

Cambridge University Press

0521413508 - Gerard Genette *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*

Translated by Jane E. Lewin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Paratexts are those liminal devices and conventions, both within and outside the book, that form part of the complex mediation between book, author, publisher, and reader: titles, forewords, epigraphs, and publishers' jacket copy are part of a book's private and public history. In *Paratexts*, an English translation of *Seuils*, Gérard Genette shows how the special pragmatic status of paratextual declarations requires a carefully calibrated analysis of their illocutionary force. With clarity, precision, and an extraordinary range of reference, *Paratexts* constitutes an encyclopedic survey of the customs and institutions of the Republic of Letters as they are revealed in the borderlands of the text. Genette presents a global view of these liminal mediations and the logic of their relation to the reading public by studying each element as a literary function. Richard Macksey's foreword describes how the poetics of paratexts interacts with more general questions of literature as a cultural institution, and situates Genette's work in contemporary literary theory.

Cambridge University Press
0521413508 - Gerard Genette Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation
Translated by Jane E. Lewin
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

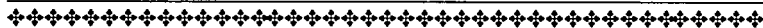
Literature, Culture, Theory 20



Paratexts: thresholds of interpretation

Cambridge University Press
 0521413508 - Gerard Genette Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation
 Translated by Jane E. Lewin
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Literature, Culture, Theory 20



General editors

RICHARD MACKSEY, *The Johns Hopkins University*
 and MICHAEL SPRINKER, *State University of New York at Stony Brook*

The Cambridge *Literature, Culture, Theory Series* is dedicated to theoretical studies in the human sciences that have literature and culture as their object of enquiry. Acknowledging the contemporary expansion of cultural studies and the redefinitions of literature that this has entailed, the series includes not only original works of literary theory but also monographs and essay collections on topics and seminal figures from the long history of theoretical speculation on the arts and human communication generally. The concept of theory embraced in the series is broad, including not only the classical disciplines of poetics and rhetoric, but also those of aesthetics, linguistics, psychoanalysis, semiotics, and other cognate sciences that have inflected the systematic study of literature during the past half century.

Selected series titles

- The subject of modernity
 ANTHONY J. CASCARDI
- Critical conditions: postmodernity and the question of foundations
 HORACE L. FAIRLAMB
- Introduction to literary hermeneutics
 PETER SZONDI
(translated from the German by Martha Woodmansee)
- Anti-mimesis from Plato to Hitchcock
 TOM COHEN
- Mikhail Bakhtin: between phenomenology and Marxism
 MICHAEL F. BERNARD-DONALS
- Poetry, space, landscape: toward a new theory
 CHRIS FITTER
- The object of literature
 PIERRE MACHEREY
(translated from the French by David Macey)
- Rhetoric, sophistry, pragmatism
edited by STEVEN MAILLOUX
- Derrida and autobiography
 ROBERT SMITH
- Novels behind glass: commodity culture and Victorian narrative
 ANDREW H. MILLER
- Kenneth Burke: rhetoric, subjectivity, postmodernism
 ROBERT WESS
- Rhetoric and culture in Lacan
 GILBERT D. CHAITIN

Cambridge University Press

0521413508 - Gerard Genette Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation

Translated by Jane E. Lewin

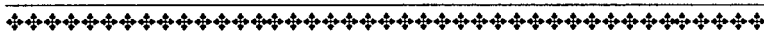
Frontmatter

[More information](#)

G rard Genette

Paratexts

Thresholds of interpretation



Translated by

JANE E. LEWIN

Foreword by

RICHARD MACKSEY



Cambridge University Press
0521413508 - Gerard Genette Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation
Translated by Jane E. Lewin
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

Originally published in French as *Seuils*
by Éditions du Seuil 1987

and © Éditions du Seuil
First published in English by Cambridge University Press 1997 as
Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation
English translation © Cambridge University Press 1997

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress cataloguing-in-publication data applied for

ISBN 0 521 41350 8 hardback
ISBN 0 521 42406 2 paperback

Transferred to digital printing 2001

Cambridge University Press

0521413508 - Gerard Genette Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation

Translated by Jane E. Lewin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Contents

<i>Foreword</i> by Richard Macksey	<i>page</i> xi
<i>List of books</i> by Gérard Genette	xxiii
<i>Translator's note</i>	xxv
1 Introduction	1
2 The publisher's peritext	16
Formats	17
Series	22
The cover and its appendages	23
The title page and its appendages	32
Typesetting, printings	33
3 The name of the author	37
Place	37
Onymity	39
Anonymity	42
Pseudonymity	46
4 Titles	55
Definitions	55
Place	64
Time	66
Senders	73
Addressees	74
Functions	76
Designation	79
Connotations	89
Temptation?	91
Genre indications	94

Contents

5	The please-insert	104
	The four stages	104
	Tangents and appendages	114
6	Dedications and inscriptions	117
	The dedication of the work	117
	Place	126
	Time	127
	Dedicators	129
	Dedicatees	131
	Functions	135
	The inscription of the copy	136
	Place, time	138
	Inscriber, inscribtee	139
	Functions	140
7	Epigraphs	144
	Historical survey	144
	Place, time	149
	The “epigraphed”	150
	Epigraphers	153
	Epigraphtees	155
	Functions	156
8	The prefatorial situation of communication	161
	Definition	161
	Prehistory	163
	Form	170
	Place	172
	Time	174
	Senders	178
	Addressees	194
9	The functions of the original preface	196
	The themes of the why	198
	Importance	199
	Novelty, tradition	200
	Unity	201
	Truthfulness	206
	Lightning rods	207

Contents

The themes of the how	209
Genesis	210
Choice of a public	212
Commentary on the title	213
Contracts of fiction	215
The order in which to read	218
Contextual information	218
Statements of intent	221
Genre definitions	224
Dodges	229
10 Other prefaces, other functions	237
Postfaces	237
Later prefaces	239
Delayed prefaces	247
Allographic prefaces	263
Actorial prefaces	276
Fictional prefaces	277
Disavowing authorial prefaces	280
Fictive authorial prefaces	284
Fictive allographic prefaces	288
Fictive actorial prefaces	291
Mirrors	292
11 Intertitles	294
Cases of absence	295
Degrees of presence	297
Narrative fiction	298
History	309
Didactic texts	311
Collections	312
Tables of contents, running heads	316
12 Notes	319
Definition, place, time	319
Senders, addressees	322
Functions	324
Discursive texts: original notes	325
Discursive texts: later notes	328
Discursive texts: delayed notes	330

Contents

Texts of fiction	332
Allographic notes	337
Actorial notes	339
Fictional notes	340
13 The public epitext	344
Definitions	344
The publisher's epitext	347
The semiofficial allographic epitext	348
The public authorial epitext	351
Auto-reviews	352
Public responses	354
Mediations	356
Delayed autocomentaries	367
14 The private epitext	371
Correspondence	372
Oral confidences	384
Diaries	387
Pre-texts	395
15 Conclusion	404
<i>Additional references</i>	411
<i>Index</i>	419

Foreword

RICHARD MACKSEY

Pausing on the threshold

Read, read, read, read, my unlearned reader! read, – or by the knowledge of the great saint *Paraleipomenon* – I tell you before-hand, you had better throw down the book at once; for without *much reading*, by which your reverence knows, I mean *much knowledge*, you will no more be able to penetrate the moral of the next marbled page (motley emblem of my work!) than the world with all its sagacity has been able to unravel the many opinions, transactions and truths which still lie mystically hid under the dark veil of the black one. Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, III, 36

Laurence Sterne, that pioneer anatomist of the physical body of the book, is offering advice to one of the much put-upon fictive readers of his antic text. What follows is indeed a literal “marbled page,” which by the convention of eighteenth-century binders marks the outermost limits of the text and by the nature of its production is both unique and stylized. Sterne had already presented his reader with his celebrated “black page” marking the innermost and overdetermined limits of the text itself.¹ The marbled page is part of the frame containing both the text itself and all the liminal devices – titles, signs of authorship, dedications, epigraphs, prefaces, notes, intertitles, epilogues, and the like – that mediate the relations between text and reader. As the Russian formalist critic Viktor Shklovsky² long ago pointed out, *Tristram Shandy* “lays bare” the constructional principles of the

¹ Some of Sterne’s commentators claim that “the veil of the black one” refers to Satan. It seems more reasonable, however, to assume the reference is to the “black page” (I, 12). Significantly, the black page, overdetermined to the point of illegibility, is a memorial to Sterne’s alter ego, Yorick.

² “Sterna – Stilistichesky Kommentary” was originally published in Petrograd in 1921 as a monograph; it was reprinted slightly revised in Shklovsky’s brilliant collection, *O teorii prozy* (Moscow, 1929; 2nd edition). For an English version, see *Theory of Prose*, translated by Benjamin Sher (Elmwood Park, IL, 1990).

Cambridge University Press

0521413508 - Gerard Genette Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation

Translated by Jane E. Lewin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Foreword*

novel as genre by a series of devices (*priemy*) that fundamentally disturb the narrative conventions of the book. In the case of the liminal devices or “paratextual” elements, this means the radical dislocation of readerly expectations: dedications and prefaces are scattered within the text (and on one occasion a dedication is put up for sale); notes, glosses, intercalations, and misplaced chapter headings interrupt the conventional diegetic progress of the narrative. The signs of authorship are repeatedly undone: the author (whose name does not appear on the title page of the original edition), the narrator, and the dramatized reader change places; the author’s sermon (intercalated in II, 17) is judged a plagiarism and reattributed to Yorick, a character within the novel, and a name which will eventually become the author’s pseudonym when his own sermons are collected. What Sterne as theorist in jester’s motley invites, with all these dislocations, is a serious reflection on the poetics of the novel. And an important part of this reflection is the function of the elements that surround and contextualize the text. As the present epigraph suggests, this interrogation of the frontiers between the text and its public demands a dedicated reader, in the senses both of one widely read and of one alert to every artful disruption, intrusion, and lacuna (under the patronage of “St. Paraleipomenon”).

G rard Genette, the most intrepid and persistent explorer in our time of the relations between criticism and poetics, is the legitimate inheritor of Sterne’s pioneer enterprise. He shares with Sterne a broad erudition and a sharp eye for the anatomy of discursive practices and narrative strategies. The mordant wit with which he seasons his textual scholasticism is also Shandean in its flavor. Although Genette has long been an authoritative figure in narratological circles, the full compass of his work is probably less well known to the anglophone audience than that of any other major French critic of his generation. Until recently, only a small fraction of his * uvre* has been available in English translation. This relative neglect is not so much a function of any inherent difficulty in his method or style. (Derrida, Barthes, and, *a fortiori*, Blanchot and Lacan present much greater challenges to the translator.) It is not even a matter of the company he has kept, since he has been a key figure among the critics associated with two of the most influential Parisian journals of our era, *Tel quel* and *Po tique*. It remains rather a matter of the vagaries of

Cambridge University Press

0521413508 - Gerard Genette *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*

Translated by Jane E. Lewin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Foreword*

publishing activity and perhaps Genette's stubborn refusal to be easily categorized: he has at various times been called many names – structuralist (both "high" and "low"), narratologist, historian of discursivity, rhetorician, semiotician of style, post-modern poetician, mimologist, transtextualist;³ but throughout his career certain preoccupations and a characteristic rigor have marked all his publications. Thanks in large part to the efforts of Jane E. Lewin, the admirable translator of the present book, six volumes of his work have already appeared in English, but most have been relatively short works. Happily this situation is at last about to be remedied. In addition to *Seuils (Paratexts)*, a translation of one other large volume has just appeared (*Mimologiques*) and another is about to be published (*Palimpsestes*), which will allow his English readers a much more comprehensive survey of Genette's achievement.⁴

His first book, *Figures [I]*, a series of critical essays on subjects ranging from baroque literature to Proust, Valéry, Borges, and Robbe-Grillet, was received in 1966 with considerable critical acclaim. It opened a number of his abiding concerns: the relation of classical rhetoric to contemporary discursive practice, the reciprocations between criticism and poetics, the nature of *littérarité*, the unceasing play between the specific text and the larger literary figuration of which it is a continuous part. His second collection of essays, *Figures II*, appeared three years later and extended his presiding concerns with narrative theory and the poetics of language. In 1972 *Figures III* collected important essays on "Critique et poétique," "Poétique et histoire," "La Rhétorique restreinte," and "Métonymie chez Proust," but the largest part of the book was devoted to an extended narratologic discussion of the syntax of narrative, with Proust as the exemplary text. His systematic analyses of the order, duration, frequency, mood, and voice of narrative structure have become canonical among students of fiction. At the level of applied criticism, *pari passu*, the

³ "Narratology" is a term first coined in 1969 by Genette's colleague and collaborator Tzvetan Todorov. "Mimologist" refers to Genette's "voyage to Cratylusland" in *Mimologiques* and "transtextualist" to his detailed analyses of textual transcendence in his trilogy *Introduction à l'architexte*, *Palimpsestes*, and *Seuils* (the French title of the present work).

⁴ The University of Nebraska Press published a translation of *Mimologiques* [*Mimologics*] by Thais E. Morgan in 1995 and has announced a forthcoming translation of *Palimpsestes* by Channa Newman.

Cambridge University Press

0521413508 - Gerard Genette Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation

Translated by Jane E. Lewin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Foreword*

subtle readings of the case texts, which are at once illustrative of narrative functions and uniquely Proustian in their transgressions, constitute a major contribution to Proust studies. (Jane Lewin translated this section of the book as *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* in 1980.) More than a decade later, in *Nouveau discours du récit* (1983), which he modestly styled “a sort of postscript,” Genette returned to his classic formulation of the fundamental elements of narrative, tightening his definitions, refining the systematic presentation with renewed attention to the connections among the choices of *mood* (“point of view”), *voice* (“person”), and *narrative level* (“embedding”). And throughout, the author replies directly and amusingly to his critics. (Lewin translated this text under the English title of *Narrative Discourse Revisited* in 1988.)

Turning in 1976 to an issue in the poetics of language that had engaged Peirce, Benveniste, Gardiner, Jakobson, and Lévi-Strauss among many others before him, Genette produced an immense study of “cratylism,” of authors since Plato who have questioned the arbitrary nature of the linguistic sign.⁵ With great wit and erudition *Mimologiques* traces the metamorphoses of the debate from its first engagement by Cratylus, Hermogenes, and Socrates through its restaging in the exchanges between Leibniz and Locke in the seventeenth century and the rise of comparative philology in the nineteenth century, to its survival in contemporary linguistic theory. Attending to the cultural as well as epistemological implications of resurgent “Cratylan” arguments, Genette discusses theories of language origins, hieroglyphs, onomatopoeics, mimographisms, mimophonies, and other representational schemes.⁶ Along the way Mallarmé, Valéry, Claudel, Proust, Ponge, and their peers are invited to join the debate.

With a small volume in 1979, *Introduction à l'architexte* (also translated by Lewin), Genette opened a new phase in his mapping of a general poetics. The topology he is exploring here includes the various borderlands between the text and the

⁵ For additional perspectives on the long debate opened by Plato's *Cratylus*, see: Josef Derbolav, *Platons Sprachphilosophie im Kratylos und in den Späteren Schriften* (Darmstadt, 1972), Bernard E. Rollin, *Nature and Conventional Meaning* (The Hague, 1976), and, most recently, Joseph F. Graham's provocative study, *Onomatopoeics: Theory of Language and Literature* (Cambridge, 1992).

⁶ Thus his incisive treatment of Ernest Renan's fierce Eurocentrism and *géomimologie* anticipates by several years Edward Said's discussion in *Orientalism*.

Cambridge University Press

0521413508 - Gerard Genette Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation

Translated by Jane E. Lewin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Foreword*

Republic of Letters, the “outside” to which it relates. He states the project modestly enough in the imaginary interview that concludes the book: “[F]or the moment the text interests me (only) in its *textual transcendence* – namely, everything that brings it into relation (manifest or hidden) with other texts. I call that *trans-textuality* . . .”⁷ This general project will extend his “moment” for almost a decade and include two large succeeding volumes, of which the present book forms the tentative conclusion. The particular form of transcendence that he considers in the *Architexte* is the traditional domain of generic criticism, which Genette extends to include modes of enunciation and types of discourse. He defines the relationship more generally as one “of inclusion that links each text to the various types of discourse it belongs to. Here we have the genres, with their determinations that we’ve already glimpsed: thematic, modal, formal, and other” (82). He thus joins the enterprise initiated by Aristotle in the *Poetics*, a systematic text that Genette seeks to disentangle from a long tradition of wrong-headed readings.⁸

Genette’s transtextual project continued with the publication of *Palimpsestes* in 1982, where he considers what he calls “literature in the second degree.” Here, in the early pages, he redefines and extends his system of transtextualities into a five-part schema (elaborated on below). He then proceeds to consider specifically the relations that he styles “hypertextual.” As his governing image of the palimpsest suggests, these are new texts “written over” older ones, inviting a kind of double reading. The most obvious modern example is Joyce’s *Ulysses* (“hypertext”) superimposed on Homer’s *Odyssey* (“hypotext”), but the relationship covers all forms of imitation, adaptation, parody, and pastiche.⁹ Its incidence can be studied from the most localized cases of stylistic and thematic mirroring to designs on the grandest scale like Joyce’s novel or Mann’s Biblical tetralogy or *Doktor Faustus* (which Mann insisted on calling “parodies”). Borges too is a rich

⁷ *The Architext: An Introduction*, translated by Jane E. Lewin (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1992), 81.

⁸ One of Genette’s significant contributions to contemporary poetics is his rescue of Aristotle from what he sees as a tradition of romantic misreading.

⁹ Of course the hypertextual relationship of *Ulysses* to Homer’s epic is less than obvious without the novelist’s chapter titles, which Joyce suppressed in the published version of the book. Genette works out the complex network of correspondences between the eighteen chapters of the novel and Homer’s original narrative in a detailed diagram; see *Palimpsestes* (Paris, 1982), 356.

Cambridge University Press

0521413508 - Gerard Genette Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation

Translated by Jane E. Lewin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Foreword*

mine of hypertextual games, often intradiegetically: thus before turning to Cervantes, his indefatigable Pierre Menard had undertaken “a transposition of the *Cimetière marin* into alexandrines.” Although some earlier theorists extend the term “intertextuality” to include filiations and reinventions such as these, Genette restricts the older term to the much narrower sense of citational and related uses.

Before considering the present volume, which completes the “transtextual trilogy,” to bring Genette’s publishing itinerary up to date, we should note two more recent books: *Fiction et diction* (1991, translated by Catherine Porter in 1993) and *L’Œuvre de l’art* (1994). The first of these is a series of four essays, that returns to some of his earliest concerns about “literariness,” what it is that makes a text an aesthetic object. But like the volumes of the trilogy it also investigates the unstable frontiers between realms, between the literary and the nonliterary but also between the two modes of “fiction” (which depends for its force on the imaginary nature of what it describes) and “diction” (whose efficacy depends on its formal characteristics). He extends these border distinctions in discussions of how speech acts relate to fictional statements and of the differences between fictional narratives and those based on fact (autobiography, history). The collection concludes with a semiotic definition of style.

And finally, in *L’Œuvre de l’art* Genette announces an ambitious new project that will take him from the domain of poetics to that of general aesthetics, addressing at a higher level of abstraction the status and functions of art. In his title he plays on the double sense of “the work of art” (*l’œuvre d’art*) and “the work of that art-work.” Once again, however, he is concerned with mapping “regimes” or zones of governance, the primary distinction being between those of “immanence” (the type of object of which the work consists) and of “transcendence” (the various ways in which a work exceeds or “overflows” this immanence). Following Nelson Goodman, he further distinguishes kinds of immanence between the “autographic” and the “allographic.”¹⁰ His provisional definition of the work itself is

¹⁰ See Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art* (Indianapolis, 1968), 112–22. Genette adopts Goodman’s distinction between the status of those art works where the authenticity of the immanent object is crucial (e.g., painting or sculpture) and those where it is not (e.g., a literary text or a musical composition). The former

Cambridge University Press

0521413508 - Gerard Genette *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*

Translated by Jane E. Lewin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Foreword*

rigorously intentional: “a work of art is an intentional aesthetic object, or, which amounts to the same thing: a work of art is an artifact (or human product) [enlisted] to an aesthetic function.”¹¹ He underscores the viewer’s or reader’s share in this intentional process: one never sees the same painting twice; one never reads the same book twice. “The work is never reducible to its immanent object, because its being is inseparable from its action.”¹²

Paratexts (whose French title, *Seuils*, surely contains a sly wink at his long-time publisher, Editions du Seuil) is (as the French title also tells us) about “thresholds,” the literary and printerly conventions that mediate between the world of publishing and the world of the text. In a brief introduction to a special issue of *Poétique* devoted to essays on the paratext by members of a seminar at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes, Genette speaks of their topic as “this fringe at the unsettled limits that enclose with a pragmatic halo the literary work.”¹³ And writing of this undecidable space, which is neither quite container nor contained, he adds: “Now the paratext is neither on the interior nor on the exterior: it is both; it is on the threshold; and it is on this very site that we must study it, because essentially, perhaps, *its being depends upon its site*.” As a key work in Genette’s career, *Paratexts* is itself a resolutely liminal book: it completes (for the time being at least) his transtextual poetics, but in its complex mediations between author, publisher, and audience it broaches issues related to the adjacent realms of fiction and fact that are discussed in the much briefer *Fiction et diction* that follows it. In a self-contained work, *Paratexts* also presents some of the characteristic virtues of Genette’s criticism early and late. These virtues include clarity of exposition, systematic precision, a vast range of literary example – all products of an agile and original theoretical mind. As a major player in contemporary poetics and narrative theory, Genette is able to situate even his most detailed analyses within

are styled “autographic,” the latter “allographic.” Note that Genette here departs from his earlier use of “allography” in the first chapter of *Paratexts* (see footnote 8 and the translator’s comment).

¹¹ *L’Œuvre de l’art* (Paris, 1994), 10. Translation mine. This book is the first volume of an announced pair.

¹² From the author’s *prière d’insérer* for *L’Œuvre de l’art*.

¹³ “Paratextes,” *Poétique* 69 (Paris, 1987), my translation. Genette has been for many years *Directeur d’études* in the history and theory of literary forms at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales.

Cambridge University Press

0521413508 - Gerard Genette *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*

Translated by Jane E. Lewin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Foreword*

the framework of larger critical issues. To his perseverance in systematic development must be added that Shandean humor noted earlier, which explodes jokes amid the soberest topics, a rare quality in the higher reaches of contemporary poetics.

At this point, since the terminology is precise but occasionally at variance with the usages of other critics, the reader of *Paratexts* may find it useful to see the work situated within Genette's general poetics of transtextuality, alluded to above. Writing in *Palimpsestes* he observes that the following five-element schema is arranged in ascending order of "abstraction, implicitation, and globality."¹⁴

1. *Intertextuality*: A textual transcendence that Genette defines in what he admits is "an undoubtedly restrictive manner":¹⁵ "a relation of co-presence between two or more texts, that is to say, eidetically and most often, by the literal presence of one text within another" (8). Quotation, the explicit summoning up of a text that is both presented and distanced by quotation marks, is the most obvious example of this type of function, which may also include plagiarism and allusion of various kinds. Since Genette feels this form of transtextuality has been vigorously studied in recent years, he sees no need for another book on the subject.
2. *Paratextuality*: The subject of the present book, comprising those liminal devices and conventions, both within the book (*peritext*) and outside it (*epitext*), that mediate the book to the reader: titles and subtitles, pseudonyms, forewords, dedications, epigraphs, prefaces, intertitles, notes, epilogues, and afterwords – all those framing elements that so engaged Sterne; but also the elements in the public and private history of the book, its "epitext," that are analyzed in the latter part of this volume: "public epitexts" (from the author or publisher) as well as "private epitexts" (authorial correspondence, oral confidences, diaries, and pre-texts).

¹⁴ *Palimpsestes*, 8–12. The translations from this passage in the schema are mine. (This five-element system is a refinement on the presentation in the *Architexte*, where Genette had made do with four levels of transtextuality.)

¹⁵ Very generally he associates his "classic" notion of intertextuality with that of Julia Kristeva in *Séméiôtikè* (Paris, 1969) rather than with the much broader sense of the term enlisted by Michael Riffaterre in *La Production du texte* (Paris, 1979; English translation, New York, 1983) and elsewhere. For a historical account of the practice of citation, see Antoine Compagnon, *La Seconde Main* (Paris, 1979).

Cambridge University Press

0521413508 - Gerard Genette Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation

Translated by Jane E. Lewin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Foreword*

3. *Metatextuality*: The transtextual relationship that links a commentary to “the text it comments upon (without necessarily citing it).” In the *Architexte* Genette remarks, “All literary critics, for centuries, have been producing metatext without knowing it” (82). Since a systematic discussion of metatextuality would require a comprehensive survey of all literary criticism (whether explicit or implicit), the author feels such a task must be deferred to the indefinite future.
4. *Hypertextuality*: The “literature in the second degree” discussed above: the superimposition of a later text on an earlier one that includes all forms of imitation, pastiche, and parody as well as less obvious superimpositions.¹⁶ This relationship is the terrain of *Palimpsestes*.
5. *Architextuality [or architexture]*: The most abstract and implicit of the transcendent categories, the relationship of inclusion linking each text to the various kinds of discourse of which it is a representative. (Conventionally, the paratextual elements – title or preface – can be enlisted to define an architext.) These generic and modal relationships are surveyed in *Introduction à l’architexte*.¹⁷

Much as Genette delights in the systematic deployment of categories, functions, and domains, he is even more fascinated by the fringes and borderlands between regimes that these explorations open up. *Paratexts* is especially rich in these regions of ambiguity. Thus the terrain of the paratext poses intriguing problems for any speech-act analysis, situated as it is between the first-order illocutionary domain of the public world and that of the second-order speech-acts of fiction. As Genette suggests in his Introduction, the special pragmatic status of paratextual declarations requires a carefully calibrated analysis of their illocutionary force. While he charts a topology that abounds in precisions (and neologisms), repeatedly drawing distinctions reminiscent of High

¹⁶ For a recent account of parody and pastiche that is both analytic and historical, see Margaret A. Rose, *Parody: Ancient, Modern, and Postmodern* (Cambridge, 1993).

¹⁷ At the beginning of *Palimpsestes*, Genette notes that Louis Marin had already used the term *architexte* in “Pour une théorie du texte parabolique,” an essay in Claude Chabrol and Louis Marin, *Le Récit évangélique* (Paris, 1974), 167f. Genette remarks, however, that this usage for an originary text can be easily assimilated to his own term *hypotexte*, adding with mock impatience: “It’s about time that some Commissioner of the Republic of Letters impose on us a coherent terminology” (7).

Cambridge University Press

0521413508 - Gerard Genette *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*

Translated by Jane E. Lewin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Foreword*

Structuralism (e.g., *spatial*: peritext/epitext; *temporal*: original/ later/delayed; *enunciatory*: authorial/allographic/actorial), Genette is never satisfied with purely taxonomic mappings. Each element is studied as a literary *function*. He is thus equally concerned with the anatomy and physiology of the devices. Similarly, he is constantly alert to ways in which these paratextual devices can be both conventional in their form and highly original in their deployment.

From authorial “pre-texts” to public and private “epitexts,” Genette is lucidly systematic in his development and often brilliantly apt in his illustrations. These literary examples range over nearly three millennia from Homer and Virgil to Nabokov, Pynchon, Percec, and (inevitably) Proust. The references are also strenuously “comparative,” drawing from a wide range of national literatures and conventional practices. (He points out, for instance, that one of the most familiar forms of public epitext, the “interview,” arrived only very late in France, 1884, and was based on an American model. Similarly, he is able to distinguish the francophone *prière d’insérer*, often implicitly or explicitly the voice of the author, from the anglophone *blurb* or jacket copy, which issues from the publisher.) In its scope and exactitude *Paratexts* constitutes an encyclopedic survey of the customs and institutions of the Republic of Letters as they are revealed in the borderlands of the text, a neglected region that the book maps with exceptional rigor. Other scholars have studied the literary use of individual paratextual elements, but Genette seems to be the first to present a global view of liminal mediations and the logic of their relation to the reading public.

Any book of this magnitude inevitably casts the shadow of what it does not propose to do. Genette is explicit about this. In his epilogue he mentions three aspects of paratextuality that he has omitted: *translation*, particularly when the author is collaboratively engaged in the process; the issuing of the text *in serialized form*; and the inclusion of *illustrations*, especially those supplied by the author. But there are other aspects of scholarship that are deliberately refused. Although the literary examples cover the canon of Western literature, the study is resolutely synchronic, “un essai de tableau général,” and does not claim to be a *history* of paratextuality. Save for his local and often brilliant accounts of specific paratextual devices, Genette is not concerned

Cambridge University Press

0521413508 - Gerard Genette *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*

Translated by Jane E. Lewin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Foreword*

with the evolution of forms but with their functions, defined with as much precision as possible. His meticulous anatomies and taxonomic distinctions trace an exhaustive list of logical relationships and modal inflections: of “text” to “book” and of the book to the audience; of the status of the writer; and of enunciative temporalities – the “anterior” and degrees of the “ulterior” and “posterior,” the “anthumous” and the “posthumous,” etc. Thus the discussion of prefaces (*pace* Sterne) generates a nine-element grid for situating the writer according to “rôle” and “régime” (see the chart in Chapter 8 under “Senders”). These precisions could have proven exhausting as well as exhaustive (an ambition the author explicitly denies) were it not for Genette’s humor and richness of illustration. As in the case of Sterne, this humor and richness are pervasive, a signature of his style (nicely captured here by his translator): the sentences are *alive*, not wooden or routine or mechanical. The author’s personal tone informs even what would normally be the dullest material or the most academic demonstrations.

In addition to studying these mediating devices, *Paratexts* also resumes, in isolated passages, questions of the hypertext and readership that had been approached from another angle in *Palimpsestes*. This could be seen as an invitation to the reader to push beyond the poetics of liminal structures toward a consideration of the way these discursive functions interact with the more general question of literature as a cultural institution. While such an exploration would extend into another kind of pragmatic borderland, this may be a direction – already implicit in his work – that Genette will explore in subsequent books. The author’s reticence before the “institutional question” may reflect a more general contemporary reluctance about addressing the social consequences of theory.

Pausing on the threshold of *Paratexts*, we return finally to Sterne’s liminal invitation to his reader at the marbled page, poised on the cusp of the synecdochic relationship between the text and its container. The invitation (and challenge) is to *read*, with vigilance as well as knowledge, and, as Sterne also reminds us, to become through this reading a collaborator in the on-going literary construction. And by recognizing the complex conventions of “the book” we are thus invited to understand how we unwittingly are manipulated by its paratextual elements. Genette

Cambridge University Press

0521413508 - Gerard Genette *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*

Translated by Jane E. Lewin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Foreword

too challenges us to *read through* the conventions of the paratext to the discursive life of the book, which in turn enables the reading with renewed vigor of other books.¹⁸

¹⁸ Speaking of the dynamic role of his "transtextualities," Genette asserted the constructive power of critical reading as long ago as an interview that appeared in the *Magazine Littéraire* (192, February 1983): "So far critics have only interpreted literature; it is now a question of transforming it" (41).

Cambridge University Press
0521413508 - Gerard Genette Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation
Translated by Jane E. Lewin
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Books by Gérard Genette

Genette has edited a number of collaborative volumes, notably the following titles:

[with R. Barthes and T. Todorov], *Recherches de Proust*. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1980.

[with R. Debray-Genette and Todorov], *Travail de Flaubert*. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1983.

[with P. Bénichou and Todorov], *Pensée de Rousseau*. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1984.

[with Todorov], *Théorie des genres*. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1986.
Esthétique et poétique. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1992.

Genette has also published a valuable edition of Dumarsais's *Les Tropes* (1730) with commentary by P. Fontanier from the Paris edition of 1818 (Geneva: Slatkine, 1984).

Translator's note

Throughout this text, the word *classical* refers to the French seventeenth century, except where the context makes clear that some other country or period is meant.

All bracketed material in both the text and the footnotes is the translator's, except bracketed comments within quotations: those are the author's.

Every title mentioned is identified by author the first time it appears in a chapter, except titles of works in the following two categories: (1) works originally written in English and (2) non-English works that are considered classics (for example, the *Iliad*, the *Decameron*, *Madame Bovary*, *War and Peace*, *The Trial*).

Although the author often illustrates his points with references to French literature, readers who are not familiar with the works or authors he invokes will have no trouble grasping his points – most of the time. Thus, annotations of material that in itself may be unfamiliar are generally not necessary. Only when the author's point would be unclear without an explanation have I supplied one.

Some sources of quotations from works originally published in English or from published English translations of works originally written in a language other than English are given in the notes; all others are listed following page 410. Unattributed translations of quotations originally written in French are mine. Unless otherwise stated, the place of publication of French works is Paris.

Possessive adjectives and personal pronouns that refer to authors in general, or to publishers, editors, readers, and critics in general, are in the masculine.

For the English translation, the author added a number of explanatory passages.