

Current notions of authority are based on paper-based materials, especially books. What it means to author a work depends, at least in part, on the genre and the medium in which it is expressed. (Who is the 'author' of a movie? Of a videogame?) As multimedia and hypertext materials gain in importance, authorship--and thus notions of authority--are changing. These changes are not unprecedented. Past communication revolutions serve as an example for the current, ongoing shift to electronic media. This paper will discuss how modern notions of authorship stem from the fifteenth-century communication shift.

By preserving and distributed a fixed text, the printing press created the opportunity for modern authorship. "Until it became possible to distinguish between composing a poem and reciting one, or writing a book and copying one... how could modern games of books and authors be played?"(Eisenstein, 121). Oral transmission and hand-copying could not preserve a text in fixed form. Works that went unrecited or uncopied vanished; as Eisenstein notes, those that remained were, "altered by copying, or--if truly memorable--be carried by oral transmission and assigned ultimately to 'anon.'"(Eisenstein, 122).

While the notion of author predates the printing press, notions of authorship have changed since the 1300's when St. Bonaventure described an author as a man who "writes both his own work and others' but with his own work in principal place adding others' for purposes of confirmation" (St. Bonaventure as quoted by Burrow 615). Medieval writers did not strive for a unique authorial voice, instead, as Chaytor reports, style was based on the "rules and precepts" (Chaytor 49) appropriate to each genre.

Bonaventure's contemporary Boccacci sends his *De casibus virorum illustrium* with abandon:

"While reading it do not disdain to correct whatsoever is not fitting. Then, when it shall seem well, share it with your friends, and finally send it forth to the public under your name.'" (Boccaccio, letter to Maghinardo dei Cavalcanti, as quoted in Root p418-9)

As the medieval period yielded to the age of the printing press, authors' desire for individuality and personal fame seems to have been increased. As the communication shift to electronic media continues, we would do well to attend to the changing notion of authorship. I can see no better way to start than by examining this rich history.

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