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Seventeenth-Century Female Author Portraits, Or, The Company She Keeps

Abstract: Looking at examples of author portrait frontispieces from the mid- and late seventeenth century in English books offers illumination on the nature of the relationship between author, image, and text in print culture, which, in turn, may coincide with issues raised about the circulation of these items in new media today. The use of the image of the author in these earlier texts also foregrounds questions pertinent to readers then and now: what need or desire does seeing the face of the author fulfill for the reader and who ultimately controls the author's physical image? This essay looks at the use of women writers' portraits in the context of a larger shift in the representation of the author from that found in posthumous editions, which serve as monuments to the departed through classical allusion and styling, to images that are contemporary and display the writer's individuality, inviting a sense of intimacy and creating for the author an aura of celebrity.