

**I** have been thinking recently about tragedy and comedy. These two staples of the literary world are often spoken of but not always understood. I know I don't understand them very well but I am prepared to venture a few remarks nonetheless. Earlier this spring I attended a conference in which one of the speakers made a passing comment about the tragic and the comic. He noted that the tragic in life tends to bring us to a place of self-absorption while the comic has the effect of taking us out of ourselves. And so it was suggested that while classical culture tends to be "tragic", Christianity is best understood as "comic".

To be clear, speaking of Christianity as comic should not lead us to think in terms of television sitcoms or the current fare in stand-up comedy. Rather the comic is understood as life winning over death, as hope trumping despair and joy taking precedence over sadness. Life is a mixture of darkness and light, of good and bad, of treacherous waters and calm seas. Our task is to negotiate our way through these contrasting realities and to discern whether to accept the account of the writer of Ecclesiastes or St. Paul. Is all vanity, or do we have grounds for hope and the promise of life to come?

The fabric of life is woven with elements of both tragedy and comedy, and the line between them is often very thin. However we should not think that if it is comedy it is not serious. Comedy is a signal of transcendence and can readily play together with the serious bits of life. With tragedy there is predictability while comedy involves the element of surprise. Humour is



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## Sue Lyon, pottery artist

### 1. What got you interested in doing pottery? or How did you get started?

I came from a background in which I was encouraged to pursue and learn all kinds of handwork. As a young person I mostly engaged in fibre arts. Later as a mother of our first child I saw an advert for a Mother and toddler pottery course and so I signed up. I soon became hooked on the medium and fascinated by the process.

### 2. In the making of pottery you have to engage with the clay/the material in a most direct way. Could you say something about what that experience is like for you.

I love the plasticity of clay and the way it takes on the texture of anything it touches. Working on the wheel is a very engaging activity in which the clay can feel more like it has a life of its own and needs a firm hand to coax it into the shape I wish for. In working with clay one works against time as the clay dries and hardens. The whole process from soft pliable clay to glazing and firing the completed project fascinates me. I love the change the fire makes to the pieces. The challenging aspect of clay is that one must have a vision that sees beyond the soft clay and the initial moves to the final product.

### 3. Could you comment on why it is important to you to see the ordinary "transformed into the beautiful"?

We are surrounded, in our everyday lives, by many objects both natural and human-made. In the natural world I am often surprised at how beautiful the ordinary is.



God took great care in each part of his design, he made the ordinary beautiful.

Even though we need practical items for everyday food use, it seems to me that each cup or bowl or plate, ordinary items

that we use regularly, can be made with care and be beautiful as well as functional.

### 4. You mention how you are moved by the pottery poems in the Hebrew scriptures and the New Testament... could you comment on the links you see between divine and human creativity?

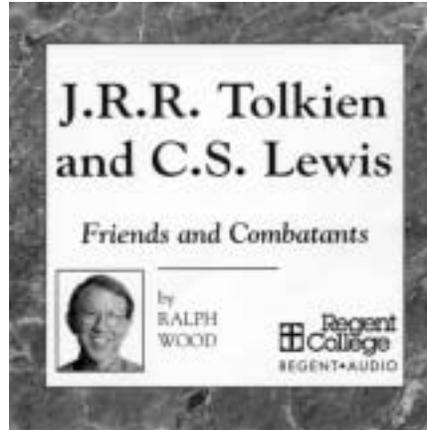
I am inspired by God's attention to detail in His creativity. His choice of colour combinations and selection of parts to make up the whole, especially seen in animals, can be daring or calming, stimulating or soothing. As I create I love to produce items with that same diversity. I also love the non-uniform way God created. As humans we all share the same basic parts (anatomy) but each of us is unique. Whilst working in clay I experienced some of the biblically expressed relationship of the potter to the clay, the maker to the made and appreciate the gentleness and care of this tactile process. I have learnt to appreciate how in the process of producing pots great strength is often needed and at other times a delicate touch. ♡

[www.suesstudiopottery.com](http://www.suesstudiopottery.com)

Sue Lyon's work will be on show at Regent College this summer –

**In our Likeness** – at the Lookout Gallery, Regent College, Vancouver BC, June 29th to August 5th, 2005. Opening reception June 29, 4:30 to 7:30 pm.

Professor Ralph Wood's lectures given in September 2004 are now available on CD. The Friday evening lecture titled *J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis: Friends and Combatants*, may be purchased for \$12 (postage included). Or you may wish to have the 2 CD set with both the Friday night lecture and his talk given on the Saturday morning *The Story within the Story* which may be purchased for \$18 (postage included). Please send your cheque to the address on page 4.



*Queen of the Forest*, Oil on canvas, and Digital Print, 2005.

## Phil Irish: My Pilgrim Route

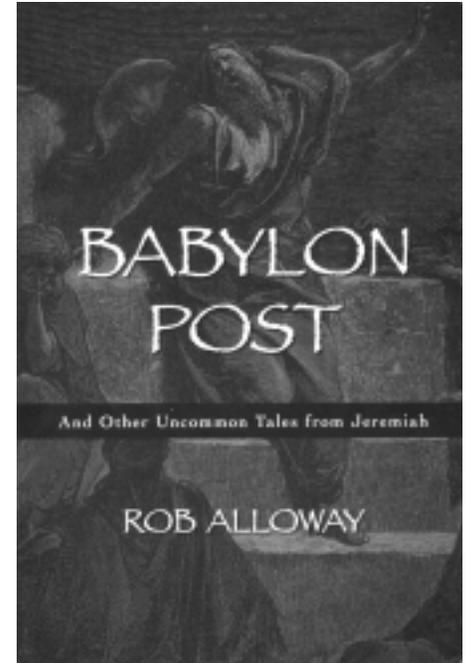
There are sacred sites, all around the world. Somehow, these places hold special meaning – perhaps special power – in the lives of those who visit. Whether seeking meaning, or a unique tourist experience, the pilgrimage routes of Europe continue to see people crossing mountain ranges on foot. But what are the places that hold special meaning for you?

I have been asking people to draw a map for me. The destination? A place of particular significance to them: perhaps where a decision was taken, or an accident happened, or a place of solace returned to again and again. Some people become confessional, giving me instructions on what the place means and how to experience the place fully. Others, in reverent reticence, scratch a few lines and send me into the mystery. I follow these maps, full of curiosity and empathy. In this place – significant to another but new to me – I draw, take photographs, and think.

The map and my response to the place become one artwork. I have had to find a specific tree, or order a certain meal from a diner, or find a particular artwork in a museum. Once the process is complete, the finished works will, I hope, spark imagination and wonder in those who engage them. Perhaps others will follow the same maps again? Or will viewers become intentional about their own sacred spaces? Or, in empathy, will one turn to another saying, "Tell me of a significant place on your journey".

**The Cartographer's Lounge** – a space for the collection of these maps – as well as my responses to the maps will be part of the Symposium d'art contemporain, in Baie-Saint-Paul Quebec, from August 5 until September 5. I will be there the entire month, so come and visit!

[www.philirish.com](http://www.philirish.com) 



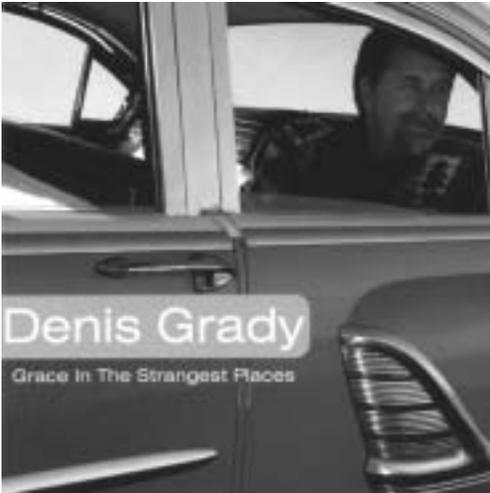
## *Babylon Post: And Other Uncommon Tales from Jeremiah*

By Robert Alloway,  
Regent College Publishing.

[www.regentpublishing.com](http://www.regentpublishing.com)

It is standard practice in some Christian circles to give much less time to the Old Testament – or Hebrew Scriptures than to the New Testament. This is a habit that results in a truncated understanding of the biblical story. We have much to learn from the histories and the prophets much that would serve us well in the chaotic world in which we currently find ourselves. *Babylon Post* is a good antidote for this problem as it takes up a number of the stories from the time of the prophet Jeremiah. The author has a special ability to take these tales from a dim and distant past and give them renewed energy and emotion for a contemporary audience. His keen imagination brings freshness to a wonderful collection of ancient stories. What becomes clear is that the long history of humanity has done little to change our foibles. But this book is also a vivid reminder that there are insights to be discovered and wisdom to be gleaned in these tales. There is no doubt that the reader will find this a compelling read that is at once entertaining and instructive.

*By the Rivers of Babylon – there we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion... How could we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land? – Psalm 137:1, 4*



**Denis Grady** is a singer/songwriter who hails from Calgary, Alberta. His CD *Grace in the Strangest Places*, weaves together spiritual wisdom and encouragement with an energetic country music flavour. The title song expresses a longing for the light that faith discloses, while *Walking in the Mystery* acknowledges that some things remain hidden. Each of the twelve songs on the album gives us a glimpse into some aspect of the walk of faith. Denis is backed-up by a fine roster of musicians making this an enjoyable and heartwarming collection of songs. [denis@keyguys.com](mailto:denis@keyguys.com)

## Poet's Corner

Poems by Paul Tucker

[JohPaTucker@yahoo.com](mailto:JohPaTucker@yahoo.com)

### City Sidewalks

They've done a good job  
On these new sidewalks  
Smooth and straight  
Sculpted with precision

But I don't like them  
These new monuments to progress say new too loudly  
They're harder somehow and do not like my reflective tread  
They invite the bright fresh step of walkers brisk, new and thoughtless

I like the old ones  
Let them crack and wear with me  
Let us finish our walk together  
As a memento of my passing

### On a New Plain

I like to walk on the roof tops  
Joined together along the top of our street  
They put me on a new plain  
A new terrain  
Of slopes and peaks and flats  
And sheer, breath stopping crevices  
Undisturbed by the anxious thoughts  
And relentless clutter  
below

### Garbage Bags

Wallowing  
slick  
dark  
oily smooth  
bags of shiny green plastic neatly twisted and  
tied off deposited thoughtlessly for those men who drive those  
reeking trucks to rid us of that round wound is deep and as sure as  
dross the garbage comes as natural and thoughtless as Pilate we wash  
our hands of it is taken like the burdened goat outside the city in  
appalling insolence we say we're clean

### The Policy of a Tree

Today I grew tired of Human Resources  
and collective agreements and workplace harassment policies  
and wanted suddenly to live lawlessly  
not lawless without regard for life  
but in some rock-splitting root expression  
in exuberant fertility oblivious to law  
and full of a thousand research baffling paradoxes

like a tree  
with no bark  
advisory board  
for the regulating  
of ants  
or drilling bids  
from woodpeckers  
between 9 a.m. and 3  
no committee  
issuing ADD  
memoranda  
on the  
overabundance  
and excessive  
activity  
of leaves  
no colour codes  
height restrictions  
or expansion regulations  
and especially section seven article thirteen  
in the policy of a tree

## Tragedy and comedy

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able to bypass the merely rational and predictable and lead us to discover something new and unexpected. What has been called “deep comedy” serves to mark hope amidst the chaotic landscape of life. Traditionally the tragic calls for the heroic acceptance of the fact there is no way out. Comedy brings (unexpected) resolution.

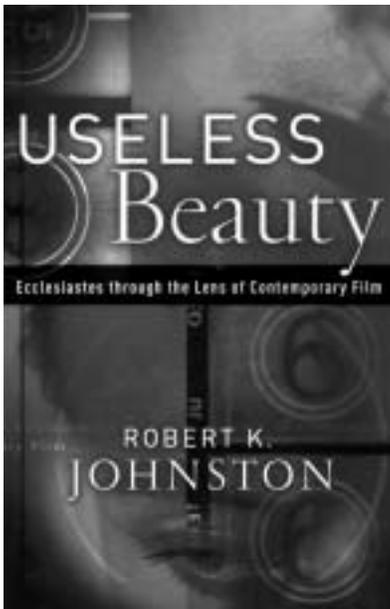
A couple of biblical stories illustrate this point. Abraham and Sarah are promised a child and they are laughing at this preposterous idea that as members of the geriatric set they will soon be proud parents of a new baby. Isaac, whose name means “laughter”, is the fulfillment of that promise and he

launches the history of God’s chosen people. In laughter there is hope. The second story is of two disciples walking the seven miles or so along the road to Emmaus just after that fateful weekend of Jesus’ death. This story is referred to by one author as the funniest incident in the Bible. Here are these two discouraged figures who “begin to pour out their sorrows while ... Jesus nods and sympathizes” and then Jesus goes on to give them “a massive bible study” on why the messiah must die. Soon they realize with whom they have been in conversation – he disappears and they – dogged tired though they are - run all the way back to Jerusalem to tell their story only to find that Jesus has already appeared to those in Jerusalem.

## *Useless Beauty: Ecclesiastes through the Lens of Contemporary Film*

**Robert K. Johnston, Baker Academic, 2004.**

In September of 2000 a festival under the title of *Theology Through the Arts* was hosted by Jeremy Begbie in Cambridge England. As part of that event, Robert Johnston along with some colleagues from Fuller Seminary in Pasadena California led a number of sessions on film and Ecclesiastes. This book is born out of that event. The title is borrowed from a song by Elvis Costello in which he “critiques the repeated attempts to turn life into a ‘sweetheart’ plaything or pet.” After all “Nonsense prevails, modesty fails/ Grace and virtue turn into stupidity. / What shall we do with all this useless beauty?” (p17)



At the heart of this work is a call for a new model of interpretation of culture. Instead of the standard move of faith evaluating culture, Johnston recommends that we begin with culture. Specifically we let film speak to us and raise the questions – faith then responds noting places of agreement and disagreement. Films discussed include *American Beauty*, *Magnolia*, *Monster Ball*, *The Sixth Sense*, *Signs*, *Election* and *About Schmidt*.

This book is impressive in its ability to bring into dialogue contemporary film and the writings of Qoheleth (the teacher). This is not only a book for film buffs but is valuable for any who wish to explore a model for dialogue between popular culture and communities of faith – or gospel and culture if you prefer. If you haven’t seen the films discussed you may be inspired to rent a copy and if you have seen them Johnston’s insights may move you to look again. This kind of dialogue serves to enrich in two directions, film aids in opening up the biblical text, while the biblical text serves to deepen our understanding of the film.

Ecclesiastes is a book for our time. A number of years ago Jacques Ellul wrote; *Qoheleth proposes an idea that is more than modern: he does not consider disorder, nonsense, incoherence, and contradiction as accidents, like an evil we must eliminate... Instead, he treats these elements as inherent in human social life. He integrates disorder and contradiction into humanity’s normal being.* (p181)

*Useless Beauty* will get you thinking about a number of important issues and will reward a careful reading. ❏

W.H. Auden has written of the depth of Christian society’s comedy suggesting that *...while classical comedy believes that rascals should get the drubbing they deserve, Christian comedy believes we are forbidden to judge others and it is our duty to forgive each other. In classical comedy the characters are exposed and punished: when the curtain falls, the audience is laughing and those on stage are in tears. In Christian comedy the characters are exposed and forgiven: when the curtain falls, the audience and the characters are laughing together.*

Artistry done out of the comedic vision of the gospel will see no need to avoid the serious but will recognize that side of our human journey. Even the tragic will not be ignored. It will be readily acknowledged, not as defining human existence, but as a thread in our journey which though perhaps inevitable is not definitive of our situation. It will be artistry that preserves and brings an element of surprise of play and of laughter and it is precisely there that we find a haven of hope which allows us to transcend the dark and tragic side of things.

Our calling is not to endure the world but to negotiate our way through it confident that its very nature is comedic, that surprises will come and when all is said and done that there will be laughter at the end of the play, laughter that will be shared by heaven and earth.



We continue to be grateful for all in the Imago network. Our work continues to expand and the network broadens. There are exciting prospects for the days ahead and we will do our best to keep you informed hoping that you will be able to participate in some of the events taking place. We are excited about the new projects that have been added to the roster. You can find out more at our website. Thank you to all who support Imago in one way or another we are grateful for your participation with us in working to promote the arts.

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