Paratextual Art

David J. Alworth

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BY DAVID J. ALWORTH

Consider the paratext of Gerard Genette's *Paratexts*. Or more precisely: glance at the cover image and try to imagine how the book might feel in your hands.[1] Originally published in French in 1987, *Paratexts* was translated into English and republished ten years later by Cambridge University Press as number 20 in the series "Literature, Culture, Theory."[2] It looks like it belongs there. The abstract linearity of the image suggests scientific reason, rational argumentation, and taxonomic precision. Without even cracking it open, you can sense that this book participates in what the series editors designate "the systematic study of literature." (*P*, front endpapers) At the same time, though, other paratextual effects pull in a different direction. The smooth, glossy finish of the binding calls to mind the supermarket paperback, the glitzy magazine, or the movie poster, while the tropical color palette (purple, magenta, aquamarine) conjures up the atmosphere of beach reading in the era of *Miami Vice*.

It is easy to find other paratexts that resemble this one: visual objects that not only index the state of the discipline but also employ the color palates of American mass culture at the time of publication. In fact, a whole genre of critical writing has been visualized this way. Take, for instance, Jonathan Culler's *Structuralist Poetics*, published in 1975, whose orange vortex suggests the widening gyre of lyrical complexity; or Fredric Jameson's *The Political Unconscious*, published in 1981, whose palimpsest of squares, evoking flyleaves or parchment paper, anticipates the semiotic cubes contained within its pages, and whose modest flash of color—lavender—offers just a touch of softness to a book that figures interpretation as a kind of blood-sport, "tak[ing] place," as Jameson writes in the preface, "within a Homeric battlefield."[3] Indeed, the visual culture of the codex in the era of High Theory—when literary studies was striving explicitly and self-consciously to adopt what Michel Foucault called "the norms of scientificity"—is characterized by geometrical shapes, sans serif fonts, and various motifs of layering and repetition that connote both the bottomless mystery of the literary text and the strenuous work of depth hermeneutics.[4]

While the recent swerve in the literary humanities away from theory and toward method has called such notions into question, there remains much to be learned from Genette's *Paratexts*: a classic work of French literary theory that, in hindsight, appears to exemplify at least one version of "surface reading," insofar as it dwells on the visible, tangible apparatus through which literature makes and meets its publics.[5] Of course, Genette was writing in the mid-1980s, a moment that feels like eons ago in the history of technical media, so his terms will need some updating to account for the rise of digital culture and other more recent phenomena—which is what I aim to do in this essay by placing Genette's theoretical account in dialogue with the everyday practice of book design in the twenty-first century.

However hypertechnical it can seem, *Paratexts* is worth rereading for at least two reasons: first, because it provides an analytically precise vocabulary for conceptualizing the abstract zone, or what Genette would call the "threshold," where text meets context; and second, because it constitutes a preliminary effort to analyze the status and function of the book cover, or more specifically the book jacket, which is one of the most significant and significantly underappreciated media platforms in the history of culture (*P*, 2).[6] Far from being mere ornamentation, book jackets are crucial to literary art in the digital age. As part of a media ecology that includes promotional materials, digital marketing campaigns, and in some cases television or film adaptations, book jackets make novels visible in a world where there is simply too much to see.[7] They form a hinge not only between reality and fiction but also between literature and design, aesthetics and politics, art and life.

To analyze a jacket or a cover, then, is to analyze a lively interplay among the people, institutions, business practices, economies, cultural conventions, desires, and values that make literature possible. And such analysis is, in some cases, to reflect on our unspoken biases and cultural hierarchies. Why, for instance, do book reviews typically address only the text, and not the entire aesthetic experience of the book? Imagine if they gave the same doting attention to the covers of novels that they give to literary form, character, and plot. Or imagine if they treated jackets—those detachable paper coverings that even famed editor Maxwell Perkins used to discard before shelving his books—as more than ancillary ephemera, more than curious artifacts for the bibliographer to deal with, more than gauche platforms for hyping and selling literary fiction.[8] What if we really were supposed to judge (to acknowledge, to evaluate, to define, to experience) books by their covers?[9]

Answering this question involves disrupting standard protocols of literary reception and transgressing the durable yet imaginary boundary separating literature from other media. In Nelson Goodman's well-known distinction (later adapted by Genette) between the autographic and the allographic, the literary work is a "script" or a "text" that can manifest itself in multiple different ways as one and the same work.[10] "Differences between them in style and size of script or type, in color of ink, in kind of paper, in number and layout of pages, in condition, etc., do not matter," he argues.[11] "All that matters is what may be called *sameness of spelling*: exact correspondence as sequences of letters, spaces, and punctuation marks."[12] We generally accept that a given novel is the same novel whether it is experienced via hardcover, paper-back, Kindle, or audiobook. To take paratextual art seriously, however, is to challenge this habit: it is to assert that mediation matters to the experience—and thus, perhaps, to the meaning—of a given work, as it does in the visual arts.

A mass-market hardcover with a stylish jacket is neither a painting nor a sculpture, but in a digital culture that has newly fetishized the physical book's physicality, its status is inching closer to that of the art book.[13] At the same time, the novel form itself is being reworked by contemporary literary authors who are embracing the apparatus of previously debased genre fiction. Increasingly prevalent is a certain kind of novel that employs this apparatus—highly implausible plots; stock characters like werewolves, ghosts, aliens, and robots; familiar tropes of horror, science fiction, fantasy, and crime narrative—to achieve the ends of what Zadie Smith has called "lyrical realism": the dialectical opposite of genre fiction, a literary mode whose "credos" include "the transcendent importance of form, the incantatory power of language to reveal truth, the essential fullness and continuity of the self."[14] To put the point bluntly, then, as the art novel (understood, here, as a lyrical-realist enterprise) moves down the ladder of aesthetic value to rummage around in the mass-cultural muck of genre fiction, the mass-produced hardcover is moving up toward that more rarefied realm previously reserved for the high-concept coffee table volume, the deluxe edition, and the rare collectible, as well as the book fully determined by the autographic regime, not the art but the *artist's* book, the book that almost counts as a kind of sculpture.[15]

To explore this ongoing evolution, in what follows I analyze the creation and aesthetic effect of one particular book cover: the paper jacket for the U.S. edition of Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Buried Giant* (2015). While there are many different cultures of the cover—it would be

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a mistake, for instance, to conflate corporate, small press, and DIY publishing—my archive comes, for the most part, from Alfred A. Knopf, a publishing imprint known not only for the quality of its literary fiction but also for the exquisiteness of its physical books. Founded in 1915, Knopf's first book, *Four Plays* by Emile Augier, was printed by Plimpton Press and bound in striking orange and blue. By the 1920s, Knopf had earned a reputation for its investment in the aesthetics of physical books; over the past century, many prominent designers have done work for the imprint, from Elmer Adler, George Salter, and Vincent Torre to Carol Devine Carson, Chip Kidd, and John Gall.[16] Indeed, the very designer who coined the phrase graphic designer, W. A. Dwiggins, began working on Knopf books in the 1920s, around the same time that Willa Cather signed with the imprint, convinced that Knopf "had set out to do something unusual and individual in publishing."[17] But Cather was not always easy to please. "Miss Cather was absolutely horrified at the sight of the title page for *Death Comes for the Archbishop*," wrote Knopf to Adler on 27 April 1927, "and I am afraid I could not be very enthusiastic about it[.]"[18]

Even a brief glimpse at the inner workings of the modern publishing industry serves as a reminder that books are composite art objects, collectively made. Although Genette devotes but a few pages to "the cover and its appendages," there are good reasons to believe that such paratextual matter has never been more important to literary history (*P*, 23). At least since the second decade of the twentieth century, the book jacket has been a platform for ambitious design, but today it holds special significance. In our relentlessly visual culture, on the one hand, we often see a novel long before we can read it: a jacket designer completes a cover image, uploads it to Amazon, and the marketing department blasts the internet with the look of the book. In our relentlessly digital culture, on the other hand, the feel of the book—its shape, size, height, weight, texture, and even its smell—has acquired new meanings and values. Why purchase the hardcover when the paperback is so much less expensive, the eBook so much easier to carry, and the audiobook so much friendlier to multitasking?

One nontrivial answer—jacket design—should remind us that contemporary literature not only inhabits but also constitutes a visual culture, notwithstanding the longstanding rivalry between word and image in Western aesthetics. If, as W. J. T. Mitchell has observed, "the impulse to purify media" (to separate words and images, texts and pictures) "is one of the central utopian gestures of modernism," then one gauge of our postmodernism or nonmodernism or

we-have-never-been-modernism can be found in the composite art of the book, which fuses author's words with designer's vision to become, as Ned Drew and Paul Sternberger put it, "a physical manifestation not just of the ideas of the author, but of the cultural ideals and aesthetics of a distinct historical moment."[19]

I. PARATEXT/JACKET, MEDIUM/PLATFORM

What is a paratext? It is perhaps most accurately conceptualized as a medium that establishes and sustains a web of relationships that are endemic to literary art as we know it.[20] As Genette explains, paratexts are "those liminal devices and conventions, both within and outside the book," that broker the interactions among book, author, publisher, and reader; they include titles, forwards, epigraphs, and publishers' marketing copy (*P*, i). And if the paratext is a medium, then the book jacket can be understood as a specific media platform or material support, with its own expressive capacities and constraints, physical and technical properties, connotations of value, and histories of use, all of which may be excavated, so to speak, through the analytical procedures of media archaeology.[21]

As media, paratexts perform an obvious pragmatic function, which derives in part from their spatial configuration. They "surround" and "extend" the text, "precisely in order to present it," Genette writes, "to make present, to ensure the text's presence in the world, its 'reception' and consumption in the form (nowadays, at least) of a book" (*P*, 1). In this sense, Genette urges us to speak not of judging but of nudging a book by its cover: his emphasis falls on what he calls the "illocutionary force" of the paratext—its agency as a venue of display for the text at hand (*P*, 10). He also employs a wide range of other suggestive metaphors, calling the paratext a "threshold," a "vestibule" (*P*, 2), a "fringe" (*P*, 2), an "airlock" (*P*, 408), and an "assistant" to the text (*P*, 410), each of which inflects a different paratextual operation. While it is possible to find paratexts without texts—think, for instance, of post-Homeric epics or classical Greek tragedies known only by their titles—it is not possible to find a text without a paratext, since both transcription and oral transmission involve "some degree of material-ization, graphic or phonic, which . . . may induce paratextual effects" (*P*, 3). And in any case, Genette concludes: "If the text without its paratext is sometimes like an elephant without a mahout, a power disabled, the paratext without its text is like a mahout without an elephant, a silly show" (*P*, 410).

To exemplify this claim, Genette turns repeatedly to *Ulysses*, that great elephant of modernism. How would we read James Joyce's novel were it not titled *Ulysses*? The "unaware reader would read the novel differently," Genette contends, because the allusive force of the title, however imperceptibly, pushes the reader down a particular interpretive pathway (*P*, 409). "The effect of the paratext lies very often in the realm of influence—indeed, manipulation—experienced subconsciously" (*P*, 409). Thus, although some readers, most prominently Jorge Luis Borges, have considered the Homeric allusion to be a kind of ruse, this paratextual device makes it all but impossible to read Joyce's novel without thinking of Homer's epic. Still, the title forms but one constituent part of the cover image and book jacket; it is no easier to detach "Ulysses" from the series of iconic jackets that have enveloped Joyce's novel since 1934, when it was first published in the United States by Random House, than it is to imagine the text being titled "Leopold" or "Bloom."

Indeed, to study the history of *Ulysses* jackets, 1934–2002, is to study the vicissitudes of modernism—as a transnational aesthetic, a visual culture, a set of design parameters and protocols, and a political force—over the long twentieth century. More to the point, a brief look at these jackets provides a glimpse of the historical context in which the paratextual artists at Knopf, now a subsidiary of Penguin Random House, are working today. Set in Futura Black, a typeface designed by Paul Renner in 1927, the text on Ernst Reichl's 1934 cover for Random House dominates the front flap. An early pioneer of "thinking with type," to borrow Ellen Lupton's fine phrase, Reichl created an image that visualizes the elongated wandering of the novel's protagonist through the streetscape of Dublin, an image whose ostentatious verticality is offset by subtle horizontal lines at the top, bottom, and middle, and whose black text is counterbalanced by a single bold rectangle on the bottom right corner, suggesting, perhaps, Bloom's occasional audacity as a thinker and social actor.[22] Fifteen years later, also working for Random House, McKnight Kauffer likewise employed text as a compositional device. The exaggerated "U" and "L" on his jacket refer back to Reichl's pioneering design, while the stark black background calls to mind the visual regime of mid-century abstraction, not the work of Piet Mondrian and Kazimir Malevich but of, say, Ad Reinhardt. The giant first letters, employed by both Reichl and Kauffer, pay homage to Joyce's love of acrostics and other wordplay. At the same time, Kauffer's use of striking color, blue and especially yellow, provides a paratextual analogue for the way that the text itself figures the luminosity of a particular detail within a given perceptual field.

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In 2002 Random House issued *Ulysses* in a facsimile of Reichl's 1934 jacket, now uncredited and rendered digitally. While it does not matter who originated this image—since, as the story goes, postmodernist design treats the uneven legacies of modernism as so much material to be quoted via pastiche—it is crucial that the book look good on a tablet, a smartphone, and a laptop, not to mention in a selfie or "shelfie."[23] Pastiche is the governing device of Carin Goldberg's 1986 cover for *Ulysses* which employs Futura, too, but goes a step further, adapting Renner's 1928 *Applied Arts of Bavaria* poster as a kind of template. Goldberg's cover visualizes a historical aesthetic: it appeared three years after Hal Foster had edited *Postmodern Culture* (1983) and two years after Jameson had published the program essay for what would become *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*.[24] To glance at Goldberg's *Ulysses* is not merely to see Joyce's novel freshly marketed, sixty years after its initial publication, via the representational conventions of 1980s PoMo. It is, rather, to see how paratexts mediate concepts as well as historical conditions, how they function as a hinge between ideas and experience, or as a vestibule between, say, the theory seminar and the design studio, the classroom and the bookstore, the site of thinking and the point of purchase.

Media determine our situation, but our situation also determines media.[25] There is a dialectical relation between media and history that plays out, in the case of paratextual art, as a drama of repetitious repackaging: an iterative process of recasting literature as a visual and tactile thing. How might *Ulysses* appear, how might it look and feel, all decked out for its centennial? On 2 February 2022, what combination of historical conditions, technical capacities, imaginative talent, and market forces will eventuate in the 100th-anniversary book design that we all know is coming? Hypothetical though it is, this question relies on a real premise, confirmed by even the most casual BuzzFeed round-up of book covers, that paratextual art facilitates large-scale historical and cultural analysis, that it can and does function as a kind of luminous detail, casting a spotlight on its surrounding context.[26]

In the remaining pages, however, I want to examine paratextual art on a smaller scale—that of the individuated practice of reading—not to dismiss history and theory but to emphasize that what we call reading often involves a significant, embodied experience of looking and touching. My questions, although of a more phenomenological cast than Genette's, nonetheless emerge from the productive friction between his theoretical model and the everyday life of book design, which is to say the everyday life of reading, since a "cover designer," as novelist Tom McCarthy has stressed, is "first and foremost" a reader, and

not just any reader, but among the small cadre of professional readers, along with the agent and the editor, who encounter a completed literary manuscript prior to its release.[27] More to the point, the designer is the original reader to see the manuscript as a bona fide book.

When does the paratext, the book jacket in particular, cross the threshold from marketing device to full-fledged interpretation? And to what extent is visualizing a novel a way of reading it; or, what happens to the notion of reading when designing a jacket is understood to comprise *giving a reading* in a meaningful sense? One way to begin answering these questions is to examine how a specific book jacket was created from initial sketch to final approval. As debates in the literary humanities swirl around how, what, why, and even whether to read, addressing such questions opens up the prospect of a more robust conversation among scholars, literary writers, and the many publishing professionals who make literature possible in the twenty-first century. Among the most celebrated of these writers, Ishiguro is contemporary fiction's king of muted lyrical understatement. In the winter of 2014, however, he found his work entangled with werewolf porn.

II. ISHIGURO'S WEREWOLF NOVEL

When the jacket for Ishiguro's most recent novel, *The Buried Giant*, finally arrived in the mail, it was wrapped around a book, although not a book that he himself had authored (Figure 1). Greenlighted by the bosses at Knopf to send a prototype to the novelist for approval, the designer, Peter Mendelsund, knew that he could not mail the jacket by itself—this would be an example of Genette's "mahout without an elephant." And given the texture of the mocked-up jacket, embossed to mimic the feel of peasant's sackcloth, a .jpeg or a .pdf would have made a poor approximation of the physical thing. Thus, considering his options, Mendelsund chose an appropriately-sized Knopf hardcover from his office shelf, removed its jacket, clothed it anew, and left the rest to FedEx.

The Buried Giant took Ishiguro a long time to write. His wife hated the initial pages of the first draft, composed in 2005, so he put the novel aside and scratched out short stories for a while.[28] It must have been a special thrill, then, to begin to see, really to see and to feel, *The Buried Giant* morph from manuscript to book. Like much of Ishiguro's work, *The Buried Giant* achieves profound aesthetic effects, somewhat paradoxically, through soporific declarative prose. "His previous novel, *Never Let Me Go* (2005)," writes James Wood in *The*
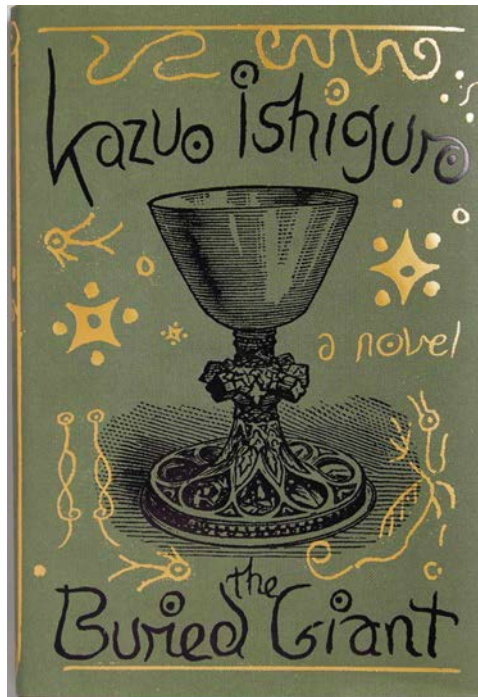
Figure 1. Original U.S. book jacket for *The Buried Giant* (New York: Knopf, 2015), design by Peter Mendelsund

New Yorker, "contained passages that appeared to have been entered in a competition called The Ten Most Boring Fictional Scenes."[29] A great many critical adjectives can be used to describe the book that Mendelsund placed inside *The Buried Giant*'s jacket, but "boring" is not one of them. Bloody, filthy, inane, and puerile, but also at times genuinely gripping and suspenseful, *The Last Werewolf*, by British author Glen Duncan, is nothing if not entertaining (Figure 2).

Duncan reimagines the classic werewolf legend by telling the story of a character named Jake Marlowe: the last of his lupine species, surviving on a diet of animal protein and vigorous sex, yet feeling existentially anguished and ethically compromised. As Marlowe (a name that is, of course, a self-conscious allusion to the genre of hardboiled detective fiction) keeps returning to questions of identity and authentic selfhood, which he does with a winning charm, we realize that *The*
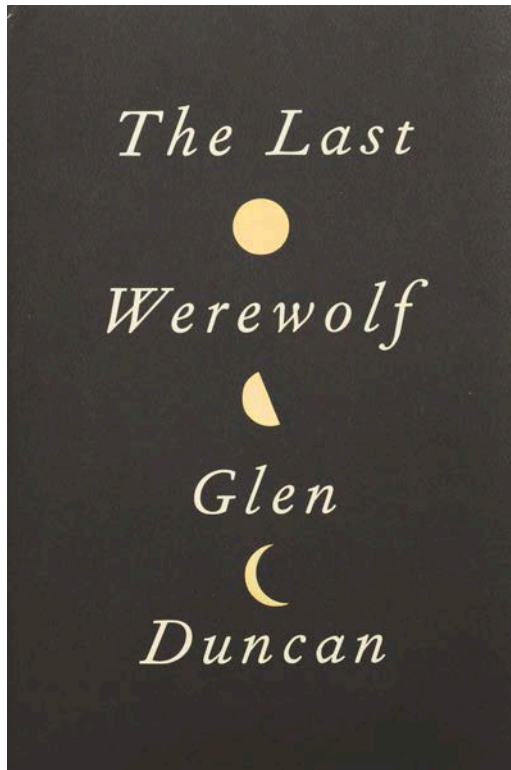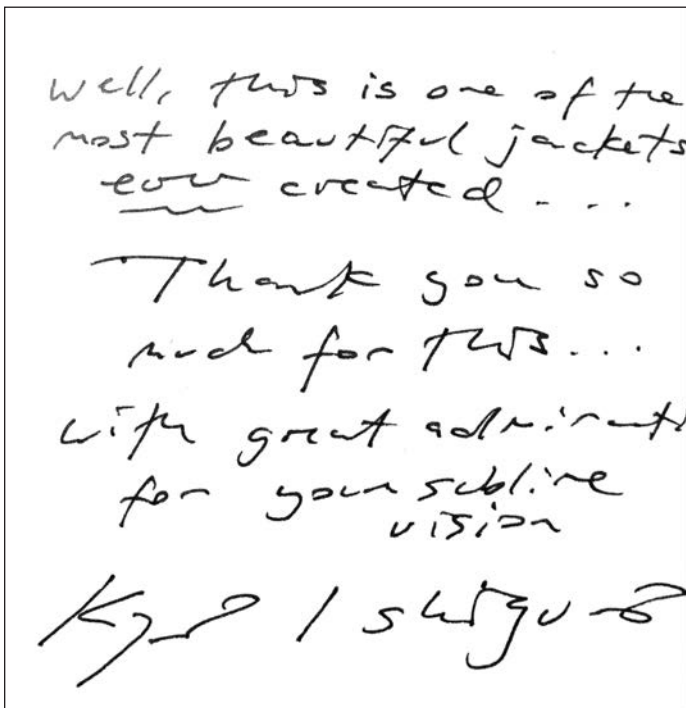
Figure 2. Original U.S. book jacket for *The Last Werewolf* (New York: Knopf, 2011), design by Peter Mendelsund

Last Werewolf displays all the trappings of genre fiction, yet has the soul of lyrical realism. In 2011, years before he took on the Ishiguro assignment, Mendelsund had completed the jacket for Duncan's novel, so copies of the hardcover were readily available at the Knopf offices for repurposing.

"Inside the holdall was a second bag made of tough transparent plastic, tightly sealed with tape," explains Marlowe.[30] "The face had been beaten. At leisure, I imagined. Creases in the plastic held bubbles of blood, as with vacuum-sealed beef in the supermarket."[31] As intensely horrifying as Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* can be, it includes nothing quite so grotesque, lurid, and literal-minded. Ishiguro's narrators do not often describe blood, much less analogize blood with . . . blood. Marlowe, however fantastical, is no Kathy H. "I am used to the body

as a thing separable violently into its constituent parts," Marlowe demurs; "To me a torn-off arm's no more searingly forlorn than a chicken drumstick is to you."[32] For hundreds of years, he has loped the earth with a three-part *raison d'être* that he calls "fuckkilleat" and that, lately, leaves him beleaguered: "I felt tired, suddenly, weighed down again," he carps; "There's an inner stink comes up at times of all the meat and blood that's passed down my gullet, the offal I've buried my snout in, the guts I've rummaged and gorged on."[33]

It is unclear whether Ishiguro himself gorged on this novel, the literary equivalent of Halloween candy. But he did thumb the pages, and he liked what he felt and saw. "Well, this is one of the most beautiful jackets *ever* created," he wrote to Mendelsund; "Thank you so much

Figure 3. Ishiguro's note to Mendelsund

for this . . . with great admiration for your sublime vision" (Figure 3). Sublime, perhaps, but also incomplete. Not long after expressing his gratitude, Ishiguro made a pricey request of the publisher: edge staining (Figure 4).
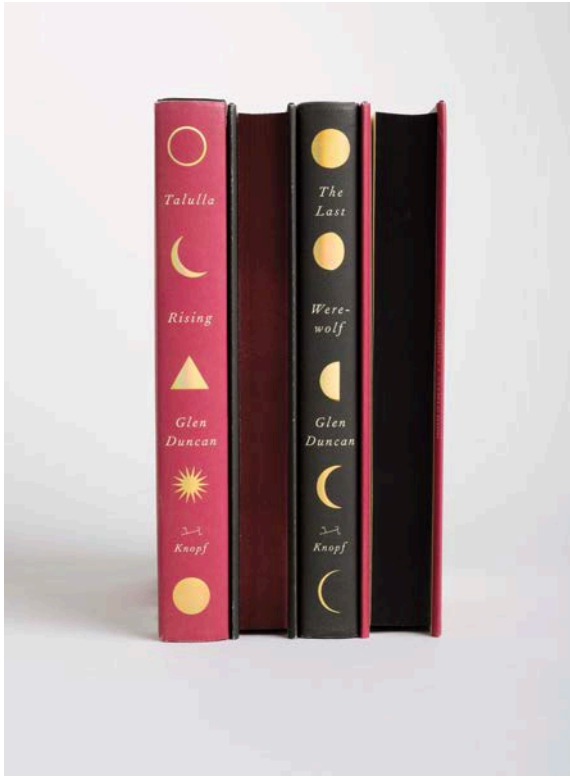
Figure 4. "Edge Staining"

To convey a sense of horror—in effect, to dip the book in blood—
Mendelsund had the edges of *The Last Werewolf* stained dark red,
which actually rubs off, smearing your fingers as you read about lupine
sex and human dismemberment. Ishiguro wanted a similar edge-detail,
even if bloodying the book would not do.

Although *The Buried Giant* unfolds in a Post-Arthurian England
that resembles the setting of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, very
little blood is spilled in the novel, so Mendelsund sought to achieve a
less visceral effect, to design edges that might suggest not evisceration
but the hermetic ancientness of Ishiguro's storyworld. The extensive
gold foil stamping on the jacket itself would have made gilding overkill;
deckling just felt trite, too prevalent to convey anything special about
the book at hand. A black stain, however, especially one that seems to
dissipate as you fan the pages of the book, not only makes the book look

old but also captures the atmosphere of a narrative whose protagonists, Axl and Beatrice, must reckon with a pervasive mist, metaphorically if not literally dark, spreading across the land.

Mendelsund often describes his design practice as one of "translation."[34] The task of the translator, as he understands it, is to select the "unique textual detail that, as the subject matter for a book jacket, can support the metaphoric weight of the entire book."[35] Translation, in this sense, always involves what media theorists call "remediation."[36] Even if there are no pure media, even if "all media are mixed media," the practice of jacket design instantiates many different yet interdependent conversions of one medium to another: words become pictures; text becomes thing; a temporal art gives rise to a spatial one; what we see when we read manifests itself, on the media platform of the book jacket, as something we glimpse before we have even glimpsed a page; a mental image, in this case Mendelsund's, is realized as a sketch, a drawing, a painting, a digital design.[37] All of these conversions, as Mendelsund himself would stress, depend on reading. And not just any kind of reading.

For the paratextual artist, reading is a self-conscious way of seeing. As Mendelsund works through a manuscript, he is intentionally and wakefully "dreaming by the book," looking for the one visual signifier that might satisfy the aesthetic demands of the manuscript without chafing too hard against the coarser concerns of the marketing department or the fragile ego of the author.[38] "The artist will read the script," explains Charles Rosner, in one of the earliest aesthetic accounts of cover design, "not only projecting himself into its atmosphere, but drawing from it the essential quality of the author's creation."[39] Poised on the cusp between art and life, the paratextual artist is nothing if not receptive to the cacophony of competing voices hollering at the contact zone between text and context. No matter how sympathetic to the text it can be, however, paratextual art does not emerge from a scene of "uncritical reading."[40] Rather, as Mendelsund describes it, reading for the detail demands a special, even critical, sensitivity to what Barthes termed the "punctum."[41] In his discussion of photography, Roland Barthes defines the punctum as the "accident" in the text that "pricks" the beholder and thus makes the text "poignant" for her or him in a uniquely personal way.[42] Readers and beholders regularly experience puncta. Barthes himself, looking at a William Klein photograph of children in New York, becomes fixated on "one boy's bad teeth."[43] The paratextual artist, however, must discern which puncta—once remediated—are representative of the work as a whole.

Because the paratext serves as a hinge between text and context, it is not just the manuscript that puts pressure on the book designer. The politics of visual culture exert a persistent force, especially in the case of genre fiction. Initially titled *By Blood We Live*, for instance, Duncan's novel provided or burdened Mendelsund with the opportunity to play with the visual tropes of horror in his sketches, while at the same time performing an ad hoc iconology of werewolf imagery. Whenever well-known literary novelists turn to genre fiction, as many have done in recent years, they must contend with dense iconographic regimes, thorny questions of value and valuation, and vibrant subcultures whose members take such questions extremely seriously. The same is true of book designers. Elegant and spare, Mendelsund's design for *The Last Werewolf* exploits the power of the paratext to present genre fiction, indeed to present pornographic horror, as a literary achievement. By differentiating his jacket from covers in the mass-market paperback tradition, he signals that this is not just any werewolf book, but, indeed, Knopf's werewolf book: yes, there will be blood, but there also will be higher-order pleasures in these pages.

"Where are the claws? The fangs? The hair?" Mendelsund asked in his acceptance speech for the 2012 Inky Tentacle Award that was presented for *The Last Werewolf* design.[44] "Well—how about some blood, for Christ's sake? Just a splatter? A drop? Damn it—how's anyone supposed to know what *genre* this book is?"[45] On the one hand, such questions form part of Mendelsund's larger case against lazy and/or condescending book design; "fans of 'genre' fiction," he goes on to argue, "are no less sophisticated or visually astute than any other readership."[46] On the other hand, such questions underscore the conceptual proximity of genre and paratext. If a genre is "an aesthetic structure of affective expectation," then a paratext is a visual and tactile hint of how it might feel to be inside (a relation with) a given book.[47] And if a genre is "a self-obsoleting system" that's always "bending and pulling and stretching," then a paratext is where much of the action occurs.[48] Genette would remind us, however, that genre and paratext are not free-floating concepts hovering above or beyond the everyday life of literary culture. They are, rather, concrete abstractions that reside in and as the embodied experience of transacting with a book. "Now the paratext is neither on the interior nor on the exterior: it is both; it is on the threshold; and it is on this very site that we must study it, because essentially, perhaps, *its being depends upon its site*" (*P*, xvii).[49]

As a site of transaction and interaction, the book jacket is about as concrete a concretization as one could want for the abstract zone

where literature and society meet. In the case of contemporary fiction, it is either redundant or revisionist to speak, as we all do, of placing a text in context, because novels always come to us pre-contextualized by the many forces—editorial, commercial, aesthetic—that bring a jacket into being. To study one of these artifacts, then, is not merely to undertake a semiotic analysis of graphic design. It is, rather, to begin performing a sociology of culture that reveals the most potent contexts for interpreting contemporary fiction.

III. HOW TO SEE CONTEMPORARY FICTION

So, what are these contexts? First of all: genre. In *The Political Unconscious*, Jameson defines genres as "social contracts between a writer and a specific public, whose function is to specify the proper use of a particular cultural artifact"—a definition that remains accurate, even though it has been emended and expanded in recent years by Lauren Berlant, Wai Chee Dimock, Lisa Gitelman, and Theodore Martin.[50] "[T]he mediatory function of the notion of genre," as Jameson puts it, "allows the coordination of immanent formal analysis of the individual text with the twin diachronic perspective of the history of forms and the evolution of social life."[51] This claim may seem abstract, but any commercial book display can confirm how "older generic categories do not, for all that, die out, but persist in the half-life of the subliterary genres of mass culture, transformed into the drugstore and airport paperback lines of gothics, mysteries, romances, bestsellers, and popular biographies, where they await the resurrection of their immemorial, archetypal resonance at the hands of a Frye or a Bloch."[52]

Or a Mendelsund. While the cover of *The Last Werewolf* eschews the conventions associated with werewolf porn, it nevertheless gestures—via foil stamping—to the "drugstore and airport paperback lines" of which Jameson speaks. A commercial printing technique wherein metallic or pigmented foil is applied to a surface, foil stamping is employed regularly for the covers of those "subliterary genres of mass culture" (think: John Grisham and Marcia Clark). It is even more prevalent on product packaging: Colgate Total, Gillette MACH3, Zantac Antacid, all those commodities that, as Wolfgang Fritz Haug puts it, are "casting flirtatious glances at the buyers" shopping for books at Rite Aid.[53] Believe it or not, though, the foil stamp has an old and respectable pedigree; it is closely related to beat gold, the technique of pounding the metal to an extreme thinness before applying it to a surface. Ancient Egyptian mummies were embellished this way. This

is how medieval illuminated manuscripts were, in fact, illuminated.

Owing to its cost as well as its gaudy effect, foil stamping is uncommon in high-literary publishing today: a book with a small projected print run cannot justify the expense. In the case of *The Last Werewolf*, however, the foil stamp functions like a knowing nod to the connoisseur of genre fiction. At the same time as it calls to mind the visual field of Crest White Strips and James Patterson, it also registers as a special effect, a little more like beat gold than usual, precisely because of where it appears: on the jacket for a would-be work of lyrical realism, attempting to fuse *The Ambassadors* (1903) with *The Werewolf of Paris* (1933) for the Netflix generation.[54] "The ways and means of the paratext change continually," Genette argues, "depending on period, culture, genre, author, work, and edition" (*P*, 29). Like all paratextual details, the meanings and values of the foil stamp are contingent; here, it signals that it knows that you know that *The Last Werewolf* is genre fiction, even if the Knopf borzoi suggests otherwise.

For Duncan himself, ever since the success of the novel, the foil-stamped-phases-of-the-moon image has become a trademark, identifying both him and his work, particularly the subsequent books in the werewolf series. *Talulla Rising* (2012) and *By Blood We Live* (2014)—the title of the latter here repurposed—carry variations on Mendelsund's theme for *The Last Werewolf*. To note that a paratextual image has become a kind of meme for a bestselling novelist with high-literary aspirations is not merely to point out the potent force of visual media within contemporary literary activity. It is, rather, to acknowledge how such activity actually produces visual culture. In what Genette calls "our 'media' age," jackets do not just visualize genres (*G*, 3). They provide a platform, which is to say both a material support and a launch pad, for an image that will circulate as currency through digitized economies of culture and information. Such images go on to function as totems for far-flung publics and literary subcultures, including the subculture made up of people who read *ELH*.[55] The names "Elena Ferrante," "Hanna Yanagihara," and "Karl Ove Knausgård" instantly conjure a vision and bring to mind a controversy over paratextual art.[56]

If it is possible to track the effects of digitization within the texts that comprise what Peter Boxall calls "an emerging canon of international literary fiction," then surely paratexts, too, must register the "virtual global environment" as the ground or horizon of literature in the twenty-first century.[57] In this environment, visuality is no less important than translation to the business of contemporary fiction or to "the world republic of letters."[58] And while it was easy enough for Genette in the 1980s to dismiss the "packaging" of literature—by which

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he meant "protective boxes, covers for the boxes, and so forth," as well as "posters, blow-ups of covers, and other gimmicks"—as so much "promotional material, intended solely for bookstores and ultimately for their clientele," it is much harder for us, in the age of Amazon, Google Books, and Instagram, to think that the novel might have a meaningful mode of existence without assuming visual form (*G*, 32).

Finally, in addition to genre and digital media, a third context for contemporary fiction suggests itself through the analysis of paratextual art. The cultural politics of identity remain as pressing as ever, and book covers reside at the threshold between political circumstances and aesthetic form. Just think of how the cover for Claudia Rankine's *Citizen* (2014) helped to visualize the concerns of Black Lives Matter, particularly after a silent protester read the book to herself at a Trump campaign rally. On the other hand, of course, there are plenty of egregiously bad book covers that not only misrepresent the contents of the book at hand but also traffic in a retrograde semiotics of gender or race: the fiftieth anniversary edition of *The Bell Jar*, published by Faber & Faber in 2013, comes immediately to mind. Misrepresenting Plath's text, this cover depicts a young woman holding a compact and applying powder. While it is easy enough to ridicule such failures, there tends to be an interesting story behind the scenes. Even bad paratextual art emerges through a complex series of negotiations, conflicts, and messy interactions among different stakeholders with competing interests and desires. Paratextual art is social practice.

Consider Hari Kunzru's *White Tears* (2017), a third example of a recent novel, like *The Buried Giant* and *The Last Werewolf*, that relies on the conventions of genre fiction to achieve the ends of lyrical realism. Like other contemporary fictions in the lyrical-realist mode, *White Tears* dwells on the existential question of how to define the authentic self. Its jacket also designed by Mendelsund, the novel centers on two white twenty-somethings, who inadvertently record a black street musician and try to pass off the recording as an authentic jazz song from an earlier time. The novel thematizes, within a contemporary mise-en-scene, the dialectic of "love and theft" that Eric Lott defined in relation to the nineteenth-century tradition of blackface minstrelsy.[59] There is a twist in *White Tears*, however: the white kids are haunted by the menacing black jazz musician whom they thought they had invented, a ghost of the racial past violently seeking retribution and reparations. While the brightly colored, text-based jacket does little to convey the racialized violence in the novel, Mendelsund's early sketches, all ultimately rejected by Knopf, tell a different story (Figure 5).

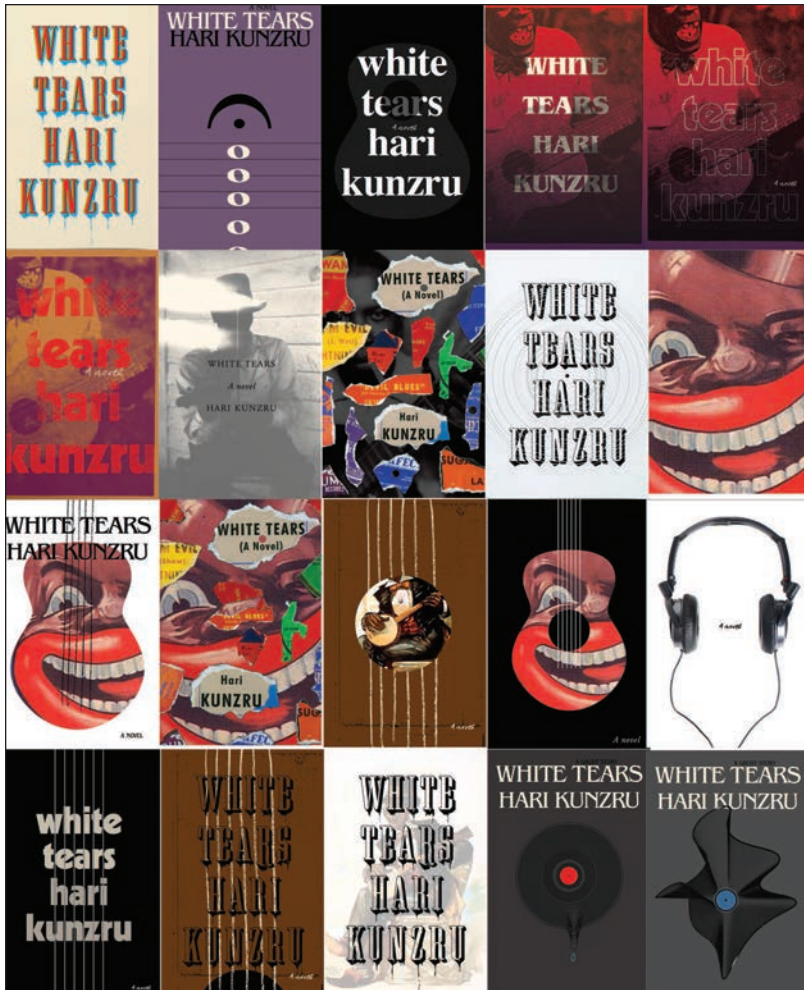*David J. Alworth*   1139

Figure 5. Mendelsund's sketches for *White Tears*

Some of them employ the tropes of Sambo art; others depict a horrifying and horrified black male figure in a state of menacing rapture; and still others, through a sly autoreferential gesture, use details from slipcases of jazz records, the paratextual platforms of another medium. The most balanced of the lot, the cover that features a record liquefying into a teardrop, was the one championed in vain by both Mendelsund and Kunzru.[60]

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Taken as a series, though, what is especially striking about these sketches is their inability or unwillingness to decide on a genre claim, and in this regard, they visualize the categorical instability that typifies so much literary fiction after postmodernism.[61] Is *White Tears* a ghost story or a literary novel? Its BISAC codes suggest an awkward mix of *literary fiction*, *cultural heritage*, and *noir*. The second code is the least convincing; labeling *White Tears* cultural heritage is a bit like labeling *The Last Werewolf* animal husbandry. But this categorical flux is interesting in itself, insofar as it underscores the flexibility and capaciousness of the novel form, two quintessential features of the form that place book designers like Mendelsund on the front line of the genre wars, which perfectly exemplify Mark Seltzer's thesis that we inhabit "a self-reporting world," governed by a relentless drive to categorize.[62] Indeed, the critical aspiration to situate contemporary fiction inside what Dimock calls "a rigid taxonomic landscape" is the flipside of a creative impulse to experiment around the edges of genre, an impulse that has gripped so many authors over the past two decades.[63] Still, this impulse is a bit of a mystery. Why does a celebrated literary novelist—an Ishiguro or a Colson Whitehead or a Jennifer Egan or a Chang-rae Lee—engage the apparatus of genre fiction? Given the conceptual proximity of genre and paratext, I propose, these questions can be answered convincingly by thinking like a paratextual artist, which is what I want to do by way of conclusion.

IV. PARATEXTUAL READING

Set in sixth- or seventh-century England, just after the end of a war between Saxons and Britons, *The Buried Giant* tells the story of Axl and Beatrice, two elderly married Britons, as they embark on a quest to find their estranged son. In the course of the journey, they encounter two knights: Wistan, a young Saxon warrior, and Sir Gawain, an elderly and slightly clownish nephew of King Arthur. There are adventures with ogres, pixies, dragons, soldiers, and some menacing monks. The most important plot point (that a kind of collective amnesia has taken hold across the land) and the key theme of the novel (memory and forgetting) are both figured visually by what Axl and Beatrice call "the mist."[64] Eventually, we learn that "the mist" is the breath of an oppressive she-dragon named Querig, and that the only way to restore the country's stolen memory will be to kill Querig. The novel ends with the vanquishing of Querig and thus the beginning of a new historical epoch in which people will have to confront what they have forgotten, as well as what they have invented to fill in the gaps. What can only be

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called the process of *demistification*, though, will have uneven effects. For Axl and Beatrice it will mean remembering the ups and downs of a long erotic relationship; for the Saxons and Britons, collectively, it will mean a return to war. "Who knows what old hatreds will loosen across the land now?" Axl asks; "The giant, once well buried, now stirs."[65]

Mendelsund did a series of sketches for *The Buried Giant* (Figure 6). His symbols, figures, and calligraphic style were inspired partly by J. R. R. Tolkien's own design for the cover of *The Hobbit* (1937). Many of these sketches plunder the iconography of fantasy and folklore; the image of the Holy Grail, the central figure on the finished jacket, was important to Mendelsund from the start, as was the map that was commissioned for the book's inside boards. "If a book contains a map," Mendelsund reminded me, "it's most likely either military history or fantasy—or Faulkner, which is both."[66] For *The Buried Giant*, he wanted to suggest fantasy *tout court*: to craft a paratextual image that would convey genre generically. Just as genres, standardized as BISAC codes, establish limits (however malleable) around what a paratextual artist can realize on a given jacket, so too jackets specify or intimate a set of aesthetic, affective, and formal expectations for readers. And when jackets visualize genres—explicitly or implicitly, via word, image, texture, or all three—they lay out the terms for engaging with a particular literary artifact, and they make promises or threats about what it might be like to travel into a given storyworld, to pass through Genette's "airlock" from reality to fiction. But what happens when jackets violate their own terms, or when books make promises that they do not intend to keep?

There is no chalice, no Holy Grail per se, in *The Buried Giant*. Mendelsund's jacket, in other words, figures an image that never appears in the text—or almost never appears. During a crucial scene late in the novel, Ishiguro's narrator describes a sleepy dragon resting in a lair that resembles a rimmed drinking vessel:

> Axl helped his wife onto a ledge beside him, then leant over one of the rocks. The pit below was broader and shallower than he had expected— more like a drained pond than something actually dug into the ground. The greater part of it was now in pale sunlight, and seemed to consist entirely of grey rock and gravel—the blackened grass finishing abruptly at the rim—so that the only living thing visible, aside from the dragon herself, was a solitary hawthorn bush sprouting incongruously through the stone near the center of the pit's belly.[67]

This passage gave rise to the map that appears on the Knopf hardback's inside boards (Figure 7).
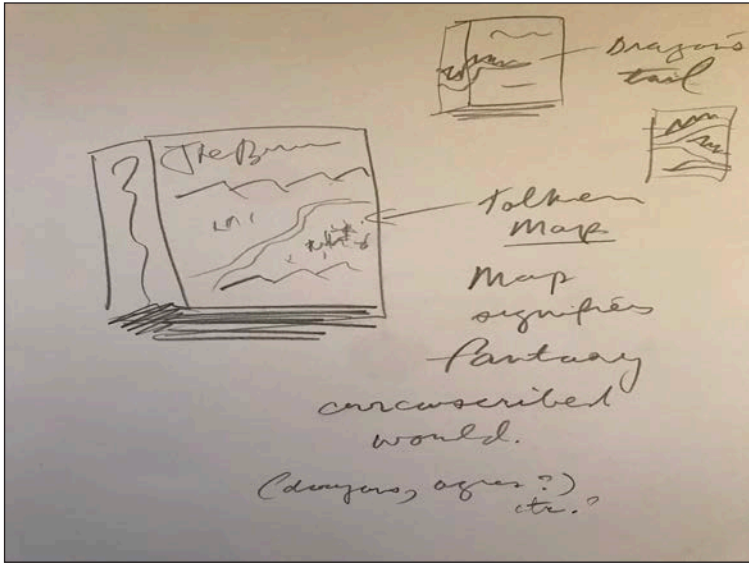
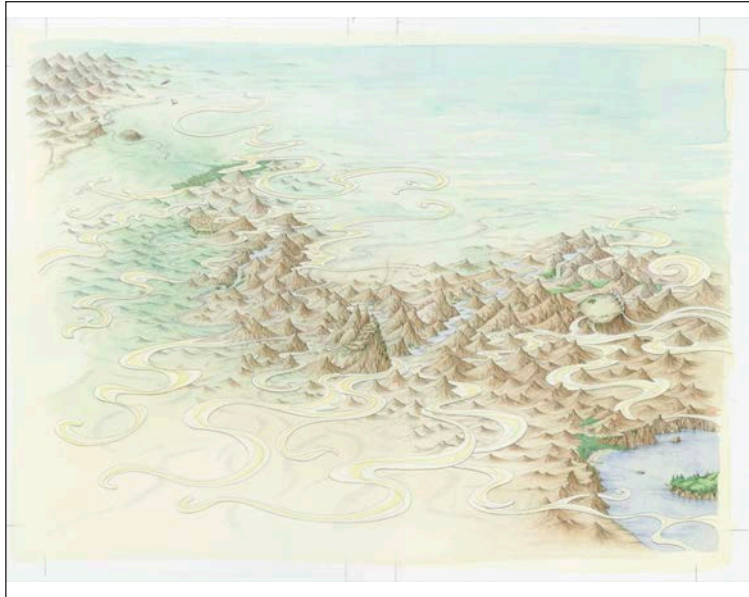Figure 6. Mendelsund's sketches for *The Buried Giant*

Figure 7. Map that appears on the inside boards of the 2015 Knopf edition of *The Buried Giant*

For the reader, though, this passage registers as a strange kind of ekphrasis: a verbal representation of a visual representation, the latter initially encountered with the first crack of the book's spine. More to the point, with the help of the paratext—including both the jacket and the map—which imagines the site described in this passage as the Holy Grail, we might be able to understand Ishiguro's project: to clarify what is at stake in his turn to fantasy, which is really to say his return to the older genres of romance and epic from which both the novel as such and its fantastical variant emerged. Writing a novel with a dragon as the antagonist, Ishiguro produced neither literary realism (which is why Wood called it a "slog") nor fantasy (which is why Ursula Le Guin called it "painful," and said reading it was "like watching a man falling from a high wire while he shouts to the audience, 'Are they going say I'm a tight-rope walker?'").[68] The paratext makes two promises about genre—the names "Ishiguro and Knopf" augur literary fiction while the title, the Holy Grail, and the Tolkienesque figures augur fantasy—that the text struggles to keep. It also makes one other promise about genre that it keeps perfectly well. For all the boundary blurring that occurs in *The Buried Giant*, it remains a novel: the genre that Mikhail Bakhtin famously called "plasticity itself."[69]

All this seems intentional, given that *The Buried Giant* thematizes the risks of asking for and making promises. "Should Querig die and the mist begin to clear," Axl implores Beatrice; "Should memories return, and among them of times I disappointed you. Or yet of dark deeds I may once have done to make you look at me and see no longer the man you do now. Promise me this at least. Promise, princess, you'll not forget what you feel in your heart at this moment."[70] Which brings me back, finally, to the dragon, slain by the knight Winston in a heroic but subdued climax. What does it mean to kill this dragon? This plot point surely has some allegorical potential. Yes, it could be the same old metafictional story: Ishiguro, literary novelist, invents a dragon, and the novel summons the older genres against which it defines itself; Ishiguro, literary novelist, kills a dragon, and the novel, yet again, vanquishes epic, romance, and fantasy.

But a different reading suggests itself if the paratext is entered into evidence, which is to say if the novel as such is considered to be irreducible to the printed matter of the text, but understood, rather, to encompass the entire aesthetic experience of the book. A different reading suggests itself if, in other words, reading is understood to include appreciating the design details of the codex. In this case, treating Mendelsund's cover design as a kind of critical interpretation,

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the dragon dies inside a Holy Grail, and when her blood spills, it is the blood of everlasting life. Metaphorically or metonymically, then, Ishiguro slays genre fiction, but slays it so that the novel, the novel as such, may live forever, precisely by remembering its past—remembering the traditions from which it emerged as a way of forecasting what else it might be, what else it might become, besides a lyrical-realist enterprise.

This project is, finally, a political one. And the political force of this project accounts to some degree for the turn to genre in contemporary literary fiction. Almost sixty years ago Phillip Roth, who has himself dabbled in genre fiction, said of reality: "It stupefies, it sickens, it infuriates, and finally it is even a kind of embarrassment to one's own meager imagination. The actuality is continually outdoing our talents, and the culture tosses up figures almost daily that are the envy of any novelist."[71] He could have been writing in 2001 or 2008 or 2016 or yesterday. After all, it is not as though reality has gotten any better—any more coherent or reassuring or egalitarian—now that a former reality TV star has access to the nuclear codes. And in this context, it is lyrical realism that looks like fantasy.

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[1] Reproductions of selected images discussed in this article are embedded throughout this print version. The full cluster of images is available as a downloadable supplementary file on Project Muse: <http://muse.jhu.edu/resolve/53>

[2] See Gerard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997). Hereafter abbreviated *P* and cited parenthetically by page number.

[3] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1981), 13.

[4] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (Abingdon : Routledge, 2002), 210.

[5] Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, "Surface Reading: An Introduction," *Representations* 108.1 (2009): 1–21.

[6] In the most comprehensive scholarly study of the topic to date, Thomas Tanselle's *Book-Jackets: Their History, Forms, and Use* (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 2011), the author makes the case for the significance of the book jacket to cultural history, but nearly two-thirds of this study consists of bibliographical lists and examples, rather than historical or aesthetic analysis.

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[7] Following Marshall McLuhan, Neil Postman pioneered the concept of media ecology as a system in which forms of life are developed; see "About MEA," Media Ecology Association (MEA), Accessed August 27, 2018, *https://www.media-ecology. org/about-us/*. With this concept in mind, I mean to ask, what is the form of life, or the mode of existence, of the novel in our current, digitized media ecology? And how are the novel and the book, separately and together, adapting to such conditions?

[8] See A. Scott Berg, *Max Perkins: Editor of Genius* (New York: New American Library, 2016), 124.

[9] Although my emphasis falls on how such questions pertain to the relationship between paratextual art and contemporary literature, literature occupies but a small portion of the overall publishing market, and book designers, even those who have attained high-art cache, are employed to work on many decidedly nonliterary projects. For instance, Peter Mendelsund, the paratextual artist whose work I discuss, recently led the team that designed the cover for Sheryl Sandberg's *Option B: Facing Adversity, Building Resilience, and Finding Joy* (2017).

[10] Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1976), 115, 114.

[11] Goodman, 115.

[12] Goodman, 115. See also Genette, *The Work of Art: Immanence and Transcendence*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1997).

[13] The digital revolution has not killed the physical book, which still remains the most popular reading platform in the U.S., according to Pew Research 2016, http:// www.pewinternet.org/2016/09/01/book-reading-2016/. But digitization has prompted contemporary literary authors to experiment in new ways with physical book design—one prominent example is Mark Z. Danielewski's *The Fifty Year Sword* (2012)—and it has contributed to the rise of textual materialism within literary studies. See Bill Brown, "Introduction: Textual Materialism," *PMLA* 125.1 (2010): 24–28.

[14] Zadie Smith, "Two Paths for the Novel," *The New York Review of Books,* 20 November 2008, http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2008/11/20/two-paths-for-the-novel/. See Mark McGurl, "The Novel's Forking Path," *Public Books*, 1 April 2015, http://www. publicbooks.org/the-novels-forking-path/.

[15] On the category of the art book, see Johanna Drucker, *The Century of Artist's Books* (New York: Granary Press, 1994). And for a richly developed case study of the topic as it pertains to both art and literary history, see *Anna Sigrídur Arnar*, *The Book as Instrument: Stéphane Mallarmé, The Artist's Book, and the Transformation of Print Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

[16] On the history of Knopf, see Laura Claridge, *The Lady with the Borzoi: Literary Tastemaker Extraordinaire* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, & Giroux, 2016).

[17] Edith Lewis, *Willa Cather Living: A Personal Record* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1953), 109–10.

[18] Alfred A. Knopf to Elmer Adler, 27 April 1927, box 731, folder 9, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. Papers, The Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas, Austin, TX.

[19] W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 5; Ned Drew and Paul Sternberger, *By Its Cover: Modern American Book Cover Design* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 2005), 8.

[20] While the definitions of medium and media are hotly contested, my own sense of these terms comes from Mitchell and Mark B. N. Hansen, *Critical Terms for Media Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010). See also John Guillory, "Genesis of the Media Concept," *Critical Inquiry* 36.2 (2010): 321–62.

[21] See, for instance, *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, and Implications*, ed. Erkki Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2011).

[22] Ellen Lupton, *Thinking with Type: A Critical Guide for Designers, Writers, Editors, & Students* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 2010).

[23] Talib Choudhry, "The Rise of the Shelfie: How Good Looking is Your Bookcase?", *The Telegraph*, 3 February 2017, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/interiors/home/rise-shelfie-good-looking-book-case/. On the importance of pastiche to postmodernism, see Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 16–25.

[24] For an account of *Ulysses* covers in the context of American book design, see Drew and Sternberger, 8–17.

[25] See Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), xxxix.

[26] An excellent example of how analyzing covers illuminates cultures can be found in R. John Williams, *The Buddha in the Machine: Art, Technology, and the Meeting of East and West* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2014).

[27] Mendelsund, *Cover* (New York: powerHouse, 2014), xii.

[28] See Alexandra Alter, "For Kazuo Ishiguro, 'The Buried Giant' Is a Departure," *The New York Times*, 19 February 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/20/books/for-kazuo-ishiguro-the-buried-giant-is-a-departure.html?_r=0.

[29] James Wood, "The Uses of Oblivion," *The New Yorker*, 23 March 2015, http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/03/23/the-uses-of-oblivion.

[30] Glen Duncan, *The Last Werewolf* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011), 98

[31] Duncan, 98.

[32] Duncan, 98.

[33] Duncan, 43.

[34] Mendelsund, *Cover*, 110.

[35] Mendelsund, *Cover*, xxv.

[36] J. David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999). Also see Garrett Stewart, *Bookwork: Medium to Object to Concept to Art* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2011).

[37] Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, 5; See Peter Mendelsund, *What We See When We Read* (New York: Vintage, 2011).

[38] Elaine Scarry, *Dreaming by the Book* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, & Giroux, 1999).

[39] Charles Rosner, *The Art of the Book Jacket* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1949), 6.

[40] Michael Warner, "Uncritical Reading," in *Polemic: Critical or Uncritical*, ed. Jane Gallop (New York: Routledge, 2004).

[41] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980), 27.

[42] Barthes, 27.

[43] Barthes, 46.

[44] Mendelsund, email message to author, May 7, 2017.

[45] Mendelsund, email message to author, May 7, 2017.

[46] Mendelsund, email message to author, May 7, 2017. Includes the text of the speech delivered when receiving the Inky Tentacle Award.

[47] Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2008), 4.

[48] Wai Chee Dimock, *Through Other Continents: American Literature Across Deep Time* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2005), 73–74.

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⁴⁹ On "site" as a category of literary, cultural, and sociological analysis, see my *Site Reading: Fiction, Art, Social Form* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2016).

⁵⁰ Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, 106.

⁵¹ Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, 105.

⁵² Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, 107. In addition to the titles by Berlant and Dimock cited above, see Lisa Gitelman, *Paper Knowledge: Toward a Media History of Documents* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2014); and Theodore Martin, *Contemporary Drift: Genre, Historicism, and the Problem of the Present* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2017).

⁵³ Wolfgang Fritz Haug, *Critique of Commodity Aesthetics: Appearance, Sexuality, and Advertising in Capitalist Society*, trans. Robert Bock (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986), 19.

⁵⁴ There are many examples of such fusion. In 2016, for instance, Brian Ference published *The Wolf of Dorian Gray: A Werewolf Spawned by the Evil of Man (Volume 1)*. More volumes, it seems, are forthcoming.

⁵⁵ Here it is worth recalling Emile Durkheim's apt description of how totems work: "By expressing the social unit tangibly, it makes the unit itself more tangible to all" (*The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Karen E. Fields [New York: The Free Press, 1995], 231).

⁵⁶ See, for example, Emily Harnett, "The Subtle Genius of Elena Ferrante's Bad Book Covers," *The Atlantic*, 3 July 2016, https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2016/07/elena-ferrante-covers-bad-no-good/488732/.

⁵⁷ Peter Boxall, *Twenty-First Century Fiction: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2013), 6, 9.

⁵⁸ See Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of* Letters, trans. Malcolm DeBevoise (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007). In *Born Translated: The Contemporary Novel in an Age of World Literature* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2013), Rebecca Walkowitz makes the convincing case that "translation" is "a condition of . . . production" for twenty-first century literary fiction (4). But the title of her study alone indicates that translation is inextricable from digitized visual culture, which is not only a "condition" but also product of literary activity.

⁵⁹ Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1993).

⁶⁰ For a novelist's candid take on the frustrations associated with paratextual art, see Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Clothing of Books* (New York: Vintage, 2016).

⁶¹ See Andrew Hoberek, "Introduction: After Postmodernism," *Twentieth Century Literature* 53.3 (2007): 233–47.

⁶² Mark Seltzer, *The Official World* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2016), 3.

⁶³ Dimock, 73.

⁶⁴ Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Buried Giant* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015), 3.

⁶⁵ Ishiguro, 297.

⁶⁶ Interview with Mendelsund, 5 May 2017, New York City.

⁶⁷ Ishiguro, 284.

⁶⁸ Wood, "The Uses of Oblivion"; Ursula K. Le Guin, "Are they going to say this is fantasy?", 2 March 2015, http://www.ursulakleguin.com/Blog2015.html#New.

⁶⁹ M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1981), 39.

⁷⁰ Ishiguro, 258.

⁷¹ Philip Roth, "Writing American Fiction," *Commentary*, 1 March 1961, https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/writing-american-fiction/.