

# 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.

A handwritten signature in green ink that reads "John Franklin".



**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 stalls, 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](http://www.mcilvride-evans.com)

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

John Franklin, *Executive Director*  
133 Southvale Drive, Toronto, ON M4G 1G6  
416-421-8745 [franklin@ultratech.net](mailto:franklin@ultratech.net)  
[www.imago-arts.on.ca](http://www.imago-arts.on.ca)

## 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

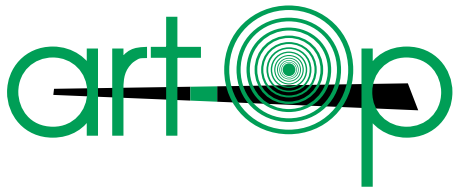
Unobtrusive as dawn, the lake balances perfectly  
 between East and West. An early hiker  
 rounds the corner, headset clamped on.

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](http://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 Rommelspacher  
 Address of introduction and prayer by Pastor of Cedar College Church, St. Catharines, ON  
 Friday, 7:30 pm, St. George the Martyr Church, 107 John Street, Toronto, just east 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).