



**UNIVERSITÉ
DE GENÈVE**

FACULTÉ DES LETTRES



FIRST INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

THE LONG LIFE OF EPHEMERAL LITERATURE

5–7 May 2022, Geneva

First communication – Call for papers

The production of ephemeral literature in previous centuries deserves special attention, not only because of the sheer amount of these prints, but also because of the diversity of their contents, and the valuable contributions they make to various fields, particularly popular culture, the circulation of ideas, and the history of books. Frequently referred to as cheap prints, this type of publications appeared hand-in-hand with the invention of the printing press and existed until very recently. Though texts and accounts published in the form of ephemera survive to this day in only a few places around the world, they constitute an important part of Europe's bygone past. The disappearance of such a traditional editorial activity, along with the loss of the printed objects themselves, compels us to study these publications and preserve what is becoming a fading memory.

Geneva – a city which holds an important place in European printing history – is also the place of the conservation of various collections of French and English booklets, of Spanish *pliegos de cordel*, and Brazilian prints. This conference offers to make the richness of these collections known, take stock of the research being carried out in western Europe, and approach the production of ephemeral literature from a transnational perspective across a broad chronological spectrum.

In the image of its object of study, this is an international and interdisciplinary conference, traversing epochs, geographical borders, and literary, editorial, and artistic genres. From English *chapbooks*, to Italian *fogli volanti*, Iberian *pliegos de cordel* and other *plecs de canye i cordeta*, to the French *Bibliothèque bleue* and the German *Volksbuch*, we wish to encourage intellectual exchange and forge connections between researchers of different academic backgrounds, be they medievalists, modernists, sociologists, art historians, folklorists, historians of literature, print, or music, or specialists in the digital humanities.

The three days planned for this conference will focus on three areas of research, detailed below.

AREAS OF RESEARCH

The speakers are invited to develop a reflection based on one of the three following perspectives.

- **Making a narrative out of an event: inform, entertain, lecture**

From the 1480s onwards, small, inexpensive brochures left the press of western printers; among them, a significant portion dealt with current events. These occasional reports related coronations and earthquakes, military victories and comets. Later on, these were expanded to include brief news stories. During the 16th and 17th centuries, these news reports grew increasingly varied, and came to be grouped in periodicals – first weekly, then daily issues. How were political, military, and religious news reported in cheap prints? What place was given to natural phenomena, to “faits divers”? Was this news reported for the sake of reporting, or did it serve as a means of convincing? Was it analysed, or even commented on? What portion of it was pure invention, and how did reality and fiction interact?

- **The printed sheet and its boundaries: international circulation and cultural particularities**

Charlemagne, Fierabras, Edmond Dantès, or even the Atala of Châteaubriand are only some examples among countless other literary characters, themes, and motifs that crossed geographical and linguistic boundaries in the form of ephemera, and which manifested differently according to the time and place of printing. There are also numerous examples of historical events, more or less faithfully conveyed, which saw substantial transnational fame. In this panel, we look forward to contributions that highlight the circulation, translation, and adaptation of literary motifs and historical themes, in order to answer the following questions: what can be said of the mobility of texts (genre, materiality, readings, etc.)? What kind of information crossed borders? Is it possible to speak of cultural specificity in terms of the country, region, and religious landscape in which ephemera were published? What can be learned from the circulation of the images illustrating these prints? When it comes to translations, what omissions, additions, or modifications are made to the texts, and how can these be explained?

- **Topicality of the research**

Since the first studies into ephemera over half a century ago, individual and group research into this topic has multiplied. Previously believed not to be worth saving, we now recognise the literary, documentary, and material value of these publications; several books have been dedicated to the topic, and endeavours made to digitalise large sets of prints. However, the most of these works are the result of individual, local, and often short-lived efforts, creating a constellation of centres with different approaches and varied content, which impedes the development of a broader vision and global dialogue. As such, it is necessary to adopt a wider perspective: both for the study of the phenomenon, as well as for the analysis of the texts and illustrations that constitute it. Papers within this line of inquiry will assess the state of the research, describe current studies, their goals, their methodology, the issues faced, and how to address them. Each research project will be illustrated by an A0 poster which will be exhibited throughout the duration of the conference; a separate *poster-session* will also be organised.

REGISTRATION

Those wishing to participate in the conference must fill out a registration form and send it to ephemera.geneva.2022@gmail.com. It is necessary to indicate the title of the paper and include an abstract (no longer than 1500 characters, spaces included), as well as a brief biography (roughly 500 characters, spaces included).

Deadlines

The submission deadline for proposals is 15.02.2021. The organisational committee will make a selection of the received proposals and contact the individuals concerned throughout March 2021. Following this, speakers will receive an email with instructions concerning the registration fee.

Inscription fees

The registration fee amounts to 120 Swiss francs. Speakers who are still undergoing their doctoral studies will be charged 80 Swiss francs. All travel costs including air and hotel accommodations are the responsibility of the attendee.

PRESENTATIONS

The presentations must not be longer than **20 minutes**. Following each presentation, 10 minutes will be allocated to discussion.

Works will be mainly in **French** and in **English**. Presentations in **other languages** will also be accepted as long as the presentation support (which is in this case obligatory) is provided in either French or English. This includes PPTs, paper hand-outs, etc.

PUBLICATION

The organisational committee plans to publish the works presented during the conference in the form of a collective volume, evaluated with a double-blind peer review procedure.

TRAVEL AND ACCOMMODATION

A list of hotel suggestions will be shared in a second communication.

Direction

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