Lecture 11: early mod authorship and the case of Montaigne (1533-92)

I. Barthes and Foucault

• Roland Barthes (1915-80): author is dead, just study works; Michel Foucault (1926-84) responds (abridged in your reader). “Author function”: legal role; exists only for certain kinds of texts; problems of attributing a work to an author

• An old question: Bonaventure (1217-74):
  “For an understanding of the things said, it must be noted, that fourfold is the manner of making a book. For one writes another's (words), by adding and/or changing nothing; and that one is called merely a writer. Another writes another's (words), by adding, but not from his own; and that one is called a compiler. Another writes both his own words and another's, but the other's as the principal ones, and his own as those annexed for evidence; and that one is called a commentator, not an author. Another writes both his own and another's, but his own as the principal ones, the other's as things annexed for confirmation; and such ought to be called an author.” Commentaries on Peter Lombard’s Sentences, questions on the foreword, question IV ‘What is the efficient cause or author of this book?’

Translation from http://www.franciscan-archive.org/bonaventura/opera/bon01014.html

II. Social origins of Italian authors, 1450-1550

From Brian Richardson, Printing, Writers and Readers in Renaissance Italy (1999)

• No very great changes: courtier (23% in 1450 to 39% in 1550), teacher, lawyer, cleric and merchant. Other (incl. Printer-publishers, women): from 13% to 26%

• But print as incentive to write: potential for financial and social rewards

III. Montaigne

• New family: noblesse de robe risen from wine merchant family
• Essays: I (1580) and II (1582)=A, III (1588)=B, after 1588=C published in 1595 (posthumously by Marie de Gournay, his “fille d’alliance”)

• A new genre, self-reflexive, changing in each edition (and print run)

See George Hoffmann, Montaigne’s Career (1998)

Montaigne and his printer, Simon Millanges of Bordeaux

• A cost-splitting venture roughly 50-50 (Montaigne ordered paper)
• Millanges’ business: attraction of the new work (protection!)
• The rhythm of revised editions to match schedule of privileges

Montaigne as proofreader

Montaigne as author

• Secretaries (cf. Erasmus); composition by dictation

• Streams of quotations, explicit or not, from ancient sources; grouped on a theme of Montaigne’s often surprising formulation
• Ambivalent relation to commonplaces
  Montaigne’s library: “solitude”; for reading and writing; for inspiration: murals and ceiling sentences