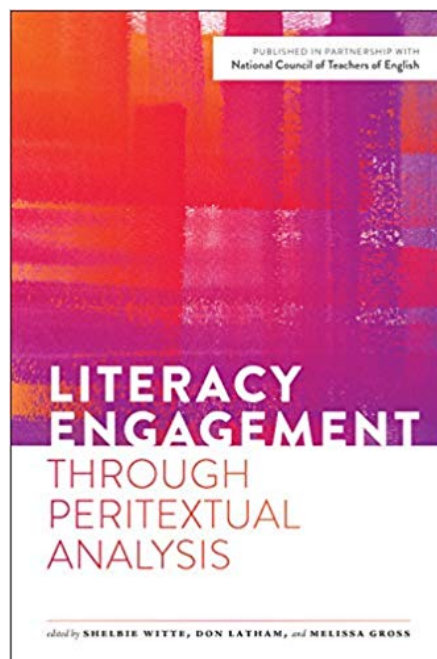# JoLLE@UGA®
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Review of Literacy Engagement through Peritextual Analysis
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Overview

As a doctoral student in English education and a high school English Language Arts (ELA) teacher, I enjoyed reading *Literacy Engagement through Peritextual Analysis* (Witte, Latham, & Gross, 2019). The book serves as a good introduction to peritext by modeling the qualities and elements of peritext. The editors, Shelbie Witte, Don Latham, and Melissa Gross highlight these facets while offering strategies that can be taken straight into the classroom. Peritext itself encompasses everything in and around a book that is not the actual text. Covers, tables of contents, about the author sections, indices, and publishing content all fall into the genre of peritext. The authors of the chapters are mostly professors in education, media science, and English at universities throughout the U.S. There are also some media specialists, doctoral students and candidates, and ELA teachers that have also contributed to this resourceful book. As noted below, there are many ways of engaging and employing multiple literacies to develop understandings of texts through their peritexts from dust jackets to movie posters. This collection guides the reader through theoretical understanding of peritext and implementing it as a supplement to reading instruction.

Literacy Engagement through Peritextual Analysis reads like a full course on using peritextual analysis in a teacher education class. The book opens with fair standard front matter which leads us to the three main sections of the text. The first section provides a theoretical framework of the Peritextual Literacy Framework (PLF). The second and third sections are the PLF in action in the classroom and media center. Authentic educational settings are described and used to illustrate how a teacher can employ and teach peritextual literacy. The whole book is framed as a way for students to not just engage with printed and digital text, but to see and understand the 21st century's peritextual elements. There are tables of contents, covers, chyrons, links, and indices everywhere that, once understood, form the foundations of digital literacy.

Each chapter in sections II and III contains similar elements. The chapters start with an overview of what will be discussed, similar to any research paper. Following this, the reader encounters, typically, a statement of the problem, usually framing the chapter in some kind of literacy or academic language familiar to any ELA teacher or media specialist. Then comes a section on the particular element of peritext to be examined and taught in the chapter, be it the dust jacker, authors' note, or more. Authors then diverge and review relevant literature, discuss context, or explain the theoretical framework (PLF) as it pertains to this chapter. Some authors have taken on a case study method of analysis, some narrative, and some more like an extended toolbox from a reading and writing class in a teacher education program.

The youngest age group of learners targeted are young primary school children. The authors of these chapters use *Last Stop on Market Street*, a picture book, (de la Pena, 2015) and *Dolphins at Daybreak*, a beginning chapter book, (Osborne, 1997) to describe ways peritextual analysis can be used with emerging readers. The chapter describes analyzing the dust jackets of these books as a pre-reading strategy. The authors provide transcripts of dialogue in the classrooms to show how the teacher facilitated the discussion and how students reacted and responded to the materials. Visual literacy is key to readers of all ages. I have unknowingly used peritext and visual literacy as a way of introducing a book. So, I can easily see myself doing this in my high school classroom and literacy seminars at universities.

The young adult chapters vary in their pedagogical moves and give the reader many ways to use and create peritext with our students. A young adult (YA) fiction novel entitled *Cathy's Book* (Stewart & Weisman, 2006) is described and analyzed from a teacher's perspective. The reader gets journal entries and reflections from the classroom teacher and theoretical analysis, but that is only half of the story. *Cathy's Book* and its accompanying peritext blur the lines of books and reality. The novel is written in journal form by its protagonist, Cathy. The subtitle, *If found call (650) 266-8233* is our first encounter with peritextual elements. I called that number—as

the chapter authors describe—and got Cathy's voicemail greeting. It is eerie to say the least, because her outgoing message talks about the fact that cell phones can be traced, and a message to her mother *not to worry*. There are other clues within the book the authors list: ways to listen to her voicemails, ways to solve puzzles in the diary, and more. Garcia and Hunt (2019) have included the idea of the participatory age in their title, and raise the important issue that peritextual elements "are the narrative and equally as substantive" (p. 117) as the text itself in the age of multimodal marketing campaigns and interactive, augmented reality texts.

A few chapters, except the news and current events peritexts, cover graphic novels like *Boxers and Saints* (Yang & Pien, 2006), more YA fiction like *Catching Fire* (Collins, 2013), DVD covers like *Fantasia 2000* (Ernst & Algar, et al. (1999), *Oliver and Company* (Scribner, 1998), *The Little Mermaid* (Ashman & Musker and Clements & Musker, 1989), and *Aladdin* (Haas, 1992), and multiple dust jackets like *The Metamorphosis* (Kafka, 1915/1971). These function more as pre-reading strategies as ways to prime readers and reluctant readers. Analysis here focuses on visual literacy as ways to understand the contents of the texts, especially the harder-to-understand ones like *The Metamorphosis* and *Boxers and Saints*. The various authors take us through looking at different jackets of Kafka's story in a first- or second-year university literature class, and high school students remix *Catching Fire* dust jackets to more accurately reflect the tensions and contents of the story.

The remaining chapters that feature *Dreamland Burning* (Latham, 2017), the non-app news websites like NPR, BBC, and American and English print news sources center around what the editors call documentary and supplemental peritextual elements. Both take this book into the 21st century by exploring what is beyond a hyperlink and the author's note in the novel. Each encourages the reader to go further and explore beyond what is presented in the text. The author's note in *Dreamland Burning* points the reader to supplementary and primary sources to learn more about the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921. The final chapter

of the book is appropriately titled "Leading Students to Exit through the Gift Shop." The authors use Banksy's self-produced documentary as a mentor text for high school students creating their own art, short documentary, and director's commentary.

Takeaways

As a high school ELA teacher this book hits a lot of high points and usable ideas. Each chapter is short, about 15 pages. I would not need to know the background theories in order to read and understand everything in a chapter. In fact, after reading the first chapter on PLF and its theoretical groundings, everything is clear. Beyond reading the two introductory chapters, and maybe the peritext, each chapter can be seen, read, or used in isolation.

In addition to being easily accessible, each chapter is adaptable. The contexts of the chapters are explicit, but I found no issues replacing texts and standards to be able to use the college-level example as well as the primary-level picture books. Given the critical thinking skills involved in peritextual literacy, all of these strategies would have a place in my high school classroom. Although it is not covered in this edition, I am thinking about how to teach digital annotation on an ebook reader. Many of the structures of peritext cross over into this domain, and I am excited to work with this framework.

Some Letdowns

This book did not cover using all the types of peritext that are enumerated within the framework. For example, in the Kafka cover chapter no mention was made of Vladimir Nabokov's supplemental or documentary peritexts. Nabokov's teaching copy of *The Metamorphosis* is full of drawings of Gregor's apartment, the bug he became, and copious notes on the surroundings and setting of the story. Similarly, his lecture on the story is widely available online and could serve as a supplement to any teaching of the short story. The chapter does analyze three different illustrated dust jackets of the story to help students predict and engage with absurdity and existentialism, but I do think understanding the

story itself requires more than an inspection of imagery.

Literacy Engagement through Peritextual Analysis is couched in developing students' critical thinking skills. This kind of critical thinking is more along the lines of evaluating news sources, predicting and analyzing plot, and remixing promotional peritextual elements of books (*Catching Fire*, for example). What is missing is a critical analysis of peritext. Critical readings of the index and the information it privileges could have been included. Another critical reading could have been done to evaluate the promotional material of YA fiction. That chapter does some remixing with cover art (back and front), but mostly as a way to more accurately represent the contents of the plot rather than analyzing the structurally oppressive elements as Katniss experiences them.

Conclusion

True to the Peritextual Literacy Framework the

editors have included every element of peritext they define, down to typesetting, author biographies, and a "you might also be interested in" section on the back cover. The PLF is explained via its theoretical underpinning and references throughout the book and written in a language that is appropriate for all levels of educators. It does not require a graduate-level literary analysis to comprehend it or put it into use. As a high school teacher, I can easily see my students working on any of the activities in the book, and I think most could be adapted for primary school as well. The point is that we are surrounded by peritext everywhere we go: a QR code on an advertisement takes us to a character's Instagram feed to promote a new book or movie, or U2's app promoting their new album, when used at their concert, delivers an augmented reality experience. By starting with the basics, the editors of this book have guided us through seeing and using peritext in books to heighten our understanding of the plot and issues. Therefore, this sets the stage for analyzing the peritext we encounter as we consume staggering amounts of information every day.

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