

Theology in Scotland on arts and culture

Negative Capability

Liz Macwhirter

Liz Macwhirter is a novelist and poet completing a PhD in Theology through Creative Practice at the University of Glasgow. Her debut novel, Black Snow Falling (Scotland Street Press, 2018), gained a Carnegie Medal nomination. Liz performed her long verse narrative, Blue: A Lament for the Sea, at Yale University GCRE 2023, All Borders Blur, and Hidden Door Arts Festival. Other poetry is published by Lucy's Writers Cambridge, Yale GCRE and 4M Netlabel. Creative-critical papers have been selected for presentation by Yale, Mystical Theology Network, Finncon, International Piers Plowman Society, International Medieval Congress and the SST Graduate Conference. Her research follows thirty years' experience as an award-winning creative copywriter. Liz runs workshops and speaks in all contexts, including events such as the Edinburgh International Book Festival. Find out more at www.ljmacwhirter.com.



Theopoetics is far more than theo-poetry or an exploration of spiritual aesthetics; it is a quest for a nuanced position from which to effect social change. My creative practice research involves a process of theopoesis with the medieval contemplative theology of Julian of Norwich (c. 1342–c. 1416) and its intersections with trauma spirituality. Trauma theology, following Professor Shelly Rambo, invites a bearing witness to the traumatic wound: encounter can lead to integration and transfiguration, instead of problematic redemption. In Julian's paradoxical incarnational theology, the 'wound' becomes a site of crossing. The body becomes a gateway to divine love without negating the sacred, fragile quality of material reality. At the end of Julian's argument, while there is no refuge from suffering, suffering has no refuge from love. In *Negative Capability*,



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hope is held in grief with complex loss. The poem alludes to the ‘coincidence of opposites’ of the medieval theologian Nicholas of Cusa, and Psalm 126:5.

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Nothing
made of her, but
ruins

moonlit shapes
absence a shadow

dungeon
deep.

Falling from her eyes, tears
seed the ground

grow
night scents
a dream of peony petals

she cups the clay bowl
in her hands

full
of nothing.