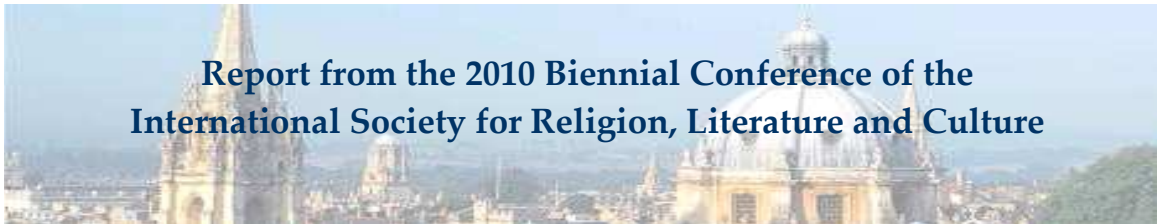


Newsletter of the International Society for Religion, Literature and Culture

January 2011

News from the ISRLC Conference



Report from the 2010 Biennial Conference of the International Society for Religion, Literature and Culture

The 15th Conference of the International Society for Religion, Literature and Culture took place at the University of Oxford between Thursday 23rd and Sunday 26th September 2010. Over 250 delegates from across the UK, Europe, USA, Asia, Australasia, Africa and the Middle East participated in the conference on ‘Attending to the Other: Critical Theory and Spiritual Practice’, and there were over 150 papers. On the Thursday evening, delegates assembled for a drinks reception at the Divinity School of the Bodleian Library. The Divinity School has played a part in the life of the University since 1427 and that evening – with rain gushing down outside – delegates were welcomed, food and wine were served; and while a harp played initial contacts were made, sparking off the sort of lively conversations which would mark the next three days! After the Bodleian, the first conference dinner took place at the host college, St Catherine’s, with its suitably modern design from the 1960s by Arne Jacobsen. Dinner was followed by the first keynote address given by Amy Hollywood, Elizabeth H. Monrad Professor of Christian Studies at Harvard University. Prof. Hollywood’s “A for Antigone: Reading Derrida’s ‘Différance’ Again” led her listeners on a fascinating exploration of the myth of a political turn in Derrida’s thought.

Friday morning brought the first parallel session. The conference was made up of 58 sessions clustered into 18 different panel topics: Literature, Modern Theology, Postcolonial Literature, Film, Islam, Judaism, Higher Education, Continental Philosophy of Religion, Biblical Studies, Religion and Modernity, Visual Arts, German Idealism, Music, Critical Theory, Gender, Performing Arts, Spirituality and Reconciliation and Theological Humanism. Academics of all levels of experience and with many different areas of specialisation gave diverse and stimulating papers throughout the weekend drawing in original ways on the conference theme. Friday also saw Graham Ward, Professor of Contextual Theology and Ethics at the University of Manchester, give the second keynote address, “Critical Theory and Spirituality: Restless Bedfellows.” This provocative sketch of the history of critical theory through Descartes, Horkheimer and Foucault ended with an invocation of the mysticism implicit in the idea of critique.

On the Friday evening, *Literature and Theology* hosted its second annual, public lecture with a packed audience in the 300-seat Bernard Sunley Lecture Theatre. After a wonderful introduction by Dr Heather Walton from the University of Glasgow, Toril Moi, James B. Duke Professor of Literature and Romance Studies at Duke University, took to the stage and in a spellbinding hour and a half spoke on the need for attention to particular others (rather than

the Levinasian other in general) through a careful reading of Simone de Beauvoir's *L'Invitée* and Stanley Cavell's philosophical project.

On Saturday and Sunday, as well as many more parallel sessions, Paul Fiddes, Professor of Systematic Theology at the University of Oxford, and Victor Seidler, Professor of Social Theory at Goldsmith's College, University of London, gave the final two keynote addresses. Prof. Fiddes' "The Sublime, the Conflicted Self and Attention to the Other: Neglected Contributions from Iris Murdoch and Julia Kristeva" focused on the neglect of the concept of the sublime in Murdoch and Kristeva. Prof. Seidler's "Attending to the Other: Listening for Differences" argued for closer attention to lived particularities through reference to Wittgenstein.

The conference banquet took place on Saturday evening and the four-course meal, including a welcome by the Revd Dr Colin Thomson, Proctor at the University of Oxford and Fellow of St Catherine's College, was enjoyed by all – and indeed everyone present extended warm thanks to the College and their staff for their three days of attentive and professional service. As a result of this 2010 conference, many new names, faces and nationalities have been added to the list of ISRLC membership, generating the hope that the next decade of the society's activities continues with the same range of lively international, intergenerational and interdisciplinary exchanges.

The journal *Literature and Theology* will publish a special issue of the best conference papers, as put forward by the various panel leaders, in an upcoming issue edited by Daniel Whistler. There were many strong papers in contention here, so keep an eye out for this featured publication on the *L&T* website: <http://litthe.oxfordjournals.org/>.

UK Conferences

- **Poetry and Spirituality**

Date: January 26-28, 2011

Place: Cumberland Lodge, The Great Park, Windsor

Further information:

http://www.cumberlandlodge.ac.uk/our_conferences/forthcoming_conference_pages/Poetryandspirituality

- **Holy Writ? Authority and Reception**

Date: April 11-13, 2011

Place: York University

Further information: <http://www.theologysociety.org.uk/>

- **The Power of the Word: Poetry, Theology and Life**

Date: June 17-18, 2011

Place: Heythrop College, University of London

Further information: <http://www.heythrop.ac.uk/about-us/conferences-and-seminars/the-power-of-the-word-poetry-theology-and-life.html>

- **The Hospitable Text: New Approaches to Religion and Literature**

Date: July 14-16, 2011

Place: London Notre Dame Centre, UK

Further information: <http://www.hospitabletext.org/>

International Conferences

- **The Future of Continental Philosophy of Religion**

Date: April 7-9, 2011

Place: Syracuse University

Further information: <http://pcr.syr.edu>

*Information for the following Newsletter?
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