Examining Paratextual Theory and its Applications in Digital Culture

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Chapter 15
Ebooks and the Digital Paratext:
Emerging Trends in the Interpretation of Digital Media

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ABSTRACT

Since its publication in 1987, Gérard Genette's Paratexts *has provided a productive means for engaging with those peripheral texts that frame, present, and bound a central work. However, advances in digital media and, in particular, the increasing prevalence of the ebook have altered or replaced many of the conventions outlined by Genette in* Paratexts. *This chapter explores these new paratextual conventions, employing case studies drawn from the "front lines" of the ebook revolution in concert with more recent scholarship in the field of paratextual studies. By examining the recent development of ebooks through the lens of the five paratextual dimensions outlined by Genette—spatial, temporal, substantial, pragmatic, and functional—this chapter argues that* Paratexts *continues to offer a crucial tool for the interpretation of texts in a new digital milieu.*

INTRODUCTION: EBOOKS AND THE DIGITAL PARATEXT

In his seminal *Seuils* (1987), later translated as *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (1997), Gérard Genette undertakes a systematic and comprehensive analysis of the various elements—forewords, dedications, titles, and so on—that surround and frame a published book. In doing so, he provides precise commentary on the cultural and social conventions that contextualize a written work. According to Genette, paratexts are those items accompanying a book which "surround it and extend it, precisely in order to *present* it, 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...of a book" (p. 1). In recent years, the emergence of the ebook as an increasingly prevalent cultural and commercial force has challenged many of the literary conventions that Genette documented in his landmark work. However, the ephemeral nature of the ebook has given a new importance to the paratext as

an arbiter of form—increasingly, digital books depend on paratextual markers for definition as a distinct mode of expression. Without paratexts, the ebook as a form cannot be truly "present in the world," and an examination of these digital books depends on paratextual markers for definition as a distinct mode of expression.

In this chapter, I will attempt to apply Genette's landmark work on paratexts to an elusive and paradoxical new medium: the ebook. While the ebook has profoundly altered how texts are produced, published, and consumed, the changes wrought in this space have only served to expand the importance of paratextual boundaries. This chapter will attempt to update *Paratexts* for a new digital milieu, building on the work of recent scholars, such as Henry Jenkins, Jonathan Gray, and Ellen McCracken, while demonstrating the continued validity of Genette's own interpretive methods and taxonomy.

In analyzing various paratexts, Genette makes use of a set of features which, when taken together, reveal the function and purpose of the central text. Each section of this chapter will focus on one of these five features, which "describe a paratextual message's spatial, temporal, substantial, pragmatic, and functional characteristics" (1997, p. 4). When taken as a whole, these five paratextual dimensions reveal an author's intent in publishing a work and provide a context in which a reader can receive and interpret a central text. Some scholars, such as Ellen McCracken, have proposed alternative taxonomies for understanding the changes wrought by the advent of digital books. McCracken's conception of paratexts along centrifugal and centripetal vectors provides a crucial framework for employing Genettian concepts such as epitext and peritext in today's commercial digital environment. However, in many cases, analysis of a paratext must go beyond directionality and space to encompass temporal, substantial, pragmatic, and functional considerations. Although there is considerable overlap between these categories,

Genette's original paratextual taxonomy provides a comprehensive epistemological framework for an examination of the changes brought about by the advent of the ebook as a medium.

Although my analysis here is confined primarily to the ebook as a form, I use the term inclusively rather than exclusively. Defining the borders of the ebook is difficult, and in this chapter I have deliberately chosen a number of examples that challenge or extend the boundaries of the medium. Although Ellen McCracken's characterization of the traditional ebook as "transitional" is certainly accurate, many of the most revolutionary recent developments in ebooks have occurred outside of this "standard" ebook format, which itself is difficult to pin down. In most cases, I have chosen examples for their spatial, temporal, substantial, pragmatic, and functional paratextual differences, and these choices have led me to present case studies that are at times far removed from the familiar codex. However, in all cases, I have confined myself to works that self-identify as digital books, either within their central text or their accompanying paratexts. It is my hope that exploring the connections between these innovations—among them the "enhanced" ebook, Kindle Singles, audiobooks, and the digital social edition—will show how these forms suggest possible paths for the future of the ebook. In presenting these case studies, this chapter attempts to move beyond simple dichotomies to embrace the complexities of the ebook as a medium.

SPATIAL PARATEXTUAL ELEMENTS

According to Genette, spatial paratextual elements are those concerned with location—they typically answer the question *Where?* (1997, p. 4) For Genette, an element's position in relation to the "central" text of a book is crucial. Those elements which exist outside the physical book, such as reviews and promotional materials, are termed

"epitexts," while a book's outermost elements, such as its cover, are described as the "publisher's peritext." At first glance, these spatial distinctions would appear to be particularly problematic for the ebook, a digital—and hence ephemeral—medium. Yet considerations of physical form are actually of paramount importance to the consumption of digital books. In this section, I have broken down the distinctive spatial properties of the ebook into two primary categories: the peritext and the epitext. These paratextual forms have received significant scholarly attention in recent years, and my analysis of these spatial paratextual elements will consider the interpretive paradigms offered up by researchers such as Ellen McCracken and Jonathan Gray.

E-Readers as Peritext

There is a wide gulf between the peritext of a print book and the peritext of an ebook. Genette describes the peritext as "the zone that exists merely by the fact that a book is published and possibly republished and offered to the public in one or several more or less varied presentations." Peritextual considerations are concerned with "the cover, the title page...[and] the book's material construction (selection of format, of paper, of typeface, and so forth)" (p. 16). Although digital books are available via web browser or mobile phone, the quintessential device for their consumption is the e-reader. Significant recent work has been undertaken toward understanding the spatiality of the e-reader, most notably by Ellen McCracken (2013), Dorothee Birke, and Birte Christ (Birke & Christ, 2013) as part of an article series in *Narrative*. While their studies pay particular regard to the e-reader's typographical and hypertextual flexibility, other social changes—most notably in the realm of privacy—have emerged with the advent of e-readers as peritext.

In recent years, the proliferation of attractive, portable, and inexpensive e-readers has contrib-

uted to a rapid increase in the popularity of ebooks and an incremental decline in the sale of print books. A recent Pew survey (Rainie & Duggan, 2012) reported that between 2011 and 2012, the number of Americans who stated that they have read an ebook in the past year has increased from 16% to 23%, while during the same period print book readership decreased from 78% to 75%. Lee Rainie, director of the Pew Internet Project and co-author of the study, has observed that "readers are embracing a new format for books and a significant number are reading more because books can be plucked out of the air" (Choney, 2012), transferred almost instantaneously to a lightweight and relatively inexpensive reading device.

E-readers possess some basic advantages over print books. Most apparent is their ability to store a great deal of data in a relatively small physical space, making ebooks eminently portable. A standard e-reader can hold the equivalent of hundreds of thousands of pages in a physical space less than half an inch thick. As part of a 2010 pilot program, professors at Stanford Medical School handed out iPads to a segment of the incoming class during their orientation. To show the amount of paper the device would be replacing, an instructor pointed out a two-foot pile of binders, the materials for just one course (White, 2010). This feature of modern ebook-ready devices makes it possible for the owner of a tablet, e-reader, or smartphone to carry a small library with him or her at all times, radically restructuring the spatial relationship between book and reader.

While the ability to store a large number of books on a local device is certainly significant, this functionality is somewhat overshadowed by other features of modern e-readers. Ellen McCracken employs a spatial and directional metaphor—centrifugal and centripetal movement—to describe two crucial functions of the Kindle and the iPad. According to McCracken (2013), ebooks use

the verbal literary text as the center, [and] outward and inward pathways of semiotic engagement lead readers in various ways to the exterior and interior....Centrifugal paratexts draw readers outside the text proper....Centripetal paratexts, in contrast, modify readers' experience on inward vectors. (pp. 106–107)

Here, centrifugal or outward movement is facilitated by the ability of e-readers to incorporate hyperlinks within their text. Using links in tables of contents and references has become common practice in ebooks, and nonfiction authors are increasingly using embedded links to provide useful outside materials, direct readers to relevant sections within the same text, and promote their other works (Salvette, 2012). By linking to outside materials, authors blur the line between text and epitext, a distinction which will be explored further in the following section.

Centripetal, or inward, movement is achieved through engagement with features that grant a greater degree of control over the reading experience. This includes the ability of the reader to change font, text size, layout, contrast, and other considerations of form that were once exclusively within the purview of the publisher. This vector also incorporates features such as the ability to highlight and annotate text, look up words using a built-in dictionary, or employ a search function to find specific keywords within the book. McCracken's envisioning of the ebook as a locus of tension between inward and outward vectors underscores concerns about new modes of engagement: will readers' increased typographical and textual agency draw them deeper into the central text, or will the ability to move outward from the text serve as a distraction?

The tense contradictions between inward and outward movement perceived by McCracken are clearly evident when considering the privacy implications of the modern e-reader. With traditional print books, privacy is fundamentally a spatial consideration: An observer in close proximity to

a reader can often determine the content of a book in public by a glance at the cover. In *Paratexts*, Genette reframes an anecdote by Michel Butor that humorously illustrates the potential significance of a book's exterior:

Simply the color of the paper chosen for the cover can strongly indicate a type of book. At the beginning of the twentieth century, yellow covers were synonymous with licentious French books: "I remember," writes Butor, "the scandalized tone of a clergyman, in a British railway car, who thundered at a friend of mine: 'Madame, don't you know that God sees you reading that yellow book!'" (1997, pp. 24–25)

Unlike Butor's unfortunate friend, those reading ebooks are not exposed to sidelong glances or other, less subtle, forms of public censure. This newfound ability to read illicit or controversial books in public has been put forth as one reason for the explosive success of risqué bestsellers such as E. L. James's controversial *Fifty Shades of Grey*. Those who purchased the 2011 novel in ebook form could comfortably read the book in cafes, during a commute, or in other public locations that would normally invite scrutiny. However, while e-readers may mask the nature of reading material to those physically present, such devices are now capable of collecting sophisticated data on individual reading habits: "[T]he rise of digital books has prompted a profound shift in the way we read, transforming the activity into something measurable and quasi-public" (Alter, 2012). E-reader technology therefore creates a sense of privacy while permitting content providers to log individualized reading behaviors, including which pages have been skipped and which sections have been highlighted. While the lack of a telltale exterior may afford readers a sense of privacy—ostensible movement along an inward vector—their reading habits are nonetheless externalized in the form of crucial information communicated externally to the content provider. This simultaneous movement

along inward and outward vectors captures some of the inherent tension of the ebook as a medium in transition and e-readers as an emerging technology. Conceptualizing features of the modern e-reader as facilitating centrifugal and centripetal movement is thus highly productive in areas, such as privacy, that are primarily concerned with spatial considerations.

Digital Epitext: Allographic and Authorial

Another form of spatial paratext that has received recent critical attention is the publisher's epitext, the conventions of which have been dramatically altered by the advent of digital media. If epitexts are those materials that exist outside a physical volume but have a direct bearing on the reception of a book, then the websites that sell ebooks must also be considered epitext. Sites such as Amazon do not merely sell books—they also frame them, enveloping them in materials such as publisher descriptions, customer reviews, and recommendations for similar books. These texts, generated through technologically-mediated interactions among author, seller, and reader, perfectly fit Genette's envisioning of epitext as "circulating, as it were, freely, in a virtually limitless physical and social space" (p. 344). The epitextual sources outlined by Genette—"publisher...semiofficial allographic, public authorial, and private authorial"—are fully represented on Amazon landing pages. In recent years, the most dramatic changes have occurred in the allographic and public authorial spheres, and these will be my primary focus in this section.

One of Amazon's earliest innovations was its inclusion of *unofficial* allographic epitexts—reader reviews—on its product pages. Beyond their obvious commercial value, these reviews have become useful sociological sources, giving insight into readers' collective reaction to individual books or entire categories of literature. For example, Gillian Whitlock, in a 2005 study of life

narratives from Afghanistan, employs Amazon reviews as a means of accessing reader responses to this form of literature:

We can return to the Amazon.com site for a particularly useful set of epitexts: the reviews posted by customers....[The] inclusion of publisher's blurbs, and reviews by editors and readers, gives some idea of how these texts are being marketed and consumed. (p. 67)

Through a careful analysis of reader reviews, Whitlock draws conclusions about how Western readers receive and interpret Afghan life narratives, using this information to show how Afghan writers negotiate and respond to the expectations of Western readers. This creative repurposing of user-generated paratexts supports Jonathan Gray's observation—made in the context of film and television studies—that "viewer-created paratexts are pre-constituted audience research, providing evidence of how viewers make sense of texts" (2010, p. 146).

The democratic nature of these unofficial allographic epitexts has been the cause of widespread optimism in certain authorial circles. One recent "ebook about ebooks" is indicative of this trend. John F. Harnish's *An Affordable Ebook About Writing and Publishing Ebooks and Digitally Printed Books* adopts a black-and-white view of Amazon's effect on the publishing industry, choosing to regard traditional publishers as ignorant and avaricious:

[Publishers] have been unable to accept the solidifying fact that financial surges for potential ebook profits are greatly determined by the preferred text platform best facilitating the essential author/reader connection and the quality of the affordable ebook content. Consumers are fed up with having to pay profit inflated prices simply to appease corporate greed. (Harnish & Franklin 2011, Kindle loc. 424–428)

Harnish portrays publishers as uncaring and arbitrary gatekeepers who inflate costs in their unending search for gain while paradoxically keeping consumers from the books they want to read. Harnish also steps back in time to depict Amazon, now the world's largest online retailer, as a scrappy underdog that had an unequivocally salutary effect on the business of selling books: "Thanks to Amazon the weary face of book publishing was slowly changing for the betterment of more folks" (Harnish & Franklin 2011, Kindle loc. 897–901).

Amazon's epitext, including innovations such as reader reviews, has become indispensable to both publishers and readers. An indication of the growing importance of these epitexts is their recent role in interactions between Amazon and publishers. In April of 2012, Salon reported strained contract negotiations between Amazon and the "Big Six"—HarperCollins, Random House, Hachette, Simon & Schuster, Penguin and Macmillan. At the time, these publishers hesitated to sign Amazon's latest contract, citing large increases in cooperative promotional fees. Though some bloggers decried Amazon's increased rates as "an illegal gouge by another name" (Zaitchik, 2012), the case was resolved with relatively little open conflict. Clearly, Amazon considers its epitexts, including user reviews and suggested purchases, to be indispensable to publishers, and the "Big Six" are currently in no position to hold out for more favorable terms. Cases such as the disagreement between Amazon and the "Big Six" and the prior dispute between Amazon and the Independent Publishers Group (Bishop, 2012) show that the increased importance of Amazon's unofficial and semiofficial allographic epitext has begun to shift the balance of power between publishers and retailers.

Recent changes in the conventions surrounding the public authorial epitext have also shifted the balance that previously existed between publisher and author. The promotional savvy of self-help author Timothy Ferriss, an entrepreneur and health guru, provides a useful case study for the increasing prevalence and necessity of author-directed promotional efforts online. In conjunction with the publication of his highly successful *The Four-Hour Workweek*, Ferriss made supplementary chapters for the book, such as "How to Learn Any Language in 3 Months" and "Muse Math: Predicting the Revenue of Any Product," available on his website for customers who had already purchased the book. These epitextual chapters—*of* the book but not *in* the book—help generate a two-way channel between the book itself and Ferriss's other products and brand identity: Materials in the book encourage readers to visit the site, while materials on the site encourage visitors to purchase the book. In the case of an ebook, these supplementary chapters can be viewed almost seamlessly from the same e-reader by tapping links embedded in the text of the book itself, a capability that blurs any strict distinctions between text and epitext. Once again, McCracken's spatial metaphor proves invaluable in understanding this relationship: Author websites draw readers inward toward the central text, while bonus chapters and links draw readers away from the text toward an author's other offerings (p. 110). Ultimately, these changes in authorial epitexts represent a shift in the responsibility for marketing books from publisher to author. As we will see, this trend toward greater authorial independence has resulted in the increasing commercial and artistic viability of a new class of self-published ebook.

TEMPORAL PARATEXTUAL ELEMENTS

Ebooks have become increasingly difficult to situate in time. The emergence of highly successful author-published ebooks has problematized the convention of the publication date, especially when those books are later repackaged and released through more traditional channels. Ebooks have

also disrupted the sedate pace of the publication and promotion cycle, accelerating timelines and favoring those authors who can release books quickly or even simultaneously. In addition, ebooks pose enormous difficulties for archivists and librarians, making considerations of long-term storage and preservation of paramount importance as digital books enter wider circulation in universities and libraries.

Self-Publishing and the Pre-Natal Publication

In March 2011, 27-year-old Amanda Hocking signed her first publishing contract. This event was unusual in two respects: her receipt of $2 million for four books, and the fact that she had already been making millions of dollars on her work before being formally published. In April 2010, Hocking began selling ebook versions of the twelve novels she had written in her free time, promoting them on her personal blog. Her marked success has come as a surprise to those who considered self-publishing a refuge for dilettantes, dreamers, and the delusional, yet her story is growing increasingly common as self-published ebooks become an established market feature.

Hocking's meteoric rise exemplifies the new importance of authorial self-promotion (see section "Digital epitext: Allographic and authorial" above). However, her career also illustrates an increasingly common phenomenon: publishers waiting for proof-of-concept in the form of successful blogs or self-published ebooks before committing to a new author. This has led to the creation of a new class of prefatory paratexts—what Genette would call "*prior* paratexts" (p. 5)—that are essentially complete versions of a book that prefigure the "official" published edition. For example, David McRaney's 2012 pop psychology book *You Are Not So Smart* is essentially an edited repackaging of the popular blog by the same name, with chapters that roughly correspond to individual blog posts. This kind of adaptation

is not an entirely new idea, since popular books such as Dubner & Levitt's *Freakonomics* (2005) have grown out of print columns in newspapers. Until recently, however, it was rare for the majority of a book's content to be made available free of charge before a book's official publication. Some authors who have distributed complete books are required to remove their work from the web as soon as the ink is dry on a traditional publishing contract, as was the case with Michael J. Sullivan's derivative fantasy series *The Riyria Revelations*, optioned by Orbit Books in 2011 (Pillai, 2011; Sullivan, 2011). Other authors allow free ebooks to coexist with standard print publications of their work. This is the case with science fiction author and copyright activist Cory Doctorow, who allows readers to download editions of his works in every conceivable digital format:

I've been giving away my books ever since my first novel came out, and boy has it ever made me a bunch of money. When my first novel...was published by Tor Books in January 2003, I also put the entire electronic text...on the Internet under a Creative Commons license that encouraged my readers to copy it far and wide. (2008, p. 71)

Genette observed that certain prior paratexts "will sometimes disappear with publication in book form, like the famous Homeric chapter-titles of *Ulysses*, whose official existence proved to be (if I may put it this way) entirely prenatal" (p. 5). The advent of ebooks has led to a situation in which books can become their own "pre-natal" paratext—David McRaney's (2013) "You Are Not So Smart" blog, for example, is essentially a prior paratext of the final book that was eventually released through more traditional channels. Yet if recent developments have resulted in a rise in prominence of prior paratexts, another emerging practice—swarming—threatens to even more significantly disrupt the sedate timescale of traditional publishing.

Ebook authors have begun to take note of the fact that their works fare better on the market when released simultaneously rather than singly. In the normal course of traditional print publishing, books are released one after the other, usually with a significant time interval between releases. This affords publicity departments adequate time to promote the book and allows the book to compete for limited shelf space alongside other new releases. Ebook experts, however, recommend that as many books as possible be put up for sale at once:

I and other authors have noticed a pattern where readers buy one of our ebooks, usually our low-priced loss leader, then go back and buy the rest of our ebooks—not one at a time, but two or more at a time. That's why trilogies and series do so well. Readers who buy book one and like it will then buy books two and three at the same time. (Ortolon, 2011, Kindle loc. 542–545)

Having a large number of books up for sale can contribute to the phenomenon known as "swarming." Reaching a certain level of buyer activity leads to better placement of books on sites, which contributes to an increased number of sales, which leads to even better placement, and so on in a virtuous circle. Perhaps the most striking example of this cascading, self-sustaining effect is the case of Amanda Hocking. By putting up her backlog of twelve unpublished novels for sale over a short period of time, Hocking was able to make self-publishing history, the beneficiary of a prolonged "swarm" that was sustained by the great scalability of ebooks, a near-insatiable demand for paranormal genre pastiches, and the self-reinforcing nature of online retailers and social media sites.

In an interview with Tonya Plank (2011) of the *Huffington Post*, Hocking reflected on what was, for her, the most difficult part of releasing ebooks:

I'll be honest—when I first started publishing in April, I thought my editing was fine. The first book I published—My Blood Approves—had been read by me about fifty times...So I thought that all the grammar errors would be taken care of. But I was wrong....[P]eople are still finding errors. It's not from lack of effort on my part, though....What I find most frustrating about editing and being indie is that everything else I can do myself....But I cannot edit properly myself.

The most remarkable part of this statement is not that Amanda Hocking can sell hundreds of thousands of ebooks with typos and grammatical errors on every other page, although that fact is certainly noteworthy. Rather, it is Hocking's astounding self-sufficiency. The young writer might not be the most accomplished prose stylist of her generation, but she has successfully filled the roles of desktop publisher, production manager, marketer, publicist, and author. In a way, she is an exemplar of what the modern writer is required to be: prolific, self-promoting, and tech-savvy. While the accessibility of new ebook publishing platforms has facilitated this unprecedented compression in the timescale of temporal paratexts, this relative flexibility has resulted in problems of paleography and presentation that will be discussed in the next section.

Persistence: The Problem of the Archive

As we have seen, ebooks are ephemeral, a quality that allows them to be conveniently downloaded over a WLAN connection and stored in a relatively small space. Yet, as accessible and portable as ebooks appear, their ephemerality is not without its cost. Buyers of ebooks are more like borrowers than owners: "[M]ost ebook 'purchases' are more like leases, and leases with few residual rights at that" (Hamaker, 2011). When ebooks

arrive on a reading device, they are usually burdened with some form of DRM, or digital rights management, software. Typically, this limits most basic interactions with the ebook beyond reading, including transfer to other devices, copying even small amounts of text, or archiving the ebook by retaining a local copy. This is a practical problem for dedicated ebook purchasers, who soon find themselves saddled with DRM-protected books from a variety of sellers, each with their own preferred devices, rights management rules, incompatibilities, and proprietary organization systems. Users are left with two options: use their purchased content under these limitations, consenting to a fragmented collection and the loss of purchased content should a distributer go out of business, or "liberate" their books by removing DRM, a measure that constitutes a legal gray area in many regions. While manually removing DRM from downloaded ebook files may be a solution for a small set of dedicated, technology-savvy consumers, most owners of ebook readers do not have the time, ability, or inclination to go through the process of archiving ebooks in an integrated library. In addition, institutions such as libraries and universities would expose themselves to liability by employing methods that invalidate a distributor's terms of service when archiving copies of ebooks. Thus, the wider adoption of ebooks presents a problem of preservation, one compounded by ebooks' comparative lack of transparency relative to their print counterparts.

In a sense, DRM is a form of paratext, although one that subverts Genette's fundamental understanding of the paratext as a gateway to a literary work. Genette envisioned the paratext as a literary threshold, a necessary context through which we understand a central text. DRM, though a paratext in the sense that it is a type of information included within the boundary of the ebook, does not facilitate an understanding of a work, but instead restricts it. In "Thresholds of Access," Stephen Paling notes the connection between

Genette's *Thresholds of Interpretation* and our ability to manipulate the data structures that grant access to digital media such as ebooks:

[T]he idea that classificatory marks and data structures constitute accretions to a text that affect the text's retrieval, meaning, and use... flow[s] naturally from Genette's paratextual theory, which points to paratexts as thresholds through which we must pass to reach a text. (2002, p. 137)

DRM, therefore, poses an entirely new difficulty. While Genette employs paratexts to access a work, providing perspective on authorial intention, historical influences, and reader reception, DRM makes the work of the theorist, the librarian, and the textual scholar more difficult by rendering inaccessible many of the paleographic and archival methods on which these disciplines depend. Because DRM limits which devices can access an ebook, libraries cannot count on having access to ebook files in the long term. This makes it exceedingly difficult to distinguish between editions of an ebook.

Ebooks, unlike their printed predecessors, tend to provide no substantive, consistent record of their iterations. This is often spun for the positive: When using digital publishing platforms, there is no need to issue formal editions of books accompanied by the usual pomp and circumstance, including the solicitation of updated forewords and the undertaking of yet another marketing push. Indeed, small corrections, additions, and updates can be slipped into ebook versions quietly, allowing authors to keep up with the curve in real time. However, these practices become problematic when ebook authors use this capability to remove criticized segments from their work or correct errors or missteps that have been commented on in writing, essentially making post facto liars of those who cited their original work. Earlier editions are typically not recoverable without

extraordinary efforts at preservation, comparison, and collation. Thus, individuals or organizations who attempt to archive an ebook may be left with a variance of texts, all bearing the same title and with identical metadata. These "editions" lack the level of transparency that print books are forced to incorporate, and a great deal of ebook publishing information is saved as metadata that can be easily stripped by a well-meaning librarian, especially when changing file formats or removing DRM. Charles Hamaker (2011) passionately defends the convention of clearly marking editions to uphold textual integrity:

We have organizations dedicated to preserving the uncomfortable content of the published word. They are called libraries....We must have guarantees for the word, for the phrase, for the paragraph, the text....Treasonous, libelous, offensive, ludicrous, blasphemous, or just out-of-fashion the words might be, but the written word still needs protection. We need continuity of text, markers of change, versioning, permanent archiving of variant editions if the ebook is to become a significant means of transmitting our culture and heritage.

Clearly, the role of institutions with an archival focus, such as libraries, is even more critical in the case of ebooks. With print books, bibliographic or archeological methods such as paleography can be used to establish attribution, approximate date of publication, and other important information about a recovered book or manuscript, while scholars attempting to establish the provenance of an ebook would be forced to rely largely on easily altered metadata. Yet even as their services are most in demand, libraries are facing their own challenges exacerbated by the increasing prevalence of the ebook.

Currently, ebooks are transient. From a temporal paratextual perspective, they are difficult to pin down—not only might they have substantial "prenatal" prior paratexts that precede their ostensible date of publication, but the ability of archivists to store metadata and preserve ebook collections is often severely restricted by DRM-imposed limitations on format. Specialists in metadata, such as Richard Gartner, have advocated that books be catalogued and preserved using XML, an interoperable markup language that underlies many proprietary file formats. Using XML, "not only can multiple collections be rendered cross-searchable in the style of a union catalogue, but the objects that constitute these collections can themselves readily be integrated into inter-institutional virtual repositories" (Gartner, 2008, p. 5). Because DRM restricts the user's ability to convert between file formats, however, attempts to use these best practices to maintain ebook collections that persist over time can be stymied. When proprietary file types become obsolete, as has already been the case with the defunct .oeb (Kirchhoff, 2011, p. 73) and .lit (Silverman, 2012) file types, books stored in these formats can become inaccessible. As Amy Kirchhoff observes,

[the] file format...being read today on the current Kindle, Nook, iPad, and so on may not be the file format needed by tomorrow's appliances....File formats will become obsolete—it may take a long time and the files may become more mangled in display than completely unusable, but it will happen. (2012, p. 73)

Thus, paratexts such as file format and DRM can determine whether an ebook will remain readable in the future. Just as the use of acidic paper can limit the longevity of a print book, the use of proprietary file formats can render an ebook inaccessible in a digital environment in which old file types are replaced by new ones. Yet the rapid technological development of the ebook as a form, a trend which makes the ebook difficult to preserve over time, has also enabled it to incorporate various other media as both central text and paratext. This capability is discussed in the next section, which is concerned with substantial paratextual elements.

SUBSTANTIAL PARATEXTUAL ELEMENTS

According to Genette, substantial paratextual features denote a book's "mode of existence" (1997, p. 4), a classification that can include the book's method of communication as well as external facts about its publication that have colored its reception. While sites such as Google and *Wikipedia* have increased access to factual substantial paratexts, a category that can include the book's genre and biographical information about its author (Genette, 1997, pp. 7–8), the rise of the ebook has had a greater effect on the book's mode of communication. In *Paratexts*, Genette is not overly concerned with the possibility of extratextual communication:

[T]he question of a paratextual element's substantial status will be settled, or eluded, here...by the fact that almost all the paratexts I consider will themselves be of a textual, or at least verbal, kind: titles, prefaces, interviews, all of them utterances that, varying greatly in scope, nonetheless share the linguistic status of the text. (1997, p. 7)

However, this form of substantial paratext has become crucial with the emergence of new "types of manifestation" such as audiobooks and "enhanced" ebooks. Transformations and innovations along the substantial paratextual dimension allow for central texts and paratextual elements that directly incorporate alternate, extratextual media types. In the case of audiobooks, this substantial alteration consists of a recorded performance of the book, while "enhanced" ebook-application hybrids incorporate a wide variety of rich media such as streaming video and geographic data.

The Audiobook as Substantial Paratext

Are audiobooks paratexts, or texts in their own right? Most audiobooks are recorded through an unabridged reading of the original text of a book, and so from one perspective, are simply an alternate way of presenting or bounding a central text. This is a particularly useful way of looking at recorded books narrated by their authors rather than by professional actors. This practice, which has been adopted by writers inclined to dramatic performance such as David Sedaris, Khaled Hosseini, Frank McCourt, Bill Bryson, and Neil Gaiman, is paratextual in the sense that it facilitates another level of interpretation—when reading his or her own work, an author can give emphasis or nuance to particular sections of the text, or may provide characterizations or emotional interpretations that go beyond what listeners might experience were they to consume the book in a more conventional manner. On the other hand, audiobooks might also be considered adaptations rather than paratexts. This view is particularly applicable in cases in which audiobooks have been heavily edited, abridged, or dramatized, techniques that make an audiobook resemble a radio play. This type of "radio play" audiobook, which favors the insertion of sound effects and which may be performed by a cast of actors rather than a single reader, is becoming less popular with the rise of Audible, an Amazon subsidiary that favors unabridged audio recordings—in 2010, unabridged audiobooks made up 89% of audiobook unit sales, up from 68% in 2008, according to the 2011 and 2009 Industry Data Reports by the Audiobook Publishers Association. This trend was recently reinforced by the introduction of Whispersync, a feature that enables purchasers to switch seamlessly between audiobook and ebook editions of a text. Even if audiobooks are viewed as separate adaptations rather than a paratextual manifestation of the central work, books in this format often include authorial paratexts that are unavailable in other versions. William Irwin points out that "the audio version of *The Amber Spyglass* [by Phillip Pullman] includes epigrams before each chapter that are not in the print version" (2009, p. 350), and audiobooks often include author interviews exclusive to that format.

Leaders in the audiobook publishing industry such as Audible have become adept at promoting the audiobook format, employing celebrities to record audiobook editions and maintaining a massive affiliate network to entice listeners. Since the widespread adoption of MP3 players, smartphones, and other portable media devices, audiobooks have enjoyed a sustained upsurge in popularity and profitability. According to the Audio Publishers Association's 2012 sales report, the total number of audiobooks published in 2011 increased by 28% from the year before, while unit sales of audiobooks increased 16% in the same period. Some, such as Harold Bloom, have seen the increasing popularity of audiobooks as a disturbing trend: "Deep reading really demands the inner ear as well as the outer ear...You need the whole cognitive process, that part of you which is open to wisdom. You need the text in front of you" (Harmon, 2005). Others have seen the pedagogical potential of audiobooks, suggesting that they might be instrumental in drawing children into a love of books (Marchionda, 2001), engendering a familiarity with diverse patterns of speech (Baskin & Harris, 1995), or treating learning disorders such as dyslexia (Milani, Lorusso, & Molteni, 2010).

Substantial Transformations: The Ebook-Application Hybrid

The rise of Android- and IOS-equipped tablets has led to the development of ebooks that are also applications (and applications that are also ebooks). Increasingly, apps sold or freely distributed on these devices operate as fully interactive ebooks, allowing readers to engage with texts in novel ways. These ebooks, sometimes called "enhanced" ebooks, integrate literary texts, audiovisual media, telemetric data, and kinesthetic input to generate experiences that go beyond the simple interactivity of the standard ebook. The paratexts that envelop the central text in these works exceed the considerations of substance laid out by Genette: they are *interactive* paratexts, pos-

sessing the ability not only to display rich media but also to react to user input in real time.

Inkling is a platform that enables authors to generate and distribute an ebook that incorporates text, sound, images, video, shared notes, and location-based services. These ebooks are optimized for the iPad's high-resolution display, enabling the faithful rendering of scanned documents, detailed diagrams, and beautiful images. The ebooks available on the platform are primarily textbooks, and are mostly focused on subjects that benefit from a multimedia presentation such as medicine, cooking, and finance. Textbooks on Inkling enable students to take tests on their iPad after reading a chapter, and the platform allows students to share notes stored on the device. Other books, such as Rob Willey's *Speakeasy Cocktails* (2011), use the platform's multimedia features to generate historical immersion, in this case channeling the ambience of a Prohibition-era speakeasy while teaching readers how to mix a range of alcoholic beverages from the period. Each of the included media—photos, maps, recordings—represents a different substantial dimension, contextualizing the written word in ways that would be largely impossible in a print book or traditional ebook.

Another revolutionary cross-pollination between app and ebook is *Device 6* (Flesser & Gardebäck, 2013), which describes itself as "a surreal thriller in which the written word is your map as well as your narrator." *Device 6* adds a kinesthetic dimension to its presentation of a central text, employing words on a tablet's screen to evoke an Escherian sense of place. Readers must turn their tablet in their hands as they navigate long corridors and twisting passages that are, simultaneously and ineffably, sentences in the narrator's internal monologue. *Device 6* makes use of game-like elements that require readers to go through the motions of pulling levers, setting dials, and turning valves, adding a further kinesthetic element to what is already a multisensory experience. The combination of high-quality sound (including echoing footsteps), minimalist

visual design, kinesthetic involvement, and haunting text conspire to create a cross between a 1960s spy thriller and Kafka's *The Castle*, resulting in an ebook in which geometry and orientation is drawn into the space of the paratext.

Another groundbreaking application-ebook hybrid is *The Silent History* (Horowitz, Moffett, Derby, & Quinn, 2012), an experimental novel that further pushes the boundaries of the ebook form by including elements such as time- and location-based chapters, user-generated "field reports," and serialized content "pushed" to mobile devices. The book's official FAQ describes the recursive relationship the digital text is designed to have with the real world:

The Field Reports are short, site-specific accounts that deepen and expand the central narrative, written and edited in collaboration with the readers.... To access and comprehend a Field Report, the reader must be physically present in the location where the Report is set. Reports are deeply entwined with the particularities of their specific physical environments— the stains on the sidewalk, the view between the branches, a strangely ornate bannister, etc [sic]—so that the text and the actual setting support and enhance each other. (Horowitz, Moffett, Derby, & Quinn, 2012)

Here, the physical world itself becomes a paratext, deliberately included within the bounds of the work by its authors. By requiring readers to be in a particular location to access a field report, Horowitz et al. demand that they make connections between that location and the central text of *The Silent History*. The authors thus employ geosocial technology—GPS-enabled smartphones—to draw the physical world within the bounds of his text, deliberately blurring the relationship between the reality present inside the work and the reality without.

PRAGMATIC PARATEXTUAL ELEMENTS

The fourth paratextual dimension outlined by Genette, the pragmatic, encompasses the characteristics of "the sender and the addressee" (p. 4), and answers the questions "Who is writing?" and "Who is reading?" The advent of the ebook and digital paratexts has caused dramatic changes in the demographics and distribution of both writers and readers. Some of these changes are caused by commercial and economic factors, a dimension that some scholars (Birke & Christ, 2013, p. 77) have criticized Genette for ignoring. Other changes are more social than economic, representing new models for collaborative authorship that offer hope for the ebook as a democratizing force.

The changes wrought by the ebook revolution represent a fundamental paradox. Authorship has at once grown more accessible and more difficult to secure: Writers have more publication options at their disposal than ever before, yet the rising importance of digital paratexts has resulted in a more uneven distribution of economic success. Henry Jenkins's theory of convergence attempts to reconcile both the new freedoms afforded by digital media and the continued inequality of the new paradigm:

[C]onvergence represents a cultural shift as consumers are encouraged to seek out new information and make connections among dispersed media content.... The term, participatory culture, contrasts with older notions of passive media spectatorship. Rather than talking about media producers and consumers as occupying separate roles, we might now see them as participants who interact with each other according to a new set of rules...[although] not all participants are created equal. (2006, p. 16)

As Jenkins acknowledges, ebooks have brought about a situation that is at once democratizing and economically unbalanced.

Ebooks and the Uneven Distribution of Success

In recent years, ebooks have begun to force changes in a publishing paradigm that some have criticized as overly orthodox, monolithic, or fundamentally unequal. According to probability theorist Nassim Nicholas Taleb, "in publishing, less than 1 in 800 books represent half of the total unit sales," creating a situation in which disproportionate and largely undeserved attention is paid to a very small number of published works (2004, p. 242). According to this theory, which was further expanded by Taleb in *The Black Swan* (2007), there is little middle ground in the publishing world: most revenue is secured via the sales of a select group of extraordinarily successful authors, while most individuals who publish a book make little or no money. In *The Wealth of Networks,* Yochai Benkler sums up this argument for the undemocratic distribution of platform on the Internet:

The first-generation critique of the democratizing effect of the Internet was based on various implications of the problem of information overload, or the Babel objection. According to the Babel objection, when everyone can speak, no one can be heard, and we devolve either to a cacophony or to the reemergence of money as the distinguishing factor between statements that are heard and those that wallow in obscurity. (2006, p. 10)

On the face of it, this argument is a sound one: The economic rewards of publishing in the age of digital paratexts are unevenly distributed. Yet this does not mean that the rise of sites such as Amazon and the increasing popularity of the ebook have not exerted some democratic influence. In contrast with print books, ebooks, particularly

self-published ebooks, are created by a more diverse array of authors for very different reasons.

Taleb's assessment of the unbalanced nature of the ebook market, though accurate, was made before certain changes fundamentally altered the economic landscape of the ebook. Since Taleb's 2004 analysis of the publishing market, Amazon has launched a self-publishing program that allows authors to retain 70% of the proceeds when their books are sold on the site. This change has led to the ascendency of popular writers such as Amanda Hocking and E. L. James, authors who would likely not have made it past publishing industry gatekeepers, but it has also led to the emergence of a new form of short-form ebook. In recent years, low-cost ebooks, averaging around forty pages and usually targeting a niche audience, have become common on Amazon. In fiction, these generally fall into a gray area between a short story and a novella, while in nonfiction they often resemble a piece of long-form journalism, a white paper, or a detailed how-to guide on a niche topic. Amazon has dubbed these short ebooks "Amazon Singles," a term borrowed from the recording industry, and encourages authors to price them under $2.99. Brian Kems (2013) observes that the commercial and creative impetus for these short ebooks is often very different from their longer counterparts:

For many writers...making money with e-books isn't about the pursuit of chart-topping success. It's about finding an outlet to publish work that traditional publishers would not find commercially viable enough to compete in the marketplace.... These shorter e-books...can be accessible vehicles for short fiction and other types of work that have no real lucrative counterparts in the print marketplace, and can also be an attractive way for writers to release more material more quickly.

This short form of ebook is also commonly given away on websites, usually requiring visitors to enter their email before downloading the text. This marketing technique, intended to gen-

erate mailing lists to promote other products or services, recontextualizes the ebook as a form of advertising. If the "functional" dimension of paratexts serves to frame and interpret a central text, then ebooks offered for strictly promotional consideration function only to draw readers to other, presumably more central, texts generated by the author. Thus, these short-form digital editions can arise from authorial intentions that are strictly artistic or strictly commercial. Either way, this form of ebook provides a new form of authorial flexibility, one that allows for a greater degree of authorial specialization.

Low-cost ebooks of any length have implications for commercial epitexts such as bestseller lists and "featured books" sections on major websites. Because ebooks enable some authors to bypass the traditional publishing model, and since authors are free to set prices at rates much more competitive than traditional publishers, the advent of the self-published ebook has created an opportunity for savvy, flexible authors to build platform and cachet. Because many of these authors price their books as low as $0.99, they can vastly increase unit sales relative to their more expensive competition, thus forcing their way to the top of ebook charts at Amazon and the *New York Times*. This technique, while forgoing short-term revenue, helps generate buzz, rapidly boosting an author's visibility. The recent increase in such low-cost releases has forced the average price of an ebook down from a high of approximately $10.00 to an all-time low of $7.43 in April 2013 (Greenfield, 2013), a change that reflects the lowering of barriers to entry and the ascendency of new business models in the world of digital publishing.

The Digital Social Edition

Although developments such as the ebook "single" have precipitated significant changes in readership and authorship, emerging forms of literary and scholarly collaboration point to the possibility of new, more democratic, modes of writing and publication. Recent work has employed collaborative tools to build digital texts using a model of shared authorship, "positing that we are witnessing the nascent stages of a new social edition existing at the intersection of social media and the digital edition" (Siemens, et al., 2012). A model for this type of collaboration is *A Social Edition of the Devonshire Manuscript* (2013), a scholarly edition initiated on Wikibooks by scholars at the University of Victoria and authored by volunteers from around the globe. This digital edition is community-driven and non-hierarchical, enabling volunteers to generate and share transcriptions, bibliographic materials, scanned documents, and commentary. Wikibooks enables readers to explore the *Devonshire Manuscript* in a non-linear fashion, allowing readers to move quickly between authors, poems, and annotations via hyperlink. This model for the collaborative creation of digital scholarly editions also demonstrates the advantages of specialization—each contributor can focus on their own areas of interest or proficiency, leaving other tasks to those more able or willing to engage with them. Furthermore, the collective efforts of over forty dedicated editors and contributors (A Social Edition of the Devonshire Manuscript, 2013, Acknowledgments) allow certain tasks, such as transcription, to be performed with fewer errors, making relatively light work of exacting tasks. The democratic nature of *A Social Edition of the Devonshire Manuscript* points to the possibility of increased collaboration between scholars and interested members of the public, suggesting that ebooks can perform useful work towards democratization and increased accessibility within the academy. At the same time, this form of digital social edition pushes the boundaries of traditional authorship, blurring the conventional relationships between writer, editor, and reader that have generally characterized publication in print.

FUNCTIONAL PARATEXTUAL ELEMENTS

The fifth dimension outlined by Genette is the functional aspect of the paratext, considered the most critical "because...the paratext in all its forms is a discourse that is fundamentally heteronomous, auxiliary, and dedicated to the service of something other than itself that constitutes its raison d'être. This something is the text" (1997, p. 12). Thus, according to Genette, paratexts are important only insofar as they frame and present a central work. However, the rise of digital media has displaced the linear relationship between content and form, and therefore between text and paratext. In this process, the text—dubbed "content" in the new, form-indiscriminate nomenclature of digital media providers—has been both elevated and dislocated. The rise of "content" has led to a new relationship between paratexts and the central text they help to frame and interpret, creating a form—the ebook—that is at once distanced from and reliant on its paratexts.

Content and Form: The Continued Importance of Digital Paratexts

The fundamental concept underpinning the drastic changes brought about by digital media and ebooks in particular is the philosophy surrounding the term "content." While the word is bandied about constantly, and most often refers to the copy or information that draws visitors to a website, the term also signifies the new relationship between texts and their containers. The idea that digital media facilitate a separation of content from form is not a new one. "In the Beginning Was the Command Line," a 1999 essay by novelist Neal Stephenson, employs the command line in operating systems such as DOS as a metaphor for the intersection of abstractions between humans and the devices they use. The essay reflects on the then-surprising phenomenon of selling operating system software, a business completely divorced from selling computers, the artifact on which the abstraction operates. Here, operating systems are recognized as the first "content"—that is, information divorced from form and physicality. According to Stephenson, operating systems are "stack[s] of metaphors and abstractions that... embody various tricks the programmer used to convert...information you're working with—be it images, e-mail messages, movies, or word processing documents—into the necklaces of bytes that are the only things computers know how to work with" (Stephenson, 2009). At bottom, computers are fundamentally interoperable—zeroes and ones are domain-indiscriminate, and are identical regardless of the parameters of the artifact through which they are mediated. Ebooks are content in a similar way, since they exist purely as information independent of the device, such as a computer or e-reader, on which they are read, in contrast to media such as scrolls, codices, or wax tablets, which are not simply or easily divorced from their form. Ebooks are

not the device but the text that is displayed on the device. The text could be Boswell's 'Life of Johnson' or Stephen King's '11/22/63,' but it's the same text, the same book however and wherever we read it....It is pure digital spirit. (Esposito, 2012)

This separation, or perhaps release, of content from form has been the catalyzing factor for most of the innovations described in the previous sections. For computers—including tablets, e-readers, smartphones, and other ebook-ready devices—there is no low-level distinction between texts, images, audio, video, and other forms of media. While these media appear radically different to us, and while they may be handled differently at a higher, more mediated level of code, these media types are all made out of the same digital building blocks: zeroes and ones. Alan Turing, the father of computer science, first observed the interchangeable quality of digitally coded information:

This special property of digital computers, that they can mimic any discrete-state machine, is described by saying that they are universal machines. The existence of machines with this property has the important consequence that, considerations of speed apart, it is unnecessary to design various new machines to do various computing processes. They can all be done with one digital computer, suitably programmed for each case....[As] a consequence of this all digital computers are in a sense equivalent. (1950, p. 441)

Cutting-edge ebooks such as *Device 6* and *A Social Edition of the Devonshire Manuscript* make use of this fundamental interchangeability when they incorporate various forms of media into their texts—*Device 6* integrates high-quality images and audio, while the *Devonshire Manuscript* takes advantage of the communication and collaboration features built into the Wikibooks platform. However, most ebooks are fundamentally form-agnostic, lending them a remarkable fluidity and flexibility and enabling them to be transferred, largely unaltered, from container to container and display to display. Yet this flexible new medium, for all its fluidity, is constrained by the paratextual conventions that allow its "'reception' and consumption" (Genette, 1997, p. 1) in the form of an ebook. As Brown and Duguid (1996) observe,

[c]hanges in technology make it clear that we can no longer take for granted a correspondence between social purpose and technological resources....This change doesn't insist we simply... renounce fixity and embrace transience, become digital where once we were material. Rather, it suggests that we should consider a symbiosis between the two.

A single digital book cannot be productively altered along all paratextual dimensions at once, abandoning fixity and embracing transience, because to do so would be to leave behind the conventions that allow a book to be received and consumed. It is for this reason that the five dimensions offered by Genette in *Paratexts* (1997) remain a useful epistemological framework for understanding the changes wrought by the advent of digital books. Genette's paradigm embraces the complexity of digital paratexts, moving away from rigid dichotomies and broad generalizations to encompass the growing diversity of the ebook as a form. When we consider any of the many emerging ebook types—the "single," the audiobook, the digital social edition, the ebook-app hybrid, the "traditional" ebook—Genette's set of key questions allows us to explore and comprehend the crucial distinctions between old and new forms. How is the central text situated in relation to its paratexts? When was the text released, and how long is it likely to last? Who are the authors of the text, and how does it find its readership? Does the text consist primarily of the written word, or does it incorporate other forms of communication? By examining digital books in the context of Genette's five paratextual dimensions, we become capable of navigating between authorial intention and reader reception, a functional shift which allows us to place technological changes in a wider social context. Thus, the presentation and social conventions that surround a central text have, paradoxically, become even more crucial in an age in which texts are highly fluid. Paratexts grant readers a frame of reference in which to receive and interpret a central text. For this reason, most authors, publishers, and readers cling to the ebook as a digital form that emulates the print book as closely as possible and thus benefits from the centuries of social conventions that have been carefully constructed around the print book as a cultural artifact. However, there is no guarantee that the form of the ebook will remain stable, and new modes of reception, facilitated by their own paratextual conventions, may rise to replace those explored in this chapter. Perhaps this process has already started: Blogs, social media sites, retailers, applications, and ebook "singles" are dependent on and in competition with the traditional ebook,

and the lines between these forms grow increasingly blurred. Yet even were the ebook to give way to these alternate forms, paratexts would remain. Genette's seminal work is focused on the thresholds of artistic works, not the proscriptive boundaries of their genres or forms. Thus, Genette's *Paratexts* remains a necessary model for the reception, contextualization, and interpretation of texts—whether analog or digital.

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