*International Conference*

**Opera omnia and authority**

**Single author anthologies and the emergence of authorship**

*Ghent University*

*22-23/09/2016*

***Call for papers***

The Department of Dutch Literature of Ghent University will host an international conference on the relationship between the emergence of authorial oeuvres in vernacular, medieval literature and the concepts of *authorship* and *authority*. We hereby invite paper proposals exploring this theme.

***Theme***

In the course of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, various codicological features privileging the author appeared in the manuscripts of vernacular texts in several West-European literary traditions and genres. Rubricated names enabled the author to step out of anonymity; miniatures gave him a face; and biographies sketched his life and ideas. These elements gave the manuscript text a more authentic and realistic character, connecting the text to its creator.

The author was also highlighted implicitly. In the German and French love lyric, for instance, the author was seen as the decisive component in the structuring process within the manuscript. As a result, the codex was transformed into a collection of confined oeuvres. Early examples are the North-Italian *chansonniers*, or the famous *Codex Manesse*.

The interest in the author was at its highest point when the authorial name did not just determine one section of the codex, but when an entire manuscript was assigned to him. In this way, all of his texts could be presented to the audience at once. This ‘*opera omnia* phenomenon’ – the publication of the complete oeuvre of one specific author – is not to be situated after the emergence of the printing press, as has been generally assumed, but around the turn of the fourteenth century. Moreover, it is not limited to the lyric tradition. Guillaume de Machaut, Christine de Pizan, Heinrich Suso, Johannes Tauler, John Govern, Hildegard von Bingen, Hadewijch, Jan van Ruusbroec: these are only a few names thatfunctioned as the predominant criterion for the selection of vernacular texts in specific manuscripts. The *opera omnia* format, together with these authors’ names, connected the individual texts and granted them authenticity, homogeneity. Thereby, the format defined the texts and differentiated them from others.

Where did the manuscript makers uncover the *opera omnia* idea? To what extent was this format adjusted to the needs of the editors? Did the authors themselves initiate the publication of their complete oeuvre – like Guillaume de Machaut or Christine de Pizan – or did others take care of their literary legacy? Never before was the *opera omnia* phenomenon clarified in general; that is without taking into account a specific genre or author. Therefore, we can only speculate on the origin of this type of textual transference, its dissemination, and its success. In addition, we have never been able to provide a complete and comprehensive definition of the format.

We invite researchers from diverse literary traditions and disciplines to shed light on these and other related questions.

The following topics can be considered at the conference:

**1. Defining an *opera omnia* manuscript**

* Which multi-text codices can be classified as *opera omnia* manuscripts?
* What happens if the oeuvre is incorporated in a larger framework (like the songs in Ulrich von Liechtenstein’s autobiographical novel *Frauendienst*), or combined with texts from other authors?
* Are personal letters, such as those of Jan van Ruusbroec, part of his authorial oeuvre? If so, is it justified to use the term *collected works* if these letters were not added to the codex?
* Who decides what belongs to the literary legacy: the editors or the writer himself?
* Is intention decisive for a multi-text manuscript to be considered as a collected works codex, or can we regard a convolute manuscript – of which the single parts of the oeuvre initially functioned separately – as an author’s manuscript as well?
* How do we know we are engaging with a complete repertoire if the prologue does not mention this?
* Is the *name* of the author crucial for the selection and structuring of the texts in an opera omnia codex?
* …

**2. *Opera omnia* manuscript as a creator of authorship and authority**

* How is the author represented in the *opera omnia*-manuscript?
* Is the historical person of the writer influenced by the transmission of his texts into a codex?
* Which strategies do the editors use to signal to readers that their collection has great authority and is worthy to be believed unconditionally? Can we discern several editorial moments?
* What is the main purpose of the collection of one author’s texts: To make an authoritative version? To shape the authority of the writer? To meet the public’s wishes? To secure the literary legacy of a specific community? To influence the copying process?
* Does the *opera omnia* format give the readers the impression of completeness – as Cerquiglini (1999) stated – so that the distribution of the individual texts was no longer necessary?
* …

**3. *Opera omnia* in different genres and literary traditions: an overview**

* Where did the *opera omnia* phenomenon originate? Where did this medium emerge from? Which genres where the very first to be presented as *opera omnia*?
* Are there specific genres in which it is more suitable to compile texts in an author’s anthology?
* Does the purpose of the compilation depend on the genre?
* How widespread is this concept in West-European literary traditions?
* What was the relationship between the *opera omnia* in manuscripts and in print forms?
* …

***Confirmed Keynotes***

The keynote lectures will be delivered by Prof. Dr. **Freimut Löser** (Augsburg University, D) and Prof. Dr. **Albert Russell Ascoli** (UC Berkeley, VS).

# **Guidelines**

To submit a proposal, please send an abstract of your paper and a brief curriculum vitae (max. 250 words) to [e.vandemeulebroucke@ugent.be](mailto:e.vandemeulebroucke@ugent.be) before **15/11/2015.** Presentations should be 25-30 minutes long. The official language at the conference will be English. We hope to publish a volume of essays based on a selection of the papers delivered at the conference.

We look forward to receiving your abstracts, and to a productive meeting on 22-23/09/2016. We hope that you will support our efforts by notifying your colleagues and students about the conference. For more detailed information about the program and registration, please visit our website: [**http://www.letterkunde.ugent.be/operaomnia**](http://www.letterkunde.ugent.be/operaomnia)**.** You are also most welcome to contact the organizers.

***Organising Committee***

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