

SEM13. Weaving voices: Collaborative creativity in literature and culture

11 September h. 11:00-13:00, Gorr 3

Convenors

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Abstract

Literary theory and book history have increasingly questioned the notion of individualistic authorship, given the multitude of factors influencing the processes of writing, editing, and publishing. Stone & Thompson's (2006: 19) heterotextual model frames the author as a composite entity "incorporating different subjectivities and speaking in multiple voices"; similarly, Van Hulle (2022, 75) considers creativity as an "ecology" involving the manuscript's physical environment, the author's literary influences, dialogic exchanges with peers, and other non-human agents of change. However, a tendency persists to regard modifications deriving from non-authorial sources as forms of impurity, contamination, or unnatural hybridization; as Stillinger (1991, vi) observes, "where others besides the nominal author have a share in the creation of a text, we ... call it corruption and try to get rid of it". Arguably, standard editorial practices continue to adhere to what McGann (1984, 8) characterizes as "ideas ... which so emphasize the autonomy of the isolated author as to distort our theoretical grasp of [creativity]".

This seminar invites investigations into diverse forms and modes of joint creativity – ranging from overt co-signatures to silent revisions – across literary and non-literary contexts, from antiquity to the present day, in traditional and digital spaces, and encompassing interactions both among humans and between humans and computers.

Potential topics include:

- Gendered perspectives on collaboration and authorship
- Manuscript studies, archival work, and textual variance
- Editorial practices, textual authority, and the history of the book
- Translation as a collaborative process
- Digital humanities and its evolving practices
- AI-human collaboration and its implications for authorship
- Scholarly co-writing and knowledge-making.

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SEM13. Papers

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- *The plurivocal art of silence* (Boris Zakić, Georgetown College, Kentucky)
- *Collaborative tensions and editorial agency in Yeats and Ellis's Blake project* (Arianna Antonielli, Università degli Studi di Firenze)
- *Reading, publishing, translating: Intertextual and professional collaborations in Virginia Woolf's writing* (Letizia Dolcini, Università di Trento)
- *Interconnected, interrelated: Percy Bysshe Shelley's societies of texts and affections* (Ilaria Natali, Università degli Studi di Firenze)

SEM13. Abstracts

Collaborative tensions and editorial agency in Yeats and Ellis's Blake project

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This paper focuses on the intricate cooperative writing and editing process of William Butler Yeats and Edwin John Ellis, from the University of Reading Manuscript 293/2/2 to *The Works of William Blake. Poetic, Symbolic, and Critical* (WWB; 1893). The two co-editors' efforts to analyse Blake's system and prophetic books were marked by a dynamic partnership that defied traditional collaboration models. As Yeats himself acknowledged, rather than working "hand in hand", they sought to "pursue the game on different tracks and in the evening divide their spoils" (WWB, x). This unconventional division of labour not only fostered intellectual exchange and diversity of interpretation but also gave rise to challenges and inconsistencies—as Yeats himself acknowledged. The complexities of their collaboration can be identified by examining Yeats's reservations, expressed in letters and marginalia, about Ellis's tendency to "trespass his own 'boundaries'" and to rewrite parts of the text that lay outside his field of expertise.

Yeats's concerns underscore the potential for conflicts arising from divergent interpretative approaches and the lack of clear demarcation between his own and Ellis's respective contributions. A thorough assessment of the co-editors' collaborative endeavours is further complicated by the perspectives and editorial mistakes or inferences introduced by the publisher, Bernard Quaritch, whose interventions led to inconsistencies within the final printed edition. Yeats's documented frustration with these outcomes highlights the broader challenges of reconciling differing editorial visions and ensuring textual coherence. Focusing on Ellis's editorial overreaches in the manuscript cluster and the consequences of these transgressions, as well as on the role of Bernard Quaritch in shaping the published version of WWB, the paper explores how all these factors influenced their edition of Blake's works. By tracing these editorial negotiations and tensions back to the manuscripts, this paper not only sheds light on the material and dialogic aspects of the Yeats-Ellis partnership but also contributes to broader debates on collaborative authorship, editorial agency, and the instability of textual authority.

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Reading, publishing, translating: Intertextual and professional collaborations in Virginia Woolf's writing

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It is no mystery that Virginia Woolf, one of the leading figures in the development of British modernism, embodied the very spirit of her time, by fusing different literary roles, composing a specific creative writing process, a collaborative one, which resulted in the end in a joint – and original – creation. This paper aims to show the meanings that the idea of "collaborative creation" can take on within the framework of Virginia Woolf's and modernist poetics, with a specific focus on the role of translations in the development of Woolf's writing. Drawing from Rebecca Beasley's statement that "the conversion of sensation to concept, experience to knowledge, is frequently conceived by these thinkers as an act of translation", this paper will illustrate how not only Woolf's position as a reader, critic and publisher of translations helps her in the intertextual process of incorporating texts into her writing, but also her reflection while translating – usually in collaboration with other intellectuals – becomes a way to "translate" her collaborative experience with the text into original creative works.

Particular attention is given to Woolf's works in connection with the publication of Roger Fry's translations from the Greek, produced between 1915 and 1920, and his later translations from the French, such as his 1936 version of Mallarmé. These instances of translation provide a useful context for interpreting Woolf's essay "On Not Knowing Greek," written in the early 1920s, as well as for examining literary representations of translation and reading in *The Voyage Out*. *Jacob's Room* may also be fruitfully read through this lens. The paper further considers Woolf's involvement, alongside Leonard Woolf and S.S. Koteliansky, in the collaborative translation of Russian literature, and examines her role as a publisher in facilitating the English-language reception of Freud's work.

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Interconnected, interrelated: Percy Bysshe Shelley's societies of texts and affections

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Percy Bysshe Shelley's notebooks from his late Pisan phase, especially Bodleian MSS Shelley adds. e.8 and e.18, offer a paradigmatic example of his collaborative, recursive, and rhizomatic modes of literary composition. Drawing on Dirk Van Hulle's model of the "creative ecology" of writing, this paper approaches Shelley's drafts as dynamic loci constituted by the manuscripts' physical environment, the author's literary influences, interactions with peers and collaborators, and other forces active in the compositional process.

The poetic fragment known as "Ginevra," published posthumously in 1824, is examined with particular attention to its compositional entanglement with *Adonais* (1821), revealing that the two texts emerged in near simultaneity and through a shared mosaic of literary appropriations and allusions. Shelley's drafts of the elegy for Keats incorporate phrases, motifs, and entire lines from "Ginevra," embracing a resolutely anti-teleological conception of the writing process.

Arguably, Shelley's creative networks suggest that he conceived intra- and intertextual dynamics as articulating a broader notion of relationality and sociality – one expressive of his embeddedness in a community of writers engaged in long-standing collaboration and the collective shaping of literary texts. Central to this network is Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, whose editorial and conceptual interventions position her not merely an inspirator and posthumous editor, but, in many respects, as a co-author of her husband's poems.

Within this paradigm, the notion of literary activity as a process of encounter and combination extends beyond material practices and writing spaces to embrace even the open-endedness of authorship itself, conceived as a porous and ongoing negotiation among selves, others, and the textual traces that link them across time.

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The plurivocal art of silence

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Le Roman de Silence is an illuminated manuscript composed in the first half of the thirteenth century. The romance's narrator, Master Heldris of Cornwall, chronicles the adventures of Silence, a revolutionary hero(ine) who navigates her identity while disguised as a boy. In 2023, the Theatre Department at Georgetown College in Kentucky brought the romance to the stage, while its Art Department formed *The Silence Scriptorium* for the occasion. Each hoped to recreate a captivating blend of Heldrian ideas for contemporary audiences in a series of live performances, scenographic solutions, studio works, installations, and gallery exhibitions.

This paper investigates the collaborative energy inherent in the original manuscript, as identified in subsequent translations and medieval scholarship, and the challenges of adapting its joint modalities to meet today's eisegetical expectations. For one, the manuscript's reputed author was likely a pseudonym, a moniker for an individual or a group, which, despite his name, may not include a male member at all. Correspondingly, *The Silence Scriptorium* alone reflects an ecology of creativity beyond individualistic authorship, evidenced by an assembly of unique individuals of diverse ages, genders, dexterities, backgrounds and interests. This paper contributes to ongoing discussions about gendered perspectives of collaboration, the fluidity of textual authority, and the implications of joint creativity in contemporary arts.

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