

Newsletter of the International Society for Religion, Literature and Culture

September 2009

Announcements

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**".

We are now able to confirm four **keynote speakers**: Paul Fiddes (Oxford University), Amy Hollywood (Harvard University), Toril Moi (Duke University) and Graham Ward (Manchester University).

Registration details and a **call for papers** (including a list of panel sessions) will be available on our website (www.theology.ox.ac.uk/ISRLC) from **1st October**.

- Iconic Books Symposium

Date: September 4-6, 2009

Place: Hamilton College, New York

Further information: <http://jameswatts.net/iconicbooks/IB%20Symposium.htm>

- The Annual American Academy of Religion Award for "Religion and the Arts"

In November 2009 in Montreal, the award will be presented to Zarqa Nawaz. Nawaz is a filmmaker, journalist, and television show creator, including the documentary "Me and the Mosque," and the hit Canadian television show "Little Mosque on the Prairie."

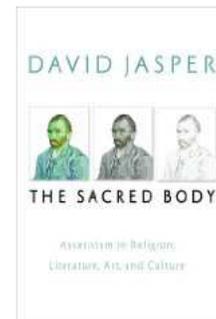
Further information: http://www.aarweb.org/Programs/Awards/Arts_Award/default.asp

New Publications

Jasper, David. *The Sacred Body. Asceticism in Religion, Literature, Art and Culture Studies in Christian Literature*. Studies in Christianity & Literature (SCL). Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009.

Details: <http://www.albanbooks.com/book-details.html?isbn=9781602581418>

http://www.amazon.com/Sacred-Body-Asceticism-Literature-Christianity/dp/160258141X/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1251452901&sr=8-1



Krondorfer, Björn (Ed). *Men and Masculinities in Christianity and Judaism: A Critical Reader*. London: SCM Press, 2009.

Details: <http://www.scmpress.co.uk/bookdetails.asp?ISBN=9780334041917>

Nielsen, Kirsten (Ed). *Receptions and Transformations of the Bible. Religion and Normativity volume 2*. Acta Jutlandica, Theological Series, Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2009.



⇒ The results of the research on the Bible and Normativity carried out by the scholars who organised the ISRLC conference in Aarhus 2008 have just been published.

Details: <http://www.unipress.dk/da-dk/Item.aspx?sku=1503>

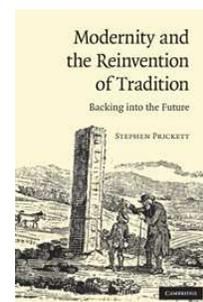
Plate, S. Brent. *Religion and Film: Cinema and the Re-Creation of the World*. London: Wallflower Press / New York: Columbia University Press, 2008.

Details: http://www.amazon.com/Religion-Film-Cinema-Re-Creation-world/dp/1905674694/ref=sr_1_5?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1240348246&sr=1-5

Prickett, Stephen. *Modernity and the Reinvention of Tradition. Backing into the Future*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Details:

<http://www.cambridge.org/us/catalogue/catalogue.asp?isbn=052151746X>



Feature Centre for Literature and Religion/Theology

In this section, you will read Elena Volkova's account of her work and experience within the Centre for Religion, Literature and Culture at the University of Moscow. She also includes a short introduction to the actual Russian context to help us better understand the situation.

In 2002, I applied to the University Council asking their permission to open the Centre for Religion, Literature and Culture and received a positive reply, but the Centre, although announced, was neither financed nor supported in any other way by the University authorities. Nevertheless, it does now exist and work, consisting of a group of scholars at the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Area Studies (Lomonosov Moscow State University), who have positions in different departments but are united by their aspiration to revive Religious Studies in post-communist Russia after the seventy years of militant atheism. So far, about ten doctoral dissertations have been written, mostly on Christianity and Literature, studying the lives of Russian new martyrs (those of the Communist regime), the Russian traditions of Christian missionaries and pilgrimages, the theory of iconology and its representation in Russian literature, the sacred and secular dimensions of time in Literature and Art, biblical stories and characters in

literature, the reinvention of Jesus Christ in Dmitry Merezhkovsky's works, comparative aspects of Russian and English religious and literary traditions, as well as many other topics if students' papers are also taken into account.

Last year, we launched the Bible club at the University, which gathers students and professors once a month to give presentations on Religion, Literature, Culture and Art, and take part in discussions on different religious issues, such as Freedom, Joy, Suffering, Death and Resurrection. The club is very popular and brings a lot of joy to my life. Students are very active and we can speak of an academic religious community which was born during these club meetings.

Since 1999 we have been taking part in co-organizing a British-Russian conference on

Russian context:

Religion and Literature Studies are very popular in modern Russia. There are several academic centres in Moscow, St Petersburg, Petrozavodsk, Krasnodar and other cities. In the last twenty years, five Christian Universities opened in Moscow. As a result of the Christian Revival, works of many Russian writers have been reconsidered from a religious perspective, with major focus made on Pushkin, Gogol, Dostoevsky, Bulgakov, on the one hand, and writers of the Silver Age (Pasternak, Merezhkovsky, Bely, Nabokov, Akhmatova, Shmelev, and others) on the other hand.

However, after many years of communist literary criticism, many Russian scholars consider a religious approach as another type of ideology, which gives them a new opportunity to divide writers into 'right' and 'wrong' ones, 'orthodox' and 'heretical'. Several years ago, this ideological tendency within Religion and Literature scholarship caused a debate which is still going on.

The situation is even worse in State-Church relationships as a new dictatorship which is being built in Russia today uses Russian Christian Orthodoxy as a new ideology which is to function very much like the Communist Party did in the USSR. That is why it is God's blessing that the University didn't want to finance us back in 2002, because if we had any official status now we would be under the ideological control of Moscow Patriarchate which means that we would only be allowed to see the Bible as the illustration of the church doctrines (Russia never had any Reformation and has quite a medieval Church), and to study the literature which illustrates the Bible as it is understood by the Church tradition (where would we find such literature, I wonder?). Besides, fundamentalism is growing very fast, together with neo-Stalinism, nationalism and anti-Semitism, even among University scholars. As a result, we work between the Scylla of atheistic suspicions (which are still very strong) and the Charybdis of the new Orthodox ideology.

Religion and Literature together with our colleagues from Durham University. We have had six conferences so far held both in Durham and Moscow. Two books of the proceedings of the conference (*Through Each Others Eyes: Religion and Literature* [1999] and *Life Conquers Death: Religion and Literature* [2004]) were published in Moscow.

In 2005, we were offered (thanks to David Jasper!) to prepare a Russian issue of the *Literature and Theology* journal (Oxford), which came out in March 2006 and was entitled "Russian Literature as Icon."

There are several more British projects in which I took part: a chapter "Visions of Heaven and Hell" in *The Oxford Handbook of Literature and Theology*, several articles for the *Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity*, and "The Bible in Literature since 1750" for *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, on which I am working now. I also cooperate with Moscow Carnegie Centre for which I have written an article in Russian "Religion and Artistic Culture in Modern Russia." David Jasper invited me to Glasgow University as a Robertson lecturer in 2004.

We are open for intercultural cooperation.

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*Information for the following Newsletter?
send it to Marie.Holdsworth@uclouvain.be*