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Short Story

Kiss Me Goodbye Mary

Jacob wept at Mary's funeral. On Thursday she was still alive and they were happy. On Friday she drowned in the muddy river. The country pastor preached a marvelous sermon over the empty coffin on Sunday and Jacob was sad.

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 a young boy and a dog were wandering towards him along the broken paths beside the river. Occasionally the dog would bound away from the boy's side to bark at nothing and return again in penance to lick the boy's hand.

The boy approached the cabin without saying a word to Jacob or the dog. Jacob fiddled restlessly with his pipe while the dog bounded away to play with the cow. The boy sat on the ground next to Jacob and leaned his back against the cabin.

"Mary's dead." The colder evening breezes tugged at the tiny blue curls of smoke coming 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 paddled 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 breezes 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 aliver 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.
**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, upset feeling in your stomach. You feel as if you’ve had a stomachache. And then you sit down, gnawed on by that pain somewhere inside, and you try to sort out what you need from what you don’t. You know, the right from the wrong. And I’m sure you know that sometimes exercising 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 know what I mean? Well, I sorta feel that way.

Cannon articles, poems, editorials, short stories, Feedback, and various conversations, a couple of books, and three classes: all dealing with art, its standards, aesthetics, and an art community in one form or another. And here’s the punch line; while I’m still sitting on the toilet bowl pressing my thoughts, along comes Joe and asks me if I’ll write a guest editorial on Christian art standards. Uh...I agree. I mean, why not?

Do you know that teeling after you’ve eaten too much? A sore, upset stomach. A stuffed, upset feeling in your stomach. You feel as if you’ve had a stomachache. And then you sit down, gnawed on by that pain somewhere inside, and you try to sort out what you need from what you don’t. You know, the right from the wrong. And I’m sure you know that sometimes exercising 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 know what I mean? Well, I sorta feel that way. But I need to sort out what you need from what you don’t. You know, the right from the wrong. And I’m sure you know that sometimes exercising 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 know what I mean?
Beat the Blues: Try Jazz
by Syd Hielema

Exam week is always one of the weirdest times of our college careers: studying notes ad nauseam, and nights without sleep balanced by all kinds of crazy stunts that are necessary as a release. This year $2.50 will buy every Dordt Student two evenings of escaping the exam-time blues. On Saturday the fourteenth the popular film Sounder will be screened in C160. Though this movie will undoubtedly be well received, the main attraction will have been on campus the night before: one of this country's top jazz groups, Stan Kenton and his band, will be here, at Dordt College, on Friday, December the thirteenth.

Now you may be saying, "Stan Kenton? Never heard of him." True, Stan Kenton's name is not exactly a household word in our Dutch community. Because he is such an outstanding performer in his field, we should probably try to become somewhat better acquainted with him so that we know what we're getting into next month.

First of all, though, we need not learn about Stan Kenton as much as we need to know what jazz is all about. Jazz has never been subjected to the mass popularity of rock, and, consequently, it is not so clearly defined in most of our ears' vocabularies. We do know that jazz was first developed by the negroes, especially in New Orleans. Though there are some soloing jazz pianists and jazz singers, it is usually performed as an instrumental-only style featuring various instruments. Kenton will have trombones, trumpets, saxophones, flutes, a strong bass, two drummers and Stan himself directing from behind the piano when he performs here.

The beauty of jazz, which can make these concerts so exciting, is that jazz is basically an improvisatory art. Each number has a prescribed rhythmic and chordal structure which serves as the accompaniment for improvised melodies. Usually these improvisations are solos: one member of the band will step forward on the stage while the others continue to pound out the back-up music. Sometimes two members will step up together and carry on an impromptu musical conversation.

The almost conversational style of jazz is also due to the mastery these people have over their instruments. They don't play them, but rather they coax sounds out of them and make them moan, whisper, scream or laugh out loud. Their instruments become extensions of the human voice, mouthpieces for the personalities that play them.

One more distinct feature of jazz is its syncopated rhythm, which throws accents onto off-beats, throwing the toe-tapping listener into confusion. This confusion is also part of the excitement that is jazz, an unpredictable quality that often leaves the listener guessing.

All the words in the world can't foster an appreciation for jazz in anyone. You know what that means: even if you don't have the exam-time blues, even if you'd rather study on a Friday night, stop by at the gym and study up on some music literature. But if you do need a break, you know where to be.

Photo by Wally Ouwens

There is an infinity in a grain of sand.
—William Blake
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 anything 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.

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.

"L.H.O.O.Q.: How funny is it?"

May 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.

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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
to be 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

*written after seeing the play Endgame
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 that we did not discover that many of the theories I learned three and four years ago are still in the air today, theories that contain no alteration, change, addition or subtraction. I felt as if some people involved with art and aesthetic theory are no longer. I felt as if some 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" daily 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 community. 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 work, be it prose or poetry, and their replies were odd and, with all I say, "unbecoming" of Christian artists. I'll be out with some; in some of the replies I received bordered on self glorification (one person's reply had faint echoes of Kafka's orders to Misunderstood to burn everything when he died). I confess, I felt I needed clarification 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 experimentally, the exploring, the work other members of the Christian community do not have time to do—work the community expects you to be doing. And secondly, those whom 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 generous 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.

—Ed.

The Death Passover

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

Like Playboy at the drugstore
no freedom from censorship 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 lintel.
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 lacks, with the exception of "Winter Triolet," "a marriage," and "Trials of a Toolman," had no form whatsoever. Most of the "poetry" is space-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 (I 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 poem "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

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

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

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