Galileo, Shakespeare, and van Gogh:
Creative Reactions to the End of the World

Four hundred years ago, Galileo made startling discoveries with the new telescope that dramatically changed the course of science and western culture. Modern-day astrophysics has seen a flood of equally amazing findings including the discoveries of hundreds of planets around nearby stars; the expanding universe; and giant black holes at the centers of galaxies. This talk will explore how we got here from Galileo’s work, and how writers, artists, and thinkers have reacted to these universe-changing events in different ways over the course of history – a story of exhilaration, fear, depression, awe, and most of all, beauty.

Dr. William Harris
McMaster University

Bill Harris has been a Professor of Physics and Astronomy at McMaster since 1976 and one of the originators of our astrophysics program. He did his PhD studies at the University of Toronto, was elected as a Fellow of Royal Society of Canada in 2004, and currently holds a Killam Foundation Research Fellowship.

Dr. Harris has a long record of teaching and speaking to student and public audiences, and this talk especially intended for IYA 2009 draws on both his scientific training and a lifelong interest in history and the connections among science, culture, and the humanities.