

University of Glasgow  
Friday 27th October 2017  
10.30am-6.30pm

# WRITING ON THE WALLS

## Literature and Theology For This World

Austerity, the refugee crisis, Brexit, Trump...we are living in an age of uncertainty. What do literature and the arts matter in times such as these? What is the role of theopoetics when the world is weighing in the balance?

This day colloquium will celebrate the past and present contribution of the research network Literature, Theology and the Arts at Glasgow, whilst exploring the interdisciplinary study of religion, art and literature in today's political and social contexts.

## Programme

### Schedule

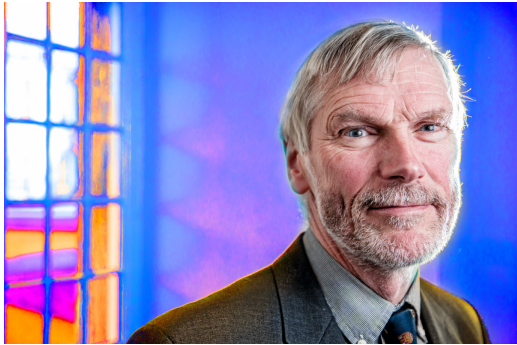
- 10.30 – Registration (4 The Square)
- 10.45 – Paper Session One ('Dystopian Bodies', 'Prophecy' 'Politics')
- 12.15 – Lunch [not provided – please make own arrangements]
- 13.00 – Prof David Jasper keynote, 'Reflections on Literature and Theology and Its Future' (University of Glasgow Chapel)
- 14.15 – Break
- 14.30 – Paper Session Two ('Poetry', 'Women Writers', 'Transformation')
- 16.00 – Professor Heather Walton inaugural lecture, 'Broken Faith and Faith in Broken Things: A Theopoetics in Ruins' (University of Glasgow Chapel)
- 17.30 – Drinks reception (University of Glasgow Chapel)
- 18.30 – Close

# Lectures

## Professor David Jasper

### *Reflections on Literature and Theology and Its Future*

13.00, University of Glasgow Chapel



David Jasper is Emeritus Professor at the University of Glasgow and Canon Theologian in the Diocese of Glasgow and Galloway. He holds degrees from Cambridge, Oxford, Durham and Uppsala universities, and is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. His most recent book is *Literature and Theology as a Grammar of Assent* (2016), and he is shortly to publish *The Language of Liturgy* (SCM, 2018).

David founded the Centre for Literature, Theology and the Arts at Glasgow, and his pioneering work in this interdisciplinary field is widely acknowledged. As well as his own prolific writing, David has supervised and examined a great number of research degrees, the legacy of which can be seen in the short paper sessions of this colloquium. He was the first General Editor of *Literature and Theology*, the OUP journal that emerged out of the early conferences of the International Society for Religion, Literature and Culture. At the evening wine reception to mark David's retirement from the University of Glasgow, we will celebrate his phenomenal contribution to scholarship and to the university community.

## Professor Heather Walton

### *Broken Faith and Faith in Broken Things: A Theopoetics in Ruins*

16.00, University of Glasgow Chapel

This lecture considers the 'broken' nature of contemporary theological discourse and its failure to speak to contemporary cultural challenges and engage adequately with human suffering. There are voices in Christian constructive and philosophical theology advocating new forms of theopoetics; active processes of theological construction. However, these new 'God-makings' often seem far removed from everyday life and the way we live now. Using creative writing and life-writing, as well as reflections upon art and ruins, I will present a vision of theopoetics that is fractured and broken and which nevertheless represents a potentially generative means to engage with questions of faith within and beyond religious communities.

This lecture is Heather's inaugural as Professor of Theology and Creative Practice.



## Parallel Papers

Session One	<b><i>Dystopian Bodies</i></b> Ground Floor Lecture Room, 4 The Square	<b><i>Prophecy</i></b> Room 251, Gilbert Scott Building	<b><i>Politics</i></b> Trinity Room, 4 The Square
10.45	Alana M. Vincent, 'Your Dystopian Fiction Won't Save You Now: Holocaust Memory, Fallen Nature, and the Dangers of Living in a World Where the Worst Has Already Happened'	Elizabeth Dodd, 'John Clare, The Poetics of Testimony and the Prophetic Potential of the Lyric "I"'	Scott Robertson, 'Walls and Dust: The Literary and Theological Subversion of Security'
11.15	Steve Fountain, 'Eradication and Assimilation: Elie Metchnikoff's Walls Against Death and Decay'	Sue Brind & Jim Harold 'Art: Enactment, Presence and Prophecy'	Clare Radford, 'Writing on Job Centre Walls: Feminist Theopoetics and Austerity Assessments'
11.45	Taylor William Driggers & Vicky Gunn 'Ambivalent Binaries: Reinscribing the Limits of the Desert Harlots? Mary, Pelagia, and Angela Carter's Tristessa'	Deryl Davis, 'Poetry, Prophecy, and the End of Days: Lyric Theodicy and Robert Pollok's <i>The Course of Time</i> '	Rachel Kent, 'Whanganui River Personhood and Theology's Potentials for Rebirthing American Environmental Politics'
Session Two	<b><i>Transformation</i></b> Ground Floor Lecture Room, 4 The Square	<b><i>Women Writers</i></b> Room 251 Gilbert Scott Building	<b><i>Poetry</i></b> Trinity Room, 4 The Square
14.30	Mark Godin, 'Strategies for Repair: The Possibilities and Pitfalls of Using Literature and Theology to Support Religious Transformation'	Elisabeth Jay, 'Jane Eyre and the Nineteenth-Century Crisis of Biblical Authority'	Romola Parish, 'New Avenues for the Spirit: Rising to R.S. Thomas' Challenge'
15.00	Nicola James & Ruth Dunster, 'Not Just Another Brick in the Wall: The Heuristic Process of Education in Our Research and Writing Ministry'	Elizabeth Anderson, 'Virginia Woolf, Domestic Space and Material Mysticism'	Kathryn Wills, 'The Finitude and Fracture of Self as Magus: Yves Bonnefoy, Cultural Narcissism, and the Re-Sanctification of the Image'
15.30	Alison Jasper, 'Reading the Writing on the Wall: Feminist Theology in China'	Hannah Marije Altorf, 'Revisiting <i>The Fire and the Sun</i> , or How Iris Murdoch Reads Plato for this World'	Hester Jones, 'Donald Davie, Ezra Pound and "the Deeps in Him"'

## Abstracts

Please note that, to save time and trees, print copies will **not** be available on the day – if you wish to refer to them during the colloquium then please print or retain on your phone/laptop/tablet.

### **Dystopian Bodies, 10.45-12.15, Ground Floor Lecture Room, 4 The Square**

Alana M. Vincent, 'Your Dystopian Fiction Won't Save You Now: Holocaust Memory, Fallen Nature, and the Dangers of Living in a World Where the Worst Has Already Happened'

Following the Brexit vote, and both in the run up to and aftermath of the American elections, dystopian fiction has occupied a notably larger than normal space in public imagination and political discourse. It figures both as a caution (responses to the Hulu broadcast of *The Handmaid's Tale* emphasising the similarities between Gilead and contemporary American politics) and as an anaesthetic which shuts down political critique ("Things aren't *that* bad yet"). In this latter mode, dystopian fiction functions very much like Holocaust memory and, as this paper will argue, both of these function in political discourse very much like notions of a fallen world, particularly as deployed in American Protestant theology, in which expectations of goodness must be sharply curtailed pending eschatological redemption. This paper will argue that each of these phenomena operates in a different sphere to blunt recognition of and response to emergent political crises.

Steve Fountain, 'Eradication and Assimilation: Elie Metchnikoff's Walls Against Death and Decay'

Metchnikoff's *The Prolongation of Life: Optimistic Studies* (1907), blames senility and shortened life-spans on the bacterial toxins that humans carry within their less-than-optimal digestive tracts. Avoidance and eradication of our microbial enemies could, Metchnikoff supposes, provide not only a defense against the ravages of age, but also a deterrent against death itself. In his *The Nature of Man* (1903), as well, Metchnikoff's interpretations of bodily and literary texts reveal a distinctly religious 19C imagination, and it is helpful to consider Metchnikoff's observations and analyses within the history of ideas of purity and impurity, holiness and defilement, and guilt and innocence. Goethe and Nietzsche, who figure prominently in Metchnikoff's work, provide a conceptual passageway to Freud, Eliade, Altizer, and others, a path suggesting that Metchnikoff's pursuit of "orthobiosis" and the prolongation of life, an orthopraxis that might appear to be a "biophilic" endeavor, may be seen as driven by a "thanatophilic" impulse toward sterility and a nostalgia for an imaginary Edenic state. The pervasive theological hermeneutic of control through eradication and/or assimilation manifests in contemporary developments such as the "othering" of immigrants, the "war on germs," and notions of "clean eating," and its critique has significant political, ethical and cultural implications.

Taylor William Driggers and Vicky Gunn, 'Ambivalent Binaries: Reinscribing the Limits of the Desert Harlots? Mary, Pelagia, and Angela Carter's Tristessa'

Imagining holy bodies is a central part of modern theological discourse. Yet, how we allow ourselves to imagine these bodies is constrained by the technologies of acceptability. We argue that creating congress between the lives of the Desert Harlots with Angela Carter's Tristessa in *The Passion of New Eve* is a useful way of expanding the limits of the theological imaginary to address contemporary ecclesial body binaries. In this paper, we tour the landscapes of this creative congress to explore how gender portrayals can simultaneously subvert and restate gender essentialism. To achieve this we interweave the tools of literary analysis with the trade of the historical imaginary. We compare the potential of gender fluidity as provided through the narratives of Mary, Pelagia and Tristessa with lessons from the application of the historical imaginary to the fifth century Syrian life of Pelagia. This has an applied purpose: to unsettle ecclesiastical histories used to perpetuate theological normativity.

### **Prophecy, 10.45-12.15, Room 251, Gilbert Scott Building**

Elizabeth Dodd, 'John Clare, The Poetics of Testimony and the Prophetic Potential of the Lyric "I"'

This paper explores lyric as a potential site of prophetic discourse through a focus on its first-person perspective. Post-Wittgensteinian British theology manifests a deep distrust towards lyric, preferring the broader category of the 'poetic' to lyrical associations with subjectivity and modern individualism. The Romantic model of lyric poetry may be inescapably bound up with the first-person singular but the great theories of lyric have always emphasised its social location and orientation. This paper explores the prophetic potential of the lyric 'I' in dialogue with Martin Buber's dialogical understanding of prophecy and Rebecca Chopp's notion of the 'poetics of testimony', in particular its contribution to a theology that is resistant to the totalising voice of theory. I will suggest that what might appear paradoxical to an anti-Cartesian audience - finding prophetic authority in

the apparent solipsism of a first-person perspective – is in fact a natural outworking of the devices of lyric, and is consistent with an understanding of the self as embedded in society, rooted in culture and manifest in a body.

### Sue Brind and Jim Harold 'Art: Enactment, Presence and Prophecy'

"Art is the only twin life has ... art does not seek to describe but to enact." (Charles Olson)

In his essay, *Human Universe* (1950-51), on the real work of poetry the early C20<sup>th</sup> American poet, Charles Olson, sought to question convention and the received rhetorical structures of poetry; to, in effect, 'wild' language and thereby return to it the immediacy of experience, process and change. By so doing he conceived human creativity as *acting* empathetically within the wild energy of the Cosmos. Olson's term 'to enact' is analysed alongside Jean-François Lyotard's formulations on art, specifically those made in the essay, 'Scapeland' (1989), in the terms of the *event* and the *figural* as indicators of a re-wilding of meaning freed from society's grand narratives. Referencing Maurice Blanchot's essay, 'The "Sacred" speech of Hölderlin' (1949), consideration is also given to the poet-artist as prophet. Using the example of Hölderlin's last poems, prophetic language unfolds to a point where *to enact* finds a natural conclusion in the poet's non-being. In this paper art practice, creative writing, and theoretical analysis are interwoven to establish a new metaphysics of enactment amongst complex social, political and cultural contemporary narratives.

### Deryl Davis, 'Poetry, Prophecy, and the End of Days: Lyric Theodicy and Robert Pollok's *The Course of Time*'

Claims for prophetic vision and utterance are nearly synonymous with Romantic literature of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. We think of Blake's bard 'Who Present, Past & Future sees', of Coleridge's poet drinking 'the milk of Paradise', and Shelley imploring the west wind to carry his voice as 'The trumpet of a prophecy'. Outside of England, we have Klopstock and Hölderlin in Germany and a host of others. My paper looks at a unique and almost entirely forgotten Scottish Romantic-era poet, Robert Pollok, and his claim to prophetic authority in the bestselling religious epic, *The Course of Time* (1827). Written in response to attacks upon biblical authority, Pollok's 8500-line poem combines the rhetoric of Hebrew prophecy, the stylistic tropes of English Romanticism, Scottish moral philosophy, and traditional Calvinist theology to defend orthodox faith and the conception of final judgment. Through the voice of 'an ancient bard of earth,' Pollok recounts the spiritual history of humankind, makes claims for divine inspiration, and depicts apocalypse and final judgment, castigating blaspheming poets (Byron) and theologians (Joseph Priestley) along the way. In this paper, I explore Pollok's claim to and use of prophetic authority in *The Course of Time*, as well as his wide-ranging literary and religious sources, and the possibility that the poem was written in response to a public call for a religious eschatological epic to counter recent secular vision poems by Lord Byron and Robert Southey. I will also consider the reasons for the poem's tremendous popularity in the nineteenth century (80,000 copies, 25-plus editions) and near disappearance in the twentieth.

### **Politics, 10.45-12.15, Trinity Room, 4 The Square**

#### Scott Robertson, 'Walls and Dust: The Literary and Theological Subversion of Security'

In the face of what Charles Taylor calls "exclusivist humanism" (*A Secular Age*), the corresponding temptation to increased academic specialisation which builds separation upon separation between and within intellectual disciplines, and the, at times, rabid expression of political fence building, the relationship between theology and the arts finds itself once again the focus of much attention. This paper paradoxically/contrarily argues that such boundaries, such walls are in fact illusory – indeed that the particular relationship between theology and literature cannot but be a sympathetic and mutually supportive one. Utilising the Temple theology of Margaret Barker in an extended reflection upon the Gospel story of the woman caught in adultery (John 8: 1-11) and allying this with Richard Kearney's notion of an anatheism, I propose that the common source of both binding and loosing, of wall building and breaking lies in the dust itself. As such, notions of security through separation are subverted in the face of a common awareness of fragility.

#### Clare Radford, 'Writing on Job Centre Walls: Feminist Theopoetics and Austerity Assessments'

In protesting his dehumanising experiences of benefits assessments in austerity Britain, the main character in Ken Loach's film 'I, Daniel Blake' writes on the walls of the Job Centre, demanding an appeal date before he starves. This image has resonated with activists in their own 'writing on the walls', writings documenting the personal and community experiences of welfare cuts and assessments to show the 'human catastrophe' created by austerity for marginalised groups. In this paper, I sketch a feminist theopoetic response to austerity assessments, exploring how the assessments shape the meaning-making strategies of those experiencing the sharp end of austerity. Firstly, I draw on activists' responses to explore how the assessments shape the voicing and legitimacy of lived experiences in austerity, focusing specifically on two areas: disability assessments, and the exemption to the two-child limit to tax credits known as the rape clause. Secondly, I draw on Rebecca Chopp's 'poetics of testimony' to suggest a theological response that involves creative forms of expression and silence. Against the austerity demand for predictable, narratable lives, this approach attends to the ordinary complexity of embodied life.



## Rachel Kent, 'Whanganui River Personhood and Theology's Potentials for Rebirthing American Environmental Politics'

This paper will explore theo-poetics' potential for birthing fresh, proactive, "sacred" protection status for geographical systems. We will begin by examining international indigenous spirituality's transformative record, particularly New Zealand's landmark 2017 legal personhood status for the Whanganui River, based in Maori spirituality and the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi's obligations. Here, indigenous cosmology's "fictive personhoods" rise to legally counter the agency of America's notorious fictive corporate personhood. Contrasting NZ's explicitly theologically-resourced land agreement, we will consider other "Rights of Nature" proponents, such as the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund (CELDF), who follow Whanganui Iwi in bringing a strictly secular legal petition for the Colorado River's legal personhood in Sept. 2017. Fleshing out the American paradigm, we will turn to a current grassroots movement, The Lancaster Stand, a broadly secular collective appealing for "sacred space" farmland status against a proposed natural gas pipeline in Pennsylvania, USA. We will examine the Stand's multi-faith spiritual resources, particularly a resistance chapel built by the Adorers of the Blood of Christ out of their Catholic land ethic, and group focus upon protecting Native American burial and heritage sites. As Western culture comes to the end of its materialist promise, we turn to theo-poetics as an imaginative reserve for forging proactive environmental law.

### **Transformation, 14.30-16.00, Ground Floor Lecture Room, 4 The Square**

## Mark Godin, 'Strategies for Repair: The Possibilities and Pitfalls of Using Literature and Theology to Support Religious Transformation'

Churches and other religious communities have not always succeeded in their attempts to do good in the world; indeed, they have at times caused great suffering. Among the many necessary actions for remedying this is theological reconstruction: assessing the theological roots of harmful action and seeking to renovate them. However, the desire for theological reconstruction within a religious community is much simpler than actually enacting it, because such change is always political, regardless of the diverse governance machineries of different institutions, requiring some form of assent from a wide range of people. Logical arguments, even drawing upon sacred texts or traditions, rarely persuade people to change their theological convictions. Thus those desiring change commonly appeal for empathy through the stories of those damaged by any current situation: essentially relying on literary powers of persuasion. But there are always counter-narratives, and the complexity of the best literary works opens up pluralities of interpretation rather than closing off rival views, so that it is difficult to control how literature and theology will work together. However, if content will always be contested, perhaps the strengths which literature and theology offers are the methodological attention to *form* and an approach honouring uncertainty.

## Nicola James and Ruth Dunster, 'Not Just Another Brick in the Wall: The Heuristic Process of Education in Our Research and Writing Ministry'

In this paper, as co-writers we both explore and in so doing, enact an heuristic method which is both research and ministry. We argue that this is a process embodying the journey of a hermeneutic of authenticity. Ruth Dunster travels from a survivor's poetry's titanic struggle with fundamentalism in a leap over the wall. For Nicola James, the heuristic process is rooted in the Quaker meeting for worship in which Spirit writes the sense of the meeting on the wall. We reflect on our travelling together which is a sisterly solidarity and a means to deepen our understandings through the light shining in our dialogue. This is the heuristic dynamic in action. The enactment before you, then, is of our Christ centred dialogical process, which is essentially an heuristic one of *theologia viatorum*. It is an expression of desire to commune in a conversational process that truthfully reflects the outworking of our convictions. Thus we give ourselves the freedom to write emancipation. Art becomes a celebration of the Spirit with us written on the wall of our conversations.

## Alison Jasper, 'Reading the Writing on the Wall: Feminist Theology in China'

This discussion – premised on the existence of a Chinese population that is 5% Christian - will consider some existing western assumptions about women, Christianity and China that may need to be reviewed or updated as a first step towards understanding the possibility of a Christian Feminist theology in China. Today, we cannot ignore the increasing numbers of Chinese people who are visiting the UK or studying in UK universities or the overwhelming preponderance of Chinese made goods in UK shops. Yet China's influence in the world is still to a very considerable extent, only present to western consciousness in terms of its own largely unreflective consumption of goods and technologies that it recognises neither as familiar or alien. It is time to read the literary, spiritual and cultural writing on the wall and in this paper I will attempt to sketch out an approach to that task from a western perspective using the feminist theologian as my focus.

## **Women Writers, 14.30-16.00, Room 251, Gilbert Scott Building**

### **Elisabeth Jay, 'Jane Eyre and the Nineteenth-Century Crisis of Biblical Authority'**

*Jane Eyre* is a troubled and troubling novel. Instantly recognized as a revolutionary fiction, attributing to women, feelings, desires and, worse still, actions, which threatened decorum, it articulated them in a plot, that, while appearing to uphold 'the law given by God; sanctioned by man' licensed a fantasy of female self-determination. Theologically-speaking, the novel prompts us to explore questions of authority, without providing a secure basis on which to form any conclusions. Neither heroine, nor author, ever come clean on how they have managed to square the successive and sometimes contradictory interpretations of divine inspiration embodied within the text.

### **Elizabeth Anderson, 'Virginia Woolf, Domestic Space and Material Mysticism'**

Recent treatments of the role of religion in Virginia Woolf's novels have posited a tension between religiosity and secularism, but this paper explores the conjunction of spirituality and materiality in Woolf's work. Rather than posing a tension between mainstream religion and materiality, I argue for an unorthodox view of spirituality in which, despite their apparent contradiction, the mystical and the material are deeply interrelated. In the tradition of negative theology or apophatic mysticism, darkness and silence are frequently used to describe the divine as transcendent, unknowable and absent. Yet in Woolf's novels darkness and silence are configured as located in the mundane, the material and presence. This paper analyses the relationship between mysticism, domestic space and materiality in Woolf's writing.

### **Hannah Marije Altorf, 'Revisiting *The Fire and the Sun*, or How Iris Murdoch Reads Plato for this World'**

This paper is very much inspired by the way of reading I learnt from David Jasper and encountered time and again when returning to Glasgow and to the ISRLC conference: careful, against the grain, looking at what is said as well as what is left out. The paper also addresses the conference theme, exploring the significance of interdisciplinary reading for this world. And I return to an author who brought me first to Glasgow: Iris Murdoch. In the last few months I have been rereading Murdoch's *The Fire and the Sun: Why Plato Banished the Artists*. This essay was first published in 1977 and is based in the Romanes lecture Murdoch gave in Oxford in 1976. At the time it was amply reviewed, but it is not much discussed in more recent scholarship. My paper will argue against the neglect and against some of the criticism by showing how *The Fire and the Sun* exemplifies reading Plato for this world. My argument consists of two parts. First, I argue that Murdoch reads Plato as a contemporary concerned with contemporary problems (the 'demise of religion', as Murdoch calls it in her 1970- essay *The Sovereignty of Good*). Second, while Murdoch pursues reasoned argument, she is not determined by it. It is literature which allows her to claim the freedom which her argument does not allow for (yet), when she writes near the end: 'Art, especially literature, is a great hall of reflection where we can all meet and where everything under the sun can be examined and considered.' (p. 86) I shall consider the significance of this sentence, on its own as well as in relation to its sibling in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (1992), Murdoch's last work of philosophy, where she writes *this time of metaphysics*: '...there is another way which consists of constructing a huge hall of reflection full of light and space and fresh air, in which ideas and intuitions can be unsystematically nurtured' (p. 422).

## **Poetry, 14.30-16.00, Trinity Room, 4 The Square**

### **Romola Parish, 'New Avenues for the Spirit: Rising to R.S. Thomas' Challenge'**

In an interview in 1993, the priest and poet R. S. Thomas exhorted poets to 'deploy the new vocabulary to open up new avenues ... for the spirit in the twenty-first century.' Nearly a quarter of a century later, it is a challenge that is no less relevant, and is arguably more urgent. This paper examines Thomas' use of the 'machine' as a poetic metaphor in attempting to make sense of, and situate, faith in an increasingly technological world. It highlights the need to adopt both new and traditional imagery and vocabulary in order to express and explore matters of faith in contemporary culture. The paper concludes with examples of how ongoing 'conversations' with poetic ancestors, and R. S. Thomas in particular, has inspired the author's own theological, artistic and poetic approach to genocide and the 'silicon wilderness'.

### **Kathryn Wills, 'The Finitude and Fracture of Self as Magus: Yves Bonnefoy, Cultural Narcissism, and the Re-Sanctification of the Image'**

Contemporary obsession with the image as idol has generated debased forms of human relationship in both intimate and socio-political contexts. In his writings on and translations of Shakespeare and Yeats, the poet Yves Bonnefoy explores how the poetic image has the potential to be both idol and icon. Bonnefoy's discussion of "A Winter's Tale" and "The Tempest" offers an aetiology and a theology of how an image becomes, in Marion's terms, idolatrous, so developing into a nexus of violent affect. Through Leontes' jealousy and Prospero's rage and disillusion, Bonnefoy identifies how Shakespeare reclaims the image, deciphering the roots of narcissism. While Shakespeare does his own image reclamation, Bonnefoy sees in Yeats one who cannot

reclaim his own images, and Bonnefoy must do it for him, reshaping Yeats' key poems through his collected translations. In place of Yeats' preoccupation with magic, which shows no development of personal quest through the poems, Bonnefoy reorders them to show Yeats' self-image evolving, at the end of these translations, into the spiritually dispossessed figure sitting amidst "the foul rag and bone shop of the heart", the emptiness of "Yeats' Epitaph", mirroring the final figure of Prospero. This provides a modern and compact exemplar of the more expansive Shakespearian discussion, through which Bonnefoy provides hope for a spiritually dispossessed society where images are disposable yet indispensable.

### Hester Jones, 'Donald Davie, Ezra Pound and "the Deeps in Him"'

This paper will use a consideration of the relation between Donald Davie and Ezra Pound to discuss the theme of 'end-of-life' ultimacy. Pound was a source of inspiration and unease through Davie's life, and Davie's work on psalms and sacred poetry late in his life became the means by which he considered how sacred art and in particular lament psalms might offer a form of engagement with the world's challenges and imperfections, not as a form of escape from it. Both poets work with the idea of depth in this regard; and both, I suggest, find a third way to the polarity often established between art and political engagement. Both poets embraced conservative points of view; yet both sought within the deep places of art to engage with and address social and political imperatives. The paper will thus be called, 'Donald Davie, Ezra Pound and 'the deeps in him'.