

Programme

- 10.00 Arrivals and coffee
Introductions
- 10.45 **Anthony Nuttall**
"Bearing the Burden of our
Sins": Heretical Atonement in
Measure for Measure
- 12.00 **Andrew Tate**
'I was guilty': Interpretation as
heresy in John Updike's
Roger's Version (1986)
- 1.15 Lunch
- 2.15 **Valentine Cunningham**
Saving Heresy
- 3.15 Tea
Work in progress
Plans
Prayer

A D Nuttall, FBA, is Professor of English at Oxford University and a Fellow of New College. He is the author of *Overheard by God* (1980), *A New Mimesis* (1983), *Why Does Tragedy Give Pleasure?* (1996) and many other books. He is especially interested in the relation between philosophy/theology and literature. His latest book, *Dead From the Waist Down*, is about scholars and sexuality.

Professor Nuttall writes: 'In my *The Alternative Trinity* I argued for the intermittent presence, in Marlowe, Milton and Blake, of a heretical doctrine: the Ophite Gnostic thesis that God the Father is an evil tyrant and Christ (who is to be identified with the Serpent of Genesis) since he leads us to knowledge, is the antagonist of the wicked Father. Can anything similar be discerned in the plays of Shakespeare? One's first instinct is 'No; Shakespeare is too sane, too steady, too centrist for any such notion. But in *Measure for Measure* a vertiginous anti-theology can perhaps be discerned.

'The play is a comedy of forgiveness in which all sinners are pardoned at the close (in line with Lk 6:35. 'Love ye your enemies'); but the title obstinately reminds us that the principle of retributive justice remains in place and rests with God (Mk 4:24, cf. Rom 12:19, Mt 7:1). This throws up a contrast between the Father locked into the

Old Law, and human loving forgiveness (Christ rejects the *lex talionis* at Mt 5:38). Shakespeare explicitly links this contrast to the doctrine of the Atonement, Christ's submission of his own person, on the cross, for us, to satisfy the principle of justice, and this is eerily echoed, within the play, by various comic substitutions.'

Selected Reading

- A D Nuttall, *The Alternative Trinity: Gnostic heresy in Marlowe, Milton, and Blake*, 1998, esp. the chapter on Marlowe.
— 'Measure for Measure: Quid Pro Quo?', *Shakespeare Studies*, iv, 1968.
R W Battenhouse, 'Measure for Measure and the Christian Doctrine of the Atonement', *PMLA*, lxi, 1946.
E M Pope, 'The Renaissance Background of Measure for Measure', *Shakespeare Survey*, ii, 1949.
Harriet Hawkins, *Measure for Measure*, 1986.

Dr Andrew Tate is lecturer in English at Lancaster University. He is the author of essays on, amongst others, John Ruskin, Robert Browning, Charles Spurgeon and Douglas Coupland. His most recent work has been published in *Literature and Theology* and *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*. He is currently completing a study of the miraculous in contemporary American and British fiction.

He writes: 'John Updike might be the most profane and prolific major theological novelist of our moment. His twenty novels, from *Poorhouse Fair* (1959) to *Seek My Face* (2003), are informed by a committed Christian spirituality and an unflinching engagement with fallen human corporeality. Updike has been variously construed as zealous reactionary and as literate pornographer. James Wood, in *The Broken Estate*, brands Updike as "of all theological writers, one of the most complacent", and challenges his credentials as a Christian writer. Wood laments the fact that the novelist is "an oddly calm Barthian, a writer for whom God is unlikely ever to be a flaming presence or a flaming absence." By contrast, Updike has argued that in this present darkness, the religious novelist can articulate "not the world of arrived faith and its consolations but the fallen world whose emptiness, perhaps, led [the faithful] to make the leap of faith."

'The paper engages with representations of heresy, grace and interpretation in *Roger's Version* (1986) one of Updike's three, non-sequential contemporary re-tellings of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850). The novel tests its nineteenth-century progenitor and, just as Hawthorne was wrestling with the ghosts of Puritan New England, so does Updike enter into a contest with Hawthorne's representation of Christian identity. Roger Lambert, a licentious theology professor in an unnamed New England Divinity school, echoes Hawthorne's quasi-demonic Roger Chillingworth. Updike's wildly unreliable narrator, whose area of research

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focuses on heresy in the early Christian church, is confronted by a young, awkward evangelical who believes the existence of God might be proved via rapidly evolving information technology. The narrative mediates the encounter between materialist and unworldly "versions" of the world, as modes of interpreting scripture and experience collide and create alternative hermeneutic possibilities. John Duvall has read the novel in terms of its metaphorical conflation of heresy with pornography, the twin illegitimate fixations of Lambert, and connects these non-official forms of discourse with a homoerotic subtext. My paper, however, will emphasise Updike's use of Hawthorne as a kind of prophetic commentary on Karl Barth's understanding of God as wholly other.'

Selected Reading

Christie-Murray, David, *A History of Heresy*, OUP, 1989

Duvall, John N., 'The Pleasure of Textual/Sexual Wrestling: Pornography and Heresy in Roger's Version', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 37, 1991.

Schiff, James A., *Updike's Version: Rewriting The Scarlet Letter*, Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1992.

Sherry, Patrick, *Images of Redemption: Art, Literature and Salvation*, London: T & T Clark, 2003.

Wood, James, 'John Updike's Complacent God' chapter in *The Broken Estate*, New York: Random House, 1999.

Yerkes, James, ed., *John Updike and Religion: The Sense of the Sacred and the Motions of Grace*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.

See also James Yerkes excellent online select Updike bibliography:

<http://userpages.prexar.com/joyerkes/Item3.html>

Valentine Cunningham, Professor of English Language & Literature at Corpus Christi College, Oxford, is author of, inter alia: *In the Reading Gaol: Postmodernity, Texts and History* (1994) and *Reading After Theory* (2002).

In his paper Professor Cunningham proposes the marriage of orthodoxy and heresy. Heresy is the necessary other of orthodoxy, and the lifeblood of orthodoxy's definitions and formations. Likewise heresy is the lifeblood of the literary, of the written *imaginaire*. He will adduce literary examples from Helter Skelter to Arius-fond James Joyce.

Selected Reading

Anne Hudson & Peter Biller, *Heresy and Literacy 1000-1530*, CUP, 1996.

David Christie-Murray, *A History of Heresy*, OUP, 1989.

Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, 1987 and *The Making of Orthodoxy*, 1989.

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DAY CONFERENCE

Saving Heresy: Shakespeare to Updike

Saturday 8 November 2003

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