

Vorlesungsverzeichnis Sommersemester 2023
Prof. Dr. Dustin Breitenwischer

53-565 Paratexts: Framing American Literature

In this seminar, we will learn to judge a book by its cover. Ever since French narratologist Gérard Genette introduced his theory of the paratext, scholars in literary and media studies have begun to pay closer attention to a book's design, title, foreword, blurbs, and the materiality of its jacket – in short, they have begun to focus on everything that is not the text but that closely relates to it. In this line of scholarship, we will discuss different theories of the paratext and we will roam through the history of American literature in order to look at the ways in which books have been designed and redesigned, marketed and reviewed. In some sessions, we will look at different editions of the same book, and in others, we will discuss the interplay of paratextual elements that allows different books to communicate with each other across space and time. We will look at the ways in which paratexts in American literature have been gendered and racialized, and we will discuss ways in which book design has been able to resist and subvert hegemonic power. Centering on the paratext, we will gain insight into the work of such different fields as history of the book, design theory, visual studies, literary sociology, and reception aesthetics. Should you be interested in the seminar, feel free to acquaint yourselves with Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (Cambridge UP, 1997) & David J. Alworth and Peter Mendelsund, *The Look of the Book: Jackets, Covers, and Art at the Edges of Literature* (Penguin, 2020). The course material will be provided on AGORA.

Course requirements: Regular attendance; preparation of the material; participation in an expert group (more information to follow in the first session); term paper of app. 15 pages, which will be due Sep. 30.