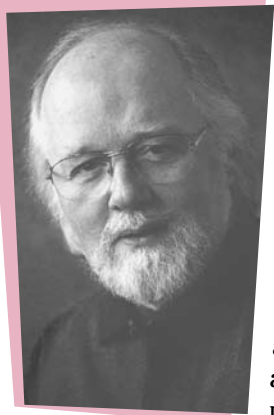


**T**he theme of transforming culture keeps showing up in books I read, conferences I attend and people with whom I have conversations. It is a buzz word both inside and outside the faith community. Linked with transformation is creativity. I think for example of the work of Richard Florida – *The Rise of the Creative Class* – where he documents how the increasingly large numbers of creatives in the workforce have been forging a new world. The creative class spans a wide spectrum of work options, scientists, engineers, architects, designers, business, education health care and law to name a few. The artists are also on the list and it is their style of thinking, discerning and intuiting the world that has now been grasped by a much larger group.

I noted a similar theme in another book I dabbled in recently, written by the well known Canadian culture critic Max Wyman. *The Defiant Imagination: An Impassioned Plea to Keep Culture at the Heart of the Canadian Experiment*. By culture Wyman means the arts and his book is an extended apologetic for a Canadian commitment to the arts as a resource for mapping what it means to be human and shaping a national identity. I confess I am not quite as optimistic as Wyman

that the arts will deliver the values we need. On this matter there is evidence of both success and failure. One thing is clear art fuels the imagination and opens heart and mind to fresh possibilities. Art

also can temper human passions at the flash points of our differences – and foster a sense of unity that is often hard to come by.



*John Coltrane by David Gnass*

Some of you may have seen the recent film *The Singing Revolution* not a blockbuster by any means. It is a gentle film that draws you into the life of the small European nation of Estonia. In the mid-twentieth century this nation experienced a profound intrusion with the coming of the Russian army to take control of its government and to reshape its identity. Large numbers of Russians moved into the country and large numbers of Estonians met their death. The Estonians have a repertoire of songs reaching deeply into their culture and tradition. There were a number of gatherings between 1987 and 1991 where the people would sing. In September 1988 about 300,000 gathered to sing. The underlying script was the cry for independence. Hope that independence would come was generated through and

*continued on page 4*

## Jazz state

David Gnass was born in St. Catharines, Ontario. While his artistic talents were encouraged during his schooling, it was a natural ability he did not value in his youth. It wasn't until the late 90's that Gnass, then living in Toronto, began to paint. Gathering inspiration from his love of jazz

music, he took two years from his working career and developed his distinctive style.

"By keeping the backgrounds as only a complimenting bold colour contrasted by a dark solid it is my hope that viewers can then give their full attention to the subject. In the subject I try to capture the essence of the "jazz state" through use of various striking colours or bold monotonies".

In 2004, Gnass began to paint landscapes. Drawing from the inspiring works of the Group of Seven and their contemporaries he set out to develop his own interpretation of the wonders of our created world starting in his backyard of Ontario.

Gnass will be exhibiting his landscapes at The McMichael Volunteer Committee's 18th Annual Autumn Art Sale at The McMichael Canadian Art Collection in Kleinburg, Ontario, October 24 to 26.

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David Gnass ■

## Baptising the art of entanglement

By Paul Tucker

While searching through *Winter Sun, The Dumfounding* (Margaret Avison's collected poems of 1940-1966), I discovered that someone had written a note in the margin of Margaret's signed poem *The Swimmer's Moment*. It read as follows: "Talked to Margaret – [She was] swimming in the Ottawa River toward an Oak. She realized the tree was going in the wrong direction and she was being carried away by the current." If not for every one of us, an otherwise ordinary, though alarming, moment, yet suddenly transformed by an intuition and enduring images into a figure much greater than its individual features. That is poetry; the synergistic art of entanglement.

Did Avison first see 'pale-bland faces on the rim of suction' or did she start with the hunch, 'For Everyone // The swimmer's moment at the whirlpool comes, // But many at that moment will not say, "This is the whirlpool then?"' Wherever the entanglement began, I sense there is a current of hope in the *The Swimmer's Moment* that may not have been entirely owing to Avison's own imagination.

An excerpt of Joseph Brodsky's Nobel Lecture, 1987: "There are, as we know, three modes of cognition: analytical, intuitive, and the mode that was known to the Biblical prophets, revelation. What distinguishes poetry from other forms of literature is that it uses all three of them at once (gravitating primarily toward the second and the third). For all three of them are given in the language; and there are times when, by means of a single word, a single rhyme, the writer of a poem finds himself where no one has ever been before him, further perhaps than he himself would have wished for". (From *Noble Lectures, Literature 1981-1990*, Editor-in-Charge Tore Frangsmyr, Singapore, 1993.)

We recognize how potent language is when a poet who is admittedly not a Christian (not referring to Avison who admittedly was) can harvest the language to great, even prophetic effect, often beyond what she may have intended. What then of the Christian who lives in the embrace of Christ?

I do not mean to trivialize, but there is magic in the recipe. It is the sort of magic illustrated by C.S. Lewis in *The Magician's Nephew*. A contemptuous Uncle Andrew throws an iron tie-bar that glances off Aslan's head (a powerful lion whose song has created the land of Narnia), sticks in the ground, and grows into a lamppost. The pugnacious piece of iron had sunk into ground so fertile, so infused with Aslan's own life-creating breath and song that if it had not set down roots and sprouted, it would have begun to quiver and sing. A swim in the Ottawa River, iron bars, temper tantrums and even hunches are not in themselves extraordinary, but to the attentive poet, raw materials of the art, transformed first by power inherent in the language, then by baptism into him who said, "The Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed."

### Notes...

"A momentary stay against the confusion of the world," is, you may think, a rather aggrandized way of describing the making of poems, especially since it was said by a poet, albeit a very good poet. Notwithstanding Robert Frost describes of what a poem is capable. Why else does the tyrant first imprison the poet, remove a 'stay' in the path of the conquering machinery of despotic insanity?

As possibly the first poem that I read and actually liked, T.S. Eliot's *The Love Song Of J. Alfred Prufrock* continues to deepen its allure. I might quote examples of its hypnotic cadences, its sagacious economy in lines like 'I have measured out my life in coffee spoons.' or its foreboding in 'I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each. // I do not think they will sing to me.' as features of the poem that draw me back to further readings that have instilled in me an unquenchable compulsion to both write them and to understand what I can best describe as the art of entanglement.

In Millennium Myth, N.T Wright encourages Christians confronted with ideologies and political forces that are "earthbound", that is, bound in the ordinary, to a rediscovery "of truly apocalyptic language: language that will speak of earth and resonate with the music of heaven." OK, sounds nice, but how? ■

### The Swimmer's Moment

By Margaret Avison

For every one  
The swimmer's moment at the whirlpool comes,  
But many at that moment will not say  
"This is the whirlpool then."  
By their refusal they are saved  
From the black pit, and also from contesting  
The deadly rapids, and emerging in  
The mysterious, and more ample waters.  
And so their bland-blank faces turn and turn  
Pale and forever on the rim of suction  
They will not recognize.  
Of those who dare the knowledge  
Many are whirled into the ominous centre  
That, gaping vertical, seals up  
For them an eternal boon of privacy,  
So that we turn away from their defeat  
With a despair, not from their deaths, but for  
Ourselves, who cannot penetrate their secret  
Nor even guess at the anonymous breadth  
Where one or two have won:  
(The Silver reaches of the estuary).

### Man In Bucket Hat

By Paul Tucker

He wears his bucket  
with the brim overshadowing his eyes  
like dependable eaves  
  
His closed left hand  
is nestled in a pensile pocket  
like an unweathered wing reserved  
  
His light blue jacket looks new  
or is it a telltale canvas, stretched round  
a waterproof, weather-top back?  
  
And his jeans, though thick  
are a little winded  
and bag out a bit at the sit and squat  
  
But he prefers his work boots  
with the tops worn through  
like the piped and windowed shell of an egg  
  
that for a moment, let me see  
the confined struggle  
of the incessant hatchling

## Noir architecture

By Hamish Robertson

The three poems and two images here presented are part of a much longer sequence which has recently been exhibited in the gallery of the Ryerson Polytechnic University's School of Image Arts under the title 'noir architecture'.

The impulse behind the project is a reflection of my peculiar gifting, as poet and photographer. I write poetic meditations upon photographs because it brings together two activities which have up until recently in my life been separate, thus groping toward some better sense of artistic integrity.

The term I've coined for this brand new art form is 'wordscape'. Now when people ask me how I justify myself in face of the great and (to me anyway) somewhat paralysing world of work I can say: 'I make wordscapes'.

Photos – even photos made deliberately as art – are today often still treated as factual matter. The joy of wordscaping is that it allows me to explore the imaginative under-world of some of my own photographs

The 'noir architecture' sequence is about to be published in book form.

<http://hamishrobertson.coffeehouse.ca> ■

you turn a corner  
(dead center of the night)  
shock of the real

from the temporal, the fleeting  
(our handprint on the earth)  
to the now, the always  
the rapt eternal now



the old stones sidle outward  
to kiss the steps to kiss the shadowed wall

while beyond  
by electric light outlined  
the tree trunks curve

in staccato concert  
aspiring in the city air  
to leaf entangled difference



pure defiant soul, opposing  
to militant office windows  
– the chlorophyll riot  
to the victory of mathematics  
– organic necessity

## Date Change

Roberta Ahmanson a seasoned independent scholar in the history of art will give a lecture, on the theme,

*Till We Have Faces*

Wednesday November 5, 2008.

This will be an illustrated talk giving attention to the importance of the human face in the history of art. The venue is yet to be determined but will be noted in the next newsletter and on the Imago website in early September.

*“There are many...things I have found myself saying about poetry but chiefest of these is that it is metaphor, saying one thing and meaning another, saying one thing in terms of another, the pleasure of ulteriority.”*

Robert Frost, *The Constant Symbol*

*Poetry confronts in the most clear-eyed way just those emotions which consciousness wishes to slide by.”*

C.K. Williams, *Poetry and Consciousness*

*“We hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us.”*

John Keats

## Transforming culture?

*continued from page 1*

expressed by the singing. Protests and acts of defiance were part of the effort to regain their country and the gathering to sing was in its own way an act of defiance.

I have been wondering how one might make a virtue out of employing a “defiant imagination”. Defiance doesn’t normally sit well in a list of virtues – but I find myself wanting to make it something of value. It resonates with what we find in the biblical narrative. The prophetic voice is often a defiant voice, taking on the prevailing values and actions of a nation, culture or people, compromised in belief and practice operating well outside the divine intention. Michael Foster in a book titled *Exiles* writes about living missionally in post-Christian culture and make reference to “dangerous songs”. He laments about how so much of the singing Christians do is “often insipid, cloying and romantic”. I was surprised to find him referring to the importance of songs in many of the great revolutions, the French outside the Bastille, the Bolsheviks in St. Petersburg,

the American civil rights movement in Alabama and Washington DC, the anti-Marcos protesters in the streets of Manila, the banning of songs in South Africa under apartheid and the singing that has roused a new generation of Chinese into action. The examples could be multiplied. To be clear I am not here advocating for a revolution – at least I don’t think I am. What I want to point out is the power of a simple art form to generate passion and hope in a way that mobilizes people to make a difference or simply serve as a vehicle to express a passion and hope already present.

Another place I stumbled over a reference to singing was in a weighty volume titled *Overcoming Ontotheology*. That is overcoming an understanding of theology that is essentially philosophical. The author, a seasoned philosopher tells of attending an academic paper on biblical interpretation. In the middle of the argument the presenter stopped and said it was time to sing (and clap). Together they sang “Oh Mary don’t you weep don’t you morn, Oh Mary don’t you weep don’t you morn, Pharaoh’s army got drowned, Oh Mary don’t you weep. Those

singing were taking an old spiritual and making the story of Miriam and Moses their story as well through which they were “seized by the message of hope and judgement”.

Now here is the point – God understood in philosophical terms can only enter the scene in a way determined by that context. Those who were singing discovered that God entered the scene without the imposed determinations. There is a freeing power in creative gestures like song and we are met in surprising ways. Song, poetry, image, drama, dance and a good story seem to have the power to move us while providing fresh vision, glimpses into what is possible and so be a catalyst for action. It appears after all that art has a role to play in changing the way we live and changing the world we live in.

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