

March 21 is World Poetry Day.

Margaret Avison (1918-2007), winner of two Governor-General Awards for Poetry (Winter Sun (1960) and No Time (1990)) and Griffin Poetry Prize (Concrete and Wild Carrot (2003)), was a Presbyterian who among other things worked for a time at Evangel Hall. The variety of jobs she held allowed her time to write poetry.

Avison's poetry covers many things, including Christian spirituality. The following lines display Avison's ability to surprise readers into new spiritual insights.

In the mathematics of God there are percentages beyond one hundred.

- from the poem "First" by Margaret Avison

Avison became a Christian as an adult in 1963, *The Dumbfounding* (1966) was her first book of poetry following her conversion. Given we are so close to Holy Week the title poem "The Dumbfounding" seemed appropriate to highlight on this International Poetry Day:

When you walked here,
took skin, muscle, hair,
eyes, larynx, we
withheld all honour: "His house is clay,
how can he tell us of his far country?"

Your not-familiar pace
in flesh, across the waves,
woke only our distrust.
Twice-torn we cried "A ghost"
and only on our planks counted you fast.

Dust wet with your spittle
cleared mortal trouble.
We called you a blasphemer,
a devil-tamer.

The evening you spoke of going away
we could not stay.
All legions massed. You had to wash, and
rise,
alone, and face
out of the light, for us.

You died.
We said,
"The worst is true, our bliss
has come to this."

When you were seen by men
in holy flesh again
we hoped so despairingly for such report
we closed their windpipes for it.

Now you have sought
and seek, in all our ways, all thoughts,
streets, musics – and we make of these a din
trying to lock you out, or in,
to be intent. And dying.

Yet you are
constant and sure,
the all-lovely, all-people's-way
to that far country.

Winning one, you again
all ways would begin
life: to make new
flesh, to empower
the weak in nature
to restore
or stay the sufferer;

lead through the garden to
trash, rubble, hill,
where, the outcast's outcast, you
sound dark's uttermost, strangely light-
brimming, until
time be full.

Peter Bush, Moderator
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