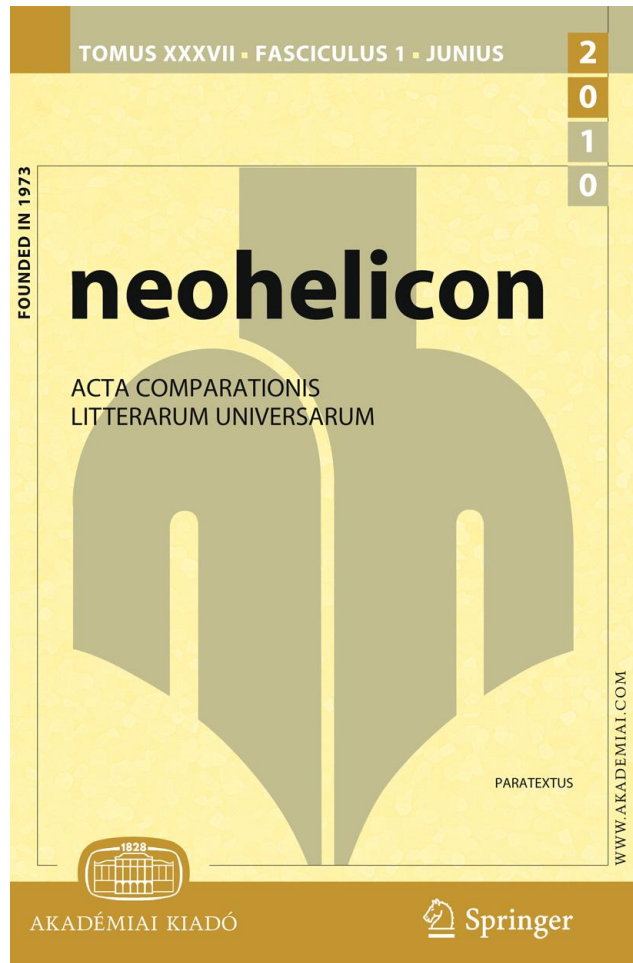


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## Paratexts in (social–political) transition

G. C. Kalman

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**Abstract** The paper addresses the modifications of certain paratextual information in a given territory and period, i.e., before, within and after the years of transition in Hungary, around 1989. After a short comparison between the legal and literary concepts of paratext, some examples are given of what paratexts in a specific period (under given circumstances) may mean, what implications they may have, and in what way they govern interpretations. These traits, it is argued, can be connected to the ruling ideological (or even political) considerations of a highly controlled literary communication, characteristics of the pre-1989 “Socialist” countries of East and Central Europe.

**Keywords** Paratext · Law and literature · Ideology · Political transition · Interpretation · Authority

### Paratext and meaning

Somewhat after the long lasting debates over what the object of literary analysis should be (e.g., “the text itself” vs. the text—or rather: texts—with its history, context, etc.),<sup>1</sup> Gérard Genette proposed to analyze what is between “inside” and “outside”, the thresholds, the frames or the limits—in one word, the paratexts. Paratextual phenomena (hereafter: paratexts, although the textual nature and the hierarchy of these “texts” is not always evident), as is well known, do not leave the meaning/significance of the text proper in question unchanged; to put it in another way, paratexts have a meaning modifying the meaning of the whole work. In a way, their function resemble to what Bloomfield labels as *glossems* (that is, morphemes or tagmemes)<sup>2</sup>: they may count as the “smallest meaningful units”, their

<sup>1</sup> For some arguments, see Culler (1976).

<sup>2</sup> Leonard Bloomfield, *Language*. Ch. 16, § 16.1, p. 264.

G. C. Kalman (✉)  
Institute for Literary Studies, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Ménézi út 11-13, 1118 Budapest,  
Hungary  
e-mail: kalman@iti.mta.hu

presence either depending on or quite independent of the authorial intention. Therefore, even if one wishes to refer to the intention in connection with the meaning of the text, precaution is all the more pertinent that in several cases, paratexts are included in (or added to) the text by those mediating the text between the reader and their audience—and, of course, they may also be present due to the author's decision.

Paratexts may provide the basics of interpretation (note that this is not to say that they are the most important factors), in a way similar to how paratextual or textual signals of literariness or the specific genre function.<sup>3</sup> It is often argued that taking cognizance of the literariness of the text (and, further, of its genre) is a prerequisite of any further interpretation of the text. Even if it is an exaggeration, this understanding (or at least perception) will, however, necessarily shape or even pre-form our interpretation. And hardly can we do anything against this—one cannot ignore the way the text is presented, the way the reader encounters the text; and it is questionable why one should ignore all this. But note that paratexts may also be tricks, instruments of misleading the reader, or at least ambiguous. First of all, they have to be interpreted—they are not more “given” or should not be more “taken for granted” as the text itself; and second, even if they have a very well established, conventionalized meaning, they still may need to be interpreted otherwise. Can one take, e.g., the genre label given in Gogol's *Dead Souls*, “poema”, on face value? Or, in what sense is Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* an autobiography?

Similarly to the pre-(in)forming nature of the genre labels, there are a number of such orienting moments in the paratexts of a text—warning, for instance, to the fictitious (or literary) nature of the text in question, naming the genre of the text (seriously or in an ironic way or otherwise), presenting the authorial name in a specific manner (e.g., using tags like “Esq.,” “Dr.,” “Mrs.,” etc.) and thus giving a special frame to the text itself). Metaphorically speaking, a text is nicely adjusted (or attractively dressed, or appealingly packed) in order to gain a proper reception; the reception of the text is (partly) led by its paratexts.

However, there is always the possibility that paratext(s) will be overlooked. “I am unaware of any postmodern narrative whose paratext is quite as complex as that of *Dictionary of the Khazars*”, writes Ivan Callus, whose aim is to interpret possibly all the paratextual traits of Pavić's book.<sup>4</sup> However, there is, if only a faint, possibility to ignore these paratexts; gossips have it that soon after its publication in Hungarian, quite a number of copies of the book appeared on the shelves of the Budapest bookshop of the Publishing House of the Academy, possibly because the book was ordered by the bookshop in the belief that it is a real dictionary—those in charge for ordering may not have had access to or overlooked the paratextual information.<sup>5</sup>

As another extreme, there is the demand to take each and every paratext into account or else the interpretation will fail. Sometimes, it is the paratexts which underpin a certain

<sup>3</sup> „La réception est médiatisée par les modalités de la publication et de la diffusion: paratexte (préface, postface), support (presse, article dans une revue spécialisée, brochure, livre), place et environnement dans le support (dans la page de journal ou la collection). L'environnement peut ainsi orienter la réception d'un texte dans un sens tout différent des intentions de l'auteur, surtout en période de paroles surveillées.” Gisèle Sapiro, Pour une approche sociologique des relations entre littérature et idéologie. *COntEXTES*, n°2, février 2007, p. 26.

<sup>4</sup> Ivan Callus, Cover to Cover: Paratextual Play in Milorad Pavić's *Dictionary of the Khazars*. *Threads 8/ Ebr 8* (winter 98/99). <http://www.altx.com/eb/eb8/8callus.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> As opposed, in an ironical way, to Callus's words: “More so than with probably any other book ..., the reader becomes involved in *Dictionary of the Khazars* even before peering between the covers”.

interpretation, or even it is only the paratext which may be held responsible for a specific reading.<sup>6</sup> In some cases, it is argued that failing to give an account of the paratext will necessarily result in a sort of defective understanding; that is, one should strive at exploring and interpreting all and every paratext available. However, it sounds very much as if prescribing a “method” or “rule” for the interpretation (which, in consequence, should lead to a “better” or even “most appropriate” understanding)—a very suspicious stance, to be sure.

As a further proviso, note that when speaking of paratexts, it is books that we tend to have in mind; illustrations, prefaces, envoys, subtitles, cover photos, blurbs, paper versus hardcover versus leather bond of a book—all these are belong to the object of the book, whereas all other forms of (written) literary communication remain in the background, if not forgotten. This duality corresponds, among a lot of other factors, to the public versus private sphere of the text in question; i.e., books are parts of a public literary communication, and this public nature is reflected in that their paratexts are at least partly imposed upon them by the market (that is, due to their public nature, their being as commodities produced and traded). Other public forms of written literary communication, such as magazines, journals, newspapers, or older forms such as pamphlets, broadsides, etc. will have certain paratextual characteristics (e.g., no poem is supposed to be presented on the first page of a newspaper; titles of literary works are apparently different from other titles of the paper; etc.). These characteristics may be highly conventional, but these are not necessarily the conventions of literature itself but rather those of the producing system and the market (though these two well may overlap). Anyway; in what follows, we have to admit, books are in the focus, just as in the whole field of “paratext studies”.

### Legal and literary paratexts

Moreover, what we tend to think about in using the term is the written text. This is far from being evident; and here it is high time to pan out about terminological issues. Another definition of paratext, i.e., different from what Genette has had in mind, is provided by experts of law.

In using the term “paratexts,” we intend to convey two essential ideas. First, we imply a meaning of “text” that extends beyond (“para”) its conventional understanding, which is typically limited to written or printed documents. Second, although the term could apply to any electronic form of transmission—such as telephone, radio, film, television, photocopying machine, facsimile (“fax”), computer, laserdisk, compact disk-read only memory (“CD-ROM”), or audio-visual equipment—we intend, for our purposes, to refer only to those technologies that record the images and sounds of persons, places, and events...<sup>7</sup>

That is, in another system of conventions, in that of legal discourse, it seems to be quite natural to regard “texts” as having several forms besides their written (or oral)

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., Olivier Parenteau. «Gérard de Nerval à Saint-Germain-en-Laye». @*analyses*, Comptes rendus, XIXe siècle. 2006-04-10. <http://www.revue-analyses.org/document.php?id=116>, where an interpretation of Nerval (by Gabrielle Chamarat-Malandain) is found convincing because it refers to the paratext of the text in question.

<sup>7</sup> See Collins and Skover (1992).

manifestation. In this respect, literary theory may seem to be quite old-fashioned, traditional, even conservative, inasmuch as it often ignores new technologies. But it is important to note that the identity of a text written and broadcasted, or written and adapted to film is not at all clear, to say the least. For the law, it may be important in the course of the legal process to record and judge what gestures, what intonation or paralinguistic signals are used in the utterances of the witness or the defendant; in the case of the literary text, however, what one looks for is more or less: more general than the concrete realization itself. For the student of literature, it is the text which has to be in the centre, even if “before” or “after” it, there may be something heterologous (i.e., “non-textual”, or created in quite another system of signs); for instance, in the case where a visual experience is “transferred” to verbality (i.e., ekphrasis), or where text is “transferred” to music (in such very different cases as in the opera and programmatic music), literary studies are interested (and may have relevance) only in the realm of verbal texts. In law, on the other hand, this problem of competency and that of the doubtful nature of “transference” does not seem to be present at all.

Thus, this legal use of the term seems to be quite eccentric, if not simply erroneous. In the field on literature one would rather use words like “media shift”, “mediatization”, “adaptation”, etc. Since literary studies are interested in verbal constructs, i.e., texts written (or spoken) in a (natural) language (to put it very simply), all other media where something similar appears are taken just as derivational forms whose relation to the text itself is highly problematic. A “movie version” or drawings to illustrate a literary work may perhaps be helpful in interpreting the literary work but they are “texts” on their own right which deserve independent interpretation.

However, even if this approach to “paratexts” seems to be very far from what literary studies would accept, curiously enough, there is a very important element in common of both conceptions. The reason why paratexts gain more and more importance in legal affairs lies in their ability to embody numerous contextual features which would otherwise be lost in mere written records:

The paratextual era will be profoundly different from the print era it now challenges. In the typographic world, legal interpretation centers on the printed text’s control of the context of social relations. The printed page—with its unchanging form, linear structure, and conceptual abstractions amenable to rational processing—reduces and frames the context of “reality” in a manner that effectuates the rule of law. In the electronic world, however, text and context are preserved and replayed as never before. Paratexts release legal reality from the confines of the printed page by representing more fully the oral dimensions of legal events and by introducing their visual element. As a result, paratexts enframe legal reality by throwing unruly context into text, thereby particularizing our legal experience.<sup>8</sup>

That is, paratexts are of great help in contextualizing, in disambiguating the meaning of the text, in governing or at least orienting the reader in her creating the meaning of the text. And it is in this respect that this legal concept of paratexts is very close to what literary studies prefers to use. The function of paratexts in law is to convey the most possible via the “paratextual” media, because lots of important information are lost in writing. Whereas written law is reduced, defective, deprived of the vivid experience, something may be recuperated by additional (and non-textual) materials.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 513.

We can observe, then, two levels of abstraction operating in printed law. First, facts and reasons are abridged to suit the typographic text. Second, rules lacking any axiomatic connection to those facts are derived from the text to govern future cases. In light of these features, what does printed law's "supremacy" mean? Generally, it means that the law will dominate all that is personal and subjective, particular and disorganized, fluid and open-ended. It means that the printed text typically will overpower and subdue context. The typographic word enhances all of the values associated with the supremacy of law—uniformity, predictability, universality, and analytical applicability of printed commands. With its systematic categories and abstract concepts, typographic law emphasizes detached and logical analysis.<sup>9</sup>

Still, as Collins and Skover emphasize, (printed, written) text remains the primary and most important source of law:

The model of contemporary law remains largely print-based. Accordingly, text typically is the starting and ending point. We may accept or reject the text, interpret and even misinterpret it, but we must first and last deal with it. In the emerging era of paratexts, we can expect some dimensions of legal activity to remain print-based. For example, internal revenue statutes, federal election campaign regulations, state insurance laws, and municipal zoning ordinances are unlikely to be enframed by paratexts.<sup>10</sup>

### Intratextual paratexts

In this context, i.e., as a concept of legal information transfer, paratexts are beyond or outside the text itself—or, at least, it is not a crucial issue if one regards them as extratextual or not.<sup>11</sup> (One can argue, however, that they are necessarily extratextual inasmuch as they are realized within another medium, they are not written texts.<sup>12</sup>) Paratexts, in this conception, are *added* to what exists independent of (and outside) them, enrich the meaning already given. In literary communication—and in the literary theoretical conception of paratexts—it is not always clear if a paratext is in fact extratextual (which it should be, by definition), or, rather, it is (counter-intuitively) intratextual. For instance, ordering the text into paragraphs, sentences or smaller units can also be taken as part of the paratextual pattern—just think of the realization of a conventional signal of verse (by way of shorter and uneven lines) as opposed to that of prose (by way of wall-to-wall lines). As Lourens de Fries suggests,<sup>13</sup> one of the "basic types of paratext in Bible translations" is "elements that are seen as part of the translation and that vary from one translation to another, for example divisions of the text into pericopes." (176) *Paradis* (1981) by

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 534.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. also the opposition between extrafictional versus intrafictional, see Lanser (1981). But is a pseudonym within or without the fiction?

<sup>12</sup> In the literature on paratexts, there is a clear controversy between those regarding only non-verbal signs (cover, illustrations, etc.) as paratexts and those differentiating between verbal and non-verbal (textual or non-textual) paratexts. What I proposed (above, implicitly) is to draw a distinction between homologous and heterologous paratexts, using this terms to paratexts of the same and of different sign systems, as compared to the text, respectively. There are paratexts written on another language than the text itself (notes, titles, etc.)—it is an issue of convention if one regards them as heterologous or not.

<sup>13</sup> See de Fries (2003).

Philippe Sollers or Bohumil Hrabal's *Dancing Lessons for the Advanced in Age* (*Taneční hodiny pro starší a pokročilejší*) (1964) resist to any such articulation, they have no paragraphs or even sentence endings. A less extreme case is the recent bestseller of Jonathan Littell, *Les Bienveillantes* (2006) which contains rather long paragraphs, so that the most important events are not emphasized (they are just hidden in the flow of events of the paragraph), suggesting a special behavior on the part of the speaker/writer of the story which gives up or refuses to underscore any of the deeds he survived or produced. So are line patterns or articulations of the flow of the text extratextual? It is clear that a (non-authorial) preface or a blurb is extratextual—but is a title or a subtitle part of the text or not?

Or think of Mallarmé's "Un Coup de Dés"—what should we call the "text" in this case? Clearly, if the text appears in a letter-to-letter, word-to-word transcription in electronic format (or, simply, on printed pages typeset as a "normal", regular piece of poetry), too much will be lost: the blank spaces on the pages and the typography, if authorial intention is to be taken into account at all, belong to the work. Somewhat later in a number of trends of the Avant-garde, typography and pictorial elements of the written text come into the foreground; these texts are not easy to reproduce just because the typographical realization is so unique that any other "transcription" of the text will be a falsification of the original. And there are the non-textual "parts" of a text, such as a collage of printed text and clutter, or, for instance, text printed on a hollow sheet of paper. In these cases, materiality of the text is evidently part of the textuality,<sup>14</sup> it is not just something added—they may be called paratexts, but parts of the text.<sup>15</sup>

### Power and paratext

In legal discourse, text and its paratexts will necessarily lead to a decision, a verdict; unlike in literary discourse, disambiguation, contextualization, reducing the possible meanings to a very limited set is the main ambition of the whole procedure (or rather of the participants of the procedure). In literary communication, however, it is appreciated if the readers can assign several, slightly different meanings to a text, one could say that it is the more highly esteemed the more interesting interpretation it can provoke. In this sense, paratexts in the legal discourse are necessarily on the side of the power (i.e., on those who, in the end of the day, will pass a judgment); whereas paratexts in literature will often be in a playful, ironic, or contradictory relation with the text, with no ambition to directly and unanimously govern its interpretation.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Alice Krieg-Plane regards a much wider scale of phenomena as "materialities": "toute la matérialité de la rencontre (guillemets, italique, locuteur, date, rubrique, genre, titraile et autres éléments du paratexte...)" Alice Krieg-Planque, «Formules» et «lieux discursifs»: propositions pour l'analyse du discours politique, *Semen*, 21, Catégories pour l'analyse du discours politique, 2006, [En ligne], mis en ligne le 28 avril 2007. <http://semen.revues.org/document1938.html>.

<sup>15</sup> See, however, Hoek's distinction: „Tout volume comprend un texte et un paratexte, rendus visibles grâce à leur mise en page (typographie, impression), qui impose au volume sa forme matérielle. Le paratexte est ce par quoi un texte prend sa forme communicatrice tandis que la mise en pages en assure la forme matérielle.” HOEK Leo Huib, "Une merveille qu'intima sa structure." Analyse sémiotique du discours paratextuel, in *Degrés* n° 58, Bruxelles, 1989, p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> „Le bref rappel d'une exemple célèbre et toujours débattu: le prologue de *Gargantua* de Rabelais devrait suffire à illustrer l'*ambiguïté* des rapports qui peuvent exister entre texte et paratexte". See Hallyn (1995).

However, in certain ages and under certain circumstances, at least some of the paratextual moments will serve authority (i.e., power). Ever since the oldest times when some old texts became obscure, hard to understand, explaining *away* the difficulties and elucidating the doubtful meanings was a scholarly work—which had an important authoritative aspect. This activity served as a guideline for the interpretation of the text; the authorities, thus, dictated an authoritative contextualization and interpretation of the text. These paratexts (not only helping but also governing understanding) are the notes; a type of paratext of extraordinary importance in legal and religious discourses. That is, exegesis and Hermeneutics are basically made up of paratexts authoritatively controlling interpretations. As Gadamer puts it, “...an authoritative will discloses to a listener an orientation he can follow.”<sup>17</sup> Talmud, as is well known, is made up of (both legal and religious) interpretations and their interpretations, etc., the line of re-interpretations being active until now but also binding those who interpret. And Talmudic exegesis is fundamentally in a note form: marginal notes are attached to the text, and then others to the note, and so on.<sup>18</sup> Although the tendency seems to be that such constraints on literary texts are gradually fading away, power relations sometimes will, nevertheless, require more direct intervention to interpretations, in order to form, by way of force, a unified interpretive community.

The “modality” of the paratext is usually seen either as a friendly, polite, compliant addendum (supplement) to the “text itself”, as being in harmony with the whole of the would-be interpretation, as a courteous guide, be it present by virtue of the authorial intention or because of the considerations of the mediating agents (editor, publisher, seller, etc.); or else a paratext may often be an ironic counterpoint to the text, an overt or hidden challenge of the would-be established interpretation. Notes are typically regarded as belonging to the first group, that is, they will help the reader, explain things she would not understand, lead her to the right path of interpretation. However, there are some counter-examples, for instance Jean Paul’s *Des feldpredigers Schmelze Reise nach Flätz mit fortlaufenden Noten, nebst der Beichte des Teufels bei einem Staatsmanne* (1809), where not only are the notes confused, mixed up, but they surely would not help even if they were in order since there is no connection between notes and texts whatsoever. In Péter Esterházy’s *Termelési-regény (kissregény)* (Production Novel—a shshshort novel, 1977) the notes are attached to the text in a very loose way—sometimes the connection depends on a word, or on a similarity of the story, or there seems to be no connection at all—but these notes, considerably longer than the novel itself, are rather parodies of the usual, regular notes.

What connects Jean Paul to Esterházy is more than an accidental coincidence of the use of notes; both authors’ vision of the world around them is highly ironic, and both challenge the routine ways of understanding—or the possibility of understanding in general. Also, notes are traditionally regarded as a discourse of the power: they represent a knowledge above us, a voice which gains its authority through knowing *more*. “Human knowledge and human power meet in one”, as Francis Bacon said,<sup>19</sup> those who know more will (or at least may) have authority over the uninitiated, the ignorant. Both Jean Paul and Esterházy turn against knowing more or better, as well as against all authorities, including political power.

<sup>17</sup> See Gadamer (1974).

<sup>18</sup> Paratexts governing interpretation are not necessarily *added* to the text, viz. they are not always *outside*: see, e.g., the analysis the Gospel of John by Jean Zumstein (2008. esp. p. 123 ff).

<sup>19</sup> *Novum Organum*, Aphorisms Book I., 3.



## Paratexts and ideology

As to the possible directions of “Paratext Studies”, one could speculate that a sort of descriptive morphology is certainly one of them; it is a rational and promising way to describe the occurrences, distribution and types of paratexts; furthermore, a historical poetics of paratexts is also a fruitful approach, i.e., to explore the major changes in the use, type and form of different paratexts; not to speak of the role paratexts studies could play in literary interpretation, analysis of individual works. However, yet another field could be added, viz. to map the possible ideological connotations of the paratexts, be they presented by the literary system behind the work or by a hypostatized authorial intention, be they willful or unintentional.

Here the word “ideology” is used as a pretty simple term to stand for meanings beyond a direct, surface meaning, a sort of worldview which can be conferred to the text via its paratext(s), a pattern of thinking or behavior which can be traced back to the use of specific paratext(s). For instance, the practice (or even obligation) of dedication hundreds of years ago can be said to express the acceptance of the social network of protection and protégé, the feudal hierarchy, the financial dependence of the writer, and sometimes the need to explain the degree and way of subordination and gratitude, etc.; it is a gesture which in a later period, when this background “ideology” faded away and then was lost, can turn into either an ironic sign, or a gesture of personal engagement (and there may still be numerous uses). Or, think of the middle of the nineteenth century, when Anton Philipp Reclam launched his yellow series of Universal-Bibliothek: after this step, a wave of publishing cheap, paper covered and possibly thin books started. Though the symbolic prestigious value of heavy, leather bound volumes survived, one can assign very different “ideologies” to these practices: whereas earlier the book, following the era of bounded and illuminated manuscripts, was only for the chosen (and rich) few, a rare and highly individual object (even if multiplied), the new fashion of thin and modestly looking books was a signal of a democratization, a counter to the expensive and exclusive publications. The Reklam-format of the book, i.e., its format as its paratext, framed the text as something for everybody, as a potentially popular, readable work.<sup>20</sup>

The presence/lack of basic information about the work and the author, the number of circulation, or additional information (blurb, photo, illustrations, etc.) is not just a question of practical considerations. More often than not, these constellations of paratext convey, even if without an overt intention, a certain ideology, a conception of authorship, work, life/art relationship, etc. One should not, of course, suppose any one-to-one correspondence between “ideologies” and paratexts. A paratextual phenomenon may “convey” several different ideologies (or, rather, different ideologies can be assigned to it), depending on the period and society. Still, a pure morphological description would not suffice, neither a registration of what changed and what remained unchanged: a reflection on the further implications is indispensable. And sometimes these implications do in fact reflect ideologies. It is absolutely evident in some situations that a decision on the part of the author will produce paratextual signs of crucial interest: to choose one journal instead of the other, to turn to this publisher and not to the other, or to settle on not to publish at all—what these will produce are not some innocent paratextual phenomena but traces of a

<sup>20</sup> On the marketing function of paratexts see, e.g., Pamela Pears, *Images, Messages and the Paratext in Algerian Women's Writing*. See Matthews and Mood (2007).

highly ideological (or political) determination. (Granted, of course, that the literary communication and the social situation allows the author to make a decision.)<sup>21</sup>

There at least two levels of interpretation of paratextual features of a text: first, the reader may gain some information from (or, rather, assign some information to) the title, notes, cover color and cover image, etc. of the text in question; second, although some of these features will be transparent (i.e., hardly noticeable, because there are conventions which practically prescribe their presence), sometimes—on changing of these conventions or in case of absence of some paratextual elements conventionally prescribed—their presence or absence itself will be very much worth noticing, they come to the fore, as it were. Several pieces of music were written before the Romanticism without taking too much care of giving them a title—however, works with the title “without title” (i.e., giving no title along with emphasizing this fact) became popular only when giving title became a highly conventionalized feature of musical pieces. (Or, in visual arts, think of willfully void titles like “Composition,” “Sketch”, etc.) *Envoy* or dedication might have been a (not necessary but) frequent addendum earlier to literary (and other) texts—in our days, using them counts as a reflection (or parody, evocation, etc.) of this older practice.

### Paratexts in the years of transition

Now I will try to give some examples from the recent literary history of the Eastern Block—specifically Hungary, presuming that other (former “Socialist”) countries in the same area follow similar pattern. In the years of state controlled book publishing, most of the paratextual characteristics were established in advance and generally; the deviations from these rules are interesting cases just as the later developments, in the years after the transition, of the paratextual patterns. Partly, of course, these developments were triggered by the power of the market economy (whereas earlier there was no real market on the book publishing scene), but, again, there may be some ideological overtones as well. I will illustrate this thesis by some remarkable (even funny) examples.

Let us take a minor paratextual signal first. It was about the end of the 1970s, early 1980s that the number of the copies published, i.e., circulation data started to disappear from the colophon; hitherto it was almost ritually obligatory, especially because the high numbers proved the interest of the widest public in the publication. (And, in fact, books were very cheap, they were sold in high sales.) However, as a sign of the slow change of times from the planned economy towards a more liberal one where even a state owned publishing house might have trade secrets, and perhaps to preclude cultural political speculations, circulation data did not seem to be that important any more.

Since the late forties, practically all works of classical literature (including sometimes even contemporary world literature) were published with a number of paratextual elements. There were blurbs on the dust-jacket, and, more importantly, prefaces (or afterwords) and endnotes (delayed paratexts,<sup>22</sup> to be sure, added by—state owned—publishing houses and their editors). (Sometimes the text was accompanied by a short note on the pronunciation of foreign names and words; in the case of some works for the children and for the youth, there was an announcement on the last page of the book encouraging the readers to express their opinion and their expectations through letters addressed to the publishing house.)

<sup>21</sup> Cf Gisèle Sapiro, *ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> See Gérard Genette (1987).

These paratexts can be interpreted on more levels. First, they expressed solicitude towards the widest reading public who may not know anything about the author, her age and the work itself—not even of the language and the pronunciation. Second, the reader is provided with a professional explanation and an expert orientation; forewords and afterwords were often written by famous, prestigious scholars or critics who, this way, seemed to take part in the everyday encounter of the wide public and the literary work; the reader could feel that she has the honor to be led by the best guides available. (Sometimes names like György Lukács or Ágnes Heller showed up as writers of forewords.) And, third, paratexts of the age were very strong proposals of how to read the text: they served to secure a rather unanimous interpretation which was considered as “the best”, “the most appropriate”, one which would the most aptly accommodate to the ruling ideology.

But this paratextual machinery could serve the cause of the work itself. That is, sometimes it had to be explained how the work related to the extant ruling ideology, what justification can be given for its publication, etc. For instance, it had to be clarified that even though Flaubert was famous of his category of “*impassabilité*”, there are signs in his text which show that he was not *that* cynical, pessimistic, and that sometimes he was even sympathetic with the deprived. Or, again, when Kafka was published, in the second half of the fifties, direct and indirect paratexts (i.e., interpretations in the form of afterword or foreword, or the critical discourse present in the journals and magazines of the age) helped to make the texts fit into the rather hostile ideological context. (In the form of the paradoxical argumentation that Kafka presents and represents the rotten world of imperialism/capitalism, and, thus, it unmasks that society.)

It has been mentioned above that choice of the author of one journal instead of the other, or of turning to this publisher and not to the other can be taken as an important paratextual sign—so that not only the name (and the place) of the journal or the publisher itself should be taken as some minor paratext but very often (though not always) it has further implications. From the late forties to the middle or end of the seventies, in the Eastern Block countries, there was practically no choice. Or if there was a formal choice, it did not have any ideological cause or consequence. To the contrary: what has had a connotation was that it does not really matter where (in what paper or by what publisher) one publishes her work.

This said, it is somewhat overstated—in the undercurrent oral communication of the age, the orientations, political as well as literary, of the editors were registered and classified, and publishing in the journals of the capitol or those of the countryside had a certain significance—depending on the given situation of literary life. However, there were some strange cases: the first Hungarian publication of Borges' short stories in the early seventies was a volume in the series of SF (science fiction) works—a sort of marginal publication, for a narrow subcultural audience. The paratextual information which could be gained from the facts of publication would not enlighten the importance or even the literary value of Borges—and this is what the publisher's real point was. This way, it could avoid the vigilant look of those in charge for the official canon. Still, just in case, there was a biographical note and a (very well informed and excellent) apologetic afterword added in order to explain that Borges' pessimism and his skeptical stance was overwritten by his commitment to the value of human fantasy.

By the late 1970s, it was evident (though not easily perceptible for an average reader) that the reader was given much more freedom; the hold of her hand was let loose, so to speak; the weight and amount of paratexts became considerably less. This withdrawal was gradual and cautious; the afterwords started to concentrate on biographical and bibliographical data, history of the publication and matters of text edition; notes were more and

more restricted to explanation of foreign language (or archaic) expressions; and if there were any blurbs, they were sometimes quotations taken from the book, sometimes some dedicatory words of the author (or somebody else), etc.

For the end of the 1970s, and in the 1980s, it became a practice that practically no paratextual information was added by the publishers. So much so that, for instance, the selection of Schiller's poetic works did not give the dates when the poems were written, and no other information whatsoever (regularly, titles of the original poems were provided in similar cases earlier); another volume in the same series, that of the poems of Shelley, did not even care to let the reader know the first and middle names of the poet. Quite a number of text editions, including the more and more fashionable memoirs about the pre-war Hungary, were published without any notes; presenting these texts *as they really are*, without any editorial intervention, as it were.

The argument of which this practice can be deduced is possibly the following: once one starts “manipulating” the text itself with paratext(s), once there is any intervention between the text and the reader, the true, right, appropriate interpretation will be diverted (and, thus, interpretation itself will be more or less defective). And, besides, once the publisher gets involved into the explanatory, interpretive operations, there is no limit, in principle, where this should be given up. So the only proper way of presenting texts is to leave them as they are (even the author's name can be regarded as something exterior to the text). The text must speak for itself, it should not be distorted by anything added to it. The aggressive, ruling, dominant and oppressive character of the knowledge (that is, power) superimposed on the text should be withdrawn and stopped so that the text/reader encounter could lead to an undisturbed interpretation. That is, interpretation without ideological biases. The commentary, be it critical or apologetic or of whatever modality, is spoken on the voice of the power—so the best of the ambitions is merely present the text, as it is. Whereas commentaries are supposed to serve the revealing of something hidden, the unmasking of something masked, here it is the commentary itself under which there is something hidden and masked: it is always a suspicious instrument towards which one had better be cautious, and get rid of it. This way, ideological burden can be reduced to the minimum.

Getting rid of ideology, of course, is a highly ideological move. But as a prelude to the economical, political, cultural changes of the late 1980s, this minor “resistances” of the text/paratext relation (as early as in the 1970s) might have counted as telling.

The impetus of the slogan, “let's see the text itself—and only the text”, lasted well after censorship was over and the press and book publishing had a complete freedom. Zoltán Z. Varga, in a study in preparation, showed how a lot of the paratexts were eradicated from the Hungarian publication of Barthes' essays—that is, for instance, not only the whole table of contents of *The Joy of Text* is missing from the volume. This may have been a technical mistake, but the order of the fragmentary texts are preserved following strictly the original publication—which may look like a “purist” solution, except that Barthes made a *French* alphabetic order (which, in translation, should be rendered to a *Hungarian* one). The idea might have been to let the reader read “Barthes himself”, an implicit and strongly ideological instruction; and in order to achieve this, let us put all the paratexts away. Even if these paratexts happen to be parts of Barthes' conception, and even if, by the way, this idea contradicts to Barthes' theoretical stance.

Contrary to this tendency, a proliferation of paratexts is also a tendency in these years. After the transition of '89, literature became overtly market oriented goods to be traded, and the publishing houses felt the pressure to keep pace with the book business. Thus, a publisher tried to achieve some success in the field of business by publishing Thomas

Mann's *Lotte in Weimar* in a pink–violet colored paper cover, with golden embossed letters and a romantic picture. If one suggested that here the paratext clearly contradicts to the authorial intention, this may be true; nevertheless, this very paratextual pattern will contribute to the understanding how this book could have been read in this age, or, at least, how gimmicks to persuade people to read Thomas Mann worked.

## Epilogue

Just in order to prove that the present paper does not share the paranoid behavior of the pre-transition literary life towards paratexts, an epilogue is in order here. Very soon after the transition into a normal democratic society, after 1989, it became evident that it is not the paratext itself which is to blame for weighing heavily upon the text and forcing one and only one “correct” interpretation on its readers—but, rather, it is the situation where there is no contestant or even alternative suggestion for the interpretation. In a normal communicative situation, however, there is always a chance for dialogue, replies, contradictions, modifications, specifications and qualifications. Ideally, in a democracy one could have a communication which is not “systematically distorted”, to use Habermas’ term.<sup>23</sup> In this situation of communication, alternative interpretations (or even discourses) are not excluded by any power; and (ideally, again) no interpretation (or discourse) is doomed to be drifted into marginality. Paratexts, then, will not have the imperative power they had before. Even if they cannot be overlooked (either theoretically or practically—they are there, anyway), the reader will, at least in principle, always have the freedom to revise their importance and overwrite the interpretation they suggest.

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<sup>23</sup> Jürgen Habermas (1970).