RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS BY current and former Visiting Scholars & Research Members of Common Room
Wednesday 30 May 2018 4.30-7.00 p.m.
The Haldane Room Wolfson College
with drinks 5.30-5.45 and 6.45-7.00
EVERYONE WELCOME

4.30-5.00 ELENA DRAGHICI-VASILESCU
(former RMCR; Oxford University):
PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS, A STATUE, AND THE PICTORIAL VISION

5.00-5.30ERICA SHEEN (former VS; University of York):
PUTTING THE PRINCE OF DENMARK BACK INTO HAMLET: JOHN PETERS HUMPHREY READS SHAKESPEARE

5.45-6.15SEAN GASTON (VS; Brunel University and University of Melbourne):
'DERRIDA AND THE CHALLENGE OF HISTORY – THE PROBLEM OF CONTEXT

6.15-6.45NIGEL RAPPORT (VS; University of St. Andrews):
STANLEY SPENCER’S PHILOSOPHY OF LOVE AS MUNDANE PRACTICE

See online Wolfson College Events Calendar for abstracts
ABSTRACTS FOR VS+RMCR RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS
Wednesday 30 May 2018
The Haldane Room
Wolfson College
Oxford OX2 6UU

4.30-5.00 Elena Draghici-Vasilescu (former RMCR; Tutor in Theology and Byzantine Iconography Oxford University Department of Continuing Education, Research Fellow Oxford Centre for Medieval History, Researcher, Oxford Centre for Byzantine Research), “Pseudo-Dionysius, a Statue, and the Pictorial Vision”

Abstract: Dionysius the Areopagite compares the spiritual, intellectual, and practical undertaking of what he calls ‘mystical theology’ (especially in his treatise bearing this title) with the process of carving a statue. Evidently connecting his thought with Plotinus’s ideas in the first Ennead, the Syrian fathoms that, by apophatic seeing and knowing, that which is unnecessary removes itself from our minds and thus we attain the ‘true vision’ of the world. Obviously, sightedness – which in the same Platonic tradition is assumed to be a manifestation of divine vision – is involved in all of the arts, not just in sculpture. Publications have come out discussing how it and architecture might be interpreted (and were practiced sometimes?) in the light of Dionysian theology. Could a similar formulation be valid with respect to other artistic domains – for instance with regard to painting? If this is so, would Dionysius’s concepts have informed the work of the artists differently when geography is to be considered? These are the questions my paper endeavours to answer.

5.00-5.30 Erica Sheen (former VS; Department of English and Related Literature, University of York), “Putting the Prince of Denmark back into Hamlet: John Peters Humphrey reads Shakespeare”

Abstract: In an essay ‘On the Foundations of International Law’, written in the immediate aftermath of World War 2, John Peters Humphrey, then of the Law Department at McGill, argued the existence of ‘an idea of international life’ - an idea he supported with reference to a notion of ‘international possessions’: ‘Homer, Shakespeare, Goethe’. Conventional as such an invocation may seem, the principles it enshrined underpinned his subsequent work at the UN as Director of the Human Rights Division with responsibility for drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. His Diary, begun in 1948 as he approached the troubled last stages of the process, records a formidable programme of personal reading. At a point of crisis - his wife seriously ill in hospital, the draft stalling under the pressure of ‘procedural wrangling’ - he took Hamlet from his bookshelf and spent a week reading it on the train coming home from work. How does this reflect on the ‘idea of international life’? Could
Shakespeare’s utility to the project of world government possibly derive less from his status as international possession than from his value as private property?

6.00-6.30  Sean Gaston (VS; Reader in English Emeritus, Brunel University and Research Fellow, University of Melbourne) 'Derrida and the Challenge of History – the Problem of Context'

Abstract: The hypothesis of this paper is that Jacques Derrida’s work was always concerned with the problem of history. Focusing on one aspect of the hypothesis – history and context – the paper will examine four areas: (a) Derrida’s response to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989; (b) the imperative to be at once ‘in’ and ‘out’ of context; (c) the historian Quentin Skinner’s ‘ideas in context’ and Derrida’s critique of the use of context in Speech Act Theory; (d) Derrida’s work on the historical and institutional contexts of philosophy and the challenge of ‘mobile’, ‘spreading’ and ‘receding’ contexts.

6.30-7.00  Nigel Rapport (VS; Professor of Anthropological and Philosophical Studies, Department of Social Anthropology, University of St. Andrews), “Stanley Spencer’s philosophy of love as mundane practice”

Abstract: My starting point in this talk is Stanley Spencer’s ideas of love. Love was central to his art, both as regards his technique and his message. Spencer (1891-1959) developed a personal philosophy of love and a personal practice. I also want to ask about audience reaction: so much that is said by those (of us) who appreciate Stanley and his art concerns love. And this finding of love in Stanley’s work, and, as it were, a sharing of love among those who come together to celebrate Stanley—such as the Friends of the Stanley Spencer Gallery in Cookham (his native village and subject of much of his art)—is worthy of a sociological treatment of its own. I end my talk with a suggestion concerning further work I wish to undertake on how the phenomenon of Stanley Spencer and the projects and communities that memorialise him—his Gallery, the Friends, art-historical critique—throws light on the possibility of love being considered not only a private virtue but a public or civil one too. I want to think with Stanley Spencer about love: Love for him was the key means of identifying the world and its individual components—people and things—and of respecting and valuing the individuals identified. I would like to take this seriously as a way in which human beings might recognise one another as individual forms of life worthy of recognition and respect irrespective of their nation, class, gender, race, religion or age.