

In and out of Fiction. Paratext and Fiction in Early Modern Spanish Literature

Enthusiasts of paratexts will find a true Eldorado in the Spanish book of the Golden Age. Even when narrowing down the meaning of 'paratext' exclusively to the *textual* liminal elements that surround a text and help to make it into a book, no less than 20 of such elements have been distinguished by José Simón Díaz in his study on the structure of the Spanish book printed between 1500 and 1700.¹ Yet in many modern editions of Golden Age classics there is no consistent practice towards paratexts: some editors reproduce all, including tables of content, while others reproduce what they consider the 'important' ones, such as prefaces and dedications. In critical editions, based upon manuscripts and one or more printed editions, a sensible reproduction of paratextual elements is, of course a highly complicated matter. The recent publication of splendid scholarly texts of Spanish classics – the 'Biblioteca Clásica' by Critica – is however an encouraging proof that such a reflection of paratextual practices is relevant, and can be done.

Negligence of paratext in modern editions explains, perhaps, the scarce critical attention the subject has received in Hispanic criticism. An exception has to be made for Porqueras Mayo a scholar well aware of the importance of preliminary texts, who has authored important monographies on the preface as a literary genre.² Mention should also be made of studies concerned with book history, censorship and the legal aspects of printing.³ Finally, Cayuela's recent book on paratexts in Golden Age Spanish prose⁴ provides Hispanism with a thorough study of the matter, that provides ample evidence on the added value of paratexts in understanding the relations between author, reader and critics in Golden Age Spain; relations that were more complex than generally thought of. The fact that paratextual proliferation seems to develop together with another distinctive feature of the Spanish Golden Age, namely the rise of the novel – *La azarillo de Tormes, Don Quijote, Guzmán de Alfarache*... – is no coincidence, considering the changes brought about by the introduction of print. But perhaps the massive presence of paratexts in Spanish book printing itself contributed to authors of fiction's awareness of the ambiguous

¹ José Simón Díaz, José, *El libro español antiguo: análisis de su estructura*, Kassel: Reichenberger, 1983.

² Antonio Porqueras Mayo, *El prólogo como género literario: su estudio en el Siglo de Oro español*, Madrid: CSIC, 1957;

Antonio Porqueras Mayo, *La teoría poética en el Manierismo y Barroco españoles*, Barcelona: Puvill, 1989.

³ Hipólito Escolar Sobrino, *Historia del libro español*, Madrid: Gredos, 1998; Virgilio Pinto Crespo, *Inquisición y control ideológico en la España del siglo XVI*, Madrid: Taurus, 1983; Jaime Moll, *De la imprenta al lector: estudios sobre el libro español de los siglos XVI al XVIII*, Madrid: Arco/Libros, 1994.

frontiers between history and fiction, leading them to make a full exploit of such liminal elements to acquaint and at the same time surprise the reader with the new form of imaginative literature they introduced. In the following article I shall explore this idea of the possible instrumentalisation of paratext in early (realistic) prose fiction. I will start with a survey of paratextual practices in the Spanish book of the Golden Age.

Presence and relevance of paratext in Spanish bookprinting 1500-1700

The typology of the structure of the 'old' Spanish book offered by Simón Díaz⁵ will be a useful instrument to reflect on the functions of paratexts, with special attention to their presence in the edition of the genre of prose fiction. [fig. 1]

1. title page
2. dedication
3. privilege
4. approbation or approbations from the civil authority
5. license by the civil authority
6. approbation or approbations from the ecclesiastical authority
7. license by the ecclesiastic authority
8. approbation or approbations by superiors from the regular clergy if the author is subject to them
9. license by a Religious order (see above)
10. errata
11. tax or price
12. praises to the author (prose)
13. preliminary poems by the author himself
14. praises to the author (poems)
15. preface
16. illustrations
17. declaration(s) of Faith
18. tables and indexes
19. register
20. colophon

⁵ Anne Cayuela, *Le Paratexte au Siècle d'Or: Prose romanesque, livres et lecteurs en Espagne au XVI^e et XVII^e siècle*, Geneva: Droz, 1996.

Legal paratexts

The indispensable part of preliminaries to be found in the Golden Age Spanish book was of a legal nature. As early as in 1502, the Spanish Catholic Kings Ferdinand and Isabel had formulated a legislation for their reigns, which prohibited the printing and selling of any book without their previous royal license. In the practice, this meant that a manuscript of a text to be published had to bear the signature of the censor on each and every of its pages, including corrections. Censors were appointed by the Royal Council, and their report was called an *approbation*. Once given, the book would then obtain a *license*. Royal licenses would be joined by ecclesiastical licenses, given by the General Vicar of the Archdiocese, after examination by a second censor. Once printed, the book would be cross-examined with the manuscript, resulting in a list of *errata* printed as part of the preliminaries. The Royal Council also protected authors/printers by granting a *privilege*, whereby the civil authority granted the author the exclusivity of the printing of his manuscript for a period of 10 years. Finally, the Council established a legal price for the book it examined. This price was called a *Tasa*, and was based on the amount of paper (the number of ungathered folios) used for the publication: thereby lending a control to Council book-pricing. By the second half of the sixteenth century, all these instances of control were reflected in printed testimonies in a book's preliminaries; their absence would lead to suspicions of piracy or clandestine publication.

In this heavily regulated context of civil and religious control, it is striking that Spanish books do not include any official license on behalf of that most powerful controlling instance of religious and moral behavior, the Tribunal of the Holy Inquisition. The Spanish Inquisition did in fact several times urge for their part in previous censorship, but never obtained the right, conferred as it had been to the Archbishop. However, with the help of its famous *Index* (Spanish Indices were published between 1558 and 1792) the Inquisition exercised a repressive control, which was highly influential, although it far from effective. The institution recognized the difficulty of grasping books, once printed, from the hands of the readers, and was also aware of the possible clandestine or secret circulation or sale by book-sellers.

⁵ José Simón Díaz. *Censo de escritores al servicio de los Austrias y otros estudios bibliográficos*, Madrid: CSIC, 1983.

If verifying the instances of control and censorship in Spanish book printing (licenses and approbations) is easy, reconstructing the criteria adopted by the censors is far less easy.

Legislation and approbations used rather vague formulae such as ‘works should be authentic, and of proven things, whereas apocryphal, superstitious or rejected notions of vain things that are worth nothing are forbidden’ (1502). Censors demanded conformity between the text and what was promised on its title page, and accordance with dogmas of catholic faith. The often repeated formula that a book should not contain anything against ‘Holy Catholic faith and good manners’ (*fe y buenas costumbres*) was however as vague as it could be.

Studies on censorship and Spanish book printing have evinced that religious and moral control was in fact less severe than it might be suspected. Most censors were more lenient than the few authors and moralists who time and again urged for repression of certain forms of texts, notably prose fiction and the drama genre. There are few instances known of negative censor reports, the majority of which has been lost. In the case of fiction (the subject of this present study), there is no reason to believe that works were rejected in more than an exceptional case. One known case is Francisco de Quevedo's *Dreams and Discourses* (*Sueños y Discursos*), an amusing though merciless satire of Spanish society which had been rejected by one monk who criticized the author for his irreverence and his ‘vulgar and scandalous style’; some time afterwards, Quevedo obtained permission from another monk.⁶

But while slackness was one thing, outright complaisance was quite another one. In her marvelous study on the reception of prose fiction in seventeenth century Spain, Anne Cayuela reveals that many censors either did not bother to examine the texts they were submitted carefully, and that frequently they were close to the writer! There are numerous cases of censors chosen *ad hoc* by authors themselves,⁷ or of censors belonging to a literary Academy of which the author was a member. For Cayuela it was thus fair to say that censorship proved to be an ‘insider's practice’ exercised by professionals of writing and reading who alternated positions.⁸

Within such a context, approbations seem to say little of official or general acceptance. Where approbations might reveal sensitivities among political and religious authorities, they frequently were orchestrated forms of praise, that tell us more about an author's

⁶ Cayuela, *Le Paratexte...*, p.21.

⁷ Cayuela, *Le Paratexte...*, p.25.

⁸ Cayuela, *Le Paratexte...*, p.27.

strategy to present his text, than about the way this text was read or decoded. Cervantes' *Novelas ejemplares*, published in 1613 contains no less than five religious and political approbations, all of which stress the 'honest entertainment' represented by the *novelas*, and each of them elaborating on particular – literary or moral – virtues; they must have been greatly influenced by the author himself, who was concerned about possible criticism of the amorous matter contained in the stories. Cervantes was well aware of the game he played, when he made his Quixote say that:

Books that have been printed with the king's licence, and with the approbation of those to whom they have been submitted [...] that these should be lies! (I, chapter 50)

an argument which was sufficient for the Fool of la Mancha to keep on reading chivalric romance, and for us, clever readers, a revealing statement on the irrelevance of licenses and approbations.

Literary paratexts

The more familiar part of paratexts to be found in (Spanish) books are those that have been traditionally considered to be more directly related to literary communication, as are prefaces, dedications or epilogues; elements that have accordingly received more critical attention.

Prefaces have been the subject of important, pioneering monographies by Porqueras Mayo (1947, 1989) who has described the evolution of these texts into a literary genre of its own.⁹ Introductions developed from a few words to ever larger portions of text, that frequently became narratives in their own. A characteristic feature of seventeenth century prefaces was the multiplication of prefaces, one directed to the 'lector discreto' (the ingenious reader), others to the 'vulgo' (the mass); some in prose, others in verse or even in dialogue.

The increasing preoccupation with prologues of course reflects an increasing awareness among authors (or printers) of the changed form of communication brought about by the introduction of the printed book. In contrast with traditional forms of literature stemming from oral tradition or manuscript culture, where there was a certain familiarity between 'producers' and 'consumers' - a tradition that continued well into the seventeenth century - the new medium emphasized the differed nature of literary communication, where texts,

⁹ Porqueras Mayo, *El prólogo ...*; Porqueras Mayo, *La teoría poética...*

once handed over to the printer, would lead a life of their own, causing both author and reader to puzzle about the intentions of one and another. According to Walter Reed, the emergence of the novel, a new mode of 'realistic' fiction, i.e. based upon events and characters close to the expectations of the readers, was largely conditioned and influenced by the modes of production of printing.¹⁰

Prefaces were the *locus* where authors tried to bridge the gap between their texts and the readers, trying to exercise some form of control on how their texts were read. The frequent allusions in prefaces and dedications to 'zoilos', the critics that were eagerly waiting to misread texts and destroy the reputation of an author were by no means a topic only.

Authors also developed an increasing conscience of the difference between themselves as real life writers, and the character they introduced in fiction; while the common reader's tendency was to identify both –sixteenth and seventeenth century readers were not as schooled in narratology and twentieth-century discourse analysis and were prone to immediately associate the name that appeared on a work's title page with the I of the preface or even of the story. Introductory texts soon became the playground for the author to adopt a *persona* to speak for himself and his work. He could represent himself as a young man, in burlesque genre (whom could be forgiven his frivolities), a wise and sad old man, disillusioned by the false reality of worldliness; or a female author could introduce herself as a modest woman who dared to enter the realm of men, but had been convinced by the latter to publish the innocent offspring of her pastime.

To sum up, in prefaces, especially in sixteenth and seventeenth century Spanish prefaces we find all kinds of literary tendencies, which went well beyond the topical justification of an author's motive to write such and such a text. Prefaces contain embedded stories, parables, fictionalized authors and frequently also, fictionalized readers.

Dedications

Dedications were often a corollary of prefaces in the sense that they invoked the protection of a powerful patron to shield the author against the venom of his detractors. These paratexts provided thus another opportunity for an author to justify his work, or to comment upon the supposed intention of his work.

¹⁰ Walter Reed, *An exemplary history of the novel: the Quixotic versus the Picaresque*, Chicago-London: The University of Chicago Press, 1981.

In Early Modern Spain, where printing was a costly business, in an increasingly unstable market, authors were dependent on wealthy patrons to have their texts published. The ever perspicuous Cervantes already revealed, long before studies on Golden Age book printing would provide the proof, that the flattering dedications authors went out of their way to write to their patrons were in fact, seldom compensated. Behind the elaborate praises of Spanish noblemen, the extensive enumerations of their genealogy, their exploits in military campaigns, or their prestigious parties and lifestyle... there was a desperate writer whose loyalty could be a matter of pure circumstance.¹¹ Authors presented themselves in dedications as humble, dependent artists or to the contrary, as rebellious, self-conscious artists who denounced the lack of real support for their efforts. Thereby, these paratexts could develop into metafiction about the writer at work.

Finally, in the absence of patronage, dedicatories could be invented, introducing a fictitious addressee, like the female reader of the often moralistic genre of the 'novela cortesana', elaborating on both entertaining and honest love plots. This genre seemed to have had a predominantly female readership, that was then lectured on feminine virtues and faults.

Until now I have tried to show how the paratextual part of a book- had a dominant presence in Spanish book. Authors (publishers, printers) were aware of the implications of the materiality of book printing –the costs, the fact that a book could not start its circulation without previously having past a whole series of obstacles- and that at the end of the chain there was a buyer, who would soon become a reader. Authors had vague notions of who they wrote for, but increasingly they reflected – through, precisely paratexts- that once they surrendered the book to publication – they had raised their son- it would lead an independent life. Writers had a real preoccupation with the unknown (urban) audience, they called the *vulgo*. Fascinated by and afraid of this anonymous reader, they developed strategies to control this reader's handling of the fictional text they confronted him with.

Nowhere can we find better examples of an author's awareness of the relevance of paratexts as instruments of literary communication than in Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, that great work of fiction that was conscious of its own fictitiousness. His story about the alienated hidalgo of La Mancha surely started of as a parody of a particular and tenaciously popular mode of fiction, namely the fantastic chivalric romance, with its

¹¹ Simón Díaz, *Censo de escritores...*

absurdities and lies. However, *Don Quixote* soon became, among many other things, a profound reflection on the reading culture that had just begun to show its impact on society. Suffice it to recall how our hero owed his mental state and even his identity to reading; how the barber and the curate had an important and diverting scrutiny of the man's library, using their reading experience to set the standards of which books were to be saved from the penalty of fire the ignorant niece and housekeeper were all too willing to execute (*Quixote* I, VI); or how, in the second part, the characters Quixote and Sancho Panza, commented upon the way their previous (hi)story had been read, and abused by a mediocre imitator by the name of Avellaneda.

Paratext is paramount to *Don Quixote*. Its title (*Life and exploits of the ingenious hidalgo Don Quixote de la Mancha*) is a deliberate imitation and at the same time critique of chivalric fiction with its pretended historicity or truthfulness; its preface with the beautiful metaphor of the story as 'a child of my brain' is a narrative in miniature, where the fictitious author/Cervantes starts off in conventional fashion, but later enters the realm of fiction when he recalls the discussion with his in dialogue with his 'certain, lively clever friend' who dispels all the troubles imagined by the author who was so worried on how to shape his book: the reflections upon which 'sonnets, epigrams and verses' to include for the beginning, the possible reactions by readers, the common practice among pedant authors etc... Fiction thus invades paratexts, as exemplified by the laudatory preliminary poems written by friends, which were not addressed to the author, but instead to the protagonist of his story! Paratext contributed to the conscious ambiguity of fiction and truth, represented in the story (the text) itself, by the metafictional role of the different narrators ('Cervantes', the chroniclers of La Mancha, Cide Hamete Benengeli, the translator...) and greatly enhanced by the paratextual elements of the chapter titles that forced the reader to reflect on the nature of the 'droll adventures' he was reading: 'In which the narrative of our knight's mishap is continued' (I, 5) or 'Which follows Sixty-Nine and deals with matters indispensable for the clear comprehension of this history' (II, 70).

Another masterpiece of Spanish literature, written 50 years before *Don Quixote*, owes a great deal of its fictional force to 'paratextual awareness'. I refer to *Lazarillo de Tormes*, the pseudo-autobiography of a Toledo town crier, the first known edition of which was published in 1554.

The radical novelty of *Lazarillo de Tormes* rests upon a beautiful paradox: its *fiction* sustains that the work was *really* written by its humble protagonist. In order to convince the unaware sixteenth-century reader that he was being told the supposedly real life story of a low-life character –such ‘realism’ was an outrageous novelty in early modern literature– the real author of *Lazarillo de Tormes* had to disappear, a task so masterly performed that his identity is still far from sure today (despite Navarro’s book on the subject).¹² The paratextual element of *Lazarillo*’s title page thus became of paramount importance to the verisimilitude of its fiction: the life of *Lazarillo de Tormes* was not an anonymously published story, but, in fact a work written by the protagonist himself.¹³ From the start, paratext was an indispensable part of fiction.

In order to enforce the pseudo-autobiographical fiction, *Lazarillo*’s preface and the dedicatory letter had to be involved in the fiction. Only in this way would readers continue identifying author, narrator and character as the same person; regardless of the fact they actually *believed* the fiction. Critics of *Lazarillo de Tormes* have always been puzzled by the meaning of the preliminaries of the work as the preface and the letter bear no paratextual separation. There is a longstanding discussion, still unresolved, which is provoked by the conventional supposition that *Lazarillo*’s preface is to be related to the *author*, while the letter is undoubtedly the hero’s (*Lazarillo*’s) work. Recent theory has it that the whole confusion stems from a now missing leaf which would have been present in the first edition, which unfortunately has not survived although its existence is undisputed. The first leaf would have provided the clue on the author of the preface, and would have distinguished him from the fictional *Lazarillo*.¹⁴ I am not completely convinced by this argument, as it dispels the charm of the anonymous author, who, I think, played a trick on his readers, including us, modern critics. As ancient and actual decoders of texts, we readers want to contextualize a work, relating it to a biographical persona that we can put into familiar categories. *Lazarillo*’s author would be a Renaissance man, we tend to think, an Erasmian highly critical of the hypocrite Christian society he was living in; he would be a learned humanist who drew upon his vast erudition to compose a new, genial story; he could well be a *converso* reflecting upon the injustice of ethnic and social discrimination of Spanish society witnessed by *Lazarillo*.

¹² Rosa Navarro Durán, *Alfonso Valdés, autor del Lazarillo de Tormes*, Madrid: Gredos, 2003.

¹³ *Lazarillo de Tormes*, ed. by F. Rico, with a bibliographical appendix by Bienvenido C. Morros, Madrid: Cátedra, 1987.

¹⁴ Navarro Durán, *Alfonso Valdés...*

However, the genial fiction of *Lazarillo de Tormes* resides in the ambiguity of the author. Following the fiction of its paratext (preface and letter), a reader is forced to consider that it was, possibly, the young-boy-who-became-a-town crier himself who authored the prefaced and thereby occupied the privileged realm of writers. The story ventures the possibility that in the rigid hierarchy of Early Modern Spain a marginal, low-life character could in fact change, acquire respectability and eventually invade the space of learned people as writers are.

Conclusion

In a context of control and the continuous questioning of the moral value of literature, reflected in the extensive mandatory and anticipatory paratexts that accompany bookpublishing in Early Modern Spain, writers developed new modes of prose fiction. We have witnessed how two major examples, Miguel de Cervantes in his *Don Quixote* and the anonymous author of *Lazarillo de Tormes* were highly aware or had an acute intuition of the new mode of reading introduced by the progressive coming of the printed book. They created forms of total fiction in which paratexts were instrumentalized in order to condition the reader's response. The author of *Quixote* used paratext and metafiction to fight the dangers of fiction (chivalric romance), to break its illusion, reveal the indispensable intervention of writer and public if a story was to be uphold. The author of *Lazarillo*, starting off with what seemed a convention, lured the unaware reader into the supposedly autobiographic fiction of a scoundrel, in a cunning play of ironic deception. Both authors were motivated by a profound awareness of fiction's dangers, and paradoxically, both made essential contributions to the novel, the most compelling form of fiction of all.