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The Centre for Critical Thought is pleased to announce the first of our 2022 events:

University of Kent

Galathea's copyright

Rousseau and the 'battle of the booksellers'

Sotirios Paraschas (Athens)

Wednesday, 19 January 2022
17h00-18h00 | Online event: via zoom

In the twenty-first century, the idea that a literary work contains the 'soul' of its creator is seen by literary critics as an outdated cliché associated with biographical criticism and is evoked in legal discourse as a figure for the personalist conception of authorial rights. The dramatization of this metaphor in Rousseau's Pygmalion, a brief work written for the stage in 1762 has been exclusively read from an aesthetic point of view; in making the sculptor himself (rather than Venus) animate the statue of Galathea by offering her a piece of his soul, Rousseau is presenting his protagonist as a genius, echoing contemporary aesthetic debates on the role of the artist and his relation to his work. In this paper, I shall argue that Rousseau's Pygmalion can also be read alongside the contemporary legal debate on the relation between author and work that leads to the 1777 decrees on the regulation of the book trade; I shall attempt to place Rousseau's dramatization of the metaphor of the soul within the context of its uses in eighteenth-century aesthetic and legal texts as well as within the context of Rousseau's own publishing practices and his relations with his publishers.



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