Introduction: approaches to Roman paratextuality

LAURA JANSEN

What is a paratext, and where can we find it in a Roman text? What kind of space does a paratext occupy, and how does this space relate to the text and its contexts? How do we interpret Roman texts ‘paratextually’? And what does this kind of approach suggest about a work’s original modes of plotting meaning, or about the assumptions that underpin our own modes of interpretation? These questions are central to the conceptual and practical concerns of the present volume, which aims to offer a synoptic study of the interplay of paratexts and their reception within the broad sphere of Roman studies. Its contributions, which span literary, epigraphic and visual culture, focus on a wide variety of paratextual features – e.g. titles and intertitles, prefaces, indices, inscriptions, closing statements, decorative and formalistic details – and other less obvious paratextual phenomena, such as the (implicit) frames that can be plotted at various points and intersections of a text’s formal organization. The volume then explores the nature of the relationship between a text’s frame, its centre and its contexts, as well as the ways in which audiences approach and plot this set of relations.

Far from being an issue that preoccupies only the theoretically minded, the matter of the paratext is always – albeit often imperceptibly – already at work in the hermeneutic process. We may consider, by way of initial example, how readers of this volume could be approaching its reception paratextually. Perhaps you, whoever you are, first focused on the book’s title, taking its wording to be an initial guide for your reading of this introduction or any of the contributions. Or perhaps you moved directly to the table of contents, searching for a specific topic or Roman author of choice, or even to see what a scholar, whose work you follow, has to say about the reception of indices, prefaces or intertitles. It is also possible that you browsed the dust jacket and back cover first, scanning through the blurb, authorial details, or information concerning the illustration on the front cover, before selecting any one of the contributions. And, even if you approached this book from any of the above, you might have simultaneously consulted an available review of the book in an attempt either to get a general idea about the volume or to consult the opinion of a (naturally receptive!)
reviewer. Whichever way you approached the book, all of the above remain valid, though contrasting, points of entry into its text and its meanings.

But paratexts are not simply about access into a text. They are also phenomena which direct our attention to the question of how we construct our roles as audiences. To borrow from the French critic Gérard Genette (France, 1930–), whose conceptualization of paratextuality informs several strands of thinking in this volume, as we shall see, one could consider the potential influence that a mere title has vis-à-vis our approach to a modern classic: ‘How would we read James Joyce’s *Ulysses*,’ Genette wonders, ‘if it were not entitled *Ulysses*?’ Genette’s question can be pushed even further, as one ponders about the reader of the title *Ulysses* who may not have read Homer’s *Odyssey*: does Joyce’s title encourage us to be ‘epic readers’ of his novel because we have read Homer? What kind of readers are we, then, if we have not? And, if we have not read Homer, does the mere passive knowledge of the epic character of the Homeric title influence how we read Joyce’s work? The interplay between ‘a mere title’ and a work’s audience does not stop at the question of mutability, however; it can extend to the point of paradox. A tangible example of this aspect of the paratext can be found in some of the titular apparatuses that often accompany works of art in galleries and museums: the piece entitled ‘Untitled’. As audiences, are we in this case invited to posit no titularity on our viewing of a sculpture, painting or photograph, or does the label ‘Untitled’ beg for a specific form of reception, whether the label is authorial or supplied by the curator? Paratextual thinking thus suggests itself as a dynamic, indeed multidirectional, approach to both the ways in which a work frames its meanings through the lens of its paratexts and the complexities behind our own interpretative strategy.

An equally dynamic interplay can be found in our plotting of Roman paratexts. One can consider work-initial examples in which paratexts can disrupt our expectations or challenge the ways in which we tend to think about Roman textuality, whether epigraphic, literary or visual: what potential readings of the *Metamorphoses* might arise, for instance, if we attached to its front the ‘delayed preface’ in which an exiled Ovid laments his epic’s lack of polish and revision (*Tristia* 1.7.35–40)?2 How does the title of a Roman poem, such as Virgil’s *Aeneid*, interact with the more elaborate titles heading modern critical readings of his epic? Do the modern titles

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1 Genette (1997b) 2. Or, we might add, given the Latin form of the hero’s name, if the title were ‘Not-the-Odyssey’?

2 Hinds (1985, reprinted 2006) is the first to prompt this type of question in his discussion of how *Tristia* 1 ‘books’ Ovid’s ‘return trip’ to Rome.
of criticism complement or offer a whole new set of instructions for our reading of the Virgilian text? Within the context of Roman texts housed in modern (e)book form, there is scope, moreover, to examine how the change of image and design featured on modern covers of editions of, for instance, Horace’s *Satires* and *Epistles* may program us, from one generation of readers to another, to plot his early and late output. The paratextual relationship between word and image is also a fertile ground for investigation into the relationship between a work’s frames and the viewer. Even a first look at, for instance, the *Tabula Iliaca Capitolina*, one of the most complete surviving examples of the marble panels depicting the epic cycle of the Trojan War, is suggestive of the demands that the intertwining of art and inscription in one single piece makes on the competence of the observer: 3 which of the two, artistic depiction or inscription, may be said to be the text and which the paratext in this case? Which of the two, word or image, functions as a point of entry into the other? Could each, after all, be taken as both text and paratext? Indeed, the possibility of multiple functions in turn opens up the possibility of multiple perspectives and receptions of this work. Countless examples can be envisaged for this mode of plotting literary and extra-literary Roman texts. Our emphasis has been on collected letters and poems, works of oratory and historiography, legal and technical literature, visual and epigraphic culture, and the tradition of the exegetical commentary. In each of their case studies, the contributors seek to develop a new direction in the criticism of the structure of Roman texts, and a new understanding of how this material signals the construction of its audience through the lens of the paratext.

**Theoretical frameworks**

Paratextuality has had a low profile in the study of Roman texts, 4 especially when one considers the appeal that it has had in other literatures, particularly as a systematic approach to the study of the frame in the modern novel, the orders of reading in print literary culture, or the structural shifts in

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3 For a new and original interpretation of this material, see Squire (2011). See also Newby (2007) 3–4, who comments on the complex juxtaposition of the literary and epigraphic in this piece.

4 The title has been the most predominant area of paratextual investigation in Greco-Roman literature. The studies of Horsfall (1981), Ballester (1990) and Schröder (1999) are representative of this trend. Caroli (2007) and Schironi (2010) offer excellent studies in front and end matter in the Greco-Roman and Greco-Egyptian scroll. Alexander, Lange and Pillinger (2010) have focused on paratextual literature in ancient Near Eastern and ancient Mediterranean culture and its reception in Medieval literature.
One likely reason for this low profile is the dominance of the intertextual\(^5\) (and to a lesser extent, intratextual)\(^7\) approach to Latin literature: hypo- and hypertextuality tend to be employed less as approaches to the study of a text’s forms of imitation of a previous text, and more as part of the vocabulary of the intertextual reader seeking to highlight the relations between ‘source’ and ‘target’ text.\(^8\) Also significant is the fact that, while paratextual investigation tends to focus on the literary text, without a strong commitment to reception studies,\(^9\) intertextuality (and intratextuality) has extended its scope of investigation. Current intertextuality incorporates the extra-literary and favours audience-dependent over authorial-intended readings, a move that marks the wider transition in textual criticism from structuralism to post-structuralism.\(^10\) Moreover, the sense of disparity in the methodological development and use of intertextuality and paratextuality in Roman Studies is in part the result of our general assumptions about the nature of the paratext and paratextual space. A morphological question then appears to be pressing: what does the preposition \textit{para} do for the word textuality?

The preposition 	extit{para} is typically understood to mean ‘beside’ or ‘next to’,\(^11\) a meaning that may contribute to a configuration of the paratext as a separate, detachable, and thus peripheral, feature of the text. For example, if we take \textit{para} to mean simply ‘beside’, then a modern paratext such as a table of contents will not be considered a part of the text, but a feature which, despite supplying crucial information about its organization, remains \textit{outside} its contents. But this sense of the paratext as a detachable category is less than clear-cut when put under close scrutiny. Deconstructive thinking has pointed to the limitations of this view in its uncovering of the paradoxical

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\(^6\) Not least as a result of the groundbreaking work of Hinds (1998), which has taken allusion and intertextuality to the mainstream of classical studies. One should nevertheless acknowledge how instrumental Italian scholarship has been in taking intertextuality to mainstream anglophone Classics. On ‘arte allusiva’, see Pasquali (1942); on ‘poetic memory’, see Conte (1974) and (1986), and on ‘la traccia’, see Barchiesi (1984). More in the ‘intentionalist’ tradition, rather than in Conte’s reader-author collaboration approach, see Thomas (1986).

\(^7\) Pioneered by the Sharrock and Morales (2000) collection on intratextuality in Greco-Roman texts.

\(^8\) The study of the oral palimpsest in Homeric epic by Tsagalis (2008) is an important exception.

\(^9\) Though one should point out Caroli (2007), listed in n. 4, as an important exception. In his study of the title in Greco-Egyptian scrolls, Caroli detects an authorial, or co-authorial, function in readers of the early manuscript tradition who affix titles to scrolls according to their interpretation of their content.


\(^11\) This corresponds to the function of the Greek preposition \textit{para} in the dative.
nature of paratextual space vis-à-vis the text and its contexts. In particular, it has emphasized both the extrinsic and intrinsic character and effects that the preposition *para* has for words like *texts, -dox, -medic, -gon, -site, -ergon, etc.* It is significant that vocabulary in *para* forms a branch of words which employ some form of Indo-European root in *per*, whose basic meaning is ‘through’, but whose semantics extends to ‘in front of’, ‘before’, ‘toward’, ‘against’, ‘near’, ‘at’ or ‘around’. The semantics implied in this fusion of *para* with *per* might then have some implications in our understanding of what a paratext is and how it functions vis-à-vis our reception of the text. In an influential essay which aims to defend the task of deconstructive criticism against the accusation of its being ‘parasitic’ on, rather than conducive to, (literary) texts and their meanings, Hillis Miller embarks on an analysis of the word, uncovering the assumptions at work behind his own critic’s understanding of what the prefix *para* does for the term *-site*. Crucial to our purposes is Hillis Miller’s final reading of *para* on the basis of its root association with the preposition *per* pointed out above:

‘Para’ is a double antithetical prefix signifying at once proximity and distance, similarity and difference, interiority and exteriority, something inside a domestic economy and at the same time outside it, something simultaneously this side of the boundary line, threshold, or margin . . . A thing in *para*, moreover, is not only simultaneously on both sides of the boundary line between inside and out. It is also the boundary itself . . . (J. Hillis Miller, ‘The critic as host’ (1979), 179)

A word in *para* does not therefore simply mean that something is ‘beside’ or ‘next to’ something else, but also implies that it is ‘part of’ that something else. To bring in the example of a table of contents once more, this feature of the text then becomes *both part and not part of the text, in so far as it is intrinsic, from an authorial viewpoint, to the text’s narrative and thematic organization, but simultaneously extrinsic to it because it is placed before the text itself (or after, in the case of French, Italian and Spanish book culture). Paratexts and, by extension, the methodology of paratextual reading thus respond to a ‘both/and’ rather than an ‘either/or’ kind of logic. Paratexts are neither fully attached to nor detached from the text, but they conform to a liminal zone between its inside and outside. In sum, they are semantic and

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12 For Derrida’s configurations of the *parergon*, see Jansen ch. 13, 265.
13 Beekes (2010), s.v. *παρά*. Cf. also the function of the preposition *para* in the accusative in Greek.
14 For specific examples of this paradox see Peirano’s discussion about the *sphragis* in Propertius *Monobiblos*, ch. 11, 234–7, and Jansen’s discussion of the Derridean supplement in connection with Ovidian elegiac covers in ch. 13, 264–6.
physical thresholds of interpretation for both the private and public spheres of a text.

This nuanced, indeed abstract, configuration of the paratext finds a wealth of tangible examples in Gérard Genette’s monumental work on paratextuality in the classical and modern novel. Genette’s *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* – originally published in French as *Seuils* in 1987 and translated into English by J. E. Lewin in 1997 – is the first synchronic exploration of liminal devices and conventions, within and outside of the text, which form part of the complex dialogue between book, author and reader. *Paratexts* is the third and final volume of Genette’s project of ‘transtextuality’. The trilogy opens with *Introduction à l’architexte* (1979, and translated into English as *Architexts* (1992)), and follows with *Palimpsestes: La littérature au second degré* (1982, translated into English as *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (1997)). In these works, Genette is concerned with the notion of textual transcendence, a process in which texts can be seen to stretch beyond their own domain to incorporate all relations within and between texts and between texts and their readers. Genette’s brand of transtextuality, however, does not reach the extra-literary, as current poststructuralist intertextuality does in its preoccupation with establishing dialogues between texts of all kinds, literary and non-literary. In this sense, Genettean transtextuality might be best understood as ‘intertextuality from the viewpoint of structuralist poetics’; it concerns the study of the textual networks that map out the closed system of literature, and thus provide the basis for any analysis of individual works. In *Architexts*, Genette focuses on the tradition of romantic misreadings of Aristotle’s *Poetics*, texts that play a part in the architextual system which, Genette argues, the history of later Western poetics can be seen to ‘transcend’. Another aspect of this transtextual system is the dialogue between hypertexts and hypotexts; this becomes the object of Genette’s next study, *Palimpsests*, in which he proposes that texts invite a kind of double reading. Thus Joyce’s *Ulysses*, for instance, can be read through the lens of the palimpsest, or ‘palimpsestically’, i.e. through the lens of a ‘new text’ written over, or superimposed on, an ‘older text’, in this case Homer’s *Odyssey*. The image of the palimpsest as metaphor then opens

15 Allen (2000), 95. See further O’Rourke ch. 8, 156.
16 ‘Palimpsestuously’ is yet another way of viewing this relationship. Dillon (2007) explores the Genettean approach to the palimpsest both as theory and tool for the study of (mostly) English literature. She argues that the relationship between hypertextual and hypotextual layers should be best regarded as ‘palimpsestuous’, not ‘palimpsestic’. This is because the palimpsest has an ‘involved’, or ‘incestuous’, rather than separately layered, structure. Dillon’s study thus points to the more unstable aspects of the second-degree reading process elaborated by Genette. See especially 1–9.
up a ‘second degree’ perspective for plotting the ways in which the *Odyssey* transcends *Ulysses* through Joyce’s various forms of imitation, adaptation, parody and pastiche of the Homeric hypotext.

Genette’s last transtextual output borrows from yet another metaphor, the threshold, to convey the literary function paratexts can be seen to have vis-à-vis interpretation. As thresholds, paratexts are liminal spaces that invite readers to mediate the relations between the peritext and the epitext, the two main categories that constitute the field of Genettean paratextuality. Thus, for Genette, the paratextual transcendence of texts can be found respectively in the devices and conventions both around the book (covers, prefaces, titles, postfaces, etc.) and in addition to it (commentaries, reviews, interviews, etc.). ‘More than a boundary or a sealed border,’ Genette announces in his introduction to *Paratexts*,

the paratext is, rather, a threshold, or – a word [Jorge Luis] Borges used apropos of a preface – a ‘vestibule’ that offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back. It is an ‘undefined zone’ between the inside and the outside, a zone without any hard and fast boundary on either the inward side (turned toward the world’s discourse about the text), an edge, or, as Philippe Lejeune put it, ‘a fringe of the printed text which in reality controls one’s whole reading of the text.’ Indeed, this fringe, always the conveyor of a commentary that is authorial or more or less legitimated by the author, constitutes a zone between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition but also of trans-action . . . (author’s emphasis). (Genette, *Paratexts* (1997b), 1–2)

This formulation of the paratext, especially as a space for liminal mediation between inside and outside categories and as a ‘contractual fringe of the text’, has informed the central strands of thinking in this volume about the way in which audiences, both ancient and modern, might approach Roman textuality. From this perspective, each of the contributions (outlined in the next section) focuses on paratexts as sites of reception where readers or viewers are prompted to (re)negotiate trajectories of plotting meaning or (re)consider their own construction as audiences. To give some examples of this procedure in the volume, Roy Gibson invites us to contrast two kinds of reading strategies in Pliny the Younger’s letters: one that excludes and one that includes the index of addressees found in a late fifth-century manuscript of the work, which, Gibson argues, probably goes back to Pliny’s own hand (Chapter 2). Hérica Valladares looks into the dynamics of viewing pictorial paratexts when they lack their central image: this is the case with the floating figures that frame the panels in the principal room of the House of the Vetti
at Pompeii, whose central tableaux were already missing at the time of the house’s discovery (Chapter 9). Duncan F. Kennedy asks how readers plot Catullus’ dedication to Cornelius in poem 1 in two contexts: its position in modern compilations of Catullan poetry, and its most likely mode of circulation and consumption in antiquity (Chapter 1). And in the absence of tables of contents preceding collected texts of Roman law, Matthijs Wibier explores the question of how legal experts devised conceptual strategies that allowed them to map out their way through lengthy volumes to find items quickly and effectively (Chapter 3). Broadly speaking, all the contributions in the volume explore the paratext as an opportunity to question how audiences negotiate paratextual space, be it an explicit or conceptual route into the text and its meanings.

Another facet of Genettean paratextuality that the volume examines is the question of how paratexts can convey ‘a comment that is authorial’, as Genette contends in the above citation. The matter of the author (and of authorial strategy) has received a new focus in recent criticism, especially from scholars who continue to approach the text from reader-oriented perspectives. Within the sphere of Latin literary studies, an important example is that of career criticism, which aims to trace the overall shape of the literary careers of classical authors and their reception by writers like Dante, Goethe or Borges.¹⁷ Scholars are no longer plotting the kind of biographical authoriality that the French critic Roland Barthes, a near contemporary of Genette, put to death in 1968; rather, they are devising new methodologies to rediscover various facets of the author through the text which s/he writes, and which the reader then mediates. A number of contributions in this volume have found that paratextuality also offers a compelling framework for plotting the author in the text, especially through the lens of prefaces and closing statements. For example, Irene Peirano explores the sphragides that close Virgil’s Georgics, Horace’s Odes, and Propertius’ Monobiblos as liminal loci in which these authors simultaneously ‘seal’ their physical death together with the death of the book and their literary immortality in the reader’s memory (Chapter 11). My own essay uncovers an editorial discourse in Ovid’s exile poetry that has the implicit paratextual effect of framing his elegiac oeuvre as a whole, from Rome to Tomis, for readers with an intratextual memory of his pre-exile poetry (Chapter 13). Bruce Gibson investigates how Spenser constructs his career as a commentator in his Calender by incorporating the classical paratexts of the bucolic tradition into the post-classical traditions of printing culture (Chapter 12). And Ellen Oliensis discloses the authorial game that an extra-literary Ovid plays in the

¹⁷ Hardie and Moore (2010).
poem that closes *Amores* 1 (the fifteenth), a game that forever engages his readers in thinking that the authentic plot of the collection is not the love story but the career narrative of the poet. In one way or another, each of the contributions explores the theme of authorship, whether as a concrete theme or an aspect embedded in the various functions of the paratexts under investigation.

On the whole, the volume investigates Genettean paratextuality as a productive way of re-routting the study of Roman literary and non-literary texts. That said, the volume does not propose that paratextuality alone should now occupy centre stage in our theory and method. Indeed, a crucial aim in our investigation has been to engage in dialogue with other approaches and studies predominant in the field, such as: intertextuality (ch. 8, Donncha O’Rourke, ch. 12, Bruce Gibson); psychoanalytical reading (ch. 1, Duncan F. Kennedy); intratextuality, deconstruction and memory (ch. 13, Laura Jansen); metapoetics (ch. 10, Ellen Oliensis); time and temporality (ch. 5, Grant Parker); cultures of textual transmission (ch. 2, Roy Gibson, ch. 4, Shane Butler); rhetoric (ch. 6, Roger Rees); literary and material culture (ch. 7, Alison Cooley, ch. 11, Irene Peirano); topography (ch. 3, Matthijs Wibier); and visuality and the gaze (ch. 9, Hérica Valladares). In a multiple, interdisciplinary engagement, the contributions then explore, challenge and extend the Genettean picture of paratextuality, some from a theoretically oriented perspective and others from the perspective of paratextual reading as practice, but each from the viewpoint of reception and/or reader-oriented criticism. Perhaps the most persistent questions have been those of focus and approach: how does our examination of the Roman paratext, involving various literary genres of texts originally inscribed in the scroll and other pre-codex media, and nowadays read in book and electronic book format, relate to Genette’s formulation of the paratext, whose central case study is the literary novel? Further, how does Genettean structuralist paratextuality, concerning only the relationship between literary texts, relate to our study of the paratextual in the extra-literary? Indeed, these are questions without simple answers. On the whole, however, the volume’s pursuit of paratextual reading does not aim to conjure Genette’s ideas out of existence; rather, it aims to interrogate their conceptual assumptions and emphasize important aspects of their historical specificity.

**Frameworks of investigation**

The volume thus approaches Roman paratextuality from a series of interrelated post-Genettean perspectives. One such perspective is the threshold
which texts cross from the stage of composition to that of consumption and from literary to social spheres. In Chapter 1, Duncan F. Kennedy combines theoretical reflections on Genette’s theory of paratextuality with an exploration of an ancient poetic text, that of Catullus, which poses some illuminating challenges to it. Catullus’ poems are now consumed as a single ‘book’, and contain much material which Genette would classify as ‘paratextual’. But there is mounting evidence, both internal and external, to suggest that the emergence of a collection of his poems was a complex process extending not simply across the poet’s lifetime but beyond it, and that the paratextual material, itself undoubtedly Catullan, may be open to reinterpretation so as to point to patterns of literary production and consumption less familiar than those currently assumed. In his analysis of such patterns, Kennedy uncovers a psychodynamics at play in the various transitional and transactional thresholds that the Catullan corpus crosses, from the comfort zone of poetic composition, guarded by the safety of the peritext, to the epitextual anxieties raised by the prospect of publication and circulation, processes involving the activities of scribes and librarii as well as the reading responses of allies and critics. Time and temporality are other elements at play in the relationship between a Roman text’s identity and the socio-historical reality of that text’s public. In Chapter 5, Grant Parker explores various configurations of time in the prose prefaces of Statius’ Silvae, in particular those which mark the tensions between speedy composition and hesitant publication – tensions that reveal a dynamics of social inclusion and exclusion. Statius’ prefaces have to negotiate the discrepancy of previous piecemeal circulation while introducing a new literary form to a wider readership, one that extends to the new dedicatees of the books yet provides links to the inception of his poems. The prefaces, then, can be usefully considered as texts of literary communication, subject to, as Parker demonstrates, different and complex tenors of time.

Genette insists that the literary function of the paratext is ‘to present [the text], in the usual sense of this verb but also in the strongest sense: to make present, to ensure the text’s presence in the world, its “reception” and consumption in the form (nowadays, at least) of a book’.¹⁸ The physical and conceptual presence that Roman texts conjure for readers, both ancient and modern, is the focus of four essays in the volume. One such example relates to devices which work toward (re)structuring the space of our reading physically and visually. In Chapter 4, Shane Butler explores the origins and

¹⁸ Genette (1997b) 1.