

## Report of the President of the Edinburgh Jewish Literary Society

The 'Lit' had a very active 119<sup>th</sup> year with eight events. The season opened with a fascinating talk, "On translating Amos Oz," by the English translator of the works of Amos Oz, Nicholas de Lange, who is Professor of Hebrew and Jewish Studies at Wolfson College, Cambridge. After opening with general remarks about the art of translation, he described the joys and difficulties of translating Amos Oz in particular, including coping with the essential differences between English and Hebrew as languages. Prof. de Lange then treated the audience to readings from some of his translations of Oz's recent works. The evening was concluded by a lengthy period of lively discussion, including several entertaining anecdotes from Prof. de Lange's working relationship with Oz. The next speaker was Edinburgh's Rabbi David Rose, who presented a review of the Church of Scotland's evolving views of Jews in his talk "St Andrew's Jews: Attitudes to Jews in the Church of Scotland." Rabbi Rose led the following event, an exclusive showing for the Lit of the film "The Believer," arranged through the courtesy of the Edinburgh Filmhouse. A disturbing film, "The Believer" chronicles the history of a religious Jewish man who turns into a neo-Nazi, and examines the processes that led him there. The following talk was by Dr. Hannah Holtschneider, lecturer in Jewish Studies at the University of Edinburgh, who explored the shift in the stance of German Protestantism towards the Jew. In an attempt to integrate the Jew as an essential component of Protestant theology as a means of immunising German Protestantism against anti-semitism, the new theology loses track of the Jewish people and their suffering brought about by the Holocaust. The first speaker of the second half of the season was the writer Naomi Alderman. A young writer whose first novel, "Disobedience," won this year's prestigious Orange Award for New Writers, Ms Alderman delighted the audience with her vivacious and humorous account of her growing up in the secluded world of London's Orthodox Jews and the novel it inspired. As part of the 4<sup>th</sup> Edinburgh International Festival of Middle Eastern Spirituality and Peace, Rabbi Mark Solomon from St Johns Wood Liberal Jewish Synagogue spoke to a packed audience about "The Secret Light: Islamic Influences on Jewish Spirituality." Living in an Islamic environment, Jewish scholars of the medieval world had regular encounters of mutual respect with their Islamic counterparts, yielding fruitful discussions and intellectual cross-fertilization, including Islamic influences on Jewish notions of spirituality. As a second Lit-sponsored event in the Festival, the BBC journalist David Mazower spoke on his interest in Yiddish theatre in his talk "Dreams of Glory – how the Jewish Workers of Whitechapel built themselves a Yiddish Opera House in 1912." In unfolding the tale of this curiosity in the history of British Jewry, David showed how amazingly thirsty even the Jewish worker was for Yiddish culture, and how the impresarios sadly let them down. The season's series of talks was concluded by native Israeli Oron Joffe, who spoke on the intimate relationship between Hebrew and Aramaic over the course of Jewish history. The Lit AGM will be held 13 May, and will include a short talk on "The Lord and the Rabbi: a rabbi journeys to the world's most famous astronomer to ask a question."