

# GENRE AND ...

Copenhagen Studies in Genre 2



Ekbatana

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Ed. Sune Auken,  
Palle Schantz Lauridsen, &  
Anders Juhl Rasmussen

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Edited by  
Sune Auken, Palle Schantz Lauridsen,  
& Anders Juhl Rasmussen

FORLAGET EKBÁTANA

*Genre and ...*

*Copenhagen Studies in Genre 2*

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Edited by Sune Auken, Palle Schantz Lauridsen,  
& Anders Juhl Rasmussen

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# **Copenhagen Studies in Genre**

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## **Copenhagen Studies in Genre 2**

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# **APPROACHES THROUGH THEORY**

# GENRE AND PARATEXT

Anders Juhl Rasmussen

PARATEXTS, AS DEFINED by Gérard Genette, are the manifold marginal texts in a literary work—the title, genre indication, preface, jacket copy, and more—that surround the body text and shape how the reading public understands it. However, the sociology of the text, with its emphasis on how the material layers of literary works contribute to determining how they are understood, indicates that “paratext” should be (re)defined as an umbrella term that also includes typography, illustrations, formatting, etc.

While much has been written about genre and paratexts since the late 1980s, no one has yet presented a focused account of the relation between the two in literary works. The present article aims first to define “paratext” *qua* concept, and then to clarify the sociological status (particularly with regard to the sociology of publishing) and pragmatic function of paratexts, both in general and in a concrete analysis of the paratexts of the novel *6512* (1969), by the Danish author Per Højlund. Finally, the paratextual strategies of modernism and postmodernism are examined in genre-historical perspective.

The following article is an attempt to clarify the relationship between a text’s generic character and the paratexts of the book in which the text is read. This clarification presupposes familiarity with the concept of paratext as defined by Gérard Genette in his seminal study *Seuils* (1987, translated as *Paratexts* in 1997). Put briefly, paratexts are the manifold marginal texts in a literary work—the title, genre indication, preface, jacket copy, and more—that surround the body text and shape how the reading public un-



derstands it. Genette defines paratexts' status in terms of the sociological circumstances in which they are produced (particularly in terms of the sociology of publishing) and their pragmatic function with respect to audience reception. Figuratively, the paratext may be conceived as a bargaining site on the threshold of the text, a meeting ground where the writer and publisher, on one side, and the reader, on the other, join to enter into a contract about how the text is to be read and classified.

It is not the present article's intention to offer a pure elaboration of Genette's concept of the paratext—though such an effort would not be without purpose, as *Paratexts* presents the concept's sociological and pragmatic implications only in terse and barely adequate form. Instead, this article issues a call for extending the range of "paratext" from the purely linguistic realm to non-linguistic elements as well, following (among others) Jerome McGann's *The Textual Condition* (1991). The term paratext should also be used, I argue, to designate a book's material and iconic layers—such as the cover illustration, typography, and formatting—as well. For both the linguistic and the material/iconographic aspects of the paratext exert influence on the reading public's reception of the text.

Rather surprisingly, genre research has not yet produced a study devoted to the relationship between paratexts and the genre of literary texts. In *Paratexts*, Genette gives this relationship only a preliminary glance; his short section on "Genre Indications" merely treats genre indications in isolation. Nor does Marie Maclean, whose 1991 article "Pretexts and Paratexts" presents a theoretical specification of the pragmatic aspects of Genette's paratext concept, deal with the relationship between paratexts and the text's genre. Nor, for that matter, does Jean-Marie Schaeffer, whose genre theory is otherwise linked inextricably to Genette's concept of transtextuality, pay any attention to paratexts in his three studies in genre theory: "Du texte au genre" (1983), "Literary Genres and Textual Genericity" (1989a), and *Qu'est-ce qu'un genre littéraire?* (1989b).

### THE PARATEXT AS A GENRE CONTRACT

This fact might lead one to imagine that paratexts have had no significant influence on how the reading public determines a given text's genre. In truth, practically the opposite is the case.

The importance of paratexts for determining a text's genre is a function of the genre character of each individual text. In the introduction to *Paratexts*, Genette cites a pointed remark by his countryman Philippe Lejeune to the effect that a paratext is "a fringe of the printed text which in reality controls one's whole reading of the text." (p. 2). This quotation is drawn from Lejeune's groundbreaking treatise on autofiction, "The Autobiographical Pact" (1989, pp. 3-30); by "fringe of the printed text," Lejeune refers to the same marginal text elements that Genette calls paratexts. When Lejeune ascribes an absolutely decisive significance to paratexts in determining how texts are interpreted, this is due to the fact that his treatise concerns a particular textual genre that is balanced between autobiography and fiction, and in which paratexts play a crucial role in shaping how readers make sense of references within the text to the life of author. If, for example, a work's paratexts include the genre label "autobiography," this will lead the audience to read the book in a substantially different manner than they would if the genre label were "novel" instead. For in the former case—but not the latter—the work's author, narrator, and protagonist must all correspond to one another.

It is also worth noting that both Lejeune and Genette describe paratexts as sites for negotiation between a sender and a receiver. Genette speaks of a contract, with legal connotations; Lejeune speaks of a pact, with religious connotations. This raises the question of how strong the bond is that a genre contract establishes, and who is bound by it—author or reader. In *Palimpsests* (1982/1997a), Genette voiced the following reservations about the genre contract's implications for the reader:

The term pact is evidently somewhat optimistic with regard to the role of the reader, who has signed nothing and must either take it or leave it. But the generic or other markings *commit* the author, who, under penalty of being misunderstood, respects them more frequently than one might expect. (p. 430)

Thus a work's paratextual genre indication exclusively obligates the author. The reader may relate to it freely and, by implication, can withdraw from it at any time. On this point Genette adds the following five years later, in *Paratexts*:

Or it (the paratext) can involve a commitment: some genre indications (autobiography, history, memoir) have, as we know, a more binding contractual force ("I commit myself to telling the truth") than do others (novel, essay). (1982/1997b, p. 11)

Recent Scandinavian autofiction, however, has qualified Genette's claim that genre indications obligate the author and (in return) offer protection against being misunderstood. The Danish author Claus Beck-Nielsen, for example, recently made it clear that the genre label "autobiography" serves more as a smokescreen for a new type of (auto)fiction than as a guarantee of the author's intention.<sup>1</sup> The genre indication can fool the reader only because the reader, by convention, trusts that the author is bound by it; but it is of course crucial for both parties that the deception be exposed in the end. This ironic play with genre indications in the most recent autofiction bears similarities to earlier plays on the (un)reliability of the narrator. In Genette's defense, however, it should be added that such ironic paratexts

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1 Cf. Behrendt's analysis of Claus Beck-Nielsen's autobiography/novel *Claus Beck-Nielsen (1963-2001)* (2006, pp. 67-121).

occur primarily in texts that were written *after* Genette's (and Lejeune's) definition was published—and are perhaps in dialogue with it.

In *Dobbeltkontrakten. En æstetisk nydannelse* (2006) [The double contract. An aesthetic novelty] and elsewhere, the Danish literary scholar Poul Behrendt has dealt extensively with such intentional mismatches between paratext and text in the latest examples of Danish autofiction. One model, on which a fundamentally autobiographical text is coupled with the paratextual genre label “novel,” is a recent phenomenon that began gaining ground in Scandinavian literature around 2000. It is represented most starkly by the Norwegian author Karl Ove Knausgård, whose autobiographical six-volume work *Min Kamp* (2009-2012) [published in English as *My Struggle*] is designated “A Novel” on the title page. In his analyses, Behrendt locates not one but two genre contracts in the autofiction: indeed, he finds two genre conflicts in mutual conflict. On the one hand, the work establishes a “reality contract” in the form of an identity of names among its author, narrator, and protagonist; but on the other hand, it also establishes a “fiction contract,” where we find (in certain places) no identity between author and narrator. The author enters into both contracts with his audience in a manner so sophisticated that it is left to the reader to assess when to read the work according to the reality contract, and when to stick to the fiction contract. The audience can only get to the bottom of this subtle masquerade by appealing to extratextual information about the author, viz., knowledge provided independently of the author.

Given how differently paratexts have been used and perceived in different periods of literary history, it would be beyond the scope of this article to treat all possible relationships between the genre character of a text and the genre indication offered in its paratexts. For the sake of clarity—and of accuracy—I will accordingly limit myself to analyzing the particular significance of paratexts for genre character in one specific Danish modernist prose text from the twentieth century. This text was written by the genre-conscious author Per Højholt, and was published by Det Schøn-

bergske Forlag in 1969 under the sensational title *6512*. This title already sends a paratextual signal that the text is negotiating with the reader about its genre, “novel.” *6512* has certain obvious points of contact between with its author’s life, but it does not thereby set forth a double contract. Rather, the author’s mission is to problematize the novel qua conventional genre with a stable narrative subject. By this means, readers are made aware of their own expectations for the genre, and thereby of themselves.

I have selected this work because of the author’s heightened awareness of both the relativity of genre concepts and the generic instability of texts. To highlight this dynamic, Per Højholt draws the book’s linguistic and material paratexts into a complex game with his audience. He does so in a manner that is unprecedented—even in the wider European context.

### TRANSTEXTUALITY

The concept “paratext” is significantly younger than the concept “text” to which it invariably adheres. What is the reason for this conceptual delay? Clearly it cannot be that paratexts are empirical phenomena of recent vintage, for paratexts have existed as long as texts have. One can scarcely imagine a text without paratexts.<sup>2</sup> Yet the opposite has in fact occurred, as in cases where an ancient text has been lost, and only the title has survived. Whereas modern literary theory has spent decades theorizing about the status and function of the text—a reflection that dates back to Plato and Aristotle—the text’s own form of publication has, until recently, been dismissed as irrelevant to understanding the text, even in the work of such contemporary historians of the book as Jerome McGann and D. F. McKenzie.

It was in *Palimpsests* (1982/1997a) that Gérard Genette first identified as “paratextual” the relationship between the published text and the other

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<sup>2</sup> Sune Auken has pointed out to me, however, that medieval runestones are texts without paratexts (in a narrow linguistic sense).

textual elements that physically surround it and present it to the public.<sup>3</sup> In fact, however, the concept of paratext had already appeared in the final pages of *The Architext: An Introduction* (1979/1992), albeit with a different semantic content, namely, as referring to what is commonly called “intertextuality,” namely, relationships between one text and another. At that point, Genette was occupied with an investigation of all the possible relationships that transcend a work’s immanent text and set it in a signifying relation to the literary institution and to literature as a whole.<sup>4</sup>

Genette’s interest in the transcendence of the text must be understood against the backdrop of a tradition in French literary studies that stretches back to the 1960s, in which textual structures of signification are elucidated by means of structuralism and deconstruction. Indeed, in his prior narratological analyses of modern French prose, Genette had himself contributed to structuralist textual theory. When Genette introduces his so-called “transtextual trilogy” with his essay on the architext, the target of his opposition is not the overall mindset of structuralism, but rather its narrow conception of text. Genette’s new view is that if one hopes to grasp a literary work in all its complexity, one must analyze all of its manifold relationships, both to the textual elements within it and to other texts outside it. The paratextual relationship between a work’s immanent text and its title, subtitle, author’s name, publisher’s name, and so on, is just one of five transtextual relationships. As mentioned, this relationship is the subject of Genette’s encyclopedic treatise *Paratexts*, with its ambiguous French original title *Seuils*—which in part conveys the purely lexical meaning “thresholds,” and in part plays on the name of his French publisher Editions de Seuil.

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3 In *Palimpsests* (1997), Genette annotates the word “paratext” as follows: “The word paratext must be understood in the ambiguous, even hypocritical, sense that operates in adjectives such as *parafiscal* or *paramilitary*” (p. 429).

4 In the present context, “immanent text” corresponds what is called the “main text” or “body text” elsewhere.

Genette defines the other four transtextual relationships as inter-, hyper-, meta-, and architextuality, respectively. *Intertextuality* is restricted to the narrow set of directly documentable relationships between one text and another, prior text in the form of citations and allusions. In French literary theory, this area had been treated previously by such figures as Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes—and so Genette gives it only cursory attention in his book. *Hypertextuality*, on the other hand, is Genette's own conception of an overall intertextual relationship between two texts that involves either the imitation or the transformation of style, characters, narration, etc. A *hypertext* that (for example) imitates some previous *hypotext* is called a *palimpsest*, and is in Genette's words "literature in the second degree." The fourth aspect of transtextuality is *metatextuality*, the explicit relation between text and a metatext found, for example, in a review or an essay. Genette does not devote much attention to this class of relations either, even though he himself had produced metatexts in his own narrative analyses of Marcel Proust (mentioned previously). The fifth and most abstract transcendence of the text, finally, is called *architextuality*. This refers to relations among a group of texts that take the form of a genre, a mode of expression, or a type of discourse. By definition, all texts are architextual; all possess a discursive instance and a genre, though some are—as Genette puts it—more architextual than others, i.e., easier to classify narratively and generically.

Although Genette published three independent studies of the archi-text, the hypertext, and the paratext respectively, it is important to keep the relations among all five dimensions of transtextuality in mind. Genette himself, of course, is not blind to these interactions; he refers to them in passing in *Palimpsests* (1982/1997a, p. 7). A sketch of these internal relations may help to clarify the dynamics here. The generic architextuality of a text is easily marked paratextually within the work; what is more, we often find intertextual citations that may indicate a hypertextual relation in the form of parody or pastiche, all of which can emerge from a thorough and informative metatext. Quite frequently, it is the metatextual determina-

tion of a text's genre that is decisive for directing the reading public's reception of the work.

### DELIMITING AND WIDENING THE PARATEXTUAL

There is only one relation between the text and what lies outside it that Genette quite deliberately excludes from his (otherwise nearly limitless) concept of transtextuality, and that is the relation between text and extratextual reality. This exclusion is touched upon in the condensed introduction to *Paratexts*, in connection with a distinction between verbal and factual paratexts. In contrast to verbal paratexts, factual paratexts include all of the information about the author and society that the work itself does not provide. Genette's examples of factual paratexts are the author's sexuality, religion, and political affiliation, i.e., conditions that would normally be thought of as part of a work's context. But Genette uses "context" to mean the specific portion of a factual paratext that concerns the work's position within the author's *oeuvre* and in history as a whole. Frequently it can be difficult to distinguish between factual paratexts and contexts in this sense; but this is not, in any case, a distinction to which Genette gives special emphasis.

The essential distinction that Genette draws is between verbal and factual paratexts. Insofar as the factual paratext presupposes extratextual knowledge that has been derived from sources outside the work, that paratext lies *outside* the realm of transtextuality. This of course does not mean that extratextual information about the author's private life, family, travel, job history, etc., has no bearing on the reader's understanding of the text. It just means that this is a relation that goes beyond (trans-) textuality by definition.<sup>5</sup>

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5 Compare the following note in Genette's *Palimpsests* (1982/1997a): "I should perhaps have specified that transtextuality is only one transcendence among others; it does at least differ from that other transcendence which unites the text to the extratextual reality, and which does not interest me (directly) for the moment—though I know it exists: I do sometimes go out of my library (I do not have a library) ..." (p. 430).



Genette is fully aware that a work's paratexts necessarily include more than purely verbal or linguistic elements. But such layers are granted no further attention in *Paratexts*. It was only in recent work in the history of the book, as for example in Jerome McGann's *The Textual Condition*, that light was shed on all the non-linguistic codes in a work—seemingly insignificant, but in reality quite meaningful—that belong neither to the immanent text nor to the linguistic paratext (Kondrup, 2011, p. 277). In his general break with previous literature research, McGann proposes that Genette's basic distinction between text and paratext be replaced by an even more fundamental distinction between linguistic and so-called bibliographic codes:

The distinction, text/paratext, can be useful for certain descriptive purposes, but for a deeper investigation into the nature of textuality, it is not strong enough. For the past six years I have been exploring a different distinction by calling attention to the text as a laced network of linguistic and bibliographical codes. (...) The text/paratext distinction as formulated in *Seuils* will not, by Genette's own admission, explore such matters as ink, typeface, paper, and various other phenomena which are crucial to the understanding of textuality. (McGann, 1991, p. 13)

By bibliographical codes, McGann means the physical, material aspects of a work, such as its cover, illustrations, typography, paper quality, and formatting, etc., along with such sociological aspects as price, marketing mechanisms, and distribution channels. In order to bring to light the semiotic significance of textual materiality, McGann claims, textual studies must abandon Genette's linguistic definition of the paratext. McGann insists on the "textual condition," namely, that reading—and so understanding—always takes place under conditions that are concretely detectable and physically and socially determined. McGann thereby defies the text-theoretical idealism of deconstruction and hermeneutics. If we pur-

sue this text-sociological line of thinking, then we must conclude that it is wrong, strictly speaking, to concern ourselves with the paratext as an abstract concept. Historians of the book should attend only to concrete, empirical paratexts.

I do not consider it necessary to abandon Genette's distinction between text and paratext. On the contrary: when analyzing any literary work whatsoever, it is useful to distinguish between statements by the author in the text itself and in its paratexts. Nevertheless, McGann's analyses of the materiality of modernist texts have served to open studies of paratexts to the iconographic and material layers of literary works as well as the linguistic.<sup>6</sup>

### THE SOCIOLOGY-OF-PUBLISHING DIMENSION

From the perspective of the sociology of the text, the most striking function of paratexts is to frame a complicated mediation among author, publisher, book, and reading public. The complicated element here consists, among other things, in the text's generally opaque sender relations. For example, the sender of the work's cover, title, genre indication, typography, and jacket blurb may be either the author or the publisher (here including editors, graphic artists, etc.), and the reasoning behind the design of such paratexts may be dictated by either artistic or commercial interests. While such sender relations are often intermixed, it is typically the publishing house that represents commercial interests, while the author stands for artistic interests. Still, the roles need not be divided along these lines. Here follow two extreme examples where the opposite is the case.

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6 The same position is articulated by Kondrup: "The typography, formatting, jacket copy, and cover art all belong to what the French literary critic Gérard Genette calls the paratexts, namely, the set of 'thresholds' that surround a work's main text and communicate the work to the reader—and thereby direct the reader's understanding of it as well" (2011, p. 294).

At one extreme we find small, non-commercial publishers such as “Arena, Forfatternes Forlag” [Arena, Authors’ Press] (1953-1982), which served for many years as a platform for debut authors and translations of advanced European prose modernism that would not have been embraced by commercial houses.<sup>7</sup> Unlike his fellow publishers, K. E. Hermann, Arena’s chief executive, did not primarily serve commercial interests. Arena’s charter indicates that its sole criterion for accepting manuscripts was their “literary and cultural value.” Of particular interest were “the debut and the ‘difficult’ manuscript, by which we mean work without direct audience appeal.”<sup>8</sup> The product of the elitist attitude is a wide range of publications in which the author was permitted to shape the work’s paratexts almost single-handedly. The publication of Per Højholt’s *6512* by Det Schønbergske Forlag, another small press, took place under parallel circumstances: the book’s paratexts were manifestly not dictated by the publisher’s commercial interests. Højholt’s choice to publish with Det Schønbergske Forlag was largely due to the freedom it granted him to design his books’ verbal, material, and iconic paratexts, in the latter two cases in close collaboration with graphic artist Finn Brøslø.<sup>9</sup>

At the other extreme, numerous recent writers have become increasingly conscious of their sales figures. There are many examples of authors dropping publishers who fail to do enough to promote their work. Such authors tend to shape their books’ paratexts in close cooperation with marketing experts at the press, to ensure that their books will gain the greatest possible appeal to the broadest possible audience. Thus it is that, on the basis of simple, market-based reasoning to the effect that

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7 Cf. Rasmussen (2012, pp. 33-62), where the history of this non-commercial author-publisher is described in detail, and is discussed in connection with Gyldendal.

8 The charter can be found in Arena’s archive (Forlaget Arenas arkiv, 07.04.1).

9 For fuller analysis of the paratexts to Per Højholt’s *6512*, see Rasmussen (2012, pp. 170-177).

novels sell better than narrative cycles or the like, fictional texts come to be outfitted with the genre indication “novel”—preferably on the front cover, so that no potential buyer will harbor any doubt about the book’s contents. For similar reasons, the jacket copy becomes a concise summary of the plot, written in plain language devoid of artistic ambition, and commonly accompanied by a qualitative assessment of the work designed to anticipate and relativize the verdict of the literary critics.

It should be emphasized that these are extremes. Most literary works represent, in their paratexts, a compromise between publisher and author, between economic and artistic interests. What is more, it is becoming more and more common to find complicated sender relations even within literary works’ immanent text, as numerous authors now allow their texts to be revised by editors in their publisher’s employ.

### **THE PRAGMATIC DIMENSION**

Genette deals only to a small extent with the sociological (and, in particular, sociology-of-publishing) dimension of paratexts. His interest focuses primarily on the pragmatic dimension, whereby paratexts give the author an opportunity to manage the reading public’s view of the text. This pragmatic approach stands in opposition to the hermeneutic understanding of the text, in which the ideal is a fusion of author’s and reader’s horizons:

Having long been at odds with textual hermeneutics—and quite happily so—I do not intend at this last stage to embrace hypertextual hermeneutics. I view the relationship between the text and its reader as one that is more socialized, more openly contractual, and pertaining to a conscious and organized pragmatics. (1997a, p. 9)

This skepticism about the idealism of hermeneutics—idealism in regard to attaining a stable and definitive understanding of the text that is entire-

ly independent of who is reading it, and when and where they are doing so—is shared by (among others) Jerome McGann, who lays emphasis, as mentioned previously, on the concrete physical circumstances in which every reading of the text takes place.

In *Paratexts*, Genette is not nearly as explicit in his criticism of hermeneutics. Nevertheless, his definition of the performative “force” of paratexts indicates that his position is unchanged:

The pragmatic status of a paratextual element is defined by the characteristics of its situation of communication: the nature of the sender and addressee, the sender’s degree of authority and responsibility, the illocutionary force of the sender’s message, and undoubtedly some other characteristics I have overlooked. (1997b, p. 8)

The paratext is defined not as a frontier between text and non-text, but as a threshold between an inside and an outside. Whereas the metaphor of a frontier is based on an either/or dichotomy, the threshold metaphor leaves open the possibility that paratexts can be both at once. Paratexts are thus regarded as an integral part of the author’s overall message in the work. Paratexts differ from the immanent text only in their semiotic situation.

When faced with a non-commercial literary work, one might at first think that it is the author who is speaking in the work’s paratexts, while it is the narrator who is speaking in the text. But because the narrator literally cannot say a word without the author’s mediation, it is more accurate to say that the author speaks on two different levels in the respective text and paratexts. In her article “Pretexts and Paratexts,” Marie Maclean analyzes this issue on the basis of the theory of speech acts developed by the philosophers of language J. L. Austin and John R. Searle, in which (certain) statements are better understood as actions with words than as thoughts about the world. From a perspective focused on such performa-

tive utterances, Maclean proposes the following description of how an author communicates with the reader in text and paratexts, respectively, as two different levels of illocutionary speech acts:

The paratext involves 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. (1991, p. 274)

Understandably, Maclean assumes that the sender relations are generally unclear in paratexts—i.e., that they are shared among multiple senders—whereas there is a univocal sender in the immanent text.

### **PER HØJHOLT'S 6512**

Per Højholt's *6512* offers an illustrative example of complex author-reader communication in the paratexts of a literary work produced in the absence of commercial interests. Let us start with the back cover, which at first glance seems bifurcated. At the top we find a black-and-white photograph of the author: he is standing in a winter landscape and pointing straight ahead. It is worth noting that Højholt here depicts himself in everyday clothes, and that he has deliberately assumed a comic posture, inasmuch as his index finger appears to be the same size as the rest of him. Below the photograph we find an explanatory text whose style is manifestly similar to the book's interior fiction. Whether the author's index finger is pointing at the book's actual, empirical reader, or at the explanatory jacket copy underneath, cannot be established unambiguously. (The book's interior text is full of such ambiguities.) From a paratextual standpoint, the back cover's conjoining of authorial portrait (iconic)

with jacket copy (linguistic) is without precedent in Danish literature, and to my knowledge in European literature as well. If we were operating text-theoretically here with only the linguistic concept of paratext, we would deny ourselves the opportunity to make sense of this complex relation between photography and text.



The first sentence of the jacket copy reads simply: "I'm the one who wrote 6512." If the accompanying photo were not there—on the cover of a subsequent edition, let us suppose—then we could hardly imagine the jacket copy beginning in this manner. The photograph's motif serves as the implicit referent for the pronoun *I* in "I'm," while the picture itself serves, secondarily, as a referent for the person of Per Højholt. In thereby "pointing out" who wrote the book, the back cover may merely seem to be repeating the information provided on the front cover. Nevertheless, the jacket copy's first sentence, with the support of the accompanying photograph, does yield several new meanings. At first glance, its message might be thought to have a boastful character, on account of the oversized index finger. Here we should recall that, in other contexts, index fingers are used to point out the guilty. In such contexts, the first sentence assumes the character of an admission or a confession.

As obvious as it is, in the present case, that the *I* of the paratext refers to the author Per Højholt, it is equally clear that the *I* of the body text must have a different referent. This is evident in the text's first line: "For one reason or another I did not manage to write here yesterday or the day before, and the blank page annoys me ..." In Marie Maclean's terms, the paratext's message is a first-order illocutionary act, by means of which the writer is trying to influence the reader directly; whereas the fictional text's message is a second-order performative utterance, referring not to the shared world of our experience, but instead to a fictive, unreal world.

To describe the message of the paratexts as an illocutionary act is to highlight the author's attempt to influence the reader to adopt a specific belief about the text. As mentioned, Per Højholt's *6512* was released in 1969, one year after Roland Barthes had published his essay on "The Death of the Author." In that short and influential essay, Barthes sets forth his views on language and literature, and not least on the changed role of the author. Drawing upon a structuralist theory of language, Barthes claims that works of literature do not (or do no longer) have their



semantic origin in the author's person. Strictly speaking, the author is nothing more than the impersonal entity that produces the literary work, i.e. the entity that cobbles the work's meaning together intertextually: "The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture." (1968/1977, p. 146)

Barthes unites this structuralist textual theory with a pragmatic language theory emphasizing the performative or action-producing character of language. To write is not the same as to describe something that already exists. On the contrary, to write is to commit a verbal act with language. According to Barthes, therefore, literary criticism must stop taking an interest in the author, and must busy itself with the reader instead: "The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author." (p. 148)

It is likely this very essay by Barthes that the internationally well-versed Højholt had in mind when he completed the jacket design for 65/2. Højholt takes the performative theory of the death of the author literally when, in the jacket copy, he declares: "As stated, I disavow all responsibility; it rests entirely with the reader. If you read the book, then it is yours." Once this sentence has been read, then the author's index finger no longer points down toward the jacket copy, but past it and out toward the reader. Compared to Barthes' theory of the death of the author, the only essential difference is that the photograph over the jacket copy depicts Per Højholt, *qua* biographical person, as alive. That is, the author is dead enough that he has no authority over the reader's understanding of the text; but he is nonetheless alive enough to deliver material for the text and (let us not forget) to *write* it. The jacket copy's paradoxical statement to the effect that author Per Højholt takes legal responsibility for the text, while simultaneously disclaiming any hermeneutical authority over its interpretation, is an important component of the work's overall message—a component located on the threshold of the text, namely, in its paratexts.

From a text-analytical perspective, it is striking (though not particularly surprising, when one considers Gyldendal's commercial interests) that when Gyldendal's Book Club assumed the rights to *6512* in 1986, it published a third edition in which the original cover was replaced by a cover of standard design. Word for word, the immanent text was identical to the original, but the format was smaller, the paper of lower quality, and the original dust jacket eliminated. All of this presented new readers with fundamentally altered, and qualitatively worse, conditions for understanding the original work.

*6512* bears no genre designation in its paratexts. In the jacket copy, Per Højholt deftly avoids genre signals by describing his activity as a writer on wholly neutral terms, claiming simply that he has written a "book" that consists of some "leaves." In general, writers can themselves suggest genre categories in their works' paratexts, or they can refrain from doing so, leaving such classification up to the readers. By doing the latter, an author sends a theoretically ambiguous signal to the reading public. This signal might mean that a genre indication is unnecessary, since the text fits unproblematically into one of the well-known genres; or it might mean the opposite, namely, that the text departs so strongly from the usual conventions that a genre indication would seem to be impossible or irrelevant. In the case of *6512*, one must assume that the author, in literal agreement with the jacket copy, has ceded to the readers responsibility for determining the book's genre.

Two years after the book's release, Per Højholt published a piece in a Danish newspaper in which he explained the literary method he had used in writing *6512*. Here, without further ado, he referred to the book as a novel (1970/1994, p. 10). He simply did not mention the fact that this genre indication is conspicuously absent in the book's paratexts. Genette calls such a statement by an author about his own work a "public epitext." Epitexts are texts that attach themselves closely to a given work. They are either private (e.g., correspondence with the publisher) or pub-

lic (interviews or other publicity in the press). Peritexts, by contrast, are located within the work itself. Naturally, a statement in a newspaper article to the effect that the author's book belongs to the genre "novel" has more of a non-binding character than would a genre indication in the peritext.<sup>10</sup>

In works where no genre label is present, the reader must construct a genre contract out of the work's other paratexts. In *Paratexts*, Genette states that a genre contract is always constituted on the basis of a work's paratexts taken as a whole: "The genre contract is constituted, more or less consistently, by the whole of the paratext and, more broadly, by the relation between text and paratext ..." (1987/1997b, p. 41)

Apart from the absent genre indication, *6512* includes in its paratexts all of the formal elements that novels normally do, namely, a jacket bearing the name of the author, the name of the publisher, and the title, together with a table of contents and jacket copy on the back cover. What is unusual in the case of *6512* is that, taken together, its paratexts make a deliberate break from the conventions of the novel.

We may continue this examination by turning to the place where reading normally begins, and where genre expectations are set first and foremost, namely, the work's title. Genette cites Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) as an example of a thematic title; he asks rhetorically how we would read that book if we did not know its title. By contrast, Højlolt's title *6512* is entirely devoid of thematic or generic signals. If Danish readers have any immediate associations to the number 6512, they would be to a postcode, or perhaps to a telephone number; most would probably just think of it as a number. On further reflection, however, the particular combination of numbers in the title reveals the methodological principle by which the book's fictional texts are allegedly constructed. What is more, the title is

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<sup>10</sup> To avoid complicating matters unnecessarily, I consistently use the term paratext for texts that, strictly speaking, would be classified as "peritexts" by Genette.

closely related to the book's equally atypical table of contents, which—extremely surprisingly—takes the form of an addition problem: the sum of the digits of the book's pages are themselves summed and then added to an additional (random) number, yielding a result (6512) equal to the number in the title of the book. Finally, the numbering of the book's pages is quite unique, in that it turns out to be the textual fragments that are numbered, rather than (as one might expect) the pages themselves. To help the reader realize this, the numbers are moved from the bottom of the page up to a point located below each textual fragment.

In the article mentioned previously, Højholt reveals that the random number in the book's table of contents symbolizes the activity that the co-authoring reader is to invest in the book's textual fragments in order to eke coherent meaning out of them. Taken together, the numbers in both the table of contents and the title signal the author's preoccupation with what is constructed and anonymous, as opposed to what is personal and subjective.

All of these experiments with the book's paratexts are undertaken in awareness of their destabilizing effect on the reading public's expectations of the novel genre, namely, that a novel offers a recognizable representation of a stable narrative subject. Without entering into either an architextual analysis of the diary novel in Danish literature, or a hyper-textual analysis of the text pastiche in Samuel Beckett's trilogy of experimental-narrative novels *Molloy* (1955/1994), *Malone Dies* (1956/1994) and *The Unnamable* (1959/1994), I will merely assert that this work's immanent text constitutes an original experiment with the novel as a "genre model."<sup>11</sup> Unlike Beckett, Højholt incorporates paratexts into his work's total semiotic content as a threshold to the text, as both an inside

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<sup>11</sup> For fuller analysis of the text's hyper- and architextual relations, see Rasmussen (2012, p. 177-190).

and an outside, inasmuch as the jacket copy mimics the text's experimental approach at the very same moment as it describes the text.

The concept of genre model is borrowed from Jean-Marie Schaeffer's genre theory article "Du texte au genre," which interprets Genette's architextuality as a dynamic textual function, "genericity," by which each text relates itself to one or another genre model. Even the most experimental texts in literature relate (architextually) to established genre models, which is why, according to Schaeffer, there exist no genreless texts: no literary texts are so unique, so singular, that they bear no features in common with other literary texts—at the very least, with other experimental texts.

Schaeffer describes the genericity of texts as, in principle, either a doubling or a transformation of a given genre model. We can find examples of doubling in texts that can be fit seamlessly into generic fellowship with other texts; this applies particularly to popular literature. Transformation, on the other hand, is found in modernist texts, where the author deliberately cultivates and displaces discourse, mode, and genre in relation to convention. Thus Per Højlund's *6512*, with its paratexts that veer astray and its limit-testing experiments at the textual level, amounts *both* to a transformation of the traditional diary novel and to an imitation of European prose modernism, in which the subject and the outside world are merely destabilized constructs of the reader's. As important as it may be, in some contexts, to understand the text's singularity, in other contexts it can be equally important to classify a text retrospectively. From a genre-historical perspective, *6512* has contributed to a renewal of the conventions of the genre "novel" in Danish literature, inasmuch as it has long served as the model for subsequent experimental novels.

## GENRE-HISTORICAL STRATEGIES

Twentieth-century European literature can be divided into literary-historical categories such as modernism and postmodernism. Yet the

exact content of these categories remains under debate: their boundaries can never be established unproblematically. However, if we focus solely on the genre aspect, there do seem to be two distinct strategies behind modernism and postmodernism. And this permits us to describe them, tentatively, in purely genre-historical terms as follows: modernism is characterized by a critique of tradition and extending the territory of various genres, while postmodernism is typically a parodic blend of tradition's (sub-)genres. The genre-experimental works of modernists tend to widen the main genres, the novel and the poem, whereas those of postmodernists typically mix popular and elite sub-genres.

One indicator of whether a work belongs in one or another genre-historical category is in fact the work's paratext. Whereas modernist literature as a rule avoids genre indications in its paratexts, we find a myriad of innovative, parodic genre indications in the paratexts of postmodernist literature. In both cases, the goal is presumably to keep the question of the text's genre character open. For (post)modernist writers, it is essential that the reader not revert to generic conventions about how the text is to be read, but instead strive to read the text as generically singular, i.e., as an unprecedented representation of modern reality.

Let us take a few international works as examples. It can be established that both Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* (1913-27) and James Joyce's *Ulysses* adopt a critical stance toward the epic tradition of the nineteenth century, when the genre label "novel" became the conventional marker for the *Bildungsroman* and *Entwicklungsroman*, respectively. No doubt a literary historian would here interject that these bodies of literature are hardly as homogeneous as the modernist writers suggest, and that the traditions at issue largely consisted of experiments with the novel form. Nevertheless, Proust, Joyce, and others did succeed in marking a major break with the novel tradition by composing non-epic narratives with complicated semiotic relations, and so also refrained,

accordingly, from giving their works conventional genre labels.<sup>12</sup> According to A. Walton Litz, Joyce made an explicit departure from the conformist and antiquated dimensions of the novel genre's stable subjective point of view. In his private letters, Joyce refers to *Ulysses* as "a museum of different literary kinds." (Litz, 1974, p. 110).

In the following generation we find, for example, the Austrian writer Thomas Bernhard turning against the modernism of the first half of the twentieth century, and inventing new genre indications for his autobiographical prose, such as *Die Ursache: Eine Andeutung* ["The Cause: A Hint"; published in English as *An Indication of the Cause*] (1975), *Der Keller: Eine Entziehung* ["The Cellar: A Withdrawal"; published in English as *The Cellar*] (1976), *Der Atem: Eine Entscheidung* ["The Breath: A Decision"; published in English as *Breath*] (1978), *Die Kälte: Eine Isolation* ["The Cold: An Isolation"; published in English as *In the Cold*] (1981). In this series of autobiographical novels, each new work is given a new, hitherto unseen genre indication, which at the very least provokes formal consideration of such sub-genres as "a hint," "a withdrawal," "a decision," or "an isolation." Such unconventional genre labels, derived from the ordinary vocabulary of everyday language, parody genres by resembling genre indications while remaining unfamiliar to the established genre system. In *Paratexts*, Genette calls such subtitles paragenetic designations, since they only appear to represent a renewal or revolution of genre. According to Genette, only Dante, Cervantes, and perhaps Proust can truly be said to have renewed the novel tradition qua genre (1987/1997b, p. 98).

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<sup>12</sup> In *Paratexts* (1987/1997b), Genette comments as follows on Proust's attitude toward the novel genre: "A la recherche du temps perdu, as we know, includes no genre indication, and this restraint is perfectly consistent with the highly ambiguous status of a work that lies halfway between the autobiographical and the novelistic" (pp. 97).

Despite the fact that Proust and Joyce refrained, at least paratextually, from classifying their swollen experimental texts by genre, the literary establishment later found little difficulty in subsuming them within the tradition of the modernist novel. Notwithstanding Bernhard's innovative genre indications, his works too were subsequently incorporated into the canon of modern novels. To remain unclassified in the genre system, if that is feasible at all, is perhaps just one of the utopias of the avant-garde.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, as a result of the waves of genre-experimental literature in modernism and postmodernism, the concept of "novel"—understood along the lines of the long prose narratives of both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—is becoming more and more diffuse.

## CONCLUSION

In this article, special consideration has been given to the relationship between paratexts and the genre character of a literary text. The concept of paratext as a linguistic entity that transcends the immanent text was developed by Gérard Genette in the early 1980s as a reaction against the structuralist conception of the text. Later, Jerome McGann and other historians of the book highlighted the iconic and material layers of literary works, in partial disagreement with Genette. As I see the matter, the distinction between text and paratext ought to be retained, but paratexts should be understood as something other and more than *text*. When we are faced with works in which the author is writing in the space between autobiography and fiction, analysis of the significance of paratexts for the text's genre is urgent indeed. Meanwhile, paratexts play a different, important role in modernism's experiments with the conventions of the novel genre. Generally speaking, a genre indication should not be con-

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Jauss's (1982) conceptions of "horizon change" and "horizon setting" in great works of literature.



strued as a descriptive message, but as a performative linguistic act; conversely, the absence of a genre indication in the paratexts does not necessarily mean that the text is genre-less. Understood pragmatically, the paratext is a bargaining site where author and/or publisher and reading public meet to negotiate the work's genre and, thereby, a template for reading it. Per Højholt's *65/2* uniquely demonstrates how the first edition's paratexts prepare the reader for—and, perhaps, warn the reader of—how the text will call the novel genre's stable narrator-subject into question. By means of the author's conscious experimentation with convention, readers are granted the opportunity to become conscious of their own expectations of the genre 'novel' and thus of themselves. From a genre-historical perspective, *65/2* can easily be classified as a modernist novel in Danish literature (Danish modernism being slightly delayed in relation to European modernism), inasmuch as we here find a generic transformation, in the words of Jean-Marie Schaeffer, or in Hans Robert Jauss's terms a change or setting of horizons of expectation. Whereas modernist authors typically avoid genre indications in their attempts to bring narrative prose up to speed with modernity, in postmodernism we find a parodic overuse of what Genette calls "parageneric" subtitles. What both strategies share is a twofold aim: on the one hand, a desire to relativize genre concepts; on the other hand, the wish to keep the question of the text's genre character open for the reader.

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# RESEARCH GROUP FOR GENRE STUDIES (RGGS)



The Research Group for Genre Studies moves at the forefront of existing genre research, with a wide international network, a developing interdisciplinary research profile in both English and Danish, and extensive teaching activities at all levels, including a strong profile in research education.

RGGS embraces the highly developed research in current Genre Studies. At the core of this research is the advanced, remarkably cohesive, and extensive body of knowledge established in Rhetorical Genre Studies, in English for Specific Purposes, and in Systemic Functional Linguistics. The field now spans important work within Rhetoric, Composition, Linguistics, Sociology, Ethnography, Business Communication, Composition and Information Studies.

RGGS seeks to develop and expand this research by examining and challenging its theoretical underpinnings, by expanding its scholarly reach, and by reintegrating a number of subjects into Genre Studies that have been left behind in the development of current Genre Studies. Specifically, RGGS strives to establish a cohesive connection between aesthetic and functional theories of genre, in order to **reinvigorate** the study of genre in aesthetic research fields, and the inclusion of aesthetic subjects in Genre Studies.