

# EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES



**Helen Smith and Louise Wilson, eds, *Renaissance Paratexts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). xiv+274pp. ISBN 978 0 5211 1739 5.**

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Together eleven essays make up *Renaissance Paratexts*, held between the editors' introduction and Peter Stallybrass's 'Afterword', and this fine collection from the start is aware of, and looks productively to complicate, its own status: 'This introduction is a paratext. It is not the first paratext you have encountered in your approach to this book' (p.1, following pp.xiv of preliminaries). Those same essays give a particular early modern cast to the varieties of material that have comprised paratextuality for those writing in the field created by Gérard Genette in *Seuils* (1987) and its English translation, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (1997); the essays in doing so richly extend and further complicate the field and the kinds of consideration that it might invite.

In Part I, 'Orders of the Book', four chapters address the foot and head of early modern pages, the printers' flowers decoratively found within them, and the varieties of 'terminal paratext' (in William H. Sherman's phrase) with which they begin to end. In the first of these chapters, Helen Smith concentrates her attention at the foot of the early modern title page, reading the imprints found there for the real (and sometimes fictional) evidence they provide for the names, places and dates that together might locate these books institutionally, geographically and temporally. Smith reads imprints 'as stories that cross a range of texts' (p. 22), testing classic accounts by Greg, Blayney and others of their meanings and audience to suggest that they might provide 'a social and semiotic mode of understanding urban habitation' (p. 27). Matthew Day, in the chapter that follows, argues that both producers and consumers were similarly 'alive to the possibilities' of making meanings with books' running titles (p. 34). Day clears away some possible confusions of terminology before reading in detail a number of

examples to argue that running titles are interpretive rather than merely repetitive of information printed elsewhere in their books (p. 43), though none quite so much as the anti-Dutch running titles to *Purchas his pilgrimes* (1625) for which the chastened author had to produce paste-overs (p. 46). Juliet Fleming builds on her own earlier work to offer a reading of printers' flowers: 'individual pieces of type that bear decorative designs rather than letter symbols...composed into serial patterns' (p.48). In some ways existing beyond the alphanumeric sequence of most moveable type, printers' flowers are at the same time part of what articulates sequence within early modern printed books, Fleming argues, and may in other ways sequence larger collections of books, one with another, 'linking and identifying books according to a visual code that overrides, and may take no account of, their contents' (p. 54). Sequences of a different kind are illuminated in Sherman's account of 'The beginning of "The End"', which investigates not the front- but the end-matter of books, turning on and around the orders of setting, printing, binding and reading. A 'preliminary prospectus for the larger history the subject deserves' (p. 67), Sherman's chapter not only reminds readers of how rhetorically catching a self-referential attention to paratexts may be, but of the cleverness and wit that it can authorise, something in which print may collude, print in this respect being perhaps 'more tolerant of incompleteness (physical and/or conceptual)' than earlier accounts have allowed (p.85).

In Part II, 'Making Readers', the four chapters address paratext as a space in which the pledges, anxieties and genders of writers and readers might be visible in dramatic texts, texts in translation and what Danielle Clarke nicely calls 'the labile but diffuse' genre of complaint (p. 135). The pledges examined by Sonia Massai are those in which the printers of early modern playtexts vouched for 'the quality, provenance, and reliability of the printer's copy' (p. 91), a full and helpful table of which she provides (pp. 95-8). Massai's key observation is that such pledges in most cases actually do mean something about the nature of the text to which they relate: the earlier 'assumption that editorial pledges are generally unfounded and that they were used by early modern publishers as mere marketing ploys' is not one that will long survive her work (p. 99). In two chapters addressing the paratexts of translation, Neil Rhodes and Louise Wilson offer complementary accounts of the ways that translators thought about and shaped the status of their texts. As Rhodes writes, 'change of status is indeed at the heart of the concept of "translation" itself' (p. 107), and in both chapters – Rhodes with a wider range, and Wilson with a sharp focus on Anthony Munday's translation of Iberian romances – evidence is carefully sifted for the light it throws on that larger concept. Clarke, in a clever argument, beautifully and convincingly made, reads the gendered voice and space of complaint to explore the ways in which paratexts may be thought of as 'creating and articulating a visual and spatial economy for the inter-relationship of

disparate parts of a text' (p. 143), creating for the material book something of the 'coherence' that complaint draws together at the level of text (p. 147).

Part III, 'Books and Users', is a little rangier in content. Jason Scott-Warren offers a brief, suggestive consideration of 'Unannotating Spenser' over four 'exhibits', from Hugh Singleton's printing of *The Shepheardes Calender* (1579) to the second edition of Longman's *Faerie Queene*, edited by A.C. Hamilton (pp. 153-4). Is it the case in some books, Scott-Warren asks, that 'annotation is ultimately redundant, if the poem turns out to contain its own implicit paratext, a set of unspoken clues for annotation' (p. 160)? In others, could it counter-suggestibly be that 'readers' marks' added in manuscript might provide a paratext that we should imagine 'as public or semi-public statements, rather than purely private ruminations or soliloquies' (p. 163)? Wendy Wall, in her chapter, reads Gervase Markham's hugely popular estate guide, *The English Housewife*, first printed in 1615 and running through ten editions before the close of the century. Following that publication history, Wall argues elegantly that 'conventions of print and household practice partook of a shared and evolving system of knowledge' (p. 167), the thresholds of the text being legible against the thresholds of the household, and both ordered and organised in the material forms of the book. Hester Lees-Jeffries's chapter rests on the hypothesis that Sir Philip Sidney and Mary Wroth were both influenced by a French translation, the *Songe de Poliphile*, of an earlier Italian romance, the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, which they encountered in a specific but now-lost copy at Wilton House. This copy, Lees-Jeffries suggests, through its illustrations and other paratextual complements, shaped not only the *Arcadia* and the *Urania*, but the gardens at Wilton also (p. 187). Writing here, as she has at book-length elsewhere, about the fountains and pools both of texts and real places, Lees-Jeffries interrogates the spatial metaphors that shape and place her discussion to illuminating effect. Looking back over the contents of the volume as a whole in his Afterword, Peter Stallybrass acts (in effect) as a respondent to the gathered papers, aiming 'to show how the authors of this book have suggested new beginnings' – not so much, as he writes, an 'exit strategy' as an invitation to enter a field that, on the evidence of *Renaissance Paratexts*, is welcoming and open (p. 205).

### Works Cited

- Genette, Gérard, *Seuils* (Paris: Seuil, 1987).
- Genette, Gérard, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).