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978-0-521-11739-5 — Renaissance Paratexts
Edited by Helen Smith , Louise Wilson
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Introduction

Helen Smith and Louise Wilson

This introduction is a paratext. It is not the first paratext you have encountered in your approach to this book. You will have noticed its title, and registered its scholarly cover, either on the bookshelf or in a digital reproduction by an internet seller like Amazon or Abebooks. You may have found this volume through a series of epitexts: a review, a publisher's flyer, or a search of a library catalogue or online database. Perhaps you followed a footnote in someone else's work or a reference in a bibliography, or one of the contributors was shameless in promoting his or her chapter to you over coffee at a conference. A passage or pithy sentence may have been quoted in another text, persuading you this volume might be worth consulting. Some readers may never even reach this point, merely checking the copyright information on the flyleaf to create a catalogue entry or fill out a meretricious bibliographical note.

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However you have responded to the paratexts of this book, you are one of a long line of readers, all of whom have paid attention, wittingly or

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unwittingly, to the physical presentation of the text, and to the various additional or supplementary texts, information, and addresses which surround it. Perhaps the best-known reader of these apparently marginal spaces is Gérard Genette, the scholar whose work brought the term 'paratexts' into critical use. Genette's influential 1987 book *Seuils* was translated into English in 1997 under the title *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*.[1] The book proclaims itself to be an 'inventory' (3) of the 'verbal or other productions' (1) that affect a reader's approach to the text, and it examines and tabulates an array of liminal forms. In his analysis, Genette distinguishes between features like titles, dedications, and footnotes which are situated within the same volume as the text, which he calls peritexts, and epitexts: 'those messages that, at least originally, are located outside the book' (5) and include author interviews, letters, and diaries. Where previous generations of scholars have seen paratexts as primarily informational, providing concrete detail about the text and its origins, Genette argues that they should be read as transactional. He describes the paratext as 'a privileged place of pragmatics and a strategy of an influence on the public, an influence that – whether well or poorly understood and achieved – is at the service of a better reception of the text and a more pertinent reading' (2). The purpose of the paratext is, according to Genette, to guide the reader into the riches of the book, and to structure his or her approach to what s/he is about to read.

The present volume is at once a response to, and an extension of, Genette's wide-ranging taxonomy. It has become a critical commonplace to suggest that Genette's survey of paratextual possibilities is insufficiently attentive to historical difference and change. Genette raises this objection himself, explaining 'that it is appropriate to define objects before one studies their evolution' (13). The synchronic approach of *Paratexts* is in part a result of Genette's structuralist background; *Paratexts* is the final volume of Genette's trilogy on transtextual poetics, coming after *The Architext* (1979) and *Palimpsests* (1982). It is thus a late stage in Genette's project to generate a 'general poetics of transtextuality' which accounts for intertextuality in a transcendent way, incorporating all relations within and between texts and between texts and their readers.[2] This emphasis on poetics exposes Genette's focus on the linguistic elements of the book, an attention that Jerome McGann argues is too limited, since, he points out, 'texts . . . are embodied phenomena, and the body of the text is not exclusively linguistic'.[3] A number of the chapters in this volume engage with early modern books as objects which are visible as well as legible. All are aware of the book as an object which is handled by particular readers, and whose

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physicality is constructed through the processes and operations of the printing house.

Renaissance Paratexts reveals the importance of investigating the particular paratextual conventions in play in different historical periods. As Genette makes clear, some paratexts 'are as old as literature; others came into being – or acquired their official status, after centuries of "secret life" that constitute their prehistory – with the invention of the book; others, with the birth of journalism and the modern media' (14). A number of the paratexts we listed at the beginning of this introduction are strikingly modern, particularly those made possible by computer technologies. Others, including the author interview and the review, developed alongside the periodical industry from the eighteenth century onwards.[4] A few are much older than the printed codex. Most, however, came into being in the period with which this volume is concerned, following the invention of printing in around 1436, and the corresponding development of the book into the forms which are familiar to us today.

The early modern book differed from modern volumes in a number of important ways, not least in its construction. Working from manuscript copy, a compositor would pick letters from the upper and lower cases before him, and arrange them in a composing stick, from which they were transferred to a wooden forme. Another worker used leather-covered balls to coat the finished forme with ink. It was then placed in the bed of the press, and the paper was pulled on to it to create an impression. The completed sheets were dried in the printer's warehouse, and stacked. They were then folded: once to make a large-format folio, twice to make a smaller quarto, and three times to produce an octavo. Some books were even smaller: in 1614 John Taylor, the 'Water Poet', issued the first edition of his one-and-a-quarter by one-and-an-eighth inch 64mo thumb bible.[5]

Some paratexts, like printers' flowers (small type ornaments) and running titles, were an essential part of the printing process, locked into a skeleton forme to frame the text they accompanied. Composing sticks had moveable 'cheeks' which could be adjusted to create space for printed marginal annotations. Others, including dedications, addresses to the reader, indices, and errata notices, were generally printed separately and added to the work at the end. This physical and temporal separation allows many early modern paratexts to be highly self-reflexive, commenting on the quality of printing contained in the book they accompany, or on the processes and accidents of production. George Chapman, for example, closed an elegant address 'To the vnderstander' (or, according to its running title, 'the reader') by boasting of his pride in the quality of his translation of Homer, and disarming

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potential criticism by shifting the blame for any flaws on to the printer, confessing, 'Onely the extreame false printing troubles my conscience, for feare of your deserued discouragement in the empaire of our Poets sweetnes'.[6]

Printers sometimes employed their own binders, while on other occasions books were sold unbound, and the purchaser took the loose sheets to a binder. The binder relied heavily on paratexts, particularly the signatures and catchwords that appear at the foot of early modern pages, to guide him or her in constructing the book. Thus early modern paratexts had a variety of functions, and prompted very different readings, some literary or hermeneutic, some practical and physical. Book purchasers could choose to have their books bound individually or to have a number of texts collected into one volume, along topical, generic, or material lines, meaning that each text became a new peritext to its companions. Many early modern paratextual authors seem to have been alert to the fact that it is a volume's margins and framing devices which, as Genette asserts, both make it a book, rather than a text or fragment, and allow it to present or announce itself as such (1). As the Puritan divine and botanist William Turner admitted as he prepared his 1568 *Herbal* for the press:

> The Printer had geuen me warninge / there wanted nothinge to the settinge oute of my hole Herbal / saving only a Preface / wherein I might require some both mighty and learned Patron to defend my laboures against spitefull & enuious enemies to al mennis doynges sauing their owne / and declare my good minde to him that I am most bound unto by dedicating and geuing these my poore labours unto him.[7]

The dedication which follows, in which Dr Turner expends many words in praise of the 'great man' Queen Elizabeth's linguistic ability and 'Princelye liberalitie', risks being undermined at its very beginning by the author's admission that it is a last-minute addition, included at the insistence of his printer.

The proliferation and movement of paratextual features during the early modern period established many of the conventions of the physical book that we still experience today. The range of features which did not survive (including the printer's or author's address to the reader), or which appeared in a multiplicity of forms, however, also suggests, as Jason Scott-Warren argues in this volume, that the journey of the book towards its current conventional presentation was not an inevitable progress, teleologically driven to create an ever more streamlined reading experience. The books of the early modern period offer the reader a range of paratexts, many not listed by Genette, which make it clear that the history of the paratext is as

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much one of obstacles and communicative failures as it is one of clarity and reader-management. In *Reading Material in Early Modern England*, Heidi Brayman Hackel reproduces a moment from a dialogue between two model students who occupy the pages of Edmund Coote's *The English schoole-maister* (1596). One declares: 'by your leaue we shall first reade ouer againe all that we haue learned, with the preface, titles of the chapters, and notes in the margent of our bookes, which we omitted before, because they were too hard'.[8] For Hackel, this is evidence that readers did pay attention to the paratextual furniture of the book; it also suggests that paratextual reading could be seen as a more difficult, and more advanced, skill than the ability to read the text itself.

It is not only its primary resources that make the early modern period particularly relevant to a study of paratexts. In recent years, Renaissance scholars have increasingly turned their attention to the material make-up of the text, driven, to varying degrees, by a re-engagement with questions of editorial practice; by the bibliographical demands of the burgeoning field of book history; and by a more general attention to material culture and 'thing theory'.[9] Following in the footsteps of Jerome McGann, who insists on the need to interpret bibliographic as well as linguistic codes, researchers have shown themselves to be increasingly sensitive to the physicality of the printed word and its manuscript counterpart, and to the structures and meanings conveyed by the book as object, rather than the book as text. Notably, Seth Lerer has examined the hermeneutic practices encouraged by the inclusion of errata lists in early modern printed books; William Slights and Evelyn Tribble have surveyed printed marginalia; Thomas Corns and Peter Stallybrass have interrogated technologies of marking place; Ann Blair has focused on the politics of the index; and Anthony Grafton has offered a magisterial history of the footnote.[10]

In *The Commodification of Textual Engagements in the English Renaissance*, Michael Saenger argues that we should read front matter as inherently commercial in its engagements, while Hackel suggests that prefatory letters should be read as texts which 'define and shape' the reading experience.[11] Perhaps the most sustained engagement with 'the envelope or packaging' of a particular early modern text has emerged from the recent project, led by Terence Cave, to chart 'the paratexts, those ephemeral materials that carry [More's] *Utopia* over the threshold into new cultural contexts and which therefore provide a rich repertory of signs indicating what was at stake in that act of *translatio*'.[12] The *Utopia* project, which catalogues and describes the various paratexts of More's book as it moved across early modern Europe and between languages, allows us to grasp the

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extent to which paratextual materials work both outwards, altering the contexts and possibilities of the book's reception, and inwards, transforming not only the appearance but the priorities and tone of the text.

Genette and his successors have, as William Sherman points out in this volume, tended to focus their attention on those peritexts that open the book, collapsing the paratextual into the prefatory. Genette's account, though it does include some median details, including running heads and footnotes, overwhelmingly privileges front matter over the other spaces and surrounds of the printed book. This concentration is perhaps a result of his insistence that the paratext is above all functional, designed to 'ensure for the text a destiny consistent with the author's purpose' (407). We discuss the question of authorial intention below, but it seems clear that it is easier to extract an author's apparent design from the explicit instructions of the preface or dedication, or even from the title or epigraph, than from, for example, a terse envoi.

One result of Genette's emphasis on the paratext's preparatory function, however, is that the liminal space which should be a two-way zone of passage takes on a one-way function, becoming 'an instrument of adaptation' that 'helps the reader pass without too much respiratory difficulty from one world to the other' (408). This reading is reinforced by Genette's endlessly inventive metaphors for a book's paratext, which is variously described as an airlock, a canal lock (408), or, most famously, a threshold (2), all spaces which can be traversed in two directions, but which, in Genette's formulations, are seen to have a purely acclimatising, one-way function. In contrast, Genette's alternative metaphor of the paratext as a 'fringe' (2) better suggests its presence at each moment of reading: like the fringe of a rug, paratexts are the visible ends of constitutive structures that run throughout the length of the work, but that can also be perceived as distinct elements.[13] As several of the chapters in the present volume show, paratextual elements are in operation all the way through the reader's experience of the text, not merely at the start, and they continuously inform the process of reading, offering multiple points of entry, interpretation, and contestation.

If Genette's threshold is 'a "vestibule" that offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back' (2), the Renaissance paratext is an ever-expanding labyrinth, as likely to lead to a frustrating dead-end as to a carefully built pathway, or to deposit the reader back outside the building rather than guide him or her into the text. Even properly liminal paratexts, including indices and addresses to the reader, operate in multiple directions, structuring the reader's approach not only to

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the text in question but to the experience of reading, and of interpreting the world beyond the book. In its situation as a space which both frames and inhabits the text, the paratext occupies the position of Derrida's *parergon*: 'neither work (*ergon*) nor outside the work [*hors d'œuvre*], neither inside nor outside, neither above nor below, it disconcerts any opposition but does not remain indeterminate and it *gives rise* to the work. It is no longer merely around the work.'[14]

In a variety of ways, the chapters which follow reach out to the world beyond the book, in line with Genette's inclusive assertion that 'in principle, every context [including historical period] serves as a paratext' (8). Neil Rhodes and Hester Lees-Jeffries investigate the ways in which spatial, geographic, patronage and kinship connections function as a series of interconnecting interpretative sites. In a rather different move, Wendy Wall and Jason Scott-Warren examine the ways in which paratexts structured the mental worlds of their readers, creating particular ways of responding not only to other printed books but to the contexts and social structures within which they were read. Paratexts do, as Genette suggests, shape our approach to the books we are reading. They also work upon our imagination, structuring our ways of thinking about the world.

Writing three years apart, both John Earle and Francis Lenton drew on paratextual metaphors to describe shopkeepers. Earle explained: 'His Shop is his well-stuft Booke, and himselfe the Title-page of it, or Index. Hee vtters much to all men, though he sels but to a few, and intreats for his owne necessities by asking others what they lacke.'[15] Two modes of accessing the contents of a book – the index and the title-page – are here presented as fundamentally interchangeable, serving both to catalogue and advertise the contents of the volume they accompany. Lenton (who may well have been influenced by Earle's earlier publication) engaged in similar terms with the figure of the woman sempster, suggesting: 'Shee is very neatly spruc'd vp and placed in the frontispiece of her shop, of purpose, (by her curious habit) to allure some Custome, which still encreaseth and decreaseth as her beauty is in the full, or the wane'.[16] These examples suggest the extent to which the paratextual architecture of the printed codex became an available metaphor for social and commercial life. In her chapter below, Wendy Wall goes further, allowing us to suggest that this metaphor may in fact be a submerged structure of thought, creating, in her terms, an 'indexical . . . imagination': a way of approaching the world which is structured by the physical forms in which it is described.

The chapters in this volume are united by their challenge to Genette's repeated assertion that the meaning and function of the paratext are

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determined by 'the author and his allies' (2), and that paratexts operate as a way of establishing and securing authorial intention. 'By definition', Genette argues, 'something is not a paratext unless the author or one of his associates accepts responsibility for it' (9). Features such as reviews, as well as some of the elements discussed in this volume, including bindings and collections, and manuscript annotations (a common, and often illuminating, feature of early printed books), are thus, for Genette, excluded from 'the paratext, which is characterized by an authorial intention and assumption of responsibility' (3).[17] Recently, however, scholars of the early modern period have questioned the historical authority of the author, arguing that textual production was a substantially more collaborative process than is assumed by post-Romantic notions of the solitary genius.[18] The identification of an authorial presence, critics argue, is an ideological product of the impulse to establish intellectual property, and authorial rights in, as well as responsibilities for, particular texts.[19]

Genette himself recognises that 'the invention of the printed book did not impose this particular paratextual element (the name of the author) as quickly and firmly as it imposed certain others' (37), and the lack of an authorial name, or its subordination to the name of a patron or playing company, on many early modern title-pages should alert us to the dispersed and fragmentary nature of authorial control in the period. Arthur Marotti suggests that paratexts are zones where multiple, and sometimes competing, authorities and sources are the norm, describing each piece of prefatory matter as 'a site of contestation and negotiation among authors, publishers / printers, and readership(s)'.[20] Recent scholarship, particularly on early modern dramatic publication, tends to place paratextual and other decisions firmly in the domain of the printer. Zachary Lesser, for example, reads prefatory material as a revelation of printerly, rather than authorial, intentions and political, religious, or literary affiliations.[21] The relative autonomy of many early modern printers allows us to contest Genette's assumption that the publisher (a term which does not strictly apply to members of the early modern book trade; the equivalent figure would most often be the bookseller)[22] is necessarily one of the author's 'allies', equally committed to the clear explication of the singular meaning which informs the text. An 'advertisement to the Reader' at the end of Henry Burton's 1636 *A divine tragedie lately acted* illustrates the possible discrepancy between authorial desire and printed reality, asking the 'covrteovs reader':

Be pleased to understand, that thorow some oversight at the presse, the foregoing Examples are not orderly placed. Indeed it was the authors minde that they should

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have beene otherwise to wit, 1. 2. 3. and so all the rest, in order one after another, as they are numbred in the booke, and to this end gave direction, but the same was not considered of these who were imployed for the printing, untill it was to [*sic*] late. Now this we thought good to certifie thee of, that so the mistake may be imputed, to the parties deserving it, and not to the Author, who is blamelesse herein.[23]

The physical appearance of the page is, in this instance, revealed to be explicitly opposed to the author's intentions and to the clearer explication of his meaning.

Several of the chapters in this volume engage, explicitly or implicitly, with the question of authorial engagement in paratextual decisions, and the detailed unpicking of particular peritextual moments by Sonia Massai, Matthew Day, and Juliet Fleming reveals a more complex picture either than Genette's assumption of authorial intention, or than Lesser's attribution of these features to the productive matrix of the printing house. A number of the essays which follow investigate paratexts often assumed to be printerly (imprints, printers' flowers, running titles, corrections) and argue that they may, at times, be determined by the author or by a collaborative impulse, while elements we might assume to be authorial, particularly prefatory addresses, are revealed to be the product of printing-house agents or practice. Moreover, many of these chapters further illuminate Stephen Orgel's insight that the early modern book was unfinished even in its printed form. He insists that 'the purchasers of early modern books were much more actively involved in their materialisation', choosing a particular binding, ordering the contents, and, perhaps most importantly, writing in their pages.[24]

Some marginal annotations were enactments of authorial desire: Henry Burton begged the reader to 'correct' 'the mistakes and omissions of the Printers' 'with thy pen'.[25] Other readers created less obviously sanctioned paratexts for their books: paratexts which cannot be assumed to be in any straightforward sense authorial, but which often contribute decisively to interpretation, or offer a new context for our understanding of the social life and significance of the text. The title-page of the Huntington Library copy of William Turner's *Herbal*, for example, bears the inscription: 'A sincer testimonie off Cap Wil: Shay his reall affection too his approued frind Maistre Tailzoure appothecarie in Yorrk. 1643.'[26] Where Turner had used his printed dedication to emphasise the general benefit of his *Herbal*, as well as the intellectual skills necessary to appreciate it, Shay's inscription highlights the practical utility of the book to a member of the medical profession, as well as its symbolic value as a gift expressive of the friendship

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between a soldier and an apothecary within the northern Royalist stronghold of York. The sense of early modern paratexts as an expanding and ongoing category of engagement is central to this volume, and poses a vigorous challenge to Genette's restrictive definitions.

What John Jowett describes as 'the innovative fluidity of a stage of emergence'[27] that characterises the overlapping functions of authors, editors, printers, and readers in the early modern period also disrupts Marie Maclean's distinction between the fictive world of the text and the 'real' world of the paratext. For Maclean, drawing on speech-act theory:

> The paratexts involve a series of first order illocutionary acts in which the author, the editor, or the prefacer are frequently using direct performatives. They are informing, persuading, advising, or indeed exhorting and commanding the reader. On the other hand the world of the fictional text is one of second order speech acts where even the most personal of narrators belongs not to the real world but to the represented world.[28]

The chapters collected here suggest that this division is untenable; both text and paratext operate at the level of representation, and even the most direct of exhortations to the reader is in some sense second order, engaged in the construction of one represented world even as it promises to interpret another. Seth Lerer gives an example of the fictional status of the most apparently directional of paratexts when, speaking of errata sheets, he suggests that 'the need to narrativize the story of . . . errors – to offer up a personal history of detection and correction – makes the true subject of the early humanist book not so much its content but the complex relationships among textual and political fealty that write the history of its own production'.[29]

In the first chapter of this collection, Helen Smith constructs a similar argument, turning her attention to the apparently straightforward space of the imprint: the details of publisher and place that appear at the front of nearly every early modern printed book. By engaging with a series of fake and fictionalised imprints, Smith unspools the range of meanings and different versions of authority contained within this seemingly informational space, and suggests that a careful reading of the early modern imprint can inform our sense not only of the mechanics of print production, or the negotiations between author, printer, and reader, but of the ways in which book agents and their readers constructed their own place within the world of the book, and within the early modern city. Matthew Day examines another neglected, and informational, paratext – the running title – and discovers that running titles are often discursive, polemical, and refreshingly

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