

## Post-Scripta Manent

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**Abstract:** The postmodernist culture of recycling is accustomed to reusing texts and to adding sequels to them in an urge to explain and “close” texts up. The range of paratexts, especially of postscripts, is impressive and such discursive practices are employed not only by writers of fiction but also by critics, philosophers, and theoreticians. Any text may have a sequel. Even death is followed by a provision of funeral texts. Text and death are similar in that they are incomprehensible.

**Keywords:** *paratexts, postscripts, Genette, Kierkegaard, death.*

Since present-day culture is permeated with an aesthetics of incompleteness the absence of a decisive resting point is translated into a deficit of unequivocal closure. Thus, the practice of paratexts, and of the post-scriptum in particular, no longer refers to the classical supplement that clarifies what the text has omitted to say, nor even to the platitudes justifying idiosyncrasies of style or of any other kind that writers of previous centuries used to conclude their writings with.

In spite of the fact that it appears to close a text up, any *dénouement* marks the place where another text originates in the same way in which a prime text, that is never the original Text, reclaims itself from the endings of other texts. Since practices of recycling and reproduction, together with those that decenter and tear authorial authority into pieces, are quasi-universal, we use the term “text” to comprise arts in general and all forms of media where one can detect protheses of original texts that have mobilised enough energy to produce further texts. The range of afterwords is impressively substantial and it covers addenda, codicils, excursions, supplements, appendixes, epilogues, errata, etc.

The term “post-scriptum” denotes whatever comes *after the text*, any type of addendum that completes (sometimes competes with) the primary text, which is thus defined as provisional and endlessly amendable. One may include here any textual supplement that has been added *afterwards*, such as double or multiple endings, altered/alternative/open endings, but also palimpsests, versions, variants, abridgments, revisions, revaluations, etc. Likewise, rewritings, sequels, follow-ups, film and book franchises are as many postscripts as the text has generated so far whereas literary criticism, movie or stage versions of literary texts might also be

regarded as postscripts that contribute to the semantic elucidation and wholeness of primary texts. Postscripts may also belong to editors, translators or fellow writers and may stand for a mark of deference for the author of the primary text.

At times, it is the author of the text herself who revisits her own work and deems the postscript a surplus but also an opportunity to add something that she considers to be focal and necessary, something that has not been anticipated while producing the text proper but without which that one would be incomplete or unintelligible. As Daniel Mermet remarks, “sometimes, people wish to take back words, to go back over ideas with a ‘rested ear’” [qtd. in Rockhill, 2011: 1].

This is the case, for instance, of Gérard Genette who, several decades after the publication of his praised *Discours de récit* (1972), decides to write a *Postscript* to it. He does not alter unreservedly his approach though he attempts at finding a middle ground for both narratology and the postmodernist contentions that pivot on the text’s unfathomability. What Genette records in his paratext is, as Georg Danek puts it,

“an afterthought of his rigid methodology, trying to define in a precise way what postmodernists claimed to be the most indefinable aspect of literature, namely the relation between single texts.” [2010: 128]

Genette adopted the term “postscript” (under the overt influence of Kierkegaard) so as to designate in a more apt manner “ce qu’on inscrit, dans une lettre ou ailleurs, «après la signature», comme si l’avant-dernier sans avenir pouvait annoncer un après-dernier sans recours.” [2016: 11] He prefers this term to the French “apostille”, “codicille” or “épilogue” because he perceives it as covering specific connotation she was looking for:

“Mais de celui-ci, le propos est à la fois de préservation (au sens sévèrement pathologique de ce terme) et, comme il se confirmera çà et là, d’autocommentaire tardif et d’extrapolation théorique plus ou moins pertinente.” [Ibid.]

George Bataille confesses in *Inner Experience* that even though a postscript might be regarded as sloppiness, the compulsion to write it is often inescapable:

“I am anxious to explain myself on this matter, thus interrupting the exposé: I must do it, not being able to guarantee the homogeneity of the whole. Perhaps this is negligence.” [1988: 6]

Postscripts are not foreseen. Neither is death. They are both perceived as unpredicted adjuncts to one’s text and/or life. Moreover, they represent an acknowledged mortification as they testify to our fallibility: we are neither perfect, nor immortal. Every text leaves something unwritten that deserves or requires to be elucidated. Every life, whose logical and chronological closure is death, leaves something unsaid because “speechless death” (Shakespeare, *King Richard II*, II: 3)

commands absolute silence as Kierkegaard renders it in “The Decisiveness of Death” (1845):

“... death is through its equality like an empty space, and as a silence in which no sound is heard, or softened as a silence which nothing disturbs.” [1993: 94]

It is, as Thomas Parnell depicts it in “A Night-Piece on Death”, a realm of calm nothingness:

“Death's but a Path that must be trod,  
If man would ever pass to God;  
A Port of Calms, a State of Ease  
From the rough Rage of swelling Seas...” [Clery, Miles, 2000: 21]

Writing about texts after they have been long published, read and re-read, filling in the gaps of our previous comprehension and accounting for the inner truth both of the text and of our grasping of it are similar to a certain extent to talking to and about people who are no longer alive. The text cannot be altered, its form and substance are sealed forever and the same is true for the lives of the people who are no longer with us. Nothing can be said or done anymore. Nevertheless, the act of writing and speaking is in both cases an assertion of the fact that texts and people are kept alive in this way only. Most funeral texts might be viewed as existential postscripts: elegies, epitaphs, requiems, obituaries, necrologues, funeral inscriptions, laments, etc. They address someone who can no longer participate in the dialogue and who is not anymore in the position of receiving the message. Yet, by simply writing a panegyric or an encomium, life is reinstated for a split second within the realm of “muddy death” (Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, IV: 7) while the fathomlessness of both text and death is reiterated:

“Hence the address will abstain from explanation; as death is the last of all, so shall be the last thing we say about it: it is inexplicable. The inexplicability is the boundary...” [Kierkegaard, 1993: 112]

We dedicate this volume to the memory of our honoured colleagues and friends, **Sabina Fînaru** (1959-2019) and **Gabriela Rangu** (1969-2020), former members of the editorial board of *Meridian Critic*. It is a postscript to their life, bestowed on teaching and literature with joy, humour and intelligence, as well as to the inexplicability of their silence.

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