

TEXTES À L'ÉCART, TEXTES DE L'ÉCART: EN GUISE D'AVANT-PROPOS

Reflections on the Paratext

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The limits of my language are the limits of my world.
-Ludwig Wittgenstein

Ce qu'il est [le tissu du texte], n'est-il pas parfois
et justement ce qu'il n'est pas?
-Roland Barthes

The sanguine efforts of contemporary narratologists to restrict, restrain, rename, recast, re-code, rebirth the essence of the paratextual never cease to forge an ever greater gulf. Contriving what might be dubbed “textual prostheses,” many effervescently pursue an ardent quest for sameness, oneness, fixedness, for parity, correlation, and correspondence, such that it (the paratext) might adopt unencumbered definition. The liminal would thus remain just that—and would inhabit center-stage, yet at the far corners of the scene, in the minimalist crevices where the pleated folds of curtains slake, so as to take shelter from the locus of action. The inherent fallacy: the very question posed. Confronted with an elusive and oft disconcerting phenomenon, the successors to Genette furiously ferret within and without, seeking to adduce what “it” is, how to trace its parameters—their conclusions patently bereft of consonance or resolution. And so they falter. By contradistinction, the inordinately more astute and prolific inquiry—What is “it” *not*?—fails to surface. Isolated, singular manifestations of what “it” is or can be couch the clamoring of other. The paratext has been, as consequence, bounded—peevishly, faultily, paralytically. What “it” is *not* continues to take refuge, although therein lurks, no doubt, the sub-latent embeddedness that theorists fail to disinter. Its ill-defined alterity (perhaps synonymous with its ubiquitousness) is manifestly circumvented, the kernel-concept manifestly circumnavigated, the terms called upon to define it dizzyingly, frenetically subjected to circumlocution. As such, the metonymic masquerades as wholeness, when it is but a particle in full-blown disguise. And research enterprise thus assumes the visage of factitiousness, if not of avoidance.

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While its grander schema begs for illumination, we must remain engaged, follow a path that will perhaps eventually, effectively efface the shadows. What better means toward that end than a spectrum of insightful (and avowedly specialized) reflections bearing upon theory, text and paratext?

To be sure, the essays that flourish within the present compendium are distinguished aptly and elegantly by their individual and collective recognition of “difference,” by the open-ended hypotheses that under-gird and over-determine each decipherment. None claims totality or integrality; each represents one of the limitless alternatives that stand beyond, yet to be wholly disentangled. Each, in its own way, pays “silent” homage to the “what ‘it’ is not” enigma, yet to be unriddled. By the very proliferation of variance, innovation, and expansiveness, these insightful probings bypass all postulations of closure, each rebounding as a sign of a resistant or ballooning literary act, each conjoined, directly or indirectly, to an ever-widening set of alternatives without borders. To the volume there is no coda, nor could there be, for the exegetical emphasis is, intentionally or not, on the incommensurable demeanors of paratextual apartness and leads us to recall, what Derrida neatly packaged as “the problematic limit between an inside and an outside that is always threatened by graft and by parasite.”¹ A transcription of the very impossibility of circumscription or, perhaps, of representation. What of the texts whose paratext is, indeed, virtually indistinguishable from the text itself, where the two collide, explode synergistically, but without facile differentiation? *Au-delà de Genette, bien au-delà*.

This would-be “meta-introduction” sets the stage for 21 follow-up introductions, all exemplary and the supreme value of which resides ultimately and explicitly in their absence of congruence. A composite exemplar of interminable difference, a foray into a cleft of the unknown, may these illuminations be read as but a prelude. *Curieuse dynamique, enfin*.

Reference

Derrida, J. (1967). *L'écriture et la différence*. Paris: Editions du Seuil.

¹ Derrida (1967), p. 96.