

FRAMING POETRY

THE DYNAMICS OF INSIDE AND OUTSIDE IN ANCIENT POETIC TEXTS

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Frames and framing have been, very recently, thoroughly discussed by historians of the classical art (Platt/Squire 2017), while the question of paratextuality has found its way into classical scholarship (Jansen 2014). One could rightly say that this is the natural state of affairs: while pictures can be framed, literary works cannot, and in fact what they have as ‘textual frames’ – titles, author’s names, dedications, prefaces etc. – are usually and fruitfully described and interpreted, after Genette 1997, as ‘paratexts’. Our conference, however, asks, not entirely without precedent (cf. Martindale 2005: 100–107 or Margot Neger’s project on ‘Embedded poems in ancient prose letters’), how the concept of frame could be used in the interpretation of classical literature, and ancient Greek and Roman poetry in particular.

This is a risky and interesting question that cuts to the heart of ancient literature’s literariness and textuality. Both Derrida’s well-known discussion of the *parergon* where Kant’s idea of the frame as an external ornament is deconstructed, and Genette’s description of paratextuality, rely on the fundamental thought that frames/paratexts are ‘neither simply inside nor simply outside’ (Derrida 1987: 54) or constitute ‘an “undefined zone” between the inside and the outside’ (Genette 1997: 2). This implies that when a poetic or literary text is framed by something ‘other’ (whether another text, a genre, a sociolinguistic register, a real or fictive performance or quotation-context, or a physical carrier) one of the main questions that emerge is how we might begin theoretically to grasp this ‘otherness’ of the ‘frame’? To what degree is the frame something other than the text it frames? Is it a creation of that text itself? What happens between the frame and the framed? How can we describe their interaction? What kind of liminal zone is constituted between them? How does the frame determine the reading of the framed and vice versa: how do poetic texts influence the interpretation of their textual (or non-textual) environment?

The question of framing’s effect on interpretation shows that we cannot avoid the metaphorical implications of the words ‘frame’, ‘framing’ or even ‘reframing’. There is a potential in ‘frame analysis’ (Goffman 1974) that classicists can fruitfully use: the dynamics of literary communication implies that positioning poetic texts in different socio-cultural contexts goes hand in hand with their framing and reframing as social acts. Additionally, the phenomenon of framing poetic texts is closely connected to the issue of the materiality of literary communication (Johnson/Parker 2009): the *Textträger* (e.g. a wax tablet, a papyrus roll, a Teubner edition or a website) is a kind of non-textual frame itself, and its materiality – an element that, traditionally, has been treated as the ‘outside’ of a literary work – both frames and is framed by the poetic text it includes. While this material constitute a ‘threshold’ through which the outside world enters the poetic work (cf. ‘mediating between the work of art and its milieu, separating and connecting’, Simmel 1994: 17 on frames), the ‘discursive frame’ of this encounter is also, as the encounter proceeds, being permanently rewritten by the framed text itself.

Within this context, we would like to invite proposals that can address, but are not limited to, the following questions:

- How poetry is framed by prose in Menippean satire? What kind of autonomy do the poetic inserts have? How is their interpretation determined by the prose frame – and *vice versa*? Is it possible to differentiate between frame and framed (‘outside and inside’) in cases where poetic and prosaic elements alternate? How the reading practices implied here can be described?

- How can we describe the phenomenon of embedding poems into prose-texts such as literary epistles, historiography, oratorical speeches, or philosophy? What happens with a poem when it is embedded in part or even in its entirety? For example, can Pliny's epistles, or Plato's quotation in the *Protagoras* of Simonides' 'Scopas Ode' (PMG 542), be read as texts designed to (re)frame certain – in some cases carefully amputated or manipulated – poetic quotations?
- What about framing, textual survival, fragments, and interpretation? How, for example, can we speak of Longinian 'reframing' of Sappho's *fr.* 31 under the circumstance that without this frame we would not know this fragment at all? How does Catullus' 'framing' of the same Sappho poem within his own lyric collection alter the 'original text'? How do grammarians, antiquarians such as Athenaeus, and other prose writers and genres frame and reframe poetic texts when quoting and fragmenting them for their own purposes?
- How paratexts such as 'titles', prosaic prefaces, dedicatory poems of poetry books – or even acrostics such as Ovid's famous 'INCIP-' at the end of his *Metamorphoses* – can be read as textual frames? How the concepts of frame and framing can enrich their interpretation? How, for example, the Alexandrian and the Roman poetry books and the poetry included in them do reflect on their own parergonality?
- How can we address poetry framed by poetry? How, for example, might the choral odes of tragedies can be read as autonomous literary works? How does the problem of genre intersect with that of frame? Can generic interactions in ancient poetry be described as a form of framing and reframing? Is a poetry book as a kind of frame able to change the genre of a poem? And how does poetry of an occasional or performative nature, or indeed genres of shorter, lyric utterance such as Hellenistic or Roman epigram, generate and sustain an idea of a performance-context and a social world in which the written text notionally exists? How does this kind of creative poetic framing or poetic world-making interact with the genres, registers and occasions of ordinary and heightened/poetic speech?
- How can we investigate the materiality and (inter)mediality of poetic works in the context of frames and framing? Is, for example, a papyrus roll a frame, 'mediating, separating and connecting' the poems between, from and with their 'milieu'? How do ancient poems reflect on their material and medial frames? How can we grasp various forms of framing in terms of intermediality? Can a text occupy two or more different 'frames' at the same time?
- In what ways can we, literary scholars, learn from art historians in mapping the phenomenon of 'framing poetry' in the ancient world? How, for example, can the cases of framing statues – where frames are of course as metaphorical as in our literary cases – be used in discussing literary frames? Or how can the interference between works of art and their inscriptions – described as a kind of framing by art historians – be treated as instances of 'framing poetry' in our literary-hermeneutic framework?

References:

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