

Newsletter of the International Society for Religion, Literature and Culture

November 2009

As previously announced, the **2010 Biennial Conference for the International Society of Religion, Literature and Culture** will be hosted by Oxford University Theology Faculty and take place at **Oxford University between 23rd and 26th September 2010**. The topic for the conference is **"Attending to the Other: Critical Theory and Spiritual Practice"**.

The four **keynote speakers** will be: Paul Fiddes (Oxford University), Amy Hollywood (Harvard University), Toril Moi (Duke University) and Graham Ward (Manchester University).

Registration details, a call for papers (including a list of panel sessions), and many other **practical details** are now available on our website (www.theology.ox.ac.uk/ISRLC).



Call for Papers

- 2010 ISRLC Conference: "Attending the Other: Critical Theory and Spiritual Practice"

Date: 23-26 September, 2010

Place: Oxford University Theology Faculty

Further information: www.theology.ox.ac.uk/ISRLC

2010 International Society for Religion, Literature and Culture Conference

University of Oxford, 23rd – 26th September 2010

Panels and Panel Leaders

Short papers are invited for the following panels; contributors should aim to deliver a 20-minute piece with 10 further minutes for questions and discussion. Please send the proposed title of your paper, with an abstract of not more than 500 words, to the convenor of the panel for which it seems most appropriate.

The deadline for receipt of abstracts is 30th March 2010.

Literature

Panel leader: Elisabeth Jay, Sarah Apetrei and Lynn Robson.

Please send abstracts to lynn.robson@regents.ox.ac.uk

In the wake of the pendulum swing against the ludic excesses of critical theory, scholars working within the broadly-defined field of literature and theology find themselves increasingly driven to re-evaluate the ethical implications and potential uses of those critical discourses which have insisted that texts are always implicated within the wider politics of power. In his recent work, *Trouble with Strangers; A Study of Ethics* (2009), for instance, Terry Eagleton harnessed Lacanian theory and textual analysis as the means through which to assess the merit of competing ethical theories.

The literary panel will be mindful of the fact that the critical theories enlivening debate in recent years have not been driven by the philosophical concerns of continental Europe alone. Historicism might be said to have powered early modern literary studies' turn to an interest in spiritual writing, but there has been an accompanying disquiet about interpretations that frame investigations entirely in terms of political frameworks. An increasing awareness across the literary-critical landscape of the need to consider the spiritual has begun to destabilise some of the apparent certainties of cultural materialism. The renaissance of formalist criticism across the literary-critical landscape has also in part come about as a reaction to the emphasis on literature's cultural context. The recent pre-occupation with the 'afterlives' of texts has been part of a trend to engage with the diverse ways in which those coming from other religious traditions or employing different critical paradigms are reinterpreting these creations.

The literature panel therefore welcomes proposals that seek to 'attend to the other' in a variety of ways, and particularly those which consider how theology and critical theory impact upon literary study's traditional engagement with considering alternative positions and other lives.

Modern Theology

Panel leader: Trevor Hart

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Responsible handling of Christianity's doctrinal commitments today demands that they be revisited in the light of critical theory and its particular insights and claims, an engagement in which we might reasonably anticipate insights and questions flowing in both directions. This panel will concentrate on such encounters, welcoming papers that will seek to relate concrete

doctrinal loci constructively to the central concerns and claims of critical theory. Topics might fall within areas such as the following:

- Christology (e.g. history, particularity, universality; the body, crucifixion and resurrection; kenosis and the other; the divine image, imaging and incarnation)
- Trinity (e.g. otherness, mystery and apophasis; perichoresis and the boundaries of personhood)
- Creation (e.g. gift, givens, openness, and the place of human *poiesis*; ‘reality’ as divine donation and human construct)
- Revelation (e.g. language, analogy, metaphor, imagination; re-enchantment, experience, nature and culture; scripture, inspiration and authority)
- Redemption (e.g. sin, evil, guilt, notions of atonement, reconciliation and forgiveness)
- Worship (e.g. liturgy, sacraments, ritual, embodied performance, meaning and presence)
- Church (e.g. tradition, continuity and interruption; community, truth and meaning; encountering Christ in the body; the church as ‘habitus’)
- Eschatology (e.g. hope, promise and the shape of the self; hope as imagination; apocalypse and deconstruction)

Proposals on any relevant topic are welcomed.

Bible

Panel leaders: Christine Joynes

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This panel welcomes papers that explore how critical theories of biblical interpretation relate to spiritual practice in any historical period. This might include analysis of how certain critical methods arose as reactions to particular spiritual practices. We are especially keen to encourage papers that examine the afterlives (or reception history) of biblical texts. Reception history of the Bible explores how biblical interpretation across the centuries has been connected to the spiritual practices and community situations of its practitioners. Papers in this area might perhaps illustrate how varieties of biblical interpretation reflect different religious traditions and perceptions of the ‘Other’.

Islamic Studies

Panel leader: Afifi al-Akiti

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The panel will explore aspects of attending to the other from the perspective of the Islamic tradition, taking in its broader culture including the creative arts as well as the main intellectual currents – a topic that has thus far received less academic treatment than it deserves. Panelists are asked to consider the interactions and tensions within Islamic culture, whether from the theological (*kalam*), legal (*fiqh*) or spiritual (*tasawwuf*) traditions, in either the medieval or modern period (or both). ‘Other’ here could mean either God and/or the supernatural or that which is outside the Muslim religion and culture or simply people other than oneself in an Islamic context. We encourage papers that seek to contextualize these questions in particular societies, cultures, and traditions, and we welcome topics that, while retaining an internal unity, cover a wide range of issues and incorporate a variety of methodologies and approaches – textual, anthropological, sociological, philosophical, and historical (whether intellectual or social). In addition to formal papers, we also welcome media presentations, such as student-produced films, that are related to the theme of the conference, especially with regard to the creative arts.

Judaism

Panel leader: Mariane Schleicher
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'Otherness' is a concept of various dimensions, including religious, literary, cultural, sexual and existential ones. It pertains to the transcendence of the holy, to the poetic potential of scripture, to minorities within majority cultures, and to (gendered representations of) anyone entering a relationship with a subject who positions him-/herself up against this Other. Throughout history, Judaism has served as the Other of Christian and Muslim culture, which has amplified the dimensions of otherness pertaining to Jewish existence. Accordingly, this panel invites papers willing to investigate if this intensified alterity of Jewish existence has effected a production of critical theory, spiritual practices and ways of attending to the Other in any significant way.

Religion and Modernity

Panel Leader: Erik Borgman
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In the light of the topic of the conference, this panel especially invites contributions on the theme of 'Religion as the Other of Modernity'. However, a wide range of papers will be welcome which relate to the critique of religion, the religious critique of society and 'critical religion' in the period of modernity.

German Idealism

Panel leaders: Andrew Hass and Daniel Whistler.
Please send abstracts to daniel.whistler@worc.ox.ac.uk

Our contemporary preoccupations with self/other relations can be traced back directly to the German Idealist dialectic of Same and Other. The task of this panel will be to uncover critical theory's presuppositions and prejudices on this topic by excavating their philosophical and theological origins in German Idealism. Questions that may be considered include: To what extent does Hegel's master-slave dialectic still determine how we conceive the other? Did Kantian phenomenism foreclose the possibility of experiencing otherness? Is Hölderlin's expectant anticipation of the coming god an appropriate manner in which to attend to the other? The panel welcomes papers that focus not just on German Idealism narrowly considered (Kant, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel), but also the various theologies, romanticisms and materialisms which emerged out of it in the first half of the nineteenth century. as well as its legacy in contemporary critical and religious theorists.

Postcolonialism

Panel leader: Helga Ramsey-Kurz
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Postcolonial discourse has always been critical of how Western notions of spirituality were deployed in the colonial enterprise. It has exposed the promise of spiritual fulfilment made to colonisers and colonised alike as a means of legitimising imperialistic aggression. At the same time it has opened up avenues to alternative conceptions of spirituality, notably those of indigenous and other ethnic cultures. In the event, the engagement with the Other in itself has come to be understood as an exercise in spiritual regeneration, affording new ways of processing the past, transcending difference and overcoming displacement. Papers in our panel may want to explore what sites of spiritual encounter, what middle passages and third spaces, have been discovered in the process and what

new visions of selfhood this discovery has afforded. They may wish to examine what presence or reality of the Other has been conceded and what literary and other creative means have been found to give expression to this reality and its spiritual dimension. Contributors are also invited to address how careful attention to the Other may help protect forms of spirituality specific to postcolonial cultures against the new dislocations, colonisations and deletions these cultures are facing as globalisation is forcing their absorption into transnational formations.

Movies

Panel leader: Brent Plate
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The human religious system operates in and through the senses. The senses allow humans to smell, taste, touch, hear, and see ‘the Other,’ above and beyond linguistic connections. Religion itself cannot exist without sensual engagements. In this light, film provides a fascinating medium from which to see and hear an other, to be face to face with cultures, objects, languages, and portrayals of people that ‘we’ are not familiar with: via close ups, mise-en-scene, world cinemas, and through incisive editing. For the 2010 ISRLC conference, we are looking for papers that meet the thematic interests of ‘Attending to the Other’ in terms of film, beginning with provocative questions such as: How does film allow viewers to encounter otherness in ways not possible in ordinary life? How does cinema create an environment in which such encounters might help refocus the engagement? What can film offer that mere words cannot? Does film provide a different approach to otherness than the linguistic gestures of philosophers? Finally, what are the limits to film’s ability to represent the Other? This year’s meeting seeks to have three full sessions devoted to such topics, with a capstone session construed as a roundtable discussion on the medium of film and its abilities to generate discussions of ‘the Other.’

The Visual Arts

Panel leader: Ben Quash
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Papers are invited for this panel on any strand of the visual arts in relation to theology. Given the theme of the conference, priority will be given to papers which address the theme of ‘alterity’, how artists have sought to render ‘otherness’ or transcendence in their art, and how theology might want to evaluate these attempts. The art of the sublime is one especially rich locus for this exploration – whether in its ‘classical’ or in its postmodern guises. Should one question the widespread assumption that art’s gestures towards transcendent horizons give it a ‘spiritual’ quality that gives it an affinity with religious discourse about God? Or is the ‘surpassingness’ of God a wholly different sort of transcendence from the limit-experiences that are registered in visual art?

Higher Education

Panel leaders: Darlene Bird and Marije Altorf
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The convenors of this panel are interested in receiving proposals related to interdisciplinary approaches to teaching philosophy, theology and religious studies within the context of higher education. In keeping with the Society’s remit for promoting the study of literature, religion and the arts, there is particular interest in approaches that employ literary texts or artistic forms that help to bridge the gap between critical theory and (spiritual) practice.

Spirituality and Reconciliation

Panel leader: Marije Altorf

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This panel invites papers on the significance of spirituality in conflict resolution and resistance – with particular interest in storytelling and dialogue. Conflict resolution and resistance both define a very specific relation with the other. These relationships can be understood as characteristic of humans as spiritual beings. Drawing from the practice of reconciliation and resistance – especially in literary forms – this panel queries the notion and practice of spirituality in these specific relations.

Continental Philosophy of Religion

Leaders: Steven Shakespeare and Patrice Haynes

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This panel invites submissions which consider the turn to religion in recent continental philosophy and the implications this has for understandings of religion, reason and spiritual practice. If philosophy is called, driven or solicited to think its other, does this mean that philosophy itself is compelled by a religious dynamic? A particular focus will be on the debate around theological and dialectical accounts of materialism. What kind of thinking does justice to the passion of reason, the integrity of matter and the injunctions of ethical and political commitment? Relevant thinkers and themes might include Jean-Luc Nancy, Radical Orthodoxy, Slavoj Žižek, Grace Jantzen, phenomenology (Henry, Chrétien, Lacoste, Marion), speculative realism/materialism. However, other relevant submissions will be considered. The panel is being convened by the Association for Continental Philosophy of Religion: www.hope.ac.uk/acpr

Critical Theory

Panel leaders: Todd Mei and James Carter

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The history of philosophy since Descartes can be described as a series of attempts to overcome the solipsism of the human subject, from both an ontological and epistemological perspective. Fichte's account of mutual recognition as the basis of his doctrine of justice, together with Hegel's further development of mutual recognition, mark one of the most significant shifts within this history from egoism to the other and concerns for mutual recognition as the necessary condition for self-consciousness. In view of the Hegelian account, the question of the other has persisted in the form of reactions against Hegel's system. Such reactions, if not repudiating this system altogether, then at least attempt to save some aspects of Hegel's philosophy in order to develop our understanding of the other in a different direction. Heidegger, Levinas and Ricoeur figure as three significant thinkers within the debate on the other, and it is through them that the self-other relation has opened beyond a simple binary or dialectical dependency. Themes such as suffering, alibi, forgiveness, friendship and consolation have provided both a new depth to the self-other relation and a bridge by which the other forces a reshaping of critical theory in analysing its social, political and economic dimensions. This panel invites proposals that address how the other through, but not limited to, the themes mentioned above suggest new forms of practice as a critique of social, political and economic discourses and institutions. We particularly welcome proposals exploring how Ricoeur attempts to mediate between Hegel, Heidegger and Levinas in view of correlating ethics and moral philosophy with practice.

Gender

Panel leaders: Pamela Sue Anderson and Dana Mills

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"The handshake of a friend on meeting again after a long absence. I do not even notice whether it gives pleasure or pain, to my sense of touch: like the blind man who feels the objects directly at the end of his stick, I feel the presence of my friend directly." (Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, p.24) "No human life, not even the life of the hermit in nature's wilderness, is possible without a world which directly or indirectly testifies to the presence of other human beings." (Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 22) This panel welcomes proposals from diverse disciplines including theology, philosophy, political theory, and cultural studies, amongst others, which deal with gender and *attending to the other*. We would like papers which draw on the critical theories of the two women – Weil or Arendt (cited above) – in a concern for 'attending to the other', for example, in gender-sensitive discussions of attention, contingency, violence, revolutions, the physical and the metaphysical, chance and action, or work and action. But we also welcome papers which engage with the critical theory or spiritual practice of women like Iris Murdoch, Julia Kristeva, Janet Martin Soskice, Elaine Scarry, Adriana Cavarero – to name a few – who themselves have shared this concern.

Hannah Arendt (1906-1975) and Simone Weil (1909-1943) were two key figures in critical theory in the 20th century. They were two enigmatic women, who lived in and wrote about a turbulent century which removed the concept of "the other" from philosophical, religious and political texts to everyday life; that is, from theory to practice. The complex relationship between the metaphysical and the physical, the social and the political, work and action, spirituality and the body, necessity and contingency, among others, were key dichotomies both authors address.

Theological Humanism

Panel leader: David Klemm

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Theological humanism finds that neither obedience to God's will nor a concern for human flourishing alone provides an adequate orientation for human life, vital though both these aspects are. It understands the task of humanity to be a responsibility for the integrity of life, and has a theological vision of human beings as creatures striving for this integrity and wholeness. This panel thus invites proposals for papers at two levels: those which place theological humanism in dialogue with its theoretical 'others' in both humanistic traditions and in theology; and those which consider critical reflection as a form of spiritual practice within the horizon of theological humanism.

Music

Panel leaders: Nils Holger Petersen and Deborah Rooke

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In accordance with the overall theme of the Conference, the music panel wishes to focus on notions of the 'other' in music practices and composition, including current uses of medieval – and other 'older' – music as an 'other', and the making of an explicit relation to the musical past, as in for instance in works by American George Crumb, Russian-German Alfred Schnittke, or British James Macmillan. The panel is also interested in the employment of particular musical strategies to represent spiritual agendas (perhaps minimalist spiritual agendas as in Arvo Pärt's music) in any period, and modern practices concerning the performance of early music with explicit spiritual aims. Papers are invited not only on classical music but on many genres of

contemporary music, music practices, and writings on such practices. While critical theory had a prominent place in certain areas of modern musicology and musical modernism, not least through the work and influence of Theodor W. Adorno, recent developments in music practices – and various branches of musicology – show a wide array of possibilities for engaging with music and spirituality, theoretically as well as in practice.

- 6th Annual Religion, Literature and the Arts Conference: “Malicious Intentions and Wicked Deeds: Challenging Evil in Thought and Practice”

Date: 9-11 April, 2010

Place: University of Iowa

Further information: <http://www.uiowa.edu/~relgrad/RLA.html>

The Sixth Annual Religion, Literature and the Arts Conference
Malicious Intentions and Wicked Deeds: Challenging Evil in Thought and Practice
University of Iowa
9-11 April, 2010

Call for Papers

The Conference on Religion, Literature, and the Arts is an interdisciplinary meeting held at the University of Iowa. This year's topic— Malicious Intentions and Wicked Deeds: Challenging Evil in Thought and Practice—focuses on the ways that evil challenges the human way of being in the world as well as on the ways that humans are empowered to challenge evil.

The featured keynote speaker for the 2010 conference is Susan Neiman, Director of the Einstein Forum in Berlin. She is the author of *Evil in Modern Thought: an Alternative History of Philosophy*, an important work on the study of evil within current academic discussions. David Jasper, Professor of Theology, Literature, and the Arts at the University of Glasgow, has agreed to give a second keynote address. His most recent book is *The Sacred Body: Asceticism in Religion, Literature, Art, and Culture* (Baylor University Press, 2009).

We invite critical and theoretical papers that reflect on art, religion, or literature as these domains interact with "evil" (in a spiritual or social, moral or natural sense of the term). Graduate students are especially encouraged to submit proposals. The “General Sessions” portion of the conference will be held on Saturday and will feature papers no more than twenty minutes in length to be presented in concurrent sessions, divided into the following panels:

- 1) Theology
- 2) Literature
- 3) Ethics
- 4) Art and Art History
- 5) Religion
- 6) Philosophy
- 7) Pop Culture and Cultural Studies

8) Creative Writing

Submission of Abstracts:

Submit paper title and an abstract of no more than 350 words, along with your name, institutional affiliation (if applicable), street address, telephone number, and email address by 20 February 2009. Send abstracts and questions to UIowaRLA@yahoo.com

For More Information:

Please visit our website at <http://www.uiowa.edu/~relgrad/RLA.html>. This currently features a list of additional plenary papers that will be presented, a rough schedule and an expanded version of the CFP. Future updates will include a list of panels, abstracts and more information about the conference.

Feature Website on Literature and Religion/Theology

A Facebook page for the ISRLC exists. If you are a Facebook user, you can visit it using the following link:

<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?v=wall&gid=8370736733>

New Publications

Giacomantonio, Flavio (Ed.), *Serafino della Salandra, Adamo Caduto*. Pisa and Roma: Fabrizio Serra Editore, 2009. *Early Modern and Modern Studies* Vol. 4, con postfazione di Roy Eriksen. <http://www.libraweb.net/result1.php?chiave=2402&&valore=sku>

~, *John Milton, Il Paradiso Perduto*. Introduzione, traduzione e note a cura di Flavio Giacomantonio, con un saggio di Vittorio Gabrieli. Pisa and Roma: Fabrizio Serra Editore, 2009. [With parallel texts by Milton.] *Early Modern and Modern Studies* Vol. 6.

<http://www.libraweb.net/result1.php?chiave=2413&&valore=sku>

~, *Il Paradiso Perduto di John Milton ed il tema della caduta nella tradizione letteraria italiana, Serafino della Salandra da Giambattista Andreini a Serafino della Salandra*, Atti del Convegno, 10–11. novembre 2006, a cura di, Pisa and Roma: Fabrizio Serra Editore, 2009. [With translation of the articles into English by Martin Brimble.] *Early Modern and Modern Studies* Vol. 7. <http://www.libraweb.net/result1.php?chiave=2411&&valore=sku>



*The following newsletter is due in January/February
Information for the following Newsletter?
send it to Marie.Holdsworth@uclouvain.be*