Dressed for Success? Exploring paratextual changes in the English edition of Le capital au XXIe siècle

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A translation of a book is not just a faithful conversion of its text from one language to another. The translation is a regeneration of the entire complex organism of the book which often radically alters its paratextual apparatus. Thomas Piketty's Capital in the Twenty-First Century (Harvard University Press, 2014) is a book that has not only challenged the current capitalist economic model but has also revolutionized the idea of a bestseller. A comparison of the paratexts of its French and English editions demonstrates how a skilful and purposeful visual repackaging of a book, deploying a different paratext, without any cuts or alterations to its text, can radically transform it, make the translation attractive to a wider audience, and ultimately be a contributing factor in its success.

Keywords: paratext, Piketty, Capital, book covers, dust jackets, book design, translated editions

Introduction

As Gerard Genette in his seminal work on paratext pointed out, we never encounter any text, whether it is a literary or a scientific work, in 'its naked state' (1997, p. 2). Any text is always dressed in and surrounded by a number of paratextual elements, verbal and visual, that facilitate its presence in the world, its reception, and its consumption. Genette's study was synchronic, not diachronic, with the goal not to trace the history of each of the paratextual elements but to define and describe the visual and textual apparatus accompanying a text and presenting it to the public in the form of the physical book. In his book, which mostly focuses on textual paratext (titles, prefaces, etc.) and is based on French novels in the 19th century, when the role of the author in the circuit of book production was prominent, recognized, and accepted, the paratext is mainly seen as an expression of the authorial intent (Sherman, 2007).

Genette paid much less attention to the publisher's and non-verbal paratext, devoting only one chapter to the publisher's paratext—which is also the only one dealing with material and iconic paratexts. Studies in book history, which draw on paratextual theory, have deepened understanding of the role of the publisher in the creation of paratext and expanded the paratextual framework, exploring in depth the elements of the publisher's non-verbal paratext—such as covers, decorations, printers' ornament, typefaces, illustrations (both in text and on covers), formats of publication, series, choices of paper, etc.—and their influence on historical and modern readers and buyers (Allen, 2012; Armstrong, 2013; Delafield, 2012; Den Hollander et al., 2003; Gil Bardají et al., 2012; Le Huenen and Oliver, 2007; Matthews and Moody, 2007; Matthews, 2010; McCleery, 2011; Mills, 2014; Pellatt, 2013; Phillips, 2007;

Smith and Wilson, 2011; Thornton, 2009; Wilson 2014; Wright, 2013). This emphasis on the publisher's role in fashioning a book's paratext is not accidental. As Janine Barchas states, much of the 'modern paratext is placed "outside" of the printed book-pages of the text, and nearly always by … hands' other than the author's (2003, p. 18). These hands belong to publishers and book designers, who decide with often little input from the author how a particular book will be dressed up: which format will be chosen, how the cover or dust jacket will look, and what promotional blurb will appear on the back cover – in short, what kind of paratext to impart to a newly published or translated book.

When a potential reader or buyer takes a book in their hands, they pass immediate judgement on its genre, readability, and fit with their own interests and needs. According to this judgement, they make a decision on their future relationship with the book: to put it back on the shelf or to consider buying or borrowing it for themselves or someone else. Previous research, such as that presented in the collection edited by Nicole Matthews and Nickianne Moody (2007), has demonstrated that the overall appearance of the book and especially the book's cover can exercise a powerful influence on this judgement and decision-making process. The book produces a first impression and leaves a lasting imprint in the mind of its readers not only with its text but also with its visual aesthetics. With its cover and format, a book identifies itself as belonging to a certain genre, seeking a particular kind of audience, possessing a certain cultural value, tone, and mood, and, in general, sets the expectations of potential readers. The physical book as a whole can be seen as a crystallization and materialization of its content, so book covers are much more than a simple protective enclosure. Long before the 21st century, publishers and sometimes authors, such as George Eliot (Korn, 2000), became conscious that a book's outside shell, be it a cover, a wrapper, or a jacket, as well as its overall look and feel have the power not only to tempt and attract a reader, or to repel them, but also to shape readers' expectations and influence and guide their initial response to the book's content. The design of book covers has been successfully manipulated by publishers to give a new boost to the sales of an established author such as Helen MacInnes or Agatha Christie (Matthews, 2010; Phillips, 2007), while the inclusion of a controversial title such as Joyce's Ulysses in the Penguin paperbacks, with their universally recognizable and respectable covers, has helped to establish such texts as mainstream classics (McCleery, 2011).

Translated books merit special attention. As Roger Chartier observes, the book is 'not the same when it changes its language' (2014, p. ix). A translation of a book is much more than a faithful conversion of its text from one language to another. With every translation, the entire complex organism of the book is reborn and regenerated. This regeneration affects and involves not only the text but also, and to a major degree, the intricate paratextual apparatus, the translated book often being dressed up in a completely new paratext. Anticipating the response of potential readers, trying to manage future expectations, or complying with the publishing conventions of a new environment where a translated book is published book publishers will often change or recombine its paratextual elements.

Although the 'paratextual relevance [of translated works was] undeniable', Genette's theoretical framework did not include translations of original texts, because he believed they required a

separate study and could not be described in sufficient detail in his work outlining paratextual theory for the first time (1997, p. 405). Book historians have explored translated editions in their comparative studies of paratextuality (Armstrong, 2013; Den Hollander et al., 2003; Gil Bardají et al., 2012; Pellatt, 2013). Comparing translations with the editions in the original language has enabled these researchers to study 'the mediating role that these paratextual elements perform in the transmission of a text from one culture to another' (Gil Bardají et al., 2012, p. 8). They have also explored how the paratext can be used to shape the status and reputation of the author in the culture of the language of the translation or to give the work a different cultural heritage, enabling it to appeal to a more diverse audience. They have demonstrated how dressing up a translated book in a new paratext, both textual and material, can be a marketing device to position and reposition the work in the book market and to exercise an influence on readers and buyers.

Capital: Setting the Stage

In 2014, the English translation of a moderately wellreceived book became the publishing sensation of the year. Remarkably, the content of the book had nothing that could titillate the imagination of the reading public (no grey colour was involved). It was a scholarly volume full of graphs and charts and close-printed text, a work on economics by Thomas Piketty, Le capital au XXIe siècle (2013) (hereafter referred to as Le capital). It was originally published by Seuil in French and translated into English as Capital in the Twenty-First Century the following year (Piketty, 2014) (Capital hereafter).

Capital has not only challenged the current capitalist economic model but has also revolutionized the idea of what kind of book can become a bestseller. This 700-page monograph on economics became one of the biggest sales successes ever for its publisher, Harvard University Press (HUP) (Tracy, 2014). The first printing of the English translation sold out almost immediately. According to the Amazon.com results for 2014, Capital ranked number six in overall print book sales for both fiction and non-fiction. By January 2015, some one-and a-half million copies of the text had been sold (France 24 and Agence France Press (AFP), 2015). Given the economic crisis of 2008 and the subsequent 'Occupy' and 'We Are the 99 Percent' movements, as well as other manifestations of a shaken belief in capitalism in its current state, this success is not entirely surprising. What is surprising is that the book became a bestseller and a sensation not in 2013, when it was published in France, but in 2014, after the publication of its English translation. In fact, Le capital did not attract a lot of attention in France. It collected some favourable reviews but did not come even close to the success of its English translation. For example, it was not even in the top 100 bestsellers of 2013 on the French Amazon.fr. Undoubtedly, this startling difference can be attributed to factors entirely unrelated to the physicality of the books. The Economist explained the difference in reception by the fact that Piketty was seen as being too closely linked to the unpopular French President, François Hollande, and that public discourse on inequality, a novelty in the United States, had been an important and ever-present element of French political life for the last three centuries and could hardly surprise anybody (Charlemagne, 2014).

But is that all? When readers take copies of the French original and the English translation in their hands, they cannot fail to notice the difference in their look and feel, and especially in what Genette calls the publisher's paratext (cover, presentation of the title and author's name, choice of typeface, etc.). It can be reasonably assumed that this remarkable dissimilarity in paratexts triggers a different reaction and produces a different set of expectations in a prospective individual reader, and may have caused or at least may have been a significant factor in eliciting different responses from the French and English reading public. Thus, it could be argued that one of the causes and a contributing factor in the success of the English translation of Le capital was a skilful and purposeful visual repackaging of the book in a strikingly different paratext.

This paper will not attempt to discuss the economic theories presented in the book. Similar to the book history studies mentioned above, the paratexts of Le capital and Capital are compared and analysed to show that a radically different paratextual repackaging of the English translation was a contributing factor in the book's success and its transformation into a bestseller. Following the example of Alberto Manguel, the book, or rather two book-objects, the original edition and its English translation, are merely judged by their appearances or 'by their covers' (1996, p. 125).

Le capital and Capital

When the French original is compared with its English translation, there are significant differences in their material paratexts and some less prominent but no less important differences in the textual paratexts. This contrast in design approaches and decisions in the visual packaging of Le capital (Figure 1) and Capital (Figure 2) cannot be attributed to the notorious lack of interest in the book-as-an-object in France, where the book is often perceived as content not as a container (Bessard-Banquy, 2010). The material paratext of Le capital is not neglected. Rather, it is indicative of decisions made by its publisher to position the book as a work of a certain cultural value, genre, and tone, directed at a certain kind of audience who are quite unlike prospective readers of Capital. The degree of dissimilarity between the paratexts of Le capital and Capital varies according to the spatial status of the paratext, that is where the paratext is situated in relation to the text. The closer the reader moves towards the text itself, the less pronounced is the difference. It is most prominent at the paratextual fringe, in the most liminal devices of the paratextual apparatus, these being the epitext and publisher's paratext (book covers and book formats). It becomes more subtle as the physical distance between the text and paratext decreases, in the notes and epigraph, finally fading into non-existence in the table of contents. These differences between the paratexts of the original and the translation, both the ones strikingly obvious on the books' exterior as well as the more the subtle inside, quite successfully redefine the genre, appeal, and audience of the work from clearly academic and scholarly to somewhat (but not too) revolutionary, seemingly accessible, and trendy.

The main element of the material paratext, the cover, of Le capital, with its subdued colours and quiet design, an ivory-greyish background, the lettering printed in muted dark grey and a red-brown serif font similar to the classical Janson, the inconspicuous publisher's name, and the series logo that very much resembles an old-fashioned printer's device, imparts the distinct look and feel of a typical French academic paperback, a style developed in the first half of the 20th century. Another association that immediately springs to the mind of a potential purchaser or a

reader of Le capital is Gallimard's Collection blanche, which, according to the publisher's website, includes 'le plus prestigieux générique de la littérature française du vingtième siècle'.[1] This is not to imply that Seuil intentionally or unintentionally copied or mimicked the distinct design of the Gallimard series, but to suggest that the two publishers skilfully play on the same set of associations between a book's appearance and its expected content. The design of Le capital unequivocally positions and defines it as a work with a certain cachet: scholarly, maybe slightly dull, but definitely serious and not for everybody, even elitist, almost a modern classic; thus targeting primarily an academic audience and definitely not the mass market. This marketing choice is confirmed by the verbal paratext, for example, the lengthy summary on the back cover, with distinctly non-sensational overtones, in which words and expressions such as 'théorique', 'historique', 'recherche comparative', 'professeur', and 'directeur d'études' underline the academic merits of both the book and its author. The look and feel of an academic book are also reinforced by such a subtle detail as the positioning of another paratextual element, the notes. In Le capital, the notes are footnotes, which are often seen as 'the very emblem of fussiness' (Bringhurst, 2014, p. 68) and especially of an academic fussiness.

The publisher's paratext of Capital creates different expectations for potential readers. Instead of the subdued and sombre academic paperback offered to French readers, the anglophone public is confronted with what could be a typical bestseller or accessible popular science book in a vivid glossy dust jacket and with cover text in a large modern-looking sans-serif font. Both the author's name and the work's title flourish prominently, to tempt potential readers. The title given the book by Piketty is reminiscent of another work called Capital, the first one, by Karl Marx, and unavoidably affects the perception of Piketty's work. In the words of Genette:

'How would we read Joyce's Ulysses if it were not entitled Ulysses?' (1997, p. 2). Whereas this obvious association was utterly ignored in the cover design of Le capital, the appearance of the physical book published by HUP exploits the allusion to the socialist classic to its full potential, supporting the textual allusion with colour and typography. The association imparted by the book title is skilfully reinforced by splashing the dust jacket with a generous but not too disturbing amount of red (a colour firmly associated with communist and socialist ideology), printing the word 'capital' in large, all-capital, red sans-serif letters, and giving the book cover a border in the same red colour.

The choice of a sans-serif font for most of the text on the dust jacket's front cannot be accidental. Sansserif fonts were widely introduced in book design by advocates of modern typography, sometimes also called 'new typography', led by Jan Tschichold, one of the fathers of the movement. Later, Tschichold, who returned to neo-classical serif typeface designs in the late 1930s, denounced the principles of new typography, referring to the sans-serifs as a trendy, 'ostensibly modern' (1991, p. 10) form of typeface marked by 'poverty of expression' (1991, p. 9) that in aesthetic terms was 'violently reduced for little children' (1991, p. 15). Despite this recanting, sans-serif fonts remain a widely recognizable hallmark of the modern typography of the 1920s and 1930s, one that embodies the fundamental principles of simplicity and functionality. However, sansserifs are not only suggestive of the aesthetic and design movement of new typography. As has been demonstrated previously (Drucker, 1994; Gutjahr and Benton,

2001; Morison and Barker, 1972; Petrucci, 1993), typography has an ability, used throughout the history of written and printed communications, to be an active part in the discourse of the text and to 'infuse a text with social or political suggestions' (Mak, 2011, p. 15). Influenced by the artistic and architectural philosophy of constructivism, born in revolutionary Soviet Russia, the new typography and, as a consequence, one of its most prominent features, sans-serif fonts, bear the weight of yet another frequent association, this time political: the association with early socialist visual art propaganda.

The association of red as a colour and sans-serif font design with socialist ideology is evidently and, considering the book's popularity, quite successfully used in the design of Capital's dust jacket. The intentionality of these design choices is indirectly confirmed by the fact that Capital has an overall look and feel completely unlike the other books previously published by HUP under its Belknap imprint, which have pictorial front covers of one kind or another. Interestingly, The Economics of Inequality, the second book by Piketty published by HUP, pushes the same allusion to socialist ideology to the extreme with its all-red covers and black sans-serif lettering. The ideological overtones in the design of Capital are more subtle and measured. Contrasting with the red of the title and the border, the background of the dust jacket is coloured in a beautiful soft and glossy ivory, pleasing to the eye and reminiscent of the look of unbleached, hand-made paper. This, combined with the subtitle in graceful serifed italics, as well as two modest and elegant ornaments and a second border in the colour of old gold, imparts the feeling of a book with a classic lineage but still distinctly modern and not too academically dry. The overall expectation this material paratext suggests to the potential reader is that this is a work that is left-wing and substantial but not overly radical and definitely accessible and comprehensible to a non-specialist reader. The verbal paratext on the back of the dust jacket, the promotional blurb, features such expressions as 'explosive', 'seminal', 'political bulldozer', 'provocative', and 'challenge', but also 'thoughtful', 'measured', 'democratic', 'account of historical evolution', and, finally, 'book of the season', strengthening the impression of a trendy book with the right degree of radicalness.

The paratext inside Capital is also used, in a more subtle way, to impart an impression of the book as acceptably radical and not too academically dry. The epigraph, a quotation from the revolutionary Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, is moved closer to the text and made more visible by placing it just above the introduction, whereas it was quite lost among the other front matter in Le capital. The footnotes of the French original are relegated to the back in the English translation, becoming endnotes and thereby visually lightening the book pages. Endnotes are sometimes frowned upon because they require the serious reader to frequently flip back and forth between the main and the supplementary parts of the text. On the other hand, they 'leave the text page clean' (Bringhurst, 2014, p. 68), allowing the less serious reader free not to flip at all and to completely disregard them, essentially stripping the pages of a sense of academic heaviness.

The front of the dust jacket of Capital prominently highlights the author's name, which is evidently used here to tempt and to attract, whereas his name was printed much more modestly on the cover of the French original, as a plain designator of the work's origin. This difference in

the attention given to the author's name cannot owe to the general rule formulated by Genette: 'the better known the author, the more space his name takes up' (1997, p. 39). When the covers of Capital were designed, Piketty was not yet the media sensation in the anglophone world which he became shortly after the Capital's publication. However, a conspicuous rendering of the name of a yet-to-be-celebrity is not either what Genette called the 'magical thinking' of a publisher who would 'anticipate the glory by mimicking its effects' (Genette, 1997, p. 39). It is rather a part of fashioning the whole paratextual apparatus to use its tempting and marketing function to its full potential. This can be argued because, since Capital's publication, HUP has been actively engaged in the development and creation of its own epitext and in the promotion of authorial epitext, all clearly fulfilling the same function: to tempt potential purchasers and readers and to present and position Capital as a ground-breaking work and at the same time as appealing to a wide, not necessarily academic, audience. The most obvious examples are the heavy presence of Piketty on the HUP Facebook page and Capital's regularly updated page on the HUP website, which prominently lists all the author's awards, accolades, podcasts, talks, interviews, reviews, and the high places given to Capital in bestseller lists.[2] When Capital's presence on the HUP website is compared with the modest page of Le capital on Seuil's website, where all the book's reviews are concealed under an inconspicuous link at the bottom, while the page itself, according to the Internet Wayback Machine, has hardly changed since it was created in 2013, the differences in the positioning of the work are clear.[3]A testimony to the effectiveness of the paratext HUP has chosen for Capital are the design choices made by the publishers of other translated editions, which perhaps illustrate the old adage about imitation being the best form of flattery. Piketty's webpage on the Paris School of Economics website lists 33 translations of his work published in languages other than English, with images of book covers available for 28 of them.[4] Out of these 28, only seven publishers (Bulgarian, Greek, Japanese, Korean, Serbian, Spanish, and Taiwanese) opted for a cover design completely different from both the French and English editions. A striking number, 19 translations, look similar to the very successful English edition. Fifteen of them have an almost identical overall design and colour scheme, while the other four followed its design choices with some variations (Russian and Latvian), or kept the overall design but changed the dominant colour (Dutch and Albanian). Only the Polish translation has a look and feel very similar to the French original, and the Catalan edition is also somewhat like it, but only if we look at the French original with its book band still on.

All the changes in paratext from the French Le capital to the English Capital helped to transform a work first presented as distinctly academic and scholarly into a trendy publication challenging the established economic order but doing so in a non-threatening, not too radical, even a sensational way, and thus appealing to a much broader audience. This transformation of paratext has principally involved the publisher's epitext extraneous to the book (interviews, webpages, etc.) and the publisher's paratext that is easily detachable from the book (dust jacket), while keeping not only the content but also the form of most of the authorial paratext intact. For example, defying expectations of the readers, accustomed to finding tables of contents at the beginning of English books and the end of French ones, the tables of contents are identical in Le capital and Capital. They are placed in both books according to the French classical custom of the 18th century: both as tables of chapters at the beginning of the books and as detailed tables of contents at the end.

The externality and detachability of the transformed paratext of Capital also have an implication for the way the book is presented to many of its future readers which was probably not foreseen by the creators of its paratext. At present, most academic libraries in North America discard the dust jackets of newly purchased books when the books are processed, unless they are destined for a special collection. In doing so, they knowingly (or, more likely, unknowingly) are following Tschichold's dictum that dust jackets are considered disposable and 'as a rule belong in the waste paper basket, like empty cigarette packages' (1991, p. 10). However, when Tschichold made his comment, book cover designs underneath dust jackets were not as consistently neglected in favour of the jackets as they are nowadays, particularly in the case of Anglo-American publications. This results in academic libraries being filled with books devoid of any indication of cover design, creating in students' young minds an indelible impression of the outward appearance of a serious academic book as uniformly and necessarily dull and expressionless.

In the case of Capital, a routine procedure of book processing creates another transformation. Without its glossy wrappers, Capital becomes again what it was when it was Le capital, a scholarly work that resembles countless other scholarly works, only this time English ones, dressed in dark hard covers with gold lettering on the spine. In this once again reassuringly academic persona, Capital presents itself to the sophisticated specialist reader who will borrow the book from one of the thousands of academic libraries that have it on their shelves.

Conclusion

Publication of a translation gives the publisher an opportunity to repackage a work, to modify the paratextual apparatus in order to reposition the work in the book market, to promote it to new audiences, and to subtly change readers' expectations about the work's genre and contents. Through the transformation of the publisher's paratext and epitext of Le capital and without any cuts or alterations to the text of the work itself or to the verbal paratext closely intertwined in the textual fabric, the translated book was radically transformed, positioned differently on the book market, made attractive to a much wider audience, and ultimately became a commercial success, while retaining the essence of its nature, that of a scholarly work. Capital may be seen as an example of how the whole translated publication can become a paratext for the original work, tempting people to buy or read the original, since Le capital gained a second wind of popularity after the loud success of the English edition.

Coda: First Capital

The transformation of the strictly academic persona of Le capital into an English edition with a much wider appeal contrasts oddly with the difference in paratextual choices made by the English and French publishers of the other, first, Capital by Karl Marx. The English edition of Marx's Capital was published by Swan Sonnenschein, Loweey, & Co. in 1887 as a hardcover

book. It was produced with a generic title page and the same overall book design the publisher used to print books about silkworms and cats (Butler, 1888; Rule and Perez,

1887). In contrast, the French publisher, Maurice Lachatre, did everything possible to market the French translation of Marx's Le capital as widely as possible (Marx and Roy, 1872). He made it not only financially accessible, issuing it in serialized format, ten centimes per instalment, but also attractive to readers through its paratextual packaging, marketing it as a translated edition entirely revised by the author, printing it with a portrait of the author in an ornate frame, and including a facsimile of a letter by 'citizen Marx' in the first instalment. In retrospect, it is quite fitting, even if accidental and entirely owing to the timing of French and English translations, that it was a carefully crafted French edition of Marx's work that William Morris read to pieces and had to have rebound in lavish binding decorated by Thomas James Cobden-Sanderson (Thomson, 2015, p. 27).[5]

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Notes

1 http://www.gallimard.fr/Divers/Plus-sur-la-collection/ Blanche/(sourcenode)/116029

2 http://www.hup.harvard.edu/catalog.php?isbn=9780674979857

3 http://www.seuil.com/ouvrage/le-capital-au-xxie-siecle-thomas-piketty/9782021082289

4 http://piketty.pse.ens.fr/fr/articles-de-presse/86

5 An image of the binding can be seen here:
http://www.themorgan.org/exhibitions/images/binding-by-thomas-james-cobden-sanderson

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