

**W**hat I offer here is not the regular article with a sustained focus – but rather a collage of bits and pieces – fragments if you will – consisting of things that caught my attention in one way or another in recent days.

We should not be surprised that art and politics converge. Politics – particularly an unstable political environment – can capture the artist's sensibility and serve to generate new work. It might be drama, visual art, poetry or music. The unsettled and unsettling realities of Ukraine have had just such an effect as artists engage their craft to speak their own language about what is transpiring in their country. The ongoing violence and conflict call for response and art is one of the places that gives a response. Artists seek to capture icons of their stories of conflict, images that will be reminders of what the people have experienced. Marina Sochenko who used to paint flowers now paints scenes from the conflict in Independence Square, believing that artists must paint that which moves them. Another artist Tanya Cheprasova who has joined the protest has taken helmets worn by the warring factions and painted them.

Her desire is to show that there is still beauty in the midst of the dark chaos of conflict.

The commentator observes that once the conflict is passed and the casualties forgotten the art will remain as a

record of what transpired. (From *le mag* May 27 2014)

Last November I had the opportunity to see an exhibition of the work of Marc Chagall at

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**Somnium in Offertore (or: What I dreamed during the collection), 2014, Praise song with organic and Reformed instrumentation; Digital Tapestry, Open Edition**

A line, a movement, an impression: is mark-making only the privilege of people with palette and paint? The snail's trail (of course) is silvery. But what about the hoofprints of a thousand buffalo? Or the wingbeats of bats, invisible, but mischievous, and as color-latent as any brushstroke? In the absence of built-in sonar, I rely on other apparatus to see. The camera ascertains traces of living and moving things: their gurgling, and splashing and laughing.

Photoshop brings the ritual full circle: like religion, she manipulates. The challenge? Asking her to sing something true. Sometimes, enchanted by a piece of Ontario waterfront, I catch a glimpse of the chorus. It rings a while in my ears, the double-bass insisting like a Calvinist; the soprano shattering the communion glass. There are some patterns so ubiquitous, you can't escape them. To these, my hermeneutic spirals ever back: as close as I'll ever be to home. Then again, who knows what rough beast might next bake its ultraviolet way into one of my aluminum layer-cakes? The recipe book was only ever a suggestion.

*Harold Sikkema, May 2014*



continued from page 1

the Jewish Museum in New York. I am pleased for any opportunity to see Chagall's paintings. I was struck by the beauty and emotion of the work but also surprised to see so many paintings of the crucifixion. Aware of only three or four of these paintings I entered a room that had a dozen crucifixion paintings. The title of the exhibition was *Love, War and Exile* – and it consisted of work done in the 1930s and 1940s under the shadow of World War II.

In the April 2014 issue of *First Things* Canadian author David Lyle Jeffrey has an article titled *The Christ of Marc Chagall* in which he explores the Jewish and Christian symbolism in Chagall's work. His focus is on what is perhaps the best known of the crucifixion paintings *White Crucifixion* – which can be found in the Art Institute of Chicago. He notes that it is the favourite painting of Pope Francis. In all the crucifixion paintings the Crucified wears no ordinary loin cloth but a "tallit" or Jewish prayer shawl. Jeffrey observes how that these painting were for Chagall "a deliberate invitation to reflect on the meaning of the cross". Jeffrey makes the interesting point that Chagall's "verbal and visual universalizing of biblical narrative in a way that juxtaposes the Jewish and Christian stories of sacrifice and redemption is unique in modern art."

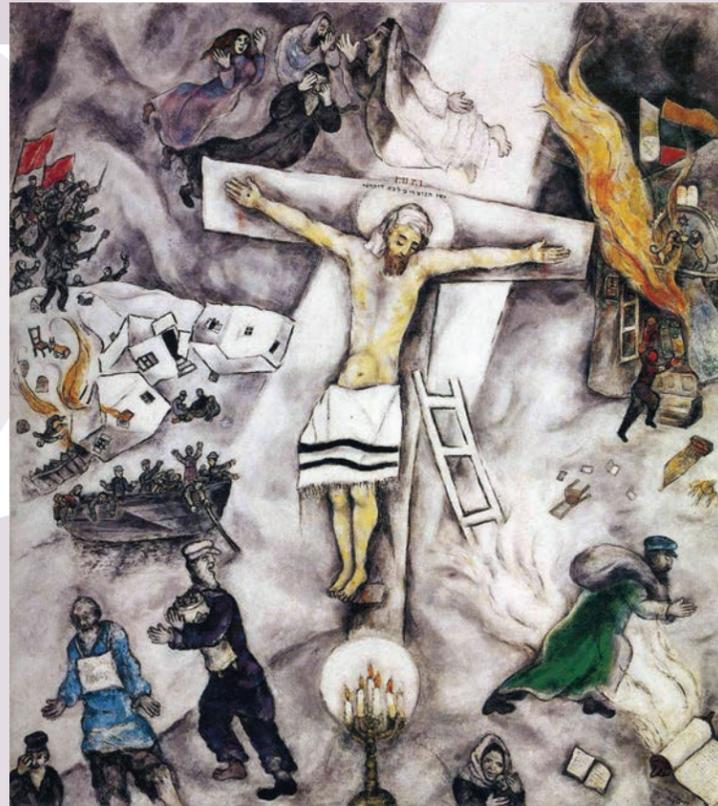
C.S. Lewis in his ever entertaining and insightful *Screwtape Letters* opens the way to see foibles within us and falsehoods around us. Two great gifts in life are music and silence but they can easily get lost in the cacophony of the world around us – something that pleases the senior devil.

"Music and silence – how I detest them both! How thankful we should be that ever since Our Father entered Hell ... no square inch of infernal space and no moment of infernal time has been surrendered to either of those abominable forces, but all has been occupied by Noise – Noise, the grand dynamism, the audible expression of all this is exultant, ruthless and virile – Noise which alone defends us from silly qualms, despairing scruples and impossible desires. We will make the whole



universe a noise in the end. We have already made great strides in this direction as regards the Earth. The melodies and silences of Heaven will be shouted down in the end. But I admit we are not yet loud enough, or anything like it." (Screwtape, in *The Screwtape Letters*, C.S. Lewis)

The English poet John Keats who lived a short life into the early part of the 19th century once wrote in a letter about, "negative capability". This phase has had a lasting association with Keats and his contribution to literature. Negative capability describes those who are "capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts without any irritable reaching after fact and reason." This is a theme that deserves more attention than I can give it here. I want only to suggest that this gift of "negative capability" seems an essential quality for the poet and artist. An example would be the ability to draw on the resourcefulness of beauty without any desire to define it or provide a full explanation of it – or without knowing just what it is. This is a gift I wish were more widely distributed.



Henri Matisse is well known for his fine paintings though his "cut-outs" are generally less familiar. The Tate Modern in London is currently featuring an exhibition of his cut-outs. This is work done late in his life. Suffering from cancer and confined to a wheelchair he lost enough mobility to make painting nearly impossible. He brought his artistic gift to paper and "cut into colour" to give shape to natural forms of animals and plants. And as one writer puts it: Beauty from ashes, stone turned to flesh: in the Bible the theme of loss, transformation and renewal is constant, especially in the

Psalms. Despite the writers' laments, there's often a final turning to praise – a 'yet'. Matisse's cut-outs of dancers and acrobats, made when he himself could barely walk, show, in searingly beautiful colour, an astounding 'yet'. Perhaps there's another reason that these shapes are so beguiling: the new form can only come into existence because of what was cut away." This exhibition will eventually travel to the Museum of Modern Art in New York.



Image Journal committed to exploring the fascinating links between art, faith and mystery has reached its 25th anniversary. Under the able and creative direction of its founder Greg Wolfe the journal continues to nourish the hearts and minds of those who value conversations on themes connected to art, faith and mystery. Issue #80 consists of articles on visual art, brief fictional pieces, plenty of poetry, and a couple of reflective essays. This anniversary issue includes more than a dozen short pieces from those who have been touched in

one way or another by the thoughtful and engaging contributions of this fine journal.

The editor in this anniversary issue harkens back to something he wrote in the first issue of *Image* in 1989:

"A culture is governed by its reigning myths. In the latter days of the twentieth century, there is an increasing sense that materialism, whether of the Left or Right, cannot sustain or nourish our common life. Religion and art share the capacity to help us to renew our

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*awareness of the ultimate questions: who we are, where we have come from, and where we are going. In their highest forms religion and art unite faith and reason, grace and nature; they preserve us from the twin errors of superstition and rationalist abstraction. Religion and art are, in the end, prophetic, reminding us both of the glory of man and the fragility of human institutions."*

Pacific Theatre Vancouver is concluding its 30th anniversary season with a four week run of *Espresso* by Lucia Frangione who is no stranger to Pacific Theatre. Founding Artistic Director Ron Reed is to be congratulated for his persistent commitment to theatre in the city. Over the 30 year journey he has brought this small theatre company from the margins to the centre of live theatre in Vancouver. Providing a full season of plays and finding an audience to attend is no easy task these days. Pacific Theatre does it and will do it again in 2014-2015 with a diverse line up of work that will entertain, challenge and enrich its audiences and may it continue to flourish in the years to come.

There is general agreement that we live in an aestheticized culture. Zygmunt Bauman has noted that cultural identities are essentially fluid and we are floating between the modern values of control and production and the postmodern values where we are seekers and gatherers drawn to sensations. Do the arts become a primary resource for generating sensations where thought gives way to feeling and emotion? How might we keep thought and feeling in judicious balance so that we are neither trapped in the cool world of ideas nor blindly preoccupied by the warm waves of feeling?

I hope that many of you will be able to attend the Wednesday June 18th Imago evening see details below. I wish you a refreshing and relaxing summer ahead and have noted a few titles that may be of interest for your summer reading.

*John*

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**Imago Event: Wednesday June 18, 2014**

Enoch Turner Schoolhouse at 7:30 p.m.

Kevin Ramessar, guitar; Greg Hines, dance troupe;  
Duane Forrest, singer/songwriter; D.S. Martin, poet;  
Cal Seerveld, author; Wilhelmina Kennedy, visual artist.  
Reception to follow.

**Doug Beardsley, *Rain Music: Travel Narratives*, Victoria, Stones Throw Press, 2013**

Doug Beardsley is, probably, one of the finest living Christian poets in Canada. Doug has published twelve books of poetry, thus far, three non-fiction books and an anthology – he was a poetic novice of sorts with Irving Layton (with whom he has a voluminous correspondence) and he published two books with Al Purdy on John Donne and D.H. Lawrence. Doug taught Canadian poetry in the English Department at University of Victoria for 25 years and he also created courses in the Holocaust, aboriginal literature and true to the Canadian tradition, hockey.

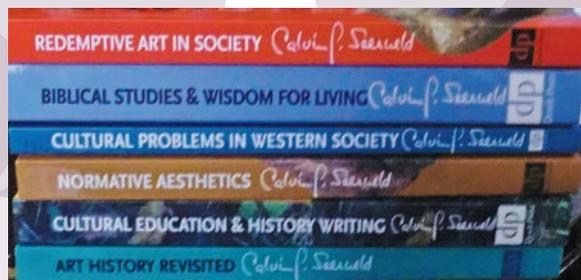
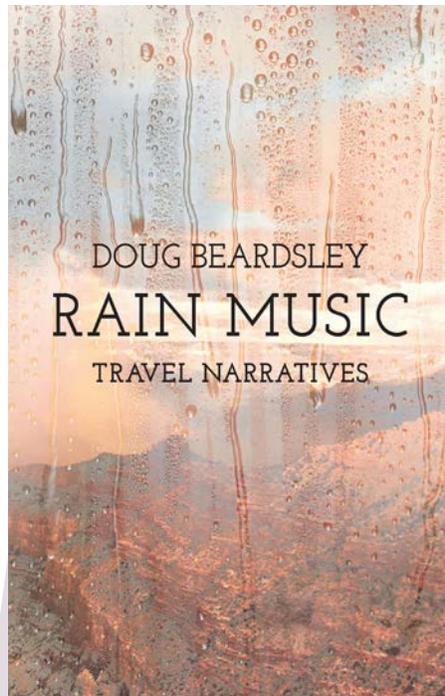
*Rain Music* “emerged from nearly four decades of living on the west coast/best coast in the mythic country of Cascadia, extending from Russian America down to the Mexican border – wherever that may be”.

*Rain Music* is, indeed, a poetic and finely tuned travel narrative that is deftly divided into four discrete yet overlapping sections: Tlingit, Salish, Pueblo, Wind Walks. Doug is committed to probing “the world behind us” as revealed to us through both the Tlingit, Salish, Pueblo peoples and the speech of nature and nature’s enticing seasons and welcoming rhymes and rhythms. The poetic missive acknowledges, faithful to an older version of Canadian poetry as embodied in Robert Service, a poet who had “a haunch what the music meant”.

It is this world behind us, this rain but also rain music, this meaning of the often unheard music that Doug is gently and evocatively pointing to in *Rain Music*. The poetic travelogue begins on the far north west coast, travels down to southern British Columbia, then further south to the Pueblo in Mexico. The final section, “Wind Walks”, is most alluring – like, rain music, a whisper to walk through a portal and hear deeper and further.

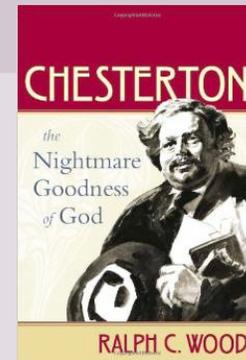
*Rain Music* is poetic music that offers the attentive a needful message from “the world behind us” or, as Leacock might suggest, a reality behind the beyond. Contemplative poetry is desperately needed in these days, and *Rain Music* is contemplative poetry at its wisest, fittest and finest.

Ron Dart



Calvin Seerveld has been giving attention to matters of art and faith over his long and distinguished career. He has lectured around the world and for many years served as Senior Member in Aesthetics at the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto. Seerveld’s work has been gathered into six volumes just published, each carrying the subtitle “Sundry writings and occasional lectures”. Dordt College Press and General Editor John H. Kok have done a great service making these wise and insightful writings available to a wider public. Images are generously sprinkled throughout these volumes and serve to enrich the narrative of the text. We plan to review these volumes in the days ahead to give you a sense of what to expect in each one. As you will see in the accompanying image the titles indicate the wide range of topics that Seerveld has explored. In these volumes we have access to rich resources where biblically informed understanding is brought to bear on social, cultural, artistic and historical themes by a unique and articulate voice.

The shrill voice of the militant atheist has become a familiar presence in recent years. A whole cadre of those disaffected for one reason or another with the idea that there is a God – who has created the world and continues to engage with what has been created. One could argue that these efforts reflect a failure of imagination. Imagination is one place we might visit in order to see the inadequacies of the flat world proffered



by those who have no room for God in their systems. I grant though that those who are disaffected on matters relating to religion are not without imagination.

The culture we live in has a

measure of amnesia around what religious commitment looks like in practice. So says Rowan Williams in a brief introduction to *Chesterton: The Nightmare Goodness of God*, by Ralph C. Wood (Baylor University Press 2011). This book is part of a series that seeks to profile the importance

of a Christian imagination as articulated by some of the creative minds from the past.

G.K. Chesterton was not short on opinion and not hesitant to speak his views. And whether one lines up with Chesterton on matters social, political or theological there is no doubt that he provides provocative material to quicken the mind and engage the heart. Though there is no pervasive theme in this book the matter of evil shows up a great deal. Chesterton was no triumphalist and did not hesitate to face the darkness head on. Wood takes the reader on a journey exploring the thought of Chesterton through visits to some of his important writings. From *Orthodoxy*, to *The Ball and the Cross* and on to *The Man Who was Thursday*, Wood unpacks Chesterton’s thinking with balanced attention to both strengths and weaknesses of the author. Wood is an eloquent writer and provides both breadth and depth in his exploration of Chesterton.