

For several decades now, a wide range of scholars and text analysts have begun to ask questions about the ways the particular physical embodiments of a book affect the way readers experience it. As **Michele Moylan** pointed out in *Reading Books* (1996), “Bindings, illustrations, paper, typeface, layout, advertisements [and] promotional blurbs – all function as parts of a semiotic system, parts of the total meaning of a text”. In fact, it was the French critical theorist “**Gérard Genette**” who coined the word paratext in his *Introduction à l’architexte* (1979) in order to describe those parts of the physical book other than the main text.

1. Definitions

- The *paratext* is what enables a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers and, more generally, to the public. *It* can change the way that a text is read, understood, and consumed. A *paratext* thus is a text that relates (or mediates) to another text (the main work) in a way that enables it to be complete.
- “Paratexts are doorways into understanding the text and contextualizing it in a particular way.” – **Garrick V. Allen**
- Perhaps the most important work on **paratext** is by **Gérard Genette**, who argues that texts are rarely presented unaccompanied by a certain number of verbal or other productions, such as *an author’s name, a title, a preface, illustrations*. **Genette** describes **paratext** as a *threshold* at which, a reader can decide whether or not to enter the work (p. 2). And although we do not always know whether these productions are to be regarded as belonging to the text, in any case they surround it and extend it, precisely in order to *present* it, in the usual sense of this verb and in the strongest sense, too: to make it present, to ensure the text’s presence in the world, its “reception” and consumption in the form ... of a book.
- Genette’s (1997) theory defines paratext as follows:

Paratext = peritext (within the book) + epitext (outside the book)

Table 1: Examples of Paratextual Elements

Paratext = Peritext (comes with the text) + Epitext (outside of the text)		
	preface	reviews
	foreword	interviews
	table of contents	author websites
	index	correspondence
	acknowledgements	diaries
	source notes	critical literary analysis

Therefore, **peritext** are the elements of a work surrounding the main content that help to facilitate the understanding of the work by its readers whereas **epitext** are elements that are outside of the volume itself but are closely connected to the text. Epitextual elements include such things as **communications between the author and editor, advertising for the text, interviews with the author, the author’s website, reviews of the text, literary criticism focused on the text**, and other related items. Both peritext and epitext elements can be found in all textual forms included print text and non-print media.

2. The Main Paratextual Elements

Genette argues that defining any paratextual element consists of determining its *location* (where?); the *date of its appearance* (when?); its **mode of existence**: verbal or other (how?); the *characteristics of its situation of communication*: its sender and addressee (from whom? to whom?); and the *functions* that its message aims to fulfil (to do what?). Below is a description of the main paratextual elements, their location and function:

- a) **The publisher's Peritext**: the cover, the title page, and their appendages, which present to the public at large and then to the reader many other items of information, some of which are **authorial** (by the author) and some of which are the **publisher's responsibility**.

- Cover 1 (Front Cover):

- Name or pseudonym of the author(s)
- Title(s) of the author(s) [e.g., professor of ..., member of ..., etc.]
- Title(s) of the work
- Genre indication
- Name of the translator(s), of the preface-writer(s),
- Dedication
- Epigraph
- Likeness of the author or, for some biographical or critical studies, of whoever is the subject of the study
- Specific illustration
- Name of the person(s) responsible for this series
- In the case of a reprint, mention of the original series
 - Name or trade name and/or initials and/or colophon of the publisher (or, in the case of a co-publication, of both publishers)
- Address of the publisher
- Number of printings, or "editions," or "thousands"
- Date
- Price

- **Covers 2 and 3**: the inside front and back covers are generally mute, but this rule admits of exceptions: magazines often put publisher's information there.

- **Cover 4 (Back Cover)**: is another strategically important spot, which may contain at least the following:

- Reminder of the name of the author and the title of the work
- Biographical and/or bibliographical notice

- Press quotations or comments about earlier works by the same author or, indeed, about this work itself, if it is a new edition.
- Mention of other works published by the same house
- Genre indication
- Date of printing/ Number of re-printings
- Price
- ISBN (International Standard Book Number)

-**The Spine**: a narrow site but one with obvious strategic importance, generally bears the name of the author, the colophon of the publisher, and the title of the work.

- **Dust Jacket (or wrapper) and the Band**: The most obvious function of the jacket is to attract attention by using a garish illustration or simply a graphic presentation more flattering or more personalized than the cover standards. The band is the mini jacket that covers only the lower third of the book and may repeat in larger letters the name of the author or display the name of a literary prize the work has already won also to attract the attention of the book public.

- The Title Page

- **Pages 1 and 2**, called the *flyleaf*, remains "blank".
- **Page 3** is reserved for the "half title": this page bears only the title (nothing else)
- **Pages 4 and 6** may be used for various items of information from the publisher, such as the title of the series, the frontispiece, the list of works by the same author, the list of works published in the same series, some legal information (copyright, which gives the official date of first publication; ISBN; reminder of the law concerning reproductions...
- **Page 5** is the *title page*. It generally includes, besides the actual title and its appendages, the name of the author and the name and address of the publisher. It may include many other things, particularly the genre indication, the epigraph...
 - The Name of the Author**: It is, in practice, in the title page and the cover (cover 1, with possible reminders on the spine and cover 4). There are different ways in which authors choose to designate themselves; they can use their real names, choose pseudonyms or remain anonyms, as they can mention their "titles" (honours, etc.)
 - Titles**: The title has four almost obligatory and fairly redundant locations: the front cover, the spine, the title page, and the half-title page. But often one still finds the title repeated on the back cover and/or as the running head, that is, along the tops of all the pages. The title appears upon publication of the original edition and comprises a message (in its words), a sender and addressees. The main functions of the title are to designate, to indicate subject matter, to tempt the public. The title may also be followed by genre indication (poetry, novel...)
 - Dedication or Inscriptions**: Both practices consist of offering the work to a person, a real or ideal group, or some other type of entity. But one of these practices involves the material reality of a single copy and, in principle, ratifies the gift or consummated sale of that copy, whereas the other involves the ideal reality of the work itself, the possession of which can quite obviously be only symbolic. The dedicator is generally the book's author, but in the case of a translated book, the dedicator is the translator not the author. Dedictees may be private or public.

- e) **Epigraphs** are quotations placed at the edge of the work, generally closest to the text - thus, following the dedication, if there is one and before the preface. The use of an epigraph is always a “mute” gesture whose interpretation is left up to the reader and hence both the content and the author quoted are crucial.
- f) **The Preface:** There exists a long list of the “preface” French parasyonyms, reflecting changing fashions and innovations: introduction, avant-propos, prologue, note, notice, avis, presentation, preambule, discours preliminaire, avant-dire... Prefaces are statements in which the author presents, and sometimes comments on his work. A preface's statement about the importance of the subject no doubt constitutes the main case for valuing the text highly. The preface also holds the reader's interest and guides him by explaining why and how he should read the text. Other than the original preface, other types do exist; later preface, delayed preface, allographic prefaces...
- g) **Intertitles:** The intertitle is the title of a section of a book: in unitary texts, these sections may be parts, chapters, or paragraphs; in collections, they may be constituent poems, novellas, or essays. In contrast to general titles, which are addressed to the public as a whole, internal titles are accessible to hardly anyone except readers, or at least the already limited public of browsers and readers of tables of contents; and a good many internal titles make sense only to an addressee who is already involved in reading the text.
- h) **The Epitext:** The location of the epitext is anywhere outside the book (e.g., newspapers and magazines, radio or television programs, lectures or other public performances perhaps preserved on recordings or in printed collections: interviews and conversations assembled by the author. The sender is most often the author or may equally well be the publisher. the epitext (the publisher’s epitext) is basically "promotional”.

3. Paratext Functions

According to the peritextual literacy framework (PLF) developed by Melissa Gross and Don Latham (2017), paratextual elements are meant to assist readers in thinking critically about text. They describe six functions of paratext:

- a) **Bibliographic:** Elements that uniquely identify a work. Examples include author’s name, work’s title, publisher’s name, and publication date.
- b) **Promotional:** Elements that interface between the work and its potential audience. Examples include the dust jacket, endorsements, author’s biography, and award medals.
- c) **Navigational:** Elements that assist the reader in understanding the organization of the work and how to search the content. Examples include table of contents, chapter titles, and index.
- d) **Intratextual:** Elements within the work that interface between the work and the reader. Examples include acknowledgements, preface, and afterword.
- e) **Supplemental:** Elements outside the text proper that augment understanding of the content. Examples include glossary, maps, and timelines.
- f) **Documentary:** Elements that connect the audience to external works used in the production of the work or that reify or extend the content of the work. Examples include bibliography, references, and source notes.

4. The significance of Paratext

- Paratextual elements are often the first encounter with the text for the potential reader/viewer.
- Peritextual elements can illuminate a reader's understanding of how the author knows what he or she knows about the subject and how that knowledge was attained.
- It seems an unnatural reading experience, for either an analyst or a casual reader to completely ignore paratextual features as cognitive psychology has shown that priming and expectation have a powerful influence on reading experiences and interpretations. Thus, it would be unrealistic to assume that

paratext has no influence on the judgement of an implied reader. For instance, Genette offers the example of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, a text that many literary critics find valuable, asking: "Limited to the text alone and without a guiding set of directions, how would we read Joyce's *Ulysses* if it were not entitled *Ulysses*?" Therefore, the title of any work is not merely descriptive. A good title creates a set of readily expectations about a text. Joyce's title *Ulysses*, for example, alludes to the famous hero known in Greek as Odysseus and his journey homeward.

- Paratext analysis has proven to be productive in other fields than literary studies. As a result, scholars have studied the paratext of newspapers ([Frandsen 1991](#)) and the importance of paratexts in the scholarly archive ([Dalgaard 2001](#)). Also, in museum studies (e.g. [Schall 2014](#)), translation analysis (e.g. [Pellatt 2013](#)), pedagogy and reading studies (e.g. [Mangen and Kuiken 2014](#)) to name a few.