



imago

spring 2002 **NEWSLETTER** volume four issue one

Poetry gets far too little attention in our modern fast-paced culture. Taking time to read (or listen to) poetry is akin to a spiritual exercise. It calls for inner space, attentiveness and a slowing down of time. Irish poet, Seamus Heaney, writes of poetry's "redress," affirming its ability to act as a counterweight to the imbalance and disproportions of the times, particularly a diminished spirituality.

The art of poetry seeks to get at the real, the particular. It does this in a way that transcends the flatland of a merely literal account. It engages the language of metaphor and so hooks the imagination and calls us to fresh perspectives. At its best, poetry communicates in a way that breaks out of the boundaries of the



particular and give us a glimpse of something larger. This idea is captured in the words of the poet George Herbert ("The Elixer") when he writes:

A man that looks on glasse,
On it may stay his eye;
Or if he pleaseth, through it passe,
And then the heav'n espie

Though we are inclined to focus on specific objects, the poet takes us further, not simply 'look at' but to 'look through' and invites the reader to do the same. Poets are adept at employing the dynamic language of metaphor. When we say "this is that" there is a movement which stimulates the imagination and fosters the promise of more than meets the eye.

The literary arts are able to take the mundane aspects of life and present the components in a way that provide us with a broader, even universal meaning. British poet Andrew Rumsey in a recent essay (in J. Begbie, *Beholding the Glory*) suggests this same

pattern is to be found in the incarnation, "the Word made flesh." Here the particular, embodied in space and time opens for us the promise of divine presence and the hope of more to come. All the arts offer an echo of that hope as we are invited to look through the images of our common experience to catch a glimpse of something more.

In this issue we have included works by four Canadian poets. We are grateful for permission to publish these poems and trust that you will take the opportunity to enjoy this brief sample of their work.

Imago's activities continue at a good pace. We have added a few new projects to our roster and there are more waiting in the wings. Beginning in March will hold the first of four evenings given to discussing the theme of "metaphor". The next **imago** evening will be held on Wednesday April 10, 7:30 at Enoch Turner Schoolhouse in Toronto, on May 3 & 4, **imago** joins with the Institute for Christian Studies for the Art Talks 2002 on contemporary film, (see back page) and mark Friday November 1, 2002 in your calendar for a celebration of **imago's** 30th anniversary.

Once again we are grateful for your support and interest in **imago**. We invite you to inform others about our events and let us know of any who might wish to receive the Newsletter.



Great Flying Tree of Life – mixed media paper construction, 16" x 36" x 6", 2001

By Lynne McIlvride Evans

I have been thinking about decoration lately. In my student experience, to say that a piece of art was 'decorative' was to say it was shallow. It wasn't serious. Only irony could redeem decoration.

That was a long time ago and I can't help myself. Decoration is becoming increasingly important in my painted constructions and I continue to work with painted and gilded 300 lb paper sculptures placed symmetrically in elaborately painted boxes.

I realize that these boxes have become like cathedral interiors to me. I am inspired by the state of wonder created by the cumulative effect of stained glass narratives, meticulously carved choir stals, ceilings encrusted with painted panels and carvings, labyrinths inlaid in floors, surfaces decorated with the repetition of symbols – a holy riot of unnecessary detail. Serious, serious decoration.

For more information on Lynne's art see her website: www.mcilvride-evans.com

See page four in this newsletter for details on two of her upcoming exhibits.

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Flames Of Affection, Tongues Of Flame

I walked to the end of Dundurn Street,
to the quiet hind of a busy road,
where the bus loops. I walked
to the foot of the escarpment and looked
up, way, way up, at all those stairs.
And though they are wooden stairs
that make a nice wooden sound, and though
they lean endearingly to one side or the other
in a manner steel could never comprehend,
there are still two hundred and forty-six of them,
and before I was even halfway to the top
my legs had begun to feel lead-filled,
and the next step seemed a millennium away,
which, after all, it *was*, in a way, since here
I was, scaling the rocky old face
of mother earth, climbing her limestone chin,
her sandstone, siltstone, shale, dolomite skin,
terra mama, and all those labour-intensive layers
of her make-up, so that when I reached the top
I had to sit and catch my breath, and there
down below, was our little city, lying
spread out on its beach of glacial rubble,
sunning itself on a completely other
geological time, and I thought, well,
here I am, three hundred and fifty million years
from home.

God! but it's been a while
since the foundation of the earth.
ALL THAT TIME!

and no one to talk to.

I was alone, sitting on the brow
of the Niagara Escarpment, and except
for the constant swell and surge of cars
coming up Beckett's Drive to Garth Street,
or going down, it might have been peaceful.
I tried to concentrate on Lake Iroquois,
or Algonquin, whichever prehistoric pond it was
that lapped and bashed against this wall, but
the sun had set, and stars were beginning
to tinkle in the sky like wind chimes,
and a million lights were coming to life,
car lights, street lights, porch lights,
bicycle lights, night lights, and people
in their dim homes were moving
room to room, switching lights,
so the whole lovely view
flickered, all the time,
like lively little tongues, like
the lively little tongues of lovers
in the flame of affection,
and I thought
this is like Pentecost, kind of.

How is it we can barely talk to each other anymore?

Three hundred and fifty million years is nothing.
We're at least that far apart, sitting across
the same room. Switch the light. Is it
just me? Or where on this hardened planet
is there a hope our mutually exclusive, accrued
beliefs of the truth will break down, soften,
and flow together in the heat of some unimaginable
quaternary change? Or do we grow old this way,
waiting till the common weather finally erodes
these bloody unforgiving rocks
into a willing roundness?

There's nothing much
to say—and it gets so tiring, climbing
the endless staircase of our wooden
chit chat

chit chit chat

chit ...

If only the window would blow open once,
and the conversation catch, like fire, so that
we're both, we're all consumed, and the room
isn't big enough anymore, and we take
to the street, and talk and talk,
and the languages we've learned to cultivate
exhaust themselves, so we have to dig deeper
and break out other mother tongues,
and get a bit drunk, spilling words
we never said before, didn't know
we knew, and we couldn't tell how long
we'd gone till people stopped
on their way to work, wondering, "What the ...?"
but then they'd join in too—because
it was contagious, it changed the face
of the earth, and these three hundred
and fifty million years
were like ...

over.

But here,
today,
the words we use,
they fly, they arc
and dive through air, land
where we don't look, won't dare.
I pick up another, palm it, a stone
chip off the top of this cliff,

thinking

I should bring it back home.
Put it on the table between us.
Show you. Show me.

How hard it is.

How long it's taken to get here.

John Tempstra

Cycling

Twenty eight wire spokes evenly spaced
carefully tightened so the weight smooths
like lines of longitude spinning us through
another amazing day

Commonplace magic is still magic
even when feet push pedals as thoughtless
as they step (the arch curving as on a ladder
rung)

every movement as precise as fingers on keys
automatically playing a minuet

It is the mystery of physicality
the way the body accepts mechanical limbs
& the mind absorbs experience

A cyclist is a new creation
an earth-tethered bird or waterless swimmer
making all things new

The Kingdom of heaven is like a cyclist
rolling through an imbalanced world
No matter how common our perception
every spring (our tilted axis coming around)
another child straddles the wonder
without training-wheels

D.S. Martin

Parable Boat

Peel the stems of coppiced willow and tie them
into a hull. Rope strips of veined, bleached cow
side by side and lash those to the frame.
Tattoo with emblems.

This vessel can sail to the Poles but not to mariners.
This vessel does not do apologetics. It is
the idea of a boat but don't get that into your head.

It will sail with certainty only by the light of common sense.
When you step in, you forget your destination.

Do you want stability? You'll have to look for someone else.
Perhaps those who expect a logical way to travel
had better rig up an explicator.

Copper talismans rattle on the staves.
Perishable boat. Lie down in the stern for sleep
and gaze through ribs wide enough
to view the Pleiades.

Dolphin mares in the bow waves.
Skin ship, airy basket,
transport me.

Hannah Main-Van der Kamp

Low Easter, Rock Chapel

They licked the trees, those two;
 at first their fingers were enough
 to touch the bark made moist by sweetwater
 and then their tongues, their disappointment
 that the maples had stopped,
 officially, evaporating
 in the proof there was some left,
 that their fingers ran and tasted,
 the damp falls spreading down
 from the holes in their treesides,
 where the taps had been removed;
 holes a finger could stop;
 and brought it to their tongues.

And after, they walked so slowly
 that we stopped, several times, to wait
 until their colours blinked between
 the trees again, dressed
 so brightly we couldn't miss
 the Here *I am* they didn't have to say
 or the sweetwater running its course.

They were going somewhere, or not—
 were returning to us with each soft step
 the earth could barely tell
 took place, luxuriating
 in what they'd seen there, and touched,
 and tasted: all a dream
 to which they slowly consented to wake.

The Sacrifice Of Isaac

God told Abraham Kill your son for me & they
 climbed Mount Moriah so there would be a great
 distance of rock cloud shadow & light to be sliced in
 two & the perplexing covenant might come to mind as
 you stare toward the blue horizon

The knife seems to fall forever
 as Abraham (looking like an old man Rembrandt
 frequently sketched) palms the bound youth's face
 with a large determined hand to shield him from the
 sight

The knife seems to fall forever
 giving you time to think of bloody Passover of Jesus
 as sacrificial lamb of what kind of god would ask so
 much & what kind of father could do it (as a
 windblown angel seizes the old man's wrist)

Then you notice the eyes bloodshot & observant
 of a ram caught in a thicket This is no happy ending
 Three centuries after Rembrandt
 the knife still falls

D.S. Martin

I'll say that our hearts burned:
 as if two creatures, naturally
 shy, should appear openly, unaware
 of how we'd been sent away;
 and passing through their sugar bush
 a second time, we turned
 to wait, and saw them enter
 recognize the place, and run,
 run! (how their arms once circled our legs)
 lean to, with sure allegiance,
 the trunk's dark wound, and embrace
 all that their thirst might intimate,
 to lap the sweet spillwater of Christ their Lord.

John Tempstra

Radical Hope

The blessing (*la blesure*) of growth
 given in the broken Root,
 First-Fruit from death
 as from the death we laboured for so long
 now gives life worth.

Earth is now opened too
 to astronomical warmth, to cultivation
 as rain and secret earthworm tunnellings
 prepare the way,

thawing now root-force,
 proving that strange power
 hid in a seed for growth.

Margaret Avison

Meditation on the Opening of the Fourth Gospel

Un-tense-able Being: spoken
 for our understanding,
 speaking forth the 'natural world' —
 "that," we (who are part of it)
 say, "we can know."

Even in this baffling darkness
 Light has kept shining?
 (where? where? then are we blind?).
 But Truth is radiantly here,
 Being, giving us to Become:
 a new unfathomable genesis.

Come? in flesh and blood?
 Seen? as another part
 of the 'natural world' his word
 flung open, for the maybe imperiller,
 in what to us was the
 Beginning?

The unknown, the unrecognized, the
 invisibly glorious
 hid in our reality
 till the truly real
 lays all bare.
 The unresisting,
 then, most, speaks
 love. We fear
 that most.

Margaret Avison

The Silence That Is Not Silence At All

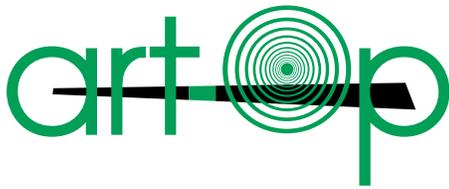
Unobtrusive as dawn, the lake balances perfectly
 between East and West. An early hiker
 rounds the corner, headset clamped on.

Juncoes *tsk tsk* and give way. Starlings catcall.
 Merganser, all white hood, skims
 a straight arrow line, alights with a velvet swoosh
 pursues prey through clear water
 soundless.

Lichen-stained alders circle the shore,
 haloed with smudges of alizarin catkins.
 Aments upon aments. A lent retreatant, I come
 for the annual fast from stimulation,
 rededicate to silence or at least
 to the diminishment of stimulants.

Make way for tumult. Here are the Big Ego geese.
 Indignant honking, they want to be noticed.
 Chest beating, a squall of identity.

Hannah Main-Van der Kamp



What Poetry Does

By *Hamish Robertson*

Nora Chadwick, in her book on the origins of the Gaels, tells of universities in which all learning was conducted orally, and entirely through the medium of poetry. The rhythmic verse structures of this early Celtic poetry served as an aid to memory, fixing patterns of knowledge and handing them down from generation to generation.

Chadwick also recounts a story I have always treasured. A Roman, travelling among the Celtic tribes in what is now Slovakia, saw a painting showing an old man walking on a path. From his mouth came silver chains, which flowed through the air and drew a number of his followers along behind him.

I take my view of the importance and power of poetry from these two accounts. A good poem moves its audience in ways that a prosaic account rarely does, because it speaks to something very old and very deep

Upcoming Events

A Divine Comedy

– April 5 to May 12, a new play from Brookstone Performing Arts, at the Walmer Centre Theatre (formerly Elmore's Hall) 188 Lowther Avenue, 416-922-1238 www.brookstonetheatre.com

Visual Artist Jim Paterson

– shows at the Institute for Christian Studies, 229 College St. (just east of Spadina). **Cross Over** – April 5 to May 4, 2002. Opening Reception April 5, 7:30 p.m. 416-979-2331

Your Story Through New Eyes

– James Tughan and the Dreaming of Lions Project, Exhibition and Seminars, St. Cuthbert's Presbyterian Church, Hamilton. Seminars are April 5, 7–10 pm, April 6, 9–12 noon, 12:30–3:30 pm. 905-516-4511

within us. Poetry works with rhythm, which is something we experience first from our mother's heart-beat in the womb, transferring this most basic early learning into the medium of spoken language, the first of our distinctive powers as created human beings.

Poetry is also the form in which oral cultures cast their most important public utterances: their genealogies, their histories, their cosmologies, their pictures of the world in which they lived.

And – finally – poetry deals in metaphor, in the telling of what things are like. Not what things are in themselves, in some abstract or scientific way, but how they come to us, how

they appear to us, as we live, here and now, in the midst of our existing, our becoming, and alongside and intermingled with the many other things that there are in our world.

And so, to sum up, this is my working definition of what poetry does: poetry tells us, in a rhythmic and hence memorable form, what the things of our world resemble, shedding light on particular (real) matters by showing them in their similarity and relation to other, often more familiar and more concrete matters.

Hamish Robertson is a Performance Poet and an Art Photographer.

The Institute for Christian Studies in partnership with Imago is pleased to present Art Talks! 2002

Shooting in the Light

Film, Faith and Contemporary Culture

Evening Lecture: **May 3, 2002**
Eyes Wide Open:
 A Christian Perspective on Popular Film
 Lecture by William Romkowski
 Address: 229 College Street, Toronto, Ontario M5T 1R7
 197 John Street, Toronto, north of Queen at Mutual
 Reception to Follow: Suggested Donation: \$5.00

Symposium: **May 4, 2002**
Faith Behind the Screens:
 The Role of Beliefs in the World of Film
 Panel Discussion with 10 films and special guests
 Sunday, 9:30 am – 12:30 pm, Institute for Christian Studies
 229 College Street, Suite 200, Toronto, just east of Spadina
 Registration Fee: \$10.00 (includes \$20.00 of food - refreshments included)

An imago Evening

– April 10, 7:30 pm, Enoch Turner Schoolhouse, 106 Trinity Street (just east of King & Parliament)

Pax Christi Choir

– April 27, 8 p.m., April 28, 3 p.m., directed by Stephanie Martin, Mozart *Requiem* and Haydn *Te Deum*, Grace Church on the Hill, 416-494-7889

Lynne McIlvride Evans' art

– can be seen at these upcoming shows:

Easter 2002 – March 29th to April 1st, Good Friday to Easter Monday, 2–4 pm daily Artist's Studio, Uxbridge ON 905-852-7768

October 2002 Solo Show
 Prime Gallery, 52 McCaul Street
 Toronto, ON (416) 593-5750

Poetry credits

Parable Boat; The Silence That Is Not Silence At All by Hannah Main-Van der Kamp, from *The Parable Boat*, 1999

Meditation on the Opening of the Fourth Gospel; Radical Hope by Margaret Avison, from *No Time*.

Low Easter, Rock Chapel; Flames Of Affection, Tongues Of Flame by John Tempstra, from *The Church Not Made With Hands*

The Sacrifice of Isaac; Cycling by D.S. Martin. "The Sacrifice of Isaac" first appeared in "Christianity & Literature" (Autumn 1998) and was reprinted in their 50th anniversary issue (Spring 2001). "Cycling" first appeared in "Wascana Review" (Spring 1999).