
creek. And now I will probably stop
reading Hemingway other than
classwork. That old feeling just isn’t
there any more.

But I do know one thing. I will never
pick up another biography of J.R.
Tolkien.

the railroad bums

They came always to the back door
in late summer
when the tomatoes were ripe,
from the tracks
in back of the backyard.
They came down the sandy bank
where they buried cans of beer
unopened,
for a time
when it was needed
more.
[some beer we dug up
and BB’d into cascading
yellow fountains]

They would come
always to the back door,
ot television bums
with Red Skelton paint
around their mouths and
stogies stuck
in pink gums,
but only old men
with empty Key cans
in their pockets
and black juice
sometimes dripping
don stubbled chins.

They would come
always to the back door
and ask
"please ma’am, maybe
ifyou’d pickem ourselves
could we just . . . ?"
And the answer was always
"yes, if you pick them
yourselfes . . .
and how about a jar
of home-canned meat?
Oh.
Well that’s fine.
keep the jarrin’
plenty."

They would come
always to the back door.

Dave Groenenboo
reached up to brush it away just then allowing a ray of sunshine to peek past a torn button-hole, lightly caress the gentle slope of her breast, and nestle itself in the troubling valley of his desire.

He never saw her again—the shame would have been too great. Perhaps it would have been easier to bear than the ache he still felt at times.

Other faces passed before him—Mama, Papa, gentle, old Pekka, brother Reino, and old Grandma who never let him go without a Finnish prayer for “little Juha.”

Hot tears welled up, melting the ice from his eyelashes. The unchecked flood coursed down his grimy cheeks, washing purifying paths under the grey stubble of beard. Silent sobs quivered through his body—diminishing as the flow of tears slackened.

In the wind’s respectful pause, one last tear dropped from the cold cheek and froze to the edge of Johnny’s front step.

---

**A Lesson on Laughing**

I heard the sun laugh at the earth in between the time
the sunflowers are turning
and the praying mantis stops.

He stuck his big head down into the valleys and shook it when he laughed.
And the hills on either side swelled with its laughter

till they burst and echoed his laugh
all the way back through the canyons.
It frightened the clouds away
but it didn’t matter,

now that the mountains knew how to laugh.
Sometimes on the still, blackest nights
[when the moon isn’t watching]

I hear them rumbling back and forth chuckling together
about the time
the sun made them laugh.

**The Executioner**

He wears yellow rubber pants
With a blue and white shirt
Two knives and a sharper around his waist
and a hard hat on his head.

In the cage
The stun-gun goes to the head
Bang, its dead.
Out with the knives
Up and down the steel bar
for a better edge.

Hook up the hind leg
up with the hoist.
Puts its head in the barrel
cuts its’ throat, drains him.

His arms are blood stained.

Off with the head
out with the tongue.
Legs cut off at the knees
Hide slit back of legs
pull and cut, cut and pull

Phone rings, deer season opens

Back to front, front to back
pull and cut, cut and pull
Off with the hide.

Slit down the center
out with the insides

Blood has dried on his clothes.

One more cut with the saw
straight down the back
two halves,
Into the cooler.

The Executioner has done his job
He awaits his next victim.

---

Wytze Woustra

Judy Van Gorp
CLOWN ALLEY

Encased in liquid glass
dripped
from the sky,
Frail fern, bent bough

I stood inside a circus tent
and smelled the roaring crowd.
Balloons were flat and money spent.
The lonely cried aloud.

Spring Cleaning

Hey look mum
look at this one
no one would ever
get this done

never
in a hunnerd
years

Pat Leegwater

Haiku

A shaft of sunlight
comes streaming through
the dark clouds
shattering raindrops.

1814 1877

Jody Van Gorp

on loneliness and love
hanging there,
on the crossed wooden beams
... our sins the nails.
looking down
at the mocking faces,
sputting and cursing him,
he felt an almost
fatherly compassion
for them...
if only they knew
this blood was theirs.
his eyes and heart
searched the hostile crowd
for a sympathetic smile, or tear.
a friend...
... he tried to shut out
the tearing pain
of his feet,
his scourged back
slipping down the
rough slivers of wood.
maybe even forget
his lonely mission
here on earth.
"Father... Father
where are You?"
the pain in his heart deepened.
"I’m your son.
don’t You love me?
my God, why have You forsaken me
stop once,
imagine the loneliness
he felt...
the whole world hating him...
not enough to want him dead.
no one
could listen,
could share his pain...
for us-

Ronda Ruisch

The winter's hoar
is gone away
and famine now
is swallowed into feast.
The ice is melted
in the stream
and sunshine floats
upon the creek.

Bonnie Kuipers