

# A Persevering Witness

## The Poetry of Margaret Avison

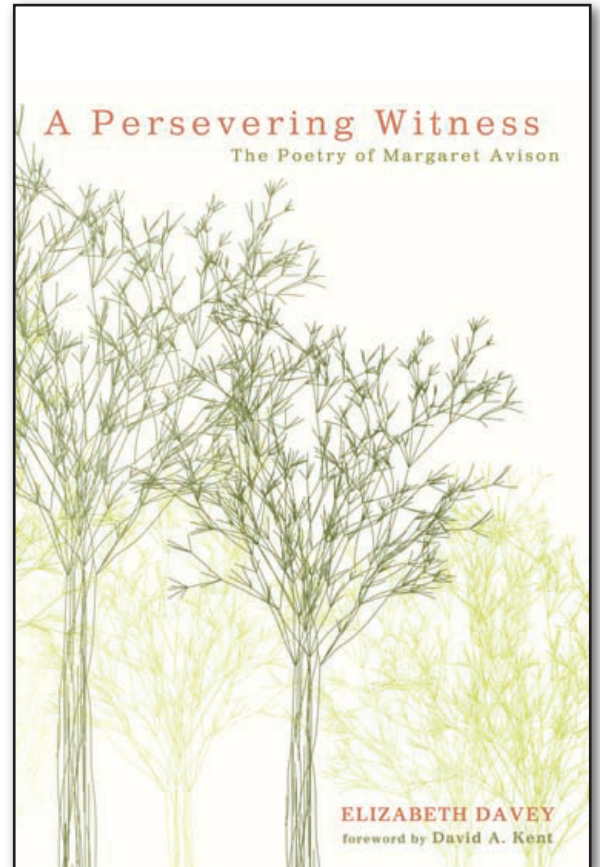
**ELIZABETH DAVEY**  
foreword by **David A. Kent**

Margaret Avison, one of Canada's premier poets, is a highly sophisticated and self-conscious writer, both charming and intimidating at the same time. She calls to mind her more famous predecessors —the religious poets George Herbert, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and T. S. Eliot—as she vigorously engages both heart and intellect. “She has forged a way to write against the grain, some of the most humane, sweet and profound poetry of our time,” write the judges of the 2003 Griffin Poetry Prize.

Becoming a Christian in her mid-forties, her life and her vocation were transformed and her lyrics record that shift. In “Muse of Danger,” she writes to Christian college students, “But in His strange and marvelous mercy, God nonetheless lets the believer take a necessary place as a living witness in behavior with family and classmate and stranger, in conversation, or in a *poem*.” How she blends her twin passions of poetry and Christian faith becomes a story of a kind of perseverance.

Readers who respond with understanding and empathy recognize both the distinctive mystery of poetic witness and the mystery inherent in Christ's saving work to which it points. Her enduring witness becomes an implicit call for us to persevere in what Avison identifies as the “mix of resurrection life and marred everyday living.”

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“Margaret Avison, in the very best sense a regional writer, is deeply rooted in a specific community which has nourished her thought and shaped her deepest meditation week by week. Elizabeth Davey, herself an intimate of that community, expertly situates Avison's poetry in the rich milieu of her religious and communal life, and in so doing helps the reader understand the acute angularity and spiritual resonances of Avison's verse. For many readers it will be most helpful that Davey shows how thoughtfully Avison reads and innovatively evokes biblical language and thought in her poetry.”

—**DAVID LYLE JEFFREY**, FRSC, Distinguished Professor of Literature and the Humanities, Honors Program, Senior Fellow, Baylor Institute for Studies in Religion, Baylor University

“Elegant, sensitive, inspiring, and challenging. As the reader journeys into the poems of Margaret Avison with Davey they are in the company of an expert guide to and commentator on both the spiritual and the literary possibilities of Avison's poetry. No dry literary criticism here, but life-enhancing interpretation and response to Avison's often oblique call to Christian witness. Meticulously researched and beautifully written. Davey serves both Avison and the reader very well indeed.”

—**BERNARD C. FARR**, Senior Research Fellow, Oxford Centre for Mission Studies

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