

IASEMS



Italian Association  
of Shakespearean and  
Early Modern Studies

*“Of Bought Wit”:  
Plagiarism, Imitation and Borrowing in Early Modern England*

The Tenth IASEMS Conference  
Università degli Studi di Genova, 22-24 May 2019

Wit is never good till it be bought.  
Thy wit is dear bought, and yet stark nought.  
John Heywood, *Epigrams upon Proverbs*, xiv (1562)

Early modern textuality seems directly to point at postmodern and contemporary visions of the text as a site of dynamic and multiple contribution. Given the role played in the foundation of an English national literature by a massive activity of rewriting and translating classical and contemporary foreign literature, early modern texts were also intrinsically inter-systemic and derivative. While early modern English began to come into its own as a national language, its more cultivated speakers felt the need to enrich and systematize its vocabulary mainly through borrowing and translation (a process contrasted by the so-called ‘purists’), so that it might compete with the more prestigious classical and continental languages. Indeed, competition with ancient or current models permeated the literary and cultural domain, and notions of imitation and borrowing were variously debated and practiced. Writers used their sources in a variety of ways, ranging from allusion to quotation to plagiarism; in the absence of legal protection of intellectual property, authorship, as well as co-authorship, was performed within more or less established patterns of literary and cultural production. In a context shaped by religious and political controversy, authorial identity was itself related to contemporary anxieties and experiences of dissimulation.

The Tenth Iasems Conference will investigate the various ways in which originality, creativity, appropriation, and borrowing were inscribed in early modern British literature and culture. Proposals meant to explore critical paradigms and counter-paradigms in the approach to early modern textuality and authorship are particularly welcome, as well as papers focused on the relationship between textual theory/practice and the political, religious, philosophical and sociological context in which the debate is situated.

Topics of interest include, but are not limited to the following:

- imitation and creativity in early modern literature
- theories and ethics of textual production
- borrowing in literary theory and practice
- language policies: borrowing, enrichment, exclusion
- translation in theory and practice
- the debate on plagiarism
- plagiarism on the stage
- textual appropriation as discourse and metaphor
- textual appropriation and gender
- anonymity and authorship as literary practice and strategy
- literary debts in manuscripts, unpublished writings
- parody and satire
- rewriting knowledge in early modern textuality (historiography, treatises, unpublished writings, patchwriting, commonplace-books, diaries)
- multiple authorship and collaborative writing
- publishers, printers, authors
- digital humanities and the early modern text

### Selected Bibliography:

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- Clare J., *Shakespeare's Stagetraffic: Imitation, Borrowing and Competition in Renaissance Theatre*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- Cook T., Nielson J., *Plagiarism and Proprietary Authorship in Early Modern England, 1590-1640*, Department of English, University of Toronto, 2011 (PhD Thesis).
- Hope J., *Shakespeare and Language: Reason, Eloquence and Artifice in Early Modern England*, London, Arden, 2010.
- Hug T., *Impostures in Early Modern England*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2013.
- Kerrigan J., *Shakespeare's Originality*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2018.
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- North M. L., *The Anonymous Renaissance. Cultures of Discretion in Tudor-Stuart England*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2003.
- Orgel S., *The Authentic Shakespeare, and Other Problems of the Early Modern Stage*, London-New York, Routledge 2002.

- Randall M., *Pragmatic Plagiarism. Authorship, Profit and Power*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2001.
- Terry R., *The Plagiarism Allegation in English Literature from Butler to Sterne*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
- Van Es B., *Shakespeare in Company*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013.
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- White H. O., *Plagiarism and Imitation during the English Renaissance. A Study in Critical Distinctions*, New York-London, Frank Cass, 1963.

We welcome proposals for twenty-minute papers (maximum). Please send a 500-word abstract and 200-word curriculum vitae by 20 December 2018 to:

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