

## Paratext

For Genette (1997 [1987]) paratext indicates those parts of a published work that provide a framework for the written text. Paratextual elements typically include the title page, preface, contents pages, illustrations and appendices. Genette argues that although the paratext amounts to just a "a fringe of the printed text ... [it is] a privileged place of pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public, an influence that [...] is at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it" (1997: 2).<sup>1</sup>

Although Genette's work has been very influential and productive, recent studies of early modern paratexts have indicated the need to situate the forms and functions of paratexts within the specific historical and cultural contexts in which the text was produced. As Belle and Hosington write, "Genette's original definition of paratexts as places of authorial or editorial control has been problematised as scholars turned their attention to the historical and material variability of liminal printed spaces" (2018b, 4). According to Hosington, paratextual features possess semiotic value which are culture-based requiring cultural and historical knowledge (2015, 14). This embeddedness is particularly relevant when examining the translation of paratextual materials: "Given that source texts and their translations are embedded in different cultures and intended for different receptors, one should expect their physical features to differ. It also follows that the paratextual materials, also culture- and context-bound, will be different" (Ibid.). One can, therefore, regard paratexts, and their translation, as a "cultural agent rather than a passive medium" (Tribble 1993, 3).

### Paratext: place and time

The role of the paratext can be influenced by features relating to place and time. Take, for example, the communicative function of the following three title pages, all relating to Filippo Pigafetta and his *Relatione del reame di Congo et delle circonvicine contrade*. Published in 1591, Pigafetta's book was successful, indeed so successful that by the end of the century it had been translated into four different languages. It was translated into Dutch in 1596, into English and German in 1597, and into Latin in 1598.<sup>2</sup> Nor did its renown disappear following these first translations. In the nineteenth century it was once more translated into English in 1881.

**Class:** Look at the 3 respective title pages of 1591 (Pigafetta), 1597 (1<sup>st</sup> translation) and 1881 (2<sup>nd</sup> translation) and examine the differences in a) illustration b) contents c) language used. In what ways does the paratext orient the prospective reader?

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<sup>1</sup> Genette, Gérard. 1987. *Seuils*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil (translated as *Paratexts. Thresholds of Interpretation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> F. Pigafetta, *A Report of the Kingdom of Congo, and of the Surrounding Countries; Drawn out of the Writings and Discourses of the Portuguese Duarte Lopez, by Filippo Pigafetta. 1591*, trans. by M. Hutchinson, London, John Murray, 1881, p.148 (orig. title *Relatione del reame di Congo et delle circonvicine contrade*, Rome, 1591). Hutchinson's translation can be accessed free of charge on Google online books.



# A REPORTE OF THE KING

dome of CONGO, a Re-  
gion of AFRICA.

And of the Countries that border  
rounde about the same.

1. Wherein is also shewed that the two Zones, *Torrída & Frigida*, are not onely habitable, but inhabited, and very temperate, contrary to the opinion of the olde Philosophers.
2. That the blacke colour which is in the skinnes of the *Ethiopiens & Negroes* &c. proceedeth not from the Sunne.
3. And that the Riuer *Nilus* springeth not out of the mountains of the Moone, as hath beene heretofore beleued: Together with the true cause of the rising and increase thereof.
4. Besides the description of diuers plantes, Fishes and Beastes, that are founde in those Countries,

Drawen out of the writings and discourses of  
*Odoardo Lopes* a Portingall, by  
*Philippo Pigafetta*.

*Translated out of Italian by Abraham Hartwell.*



LONDON  
Printed by Iohn Wolfe. 1597.

*A REPORT*  
 OF THE  
 KINGDOM OF CONGO,  
 AND OF THE  
**Surrounding Countries;**

*Drawn out of the Writings and Discourses of the Portuguese,*

DUARTE LOPEZ,

BY FILIPPO PIGAFETTA, IN ROME, 1591.

*Newly Translated from the Italian, and Edited, with Explanatory Notes,*

BY

MARGARITE HUTCHINSON.

*With Facsimiles of the Original Maps, and a Preface by*

SIR THOMAS FOWELL BUXTON, BART., F.R.G.S.,  
 ETC., ETC.

“There lies the Congo Kingdom, great and strong,  
 Already led by us to Christian ways;  
 Where flows Zaire, the river clear and long,  
 A stream unseen by men of olden days.”

*The Lusjads, v. 13.*



LONDON:  
 JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET.  
 1881.

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