

---

H-France Review Vol. 13 (July 2013), No. 114

Alistair Rolls and Marie-Laure Vuaille-Barcan, eds., *Masking Strategies: Unwrapping the French Paratext*. Oxford and New York: Peter Lang, 2011. viii + 194 pp. \$58.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-3-0343-746-8.

Review by Gerald Prince, University of Pennsylvania.

This collection of essays explores the nature, function, and functioning of the paratext, which Gérard Genette characterized in *Seuils* as the set of elements surrounding the text and added to it by the author, but also by other agents like editors or publishers. The paratext comprises the peritext, which includes titles and subtitles, dedications and epigraphs, forewords, afterwords, and blurbs, as well as the epitext, which includes other elements in the history of the text: authorial letters about the latter, private diaries, press releases, interviews, and so on. Focusing on fiction and non-fiction, on theater, on poetry, the contributors not only examine how the paratext is used to promote a book or a writer, but also how it aligns a text with certain generic paradigms and how it governs the reader's encounter with the work and interpretation. They also interrogate the relationship between central text and peripheral paratext as well as expose the porosity of the border between them. Finally, they shed light on paratextual practices like translation, which Genette had put aside (along with serialization and illustration).

Specifically, after a self-referential introduction in which Alistair Rolls and Murray Pratt draw an outline of the collection and emphasize the idea of the paratext as a zone which is both part of the text and distinct from it, David Gascoigne, in a lucid and suggestive essay, studies a work entirely composed of paratextual elements, Paul Fournel's *Banlieue*, and shows the way it foregrounds the strategies and effects of paratextual material and the way it evokes the tension between text and paratext. Gemma Le Mesurier uses Stendhal's *Armance* to point out how, by disbelieving the author's information about textual meaning, the reader can experience a well-known work anew. Focusing on *Piège nuptial*, the second translation into French of David Kennedy's *The Dead Heart*, Alistair Rolls argues that it appeals to the public through its disguise as a French novel. Similarly, Marie-Laure Vuaille-Barcan provides an interesting account of the paratextual elements exploited to establish David Kennedy in the French literary system. Through an analysis of Frédéric Beigbeder's *99 francs* and *L'Egoïste romantique*, Murray Pratt outlines the author's problematization of paratextual processes. Hélène Jaccopard, in a clear and patient piece, examines the covers of Yasmina Reza's "*Art*" and their contribution to that famous play's status as a classic. In another careful paper on book covers, Jean Fornasiero and John West-Sooby concentrate on the ways French translations of Australian crime novels—e.g. Barry Maitland's *The Marx Sisters*, Shane Maloney's *Something Fishy*, Peter Temple's *Broken Shore*—are assimilated into a distinctively French generic visual model. Likewise, Françoise Grauby looks at the covers as well as the front pages and prefaces of French writing manuals in order to reflect upon the latter's didactic aims and intended readership. Finally, in their postface, Alistair Rolls and Marie-Laure Vuaille-Barcan challenge common views about paratextual boundaries by arguing that works like Louis-Ferdinand Céline's *Voyage au bout de la nuit*, Raymond Queneau's *Zazie dans le métro*, Jean-Paul Sartre's *La Nausée*, and Jacques Prévert's *Paroles* extend the paratext into the text.

Some of the arguments deployed—on *Armance*'s *bonhomie*, for instance, or on Sartre's fear of the blank page (pp. 39-40, 173)—may be less than compelling; and, at times, Gérard Genette, who practiced a supple kind of structuralism (a *structuralisme ouvert*) is made to be more rigid and more naive than he was

(e.g., pp. 4-5, 86). One may also regret the absence of papers on illustration or serialization. But the collection as a whole stimulates thinking about the nature of the paratext (how, for example, is it different not only from text, but also from context?) and it represents a valuable contribution to understanding the play of textuality.

## LIST OF ESSAYS

Alistair Rolls and Murray Pratt, "Introduction: Unwrapping the French Paratext"

David Gascoigne, "Paratext Rules OK"

Gemma Le Mesurier, "Reading Against the Author: Layers of Impotence in Stendhal's *Armance*"

Alistair Rolls, "The Striptease at the Dead Heart of Douglas Kennedy's *Piège nuptial* or How to be a bit French around the Edges"

Marie-Laure Vuaille-Barcan, "Douglas Kennedy or an American in Paris: Paratextual Strategies and 'Acclimatization' of the Translated Text"

Murray Pratt, "'Un jeu avec le je': Frédéric Beigbeder and the Value of the Authorial Paratext"

Hélène Jacquard, "The Paratext of Yasmina Reza's *Art*: Overflowing the Image"

Jean Fornasiero and John West-Sooby, "Covering Up: Translating the Art of Australian Crime Fiction in to French"

Françoise Grauby, "Writing (Learning about): French Writing Manuals and the Peritext"

Alistair Rolls and Marie-Laure Vuaille-Barcan, "Postface: Paratextuality, Self-Alterity and the Becoming-Text"

Gerald Prince

University of Pennsylvania

[gprince@babel.ling.upenn.edu](mailto:gprince@babel.ling.upenn.edu)

Copyright © 2013 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution of individual reviews for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and the location of the review on the H-France website. The Society for French Historical Studies reserves the right to withdraw the license for edistribution/republication of individual reviews at any time and for any specific case. Neither bulk redistribution/ republication in electronic form of more than five percent of the contents of H-France Review nor re-publication of any amount in print form will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of H-France. The views posted on H-France Review are not necessarily the views of the Society for French Historical Studies.

ISSN 1553-9172