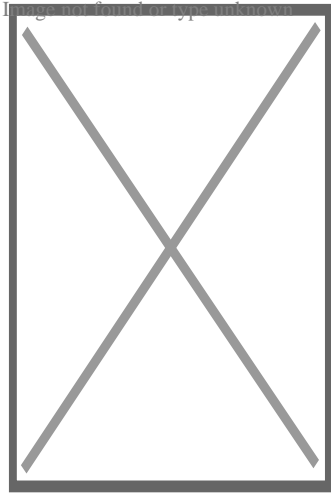


Timothy Laquintano. Mass Authorship and the Rise of Self-Publishing



Timothy Laquintano. [*Mass Authorship and the Rise of Self-Publishing*](#). Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 2016. xi, 243p. ISBN 9781609384456. US\$ 25.00 (paperback).

Over the past 20 years, scholars, public intellectuals, parents, and teachers have fretted over the impact of the computer and other digital technologies that have transformed reading. Of course, the computer has also changed the way we write, edit, and share texts as well as the ways that we locate and purchase them. And, as Timothy Laquintano explains in *Mass Authorship and the Rise of Self-Publishing*, digital tools have completely transformed publishing by making it quicker, easier, cheaper, and far more accessible. Changes in the publishing landscape carry a number of consequences for contemporary readers and writers, and it is easy to imagine the lamentations of scholars as they reckon with those consequences. Rather than bemoaning the proliferation of mediocre books or scoffing at the talents of the men and women who self-publish, though, Laquintano examines the motivations and successes of self-publishers, reports on the benefits and drawbacks of self-publication, and comes to grips with the meaning of authorship and publishing in the digital age.

Laquintano spends most of his book explaining the process of self-publication and dissociating it from vanity publishing, which remains infamous for preying on novice authors and saddling them with debts and unsellable books. New forms of self-publishing, by contrast, are available within digital environments and enable authors to target (mostly) niche audiences anxious to read in particular forms and genres. To highlight the importance of audience and form, Laquintano focuses his research on fictional romance novels and non-fiction poker manuals, though he also examines memoirs and “indie” fiction as genres particularly well-adapted for self-publication. By evaluating the publications and the locations in which they are published and discussed (the writing sites Wattpad and Smashwords, Amazon, chat rooms and discussion boards inhabited by poker players and romance writers/readers), Laquintano gives readers an in-depth look at different writing/publishing/reading communities. He peppers his chapters with author interviews, data on book costs and sales, and descriptions of the techniques self-publishers use to gain recognition, remuneration, and even renown. As Laquintano explains, self-publishers working in digital environments accept many of the standards maintained by commercial publishers, and members of their reading communities monitor and enforce

those standards. For example, self-publishers and their readers function as gatekeepers by offering thoughtful reviews and evaluations of books; readers consistently monitor new texts for plagiarism and alert community members if publications have been stolen or given away for free. And, just like commercial publishers, self-publishers spend a lot of time managing pricing and advertising so that they can attract new readers.

Mass Authorship is one of the first books to treat self-publishing in the United States in this or any other century, and Laquintano performs the difficult work of theorizing self-publication. When he moves beyond theory and historical context, though, he focuses on e-books and niche genres, which limits the applicability of his research. Moreover, even though Laquintano shares anecdotal data on costs and sales, his book is rooted in qualitative research and, as such, reads more like an ethnography of self-publishers and an examination of their platforms than an analysis of self-publishing as an economic endeavor.

These minor quibbles set the stage for future research by other critics, but all of those critics will have to reckon with Laquintano's outstanding work in *Mass Publishing*. This book should find engaged audiences among SHARPists interested in contemporary publishing, e-books and digital platforms, and the changing nature of authorship and the book itself.

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Date Created

08/10/2017