
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 Jaccomard, 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 Fornasier 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"

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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"

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